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The Assassination of President Lincoln : What was the Religious Faith of those Engaged in the Conspiracy that Resulted in the Assassination of President Lincoln at Washington, D.C., on Friday evening, April 14, 1865? :

John B. Helwig

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THE ASSASSINATION

—OF—

PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

*What was the Religious Faith of those engaged in the
Conspiracy that resulted in the Assassination of
President Lincoln at Washington, D. C., on
Friday Evening, April 14, 1865?*

*The sworn Testimony of Witnesses, taken from the Official
Report of the trial of John H. Surratt, Published by
the Government, at Washington, D. C., 1867.*

A Lecture on Romanism,

—BY THE—

REV. J. B. HELWIG, D. D.

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO.

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THE ASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

THE report of the trial of John H. Surratt, one of the conspirators in the assassination of President Lincoln, comprises two volumes of printed matter, of thirteen hundred and eighty-three pages. From that original document I have made the citation of facts which I present in this lecture.

In the first place, I desire to call the reader's attention to the comprehensive purpose of the conspirators, which must also have been known by all engaged in the plot for the assassination of the President and others that were marked for destruction.

On page 528 of the report of the trial a letter, of which the following is the exact language, was presented in evidence to the court. The letter bears the date of April 15th, 1865, at Washington, D. C., just one day after the assassination of the President. The address of the letter is:

"Dear John—I am happy to inform you that Pet has done his work well. He is safe, and old Abe is in hell."

Then the letter proceeds: "Now, sir, all eyes are on you. You must bring Sherman. Grant is in the hands of Gray ere this. Red Shoes showed a lack of nerve in Seward's case. But he fell back in good order. Johnson must come. Old Crook has him in charge. Mind well that brother's oath, and you will have no difficulty. All well. Be safe and enjoy the fruits of our labor. We had a large meeting last night. All were bent on carrying out the programme to the letter. Signed, O'B.—N. O. Five."

You observe from that letter that it was the design of the conspirators to destroy the heads of the government, and so also the operation and the authority of the government, if possible, at a single blow.

In a question of loyalty to the government, at a time when the government needed loyal men and women, the inquiry is not without its significance and importance: What was

the religion of those who were engaged in that foul conspiracy? Were they Roman Catholics, or were they Protestants? The Catholic journals of the country, as others also in the Church of Rome, admit that Mrs. Surratt was a Romanist. Proof on that point need not, therefore, to be adduced. A Catholic journal at Cleveland, Ohio, recently admitted that Mrs. Surratt was a Catholic, *but that she was the only Catholic, and that she was innocent.*

Then it says: "There is not a partisan sheet so vile as now to accuse Mrs. Surratt of complicity in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln." Then it also adds: "It has ill fared with those who were butchers and cowards enough to enact the dark drama."

This denial necessitates, in the interest of truth, the examination of the testimony in the case, as to the innocence or the guilt of Mrs. Surratt.

In the first place, it was shown in evidence that Mrs. Surratt's house was the headquarters for the conspirators, namely, Booth, Herold, Payne, Atzerodt, and John H. Surratt, her son. As a member of the family for quite a length of time there was a Mr. Lewis J. Weichman, a Catholic, as appears further in the testimony.

On page 374 of the report of the trial the question is asked Mr. Weichman where he met Atzerodt; and the answer is in Mrs. Surratt's house. And his testimony further is that he there also became acquainted with Payne, another one of the conspirators. Witness further states that Payne visited at Mrs. Surratt's frequently. He also states (on page 375) that Booth came to Mrs. Surratt's very frequently.

From the evidence, there can be no doubt in the mind of any one but that the house of Mrs. Surratt, in Washington, No. 541 H street, was the principal headquarters for the conspirators against the life of the President. That being established, without any further controversy, I now call attention to the part that Mrs. Surratt herself took in the conspiracy.

On page 179 of the report of the trial, a Mr. John T. Tibbett, a mail-carrier between Washington and some points

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south in Maryland, testified that he heard Mrs. Surratt say that she would give \$1,000 to any one who would kill Lincoln. On page 391 Mr. Weichman testifies that on the day of the assassination of the President he took Mrs. Surratt to a Mr. Loyd's, some distance south of Washington, and where some guns and other weapons had been concealed prior to that time. And that just before starting to Mr. Loyd's Mrs. Surratt said: "Wait, Mr. Weichman, I must get those things of Booth's," and that she went up stairs and brought down a package, and when they got to Loyd's she handed him the package, speaking in a low tone of voice. Then, as the case proceeds, Loyd himself testified that on the afternoon of the day of the assassination—April 14th, 1865—Mrs. Surratt and Weichman came to his house, and that Mrs. Surratt handed a package to him, with the remark that he should get the guns—or those things—and a couple of bottles of whisky, and give them to whoever would call for them that night. Here we may add that in the testimony of this man we certainly see the force and truthfulness of that epigrammatic expression, "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion."

According to the testimony of Mr. Loyd, Mrs. Surratt said, "Have those things ready and a couple of bottles of whisky, and give them to whoever will call for them that night. Then Mr. Loyd further testified (page 282) that about 12 o'clock that night Herold (one of the conspirators) came to his house and asked him to get those things at once. And he also stated that there was another man with Herold. When, in the trial, Loyd was asked when he first heard of the assassination of the President, he refused to answer, and insisted upon his refusal until the court said to him, "You must answer that question," and his reply was, "I first heard it that night" (page 286). Then the question occurs, and on the same page of the report of the trial, "Will you please state what he (Herold) said and what he did?" The reply is, "He did not tell me directly what he did himself. The expression he made use of was that he or they had killed the President." "Did he say anything about any other man?" "Not a word," was Loyd's answer. "I mean

as regards any other person being assassinated?" And Loyd's answer then is: "I am not certain, but I think it possible that he might have made use of Secretary Seward's name."

And so the testimony continues. But what I desire to call attention specially to is the part that Mrs. Surratt took in the transaction directly, and concerning which Mr. Loyd testified. At a time prior to the assassination, articles were left with Mr. Loyd, about which Mrs. Surratt said to him to have them ready, that they would soon be needed; then on the day of the assassination she took a package, that she said belonged to Booth, giving it to Mr. Loyd, with the instructions to give it to whoever would call that night. And that night about 12 o'clock Herold and Booth called—for Herold stated to Loyd that the man that was with him had a broken leg—and that was Booth's condition after the assassination. The witness, Weichman, also testifies that on the evening of the 14th of April, when he and Mrs. Surratt were returning from Loyd's, and when the city of Washington was brilliantly illuminated on account of the restoration of the United States flag to Fort Sumpter, he (Weichman) remarked that it was better for the country that peace should return, and to which Mrs. Surratt replied: "I am afraid that all this rejoicing will be turned into mourning, and all this gladness into sorrow." (Page 393.)

With this testimony, and yet much more that might be adduced of the same character, I leave this feature of the subject with the reader, feeling assured that he will be able clearly to determine in his own mind either the guilt or the innocence of Mrs. Surratt as one of the conspirators against the life of President Lincoln.

In the argument of the case, District Attorney Pierpont said: "I know the character of the American people. I know the imagination revolts at the execution of one of the tender sex. But, when a woman opens her house to murderers and conspirators, infuses the poison of her own malice into their hearts, and urges them to the crime of murder and treason, I say boldly, as an American officer,

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public safety, public duty requires that an example be made of her conduct.”

It is admitted also that Dr. Mudd, the physician who set Booth's broken limb, was a Romanist; but that Booth and Herold, in their flight, only happened to get to his house. But the testimony of Weichman is that Booth and Dr. Mudd were frequently with each other in Washington, in the winter of 1864 and 1865, prior to the assassination.

On page 386 of the report of the trial, Mr. Weichman, the Catholic, again testifies that he and Atzerodt went to church together; and he further states that he attended St. Aloysius and St. Patrick's Churches—those usually attended by Mrs. Surratt and her family (page 385). That probably will determine what Atzerodt's religion was.

On page 369, the same witness states that he first became acquainted with John H. Surratt at St. Mary's College, a Catholic institution near Ellicott's Mills, now one of the suburbs of Baltimore. That settles the fact that John H. Surratt was a Catholic, and not a Protestant.

I have already stated that the witness became acquainted with Payne, another one of the conspirators, at the house of Mrs. Surratt.

In his report of the trial of the conspirators to the War Department, General Baker says: “I mention as an exceptional and remarkable fact that every conspirator in custody is by education a Catholic.”

In referring to this significant statement of General Baker, Rev. Mr. Chiniquy, once a priest, now the pastor of a Baptist Church in Baltimore, in his “Fifty Years in the Church of Rome,” says: General Baker says, “All the conspirators were attending Catholic Church services and were educated Roman Catholics. It is true that some of them—as Atzerodt, Payne and Herald—asked for Protestant ministers when they were to be hanged.” Then says Mr. Chiniquy: “It is a well authenticated fact that Booth and Weichman, who were themselves Protestant perverts to Romanism, had proselyted a good number of semi-Protestants and Infidels, who, either from conviction or from

the hope of the fortunes promised to the successful murderers, were themselves very zealous for the Church of Rome. Payne, Atzerodt and Herold were among those proselytes. But when those murderers were to appear before the country and receive the just punishment of their crime, the Jesuits were too shrewd to ignore the fact that if they were all coming to the scaffold as Roman Catholics, and accompanied by their Father Confessors, it would at once open the eyes of the American people, and clearly show that this was a Roman Catholic plot. They persuaded three of their proselytes to avail themselves of the theological principles of the Church of Rome, namely, that a man is allowed to concede his religion, nay, that he may say that he is a heretic—a Protestant—though he is a Roman Catholic, when it is for his own interest or the best interests of his church to conceal the truth and deceive the people. Here is the doctrine of Rome on that subject: 'It is often more to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor to conceal our religious faith, since, when we live among heretics, we can more easily do them good in that way than if, by declaring our religion, we cause some disturbances, or deaths, or even the wrath of the tyrant.'—Theology of Alphonsus Liguori, book 2, chap. 3, p. 6."

But it may be said there is still another whose name you have not mentioned in this connection, and who was the direct assassin of the President—John Wilkes Booth. And what evidence have you, directly or by implication, further than already stated by Mr. Chiniquy, that Booth also was an adherent of the faith of the Church of Rome?

To the law and to the testimony again as to the religion of Booth, in so far as there was the evidence of any form of religion on his part. On page 305 of the report of the trial, Overton J. Conger, of Richland county, Ohio, is put upon the witness stand. Mr. Conger was Lieutenant Colonel of the First District of Columbia Cavalry, and was prominent in the capture of Booth. In the report of the trial Lieutenant Conger was asked to state what was found upon Booth's body after his capture and death. In his reply he referred

to some deadly weapons of various kinds, to a diary, to a pocket compass, and to some bills of exchange on a bank in Canada. After the description of the diary and weapons, on page 309, the question was asked: "And what other articles were found on his body?" And the reply of the witness is: "He had some fine shavings, some daguerreotypes, some tobacco, a pin, and—and—A LITTLE CATHOLIC MEDAL."

After that statement by Lieutenant Colonel Conger, a single inquiry, I think, is all that is necessary with regard to the religious faith or creed of Booth at the time of his assassination of President Lincoln; that is that in so far as there is any significance in an emblem, symbol, medal or badge of any kind, indicative either of a faith or of a membership in an organization, in so far, at least, the evidence is that at the time of the assassination of President Lincoln John Wilkes Booth was a Catholic, and not a Protestant.

In the week past I received in my mail an *indulgence medal*, and concerning which the presumption certainly is that the original owner of that medal was a Catholic, and not a Protestant. So, in the first place, we have learned where Booth found his associates and what was taken from his person after his death; also indicating that such were his *associates*. And where, in the letter to which I called attention, it is said, "I am happy to inform you that Pet has done his work well." *i. e.*, in the assassination of the President, according to the evidence, Pet was the name usually employed by Mrs. Surratt when she spoke of Booth.

But now we pass on to other facts in connection with the case in hand.

John H. Surratt, another one of the conspirators, was not immediately apprehended, but made his escape, and was not discovered and arrested for a period of nearly two years. Where was he in the meantime? Who were his friends and protectors? Again we go to the law and to the testimony. In the report of the trial, pages 895 to 912, inclusive, we find the testimony of the Reverend Father Charles Boucher, the priest of a Catholic Church in Canada. In his testimony he says that a few days after the assassination of the

President John Surratt was sent to him by *Father Lapierre, of Montreal*; that he kept him concealed in his parsonage from the end of April to the end of July; that then he took him back secretly to Father Lapierre, who kept him in his own father's house, very near to the house of the Bishop of Montreal.

Then he (Boucher) further testifies that he visited John H. Surratt frequently—at least twice a week. Then the same witness further says that he accompanied Surratt in a carriage, with Father Lapierre, to the steamer Montreal, when starting from Quebec; and that Father Lapierre was not dressed as a priest, but as an ordinary citizen; and that Lapierre kept John Surratt under lock during the voyage from Montreal to Quebec; and that at Quebec he accompanied him, disguised, from the Montreal steamer to the ocean steamer Peruvian; and the physician of the steamer Peruvian (Dr. McMillen) testifies that Father Lapierre introduced John H. Surratt to him under the name of *McCarthy*.

The steamer Peruvian sailed for Europe on the 15th of September, 1865, with John H. Surratt on board.

Under oath of themselves, such were the protectors of Surratt in this country. And when we follow him to Europe, where do we also find him there? We find him *in Italy*, almost under the shadow of *St. Peter's Church at Rome*, and a member of a company of the *Pope's Zouaves*, Pius IX. then being Pope at Rome. Such is also the testimony of a Catholic named Henry Benjamin St. Marie, and is reported on page 492 of the trial of Surratt.

So much, then, for the testimony with regard to those who were more or less directly implicated in the assassination of President Lincoln. And I have adhered strictly to the facts in the case, as published by the Government at Washington in the year 1867. But there is still another scrap of history in connection with this matter, to which I will also call the reader's attention:

In that valuable volume, entitled "*Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*," written by the Reverend Father Chiniquy,

now the pastor of a Baptist Church in Baltimore, I also find the statement of the following fact: Mr. Chiniquy says that on the day of the murder of Abraham Lincoln he was in the *Roman Catholic village* of St. Joseph, Minnesota; and that he was there told by a Roman Catholic of that place that President Lincoln and Secretary Seward had been assassinated on that day. The village of St. Joseph was then forty miles distant from either railroad or telegraph, and that at a town twelve miles distant from St. Joseph, Mr. Chiniquy further states, the people had no knowledge of the assassination on the next day, and that not until Sabbath, the third day after the assassination was it generally known in that part of the State.

And that fact is also sworn to before a Justice of the Peace by the Rev. F. A. Conwell, then a resident of North Evaston, Cook county, Illinois, and was at the time of giving this testimony Chaplain of the Seamen's Bethel Home, in Chicago. He testifies that he also was in the town of St. Joseph, Minnesota, on the day of the assassination of the President, and that it was reported there on that day, and several hours before it occurred.

Now we do not say that *the Church of Rome, as a Church, assassinated President Lincoln*. But we ask you now, as an intelligent and also an impartial jury, to take into consideration all the facts in this case.

First, That the impression was made upon the Catholics of this country that Mr. Lincoln had been born and baptized a Catholic; that he had renounced the Catholic faith, and therefore, in the opinion of Catholics, he was not only a heretic, but an *apostate heretic*.

And such, my friends, was certainly the teaching of Catholicism in some quarters.

At the close of my first discourse on this subject, two weeks ago this evening, an intelligent and thoroughly reliable gentleman of our city came to me and said: "This is the first time that I ever heard that Lincoln had never been a Catholic." I said to him: "Is it possible that such a false report was so general among the Catholics during the time

of the rebellion?" to which he again replied: "I had never heard anything to the contrary."

Take that fact, then, and add to that the other fact that in the letter of Pope Pius IX. to Mr. Davis, the President of the Southern Confederacy, and whom the Pope called *My Dear Son*—and the head of a legitimate government—and which letter, Mr. Chiniquy says, was read in the Catholic Churches in this country. Then take all the other evidence to which I have called your attention in the trial of John Surratt, and of the nearly 1,400 pages of which I have had the time only to give you the tithe of the testimony that might be given.

Begin with that house in Washington, and consider who were the conspirators direct, and then also consider those who sheltered, concealed and shielded the escaping fugitives from justice, in this country and in Europe—and can any impartial hearer and friend of the truth feel otherwise than that, in the light of such facts, Romanists assassinated President Lincoln; and therefore, it also, ill became one of the notable speakers at the Baltimore Council to boast of the loyalty of his Church to the American Republic, when the incontrovertible evidence is that a band of oath-bound conspirators in his Church, only a quarter of a century ago, and when the Government needed loyal citizens as never before, that then a band of Roman Catholic conspirators, according to their own admission, by letters and the sworn testimony of their friends, tried to overthrow and destroy the American Republic with one fell swoop against all its official heads, as also against the two *greatest and also Protestant Generals of our army.*

In the face of such facts, it must be admitted that whilst, as a *Church, the Church of Rome* may not have been the assassin of the President of the United States, yet the part that the Church of Rome took, from the head at Rome to its members in America, will and must be a *stain upon that Church*, such as its *holy water* can never wash out, and such as the loyal Protestant American citizens of this country must be slow to forget.

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I have no controversy now with that Church with regard to her doctrines. I have no controversy with that Church because of the spiritual province and authority of her Pope. But when the Papal decrees from the head of that Church go forth, over and over, and from year to year, and when *these are especially intended for this country*, and which are a threat, a menace and a continual peril and treason, at least in theory, to both our *civil freedom* and our Protestant Christianity, then *silence* on the part of the *Protestants* of this country is a very great mistake, as the very least that can be said of it.

In all this controversy I have been impelled to this duty only by the word of Him who has said: "If the people of the land take a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman; if, when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet and warn the people, then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet and taketh not warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and took not warning, his blood shall be upon him. But if the watchman see the sword come and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, if the sword come and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand."—Ezekiel, 33:2-6.

My friends, as a final warning word, let me yet say, *and may God make it sink into your hearts as never before, and may it stir you up to duty and watchfulness as never before*—let me yet say to you there are two very great perils that threaten the welfare of this goodly land of ours. One of these perils is *Rum*, and the other is *Romanism*. And I trust and pray that *God may continue* to give me strength to warn the people, as they ought to be warned, against both of these perils.

In view of the designs and the encroachments of the Church of Rome upon the educational and the religious institutions of this country, some plans should be adopted by which the sixty thousand Protestant pulpits and Protestant congregations could and also would warn the people against

that which is certainly one of the impending perils to the American Republic. The language of the Church of Rome to the Protestants of this country now is: "Sleep on—sleep on, and soon we will have you."

Such agitation upon this subject is now also important in view of the fact that some things must be done whilst they still can be done, since there may come a time when, by education and agitation, they cannot be done, however strong the desire may still be to do them in that manner.

Hence we believe that the time has fully come in this country when, irrespective of denominational lines, there ought to be State and National Protestant Christian conferences for the special purpose of a fuller understanding of the whole attitude of the Church of Rome to our American institutions.



APPENDIX.

The jury in the trial of John H. Surratt disagreed, and the result was his final acquittal of the crime charged.

In his "Fifty Years in the Church of Rome," Rev. Mr. Chiniquy says: "On the arrival of the prisoner, John H. Surratt, in the United States, his Jesuit confessor whispered in his ear: 'Fear not; you will not be condemned. Through the influence of a high Roman Catholic lady, two or three of the jurymen will be Roman Catholics, and you will be safe.'" Then he further says: "Those jurymen were told by their Father Confessors that the Most Holy Father, Pope Gregory VII., had solemnly and infallibly declared that 'the killing of an heretic was no murder.'"

By reason of such instruction on the part of the Papacy, the use of the deadly weapon has always been one of its favorite arguments.

In 1580, it was arranged by the Romanists that an English officer by the name of Savage should assassinate the Protestant Queen Elizabeth, and his confederates would liberate Catholic Mary Queen of Scots. The plot was also changed. It was thought to be a plot of too much importance to be left to the resolution of one man. It was arranged that six Romanists should engage in the service. The Government frustrated their plan, and the execution of the conspirators also followed. [Knight's England—Events of Seventeenth Century.]

We have no subject matter at hand that will enable us definitely to determine the religious faith of the jurors in the trial of John H. Surratt; but of these who favored his acquittal, two were natives of Maryland and three were natives of Virginia. I refer to that in view of the fact that the nativity of the jurors who voted for acquittal may not be without public interest.

In one of Joseph Cook's lectures, published in the June

(1889) number of *Our Day*, the following reference is made to the letter of Pope Pius IX. to the President of the Southern Confederacy: "After the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued by President Lincoln, Pius IX. wrote a letter to Jefferson Davis, announcing that an embassy sent from the rebel States had been courteously received at Rome, and that it was the Pope's desire that friendly relations should be perfected between the Papacy and the Southern Confederacy."

"Since the publication of that letter (and which was read in all the prominent Catholic Churches in this country)," said Mr. Lincoln, "a great number of Catholics have deserted their banners and turned traitors; very few, comparatively, have remained true to their oath of fealty."

In one of the last days of his life Mr. Lincoln wrote a letter containing these words: "The Jesuits are so expert in their deeds of blood that Henry IV. said it was impossible to escape them, and he became their victim, though he did all to protect himself. My escape from their hands is more than a miracle, *since the letter of the Pope to Jefferson Davis has sharpened a million of daggers.*"





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