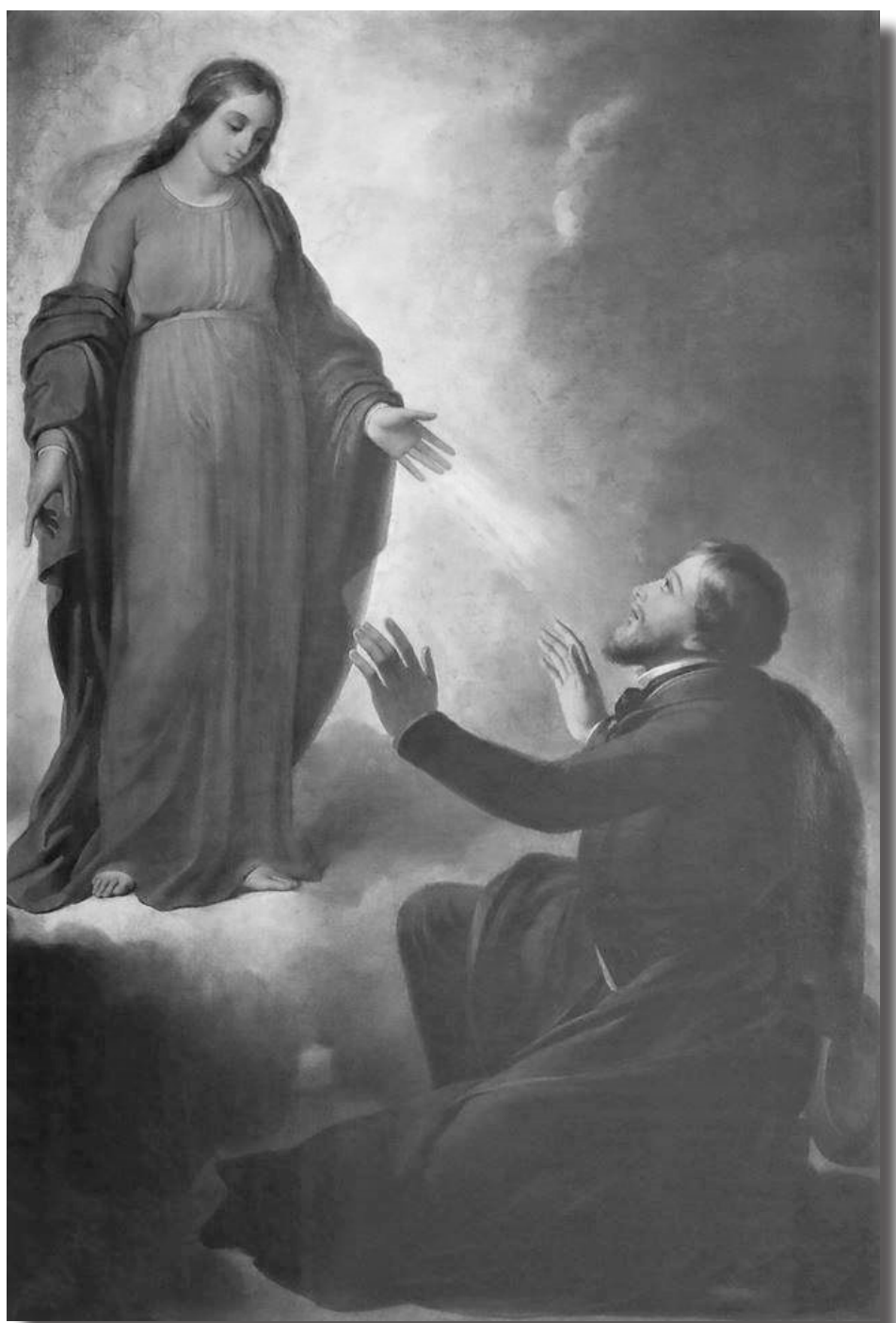


## Roberto de Mattei/Continued...



“He fell down a Jew and rose a Christian”

will spend Carnival<sup>9</sup> preparing for Baptism, ready to sacrifice yourself for the Catholic faith; and you will renounce the world, its pomps, its pleasures, your own fortune, your hopes, your future; and, if necessary, you will also renounce your fiancée, the affection of your family, the esteem of your friends, your connections with the Jews...and you will aspire to nothing other than to follow Jesus Christ and to carry his Cross even unto death!...” I tell you that if some prophet had come up to me and made such a prediction, there is only one person I would have thought more senseless than him: the man who would believe that such madness was possible! And yet, it is just such madness that today constitutes my wisdom and my happiness.

I walked out of the cafe, and there was the carriage of Theodore de Bussièrès. He stopped and invited me to get in and go for a ride. The weather was beautiful, and I happily accepted his invitation. But de Bussièrès asked me if I would mind stopping for a few minutes

at the Church of Sant’Andrea delle Fratte that was just down the street, because he had a matter he needed to take care of; he suggested that I wait in the carriage; but I preferred to get out and see the church. The people there were making preparations for a funeral, and I inquired who the deceased person was who would be receiving such extreme honors. De Bussièrès responded: “He is one of my friends, the Count de La Ferronnays.” He added, “His sudden death is the cause of the sadness that you have seen in me for the last two days.”

I did not know de La Ferronnays; I had never seen him, and I had no other impression than that of a vague sorrow that one always feels at the news of a sudden death. De Bussièrès left me to go and reserve a gallery for the family of the deceased. “Don’t get impatient,” he said to me as he entered the cloister, “it will only take two minutes....”

**“He fell down a Jew and rose a Christian”**

The Church of Sant’Andrew was small, poor, and deserted;... I believe that I was almost completely alone;... there was no work of art

that attracted my attention. I walked around, mechanically, looking around without thinking anything in particular; I recall only that there was a black dog that was jumping and dancing around in front of me... As soon as the dog disappeared, the entire church disappeared, I no longer saw anything... or rather, my God, I saw only one thing!

How can I describe it? Oh! no, human speech cannot attempt to express the inexpressible; every description, no matter how sublime it would be, would only be a profanation of the ineffable truth. There I was, lying prostrate, bathed in my tears, with my heart outside of myself, when de Bussièrès called me back to life.

I could not reply to his hasty questions; but I took the medal that I had on my chest and with great affection I kissed the image of the Virgin, resplendent with grace....Oh! It was truly Her!

I did not know where I was; I did not know if I was Alphonse or someone else; I felt such a total change within me that I believed that I was someone other than myself....I tried to find myself and I did not find myself....The most ardent joy sprang from the depth of my soul; I could not speak; I did not want to reveal anything; I felt within me something solemn and sacred that made me ask to see a priest....I was taken to him, and only after he asked me to was I able to speak as best I could, on my knees and with a trembling heart.

My first words were in gratitude to de La Ferronnays and the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories. I knew with certainty that de La Ferronnays had prayed for me; but I could not say how I knew, just as I could not give an account of the truths which I had now acquired faith in and knowledge of. All that I can say is that at the moment it happened the bandages fell from my eyes; not one only, but all the multitude of bandages that had been wrapped around me, they rapidly fell off one after the other, like snow and mud and ice under the heat of a scorching sun.

I came out of a tomb, out of an abyss of shadows, and I was alive, perfectly alive....But I was weeping! I saw, at the bottom of the abyss, the extreme miseries from which I had been rescued by an infinite mercy; I shivered at the sight of all of my iniquities, and I was stupefied, softened, lost in admiration and gratitude....I thought of my brother with an unspeakable joy; but together with my tears of love I also wept tears of compassion. Oh! how many people tranquilly descend into this abyss with their eyes closed by their pride or their carelessness. They descend there, they sink into the horrible darkness alive! And my family, my fiancée, my poor sisters! Oh, excruciating anxiety! I think of all of you, you

whom I love! I give my first prayers to you... Will you not raise your eyes toward the Savior of the world, whose blood has cancelled original sin? Oh, the imprint of this stain is horrible! It makes the creature made in the image of God completely unrecognizable.

I am asked how I learned these truths, since it is certain that I have never opened a book of religion, I have never read a page of the Bible, and the dogma of original sin, which is completely forgotten and denied by the Jews of our day, had never occupied my thoughts for even a moment; I doubt that I had ever even heard its name before. How then did I arrive at this knowledge? I do not know.

All that I know is that when I entered the church I was ignorant of everything; when I left, I could see clearly. I cannot explain this change except with the image of a man who awakens from a deep sleep, or a man born blind who sees the light in a single instant; he sees, but he cannot define the light that illumines him and in which he contemplates the objects of his admiration.

**The Apostolate to the Jews**

On hearing of the miracle, Pope Gregory XVI ordered his Cardinal Vicar Costantino Patrizi to immediately open a canonical investigation. This took place in 17 sessions, from February 17 to April 1, 1842, using the strict procedure of ecclesiastical tribunals. At its conclusion it determined “that the truth is fully confirmed of the famous miracle worked by Almighty God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely, the instantaneous and perfect conversion of Alphonse Maria Ratisbonne from Judaism.

Cardinal Patrizi himself solemnly baptized Ratisbonne, with the new name of Alphonse Maria, on January 31, 1842, the Church of the Gesù. Ratisbonne became a priest in 1847. For some time he belonged to the Society of Jesus, which he then left with the permission of Pius IX to enter the Congregation of the Daughters and Missionaries of Our Lady of Zion, founded by his brother Theodore. Just like his brother, Alphonse Maria Ratisbonne wanted to dedicate his entire life to the apostolate among the Jews. In 1855 he left for Jerusalem, where he succeeded in purchasing the ruins of the Praetorium of Pilate, on which he constructed the Sanctuary of the *Ecce Homo*. He remained in Jerusalem until his death on May 6, 1884.<sup>10</sup>

**News of the miracle spread rapidly**

<sup>10</sup> “He knelt on those ruins and prayed; it seemed that he could still hear the echo of that condemnation and the hateful cry of his fathers: “*Crucifige Eum!*” “I have never forgotten,” he said, “what I felt in front of the ruins of the court of Pontius Pilate.” There it was that the cry rang out: “May his blood fall upon us and upon our children.” “It fell, yes,” thought Alphonse, “but it fell not in a curse but in regeneration,” just as it fell on him on January 20, 1842, in Sant’Andrea delle Fratte.” Cf. Father ANTONIO BELLANTONIO, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

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<sup>9</sup> Carnival, or Shrovetide, is a period of festivities, street parades, and outdoor entertainment during the weeks preceding Lent. In 1842 Lent began on February 10.