

THE CHRISTIAN QUEST FOR A USABLE PAST

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Every Christian who is sensitive to the claims of Christ on his or her life wrestles with relating one's faith and vocation. For me as an academic historian this enterprise takes several forms: the manner in which I approach my discipline, the kinds of material I select for my courses and lectures, the interpretations I give to this material, the topics on which I do research, the quest to be as objective as possible in my studies and at the same time exercise tolerance and empathy for the views of professional colleagues with whom I differ, and of course the way I deal with students. People in my field also talk about the "uses" of history, and in my work as a practicing historian I often think about how I may provide fellow believers with a "usable past," one that encourages and edifies them in their daily walk and gives them the understanding that enables them to live confidently in today's confused and uncertain world.

One way to do this is to study the experiences of those who have gone before us, look at their achievements and failures, and draw practical lessons from these for our own lives. The occasion of an important anniversary often serves as the stimulus for such an endeavor. At such times we as evangelicals are given opportunities to reflect on the struggles of faithful servants of God and to seek wisdom from their experiences and role models for our own lives.

The year 1985 was especially favorable for this, and it was marked by an abundance of conferences, symposia, commemorative publications, and even festivals that observed various anniversaries. Among these were the deaths of Methodius (c. 815-885), the Byzantine missionary who with his brother Cyril carried the Christian faith to the southern Slavs and through their Bible translation work provided them with the Cyrillic alphabet that is still used today in some countries; Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), the lord chancellor of England under Henry VIII who was executed for refusing to countenance the annulment of the latter's marriage and renounce the authority of the pope; John Fletcher (1729-85), the prominent English Methodist preacher and theologian who was Wesley's close associate and designated successor; and Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-85), the most influential evangelical social reformer of the nineteenth century. This is also the four-hundredth anniversary of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the ensuing dispersal of French Calvinists throughout Europe and overseas, the two-hundredth anniversary of James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments*, one of the most significant documents in the development of re-

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ligious freedom in America, and the hundredth anniversary of the publication of the *Revised Version*, a major landmark in the history of the English Bible.

Also noteworthy are the birth anniversaries of prominent figures: Johann Bugenhagen (1485–1558), Luther's aide who carried the Reformation to northern Germany and Denmark; Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) and George Frederick Handel (1685–1759), all of them towering personalities in the history of sacred music; Dominikus Zimmerman (1685–1766), the leading architect of the German rococo whose ornately decorated churches even today provide worshipers with an awe-inspiring sense of the majesty of God; and Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705), the foremost figure in the development of Pietism. The list is not exhaustive, and undoubtedly others could be mentioned.

To be sure, there are always those who simply "build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous," as Jesus so pithily put it when he once addressed the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:29 *NIV*). But looking at the lives of the saints can have a didactic function. Thus I would like to select from the above list four historical examples that illustrate significant dimensions of the Christian life: the experiential or spiritual side of one's existence in Christ, the aesthetic aspect of the Christian faith, the concern for the physical needs of others that flows from a vital experience with God, and the call to remain faithful in the face of adversity and persecution. The experiences of these personalities are relevant and informative for us today, and we can draw courage and spiritual sustenance from them.

I. PHILIPP JAKOB SPENER AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The person most closely identified with German Pietism, Philipp Jakob Spener, had a distinguished ministerial career.¹ Born in 1635 in Alsace, he studied theology at Strasbourg where he received a doctorate and worked as an unattached preacher. From 1666 to 1685 he held the position of senior minister in Frankfurt am Main and came to be regarded as one of the leading pastors in Germany. In 1686 he was appointed court chaplain to the king of Saxony in Dresden, and five years later he accepted a call from the Prussian ruler to the church of St. Nicholas in Berlin where he remained until his death in 1705.

In his early years Spener had been deeply influenced by various forms of Lutheran and Reformed piety, and he recognized that a conversion experience—a rebirth—was necessary for the Christian life. He preached on that

¹Among the more helpful studies in English that provide information on Spener and the movement associated with him are D. W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); F. E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); R. F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979); R. G. Clouse, *The Church in the Age of Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1980); R. V. Pierard, "Philipp Jakob Spener," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 925; M. W. Kohl, "Wiedergeburt as the Central Theme in Pietism," *Covenant Quarterly* 32 (November 1974) 15–20; "Pietism as a Movement of Revival," *Covenant Quarterly* 33 (August 1975) 3–23; R. J. VanderMolen, "Philipp Jakob Spener," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 1039–1040; M. A. Noll, "Pietism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 855–858.

topic many times, and toward the end of his career a large collection of his sermons on the topic was published. He argued that the second birth was an act of God and the beginning point of faith in the person. From the creation of the new, inner man followed a process of growth that led ultimately to the place where one's entire existence would reflect that of Jesus Christ. He used the analogy of the drawing compass to illustrate what takes place. God's action of rebirth constitutes the center, the fixed point, while the other leg—the individual's faith, piety, and moral and social standards—traces out the circle, which is the boundary of his existence. Thus the born-again person's total being was determined by the center point, Jesus Christ. Victory over temptation, sin, and even Satan himself was now possible, and through the ongoing process of sanctification the believer could become increasingly like Christ.

This led directly to his ideas on how the church could be improved. This included strengthening the program for religious instruction of children (in those days the catechism), combatting ignorance and moral deficiency among the clergy, and encouraging lay religion. To accomplish the latter he introduced the practice of holding private meetings of small groups for the purpose of cultivating holiness, the so-called *collegia pietatis*. He suggested this in a sermon in 1669 and implemented the first one in 1670. The gatherings took place in his home, and both men and women attended—although they were seated separately, and only the men were allowed to speak. They were opened with prayer, and either the previous Sunday's sermon or passages from a devotional book were discussed. They were designed to bring the participants nearer to God and to promote a purified life. They were to be small "churches within the church" that would aid the pastor in his spiritual duties and return the church to the spiritual level of the early Christian communities.

Spener spelled out his ideas in more popular form in a small book published in 1675 entitled *Pia Desideria, or Heartfelt Longing for a God-Pleasing Reform of the True Evangelical Church*.² In this he comments on the prevailing moral laxity on the part of both clergy and laity. Sin is not taken seriously, good works are ignored, and religious duties are performed in a superficial, perfunctory manner. He then affirms the possibility of reform and sets forth six concrete proposals to achieve this: (1) more extensive public and private reading and study of the Bible; (2) a renewed emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, which would insure larger participation on the part of the laity; (3) the cultivation of the spiritual life through deeds of love to one's neighbor and not just knowledge alone; (4) avoidance of theological disputation; (5) a procedure for training future ministers that couples piety with learning by including devotional literature in the curriculum; and (6) encouragement of preaching that has edification and the development of the inner man as its goal.

Spener called attention to a vital dimension of the Christian faith that the seventeenth-century Orthodox Lutherans had neglected, and he hoped to complete the work Martin Luther had begun—namely, to insure that the reformation of doctrine became a reformation of life as well. For him the essence of Christianity was a personal relationship to God that would be expressed in a

²See the English edition of *Pia Desideria* prepared by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

life lived according to his will. This relationship began with justification and was brought to fulfillment through regeneration and sanctification. The *collegia pietatis* would be characterized by mutual edification, not a pharisaical separation of the "true" Christians from the others, and would stress the new birth, vital faith and holy living. He also affirmed the absolute authority of Scripture for faith and life but recognized it as having more than mere mechanical efficacy. It must be brought to life in the individual soul by the Holy Spirit. Also, although Scripture was inerrant, the writings of Luther and his later interpreters were not. In theological education the emphasis on systematic theology and dogmatic precision should be supplemented, if not actually replaced, by spiritual reading and going directly to the Biblical sources rather than depending on the formulations of commentators.

Spener's affirmation that the essence of Christianity was a personal relationship with God expressed through a life lived according to his revealed will rather than merely assent to a series of theological propositions evoked considerable opposition from the orthodox establishment of his day. As Theodore Tappert summarizes it:

Clergymen felt threatened in their status by the rise of the laity, professors of theology resented the brash incursion of outsiders into their academic preserve, and the complacent were disturbed by appeals for change and for departure from what was familiar, customary, and comfortable.³

Many critics contended that his conventicles were divisive elements in the church, the emphasis on spiritual living neglected the importance of right beliefs, and the role of the sacraments was neglected. Nevertheless he shows us the necessity of balancing our concern for theological-doctrinal orthodoxy with a spiritual life that is shaped by and reflects the inner meaning of those tenets. Spener's legacy to us is that correct belief and correct living may not be bifurcated or separated. They are equally necessary for one to be a mature, well-rounded Christian.

II. JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH AND THE AESTHETIC LIFE

Johann Sebastian Bach was not only one of the greatest composers of all time but also a devout Christian, and in truth the religious dimension of his life was inseparable from the musical.⁴ Born in 1685 to a musical family in Eisenach, he studied the Lutheran catechism and the Bible in Latin and Greek

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Noteworthy works on Bach include P. Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685-1750* (New York: Dover, 1951 [1883-85]); A. Schweitzer, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (London: A. & C. Black, 1911); H. Parry, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Story of the Development of a Great Personality* (London: Putnam, 1934 [1909]); C. S. Terry, *Bach, a Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933 [1928]); H. T. David and A. Mendel, *The Bach Reader* (New York: Norton, 1945); W. Mellers, *Bach and the Dance of God* (New York: Oxford University, 1981); G. Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984); F. Werner, *Johann Sebastian Bach* (New York: Norton, 1985); "J. S. Bach," in *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, 1. 169-174; J. B. MacMillan, "J. S. Bach," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 94; "J. S. Bach," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1. 785-818.

in the home-town school. Orphaned at the age of ten, he moved in with his brother in nearby Ohrdruf and attended a secondary school that was influenced by the noted educational reformer J. A. Comenius. This meant that religious instruction occupied the key place in the curriculum, and music was seen as secondary only to theology in importance. At Bach's school the same person taught both and believed that music "makes the heart ready and receptive to the divine Word and truth."⁵ Then he went to Lüneburg and worked as a choir boy while furthering his education at a local academy that was even more explicitly theological.

At age eighteen the precocious youth became a church organist in Arnstadt, then Mühlhausen, and finally at the court of the pious Duke of Weimar. After nine years he moved to Cöthen where he served the Prince of Anhalt as a "music director." At this time he wrote the famous *Brandenburg Concertos* and other instrumental works. In 1723 he went to Leipzig and spent the remaining twenty-seven years of his life as minister of music (cantor) at the St. Thomas church school. He was in charge of the musical education of the boys and also was responsible for the liturgical music at four churches in the city. He trained and directed the choirs and instrumentalists and composed most of the music for the church services. The result was a prodigious outpouring of cantatas (possibly three hundred), oratorios, and organ works, as well as the monumental *B Minor Mass* and *St. Matthew Passion*.

For Bach the Christian, music was a central, not peripheral, feature of existence. Leonard Bernstein, America's leading composer and director, paid tribute to this when he declared that "the religious spirit" was what held all his music together:

For Bach, all music was religion; writing it was an act of faith; and performing it was an act of worship. Every note was dedicated to God and to nothing else. And this was true of *all* his music no matter how secular its purpose. . . . [Bach] was a man of God, and his godliness informs his music from first to last.⁶

He had the conviction that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, the joy both of man's desiring and God's giving. For example, in the *Passion* Bach portrays the Christian's life as a continuing conversation with the mighty King who was enthroned by being lifted up on the cross. The praises of the Church are what exalt its Savior and Lord. Man's relationship to God is a personal one. Jesus is the bridegroom of the soul, and his resurrection is a guarantee of our own.⁷

Paul Minear observes that Bach's theology was thoroughly grounded in Biblical exegesis and that nothing quite so obsessed him as the text of Scripture. In composing his music he viewed himself as a servant of that text. For him the music was a response to or expression of the words of Scripture. This is excellently illustrated by the section in the *St. Matthew Passion* when the cock

⁵Mellers, *Bach* 82.

⁶L. Bernstein, *The Joy of Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959) 264-265.

⁷P. S. Minear, "Bach and Today's Theologians," *TToday* 42 (July 1985) 201-210, is a thoughtful discussion of the theology in his music.

crowded and Peter left weeping bitterly (Matt 26:75). As Minear puts it:

Bach saw this situation in its dramatic intensity; he felt the emotional weight of the conflicts within Peter's soul; he sensed what those conflicts were saying to worshipers on Good Friday afternoon. In a moving aria, he turned Peter's tears into a confession before God. "See, my heart and my eyes are weeping bitterly before you." Then he turned the tears into a prayer, "Have mercy on me, my God."

Finally, in a chorale the congregation joined with Peter in his penitence—"I do not deny my guilt"—and voiced its awareness of God's grace: "Your mercy is far greater than the sins I find in myself."⁸

Wilfrid Mellers stresses that Bach saw "doctrinal verities and a human story [as] one." The linearity in his music (its continually flowing melody and polyphony) suggests the spiritual dimension of life, while its verticality (periodic alternations of harmonic tension) stem from the physical or human side of life. Therefore linear flow may be equated with the temporal progression of the world, which is crossed at right angles by God's timeless present, and the point of intersection is the incarnation, the point where the divine Being took on human flesh, suffered on our behalf, and enabled us through faith to become God's own people.⁹

Thus Bach provides a sense of forward motion that allows his hearers to follow the gospel story from step to step. They are taken back in time, and through the medium of music the Biblical narrative is allowed to create its own ambience so that it may be applied to the people. This is illustrated by the dramatic scene in the *St. Matthew Passion* where Jesus declares that one of the twelve will betray him and the disciples respond instantly with "Lord, is it I?" The worshipers themselves provide the real answer in a chorale: "It is I, I who should be punished, and bound hand and foot in Hell." Minear rightly concludes:

Bach's music transports listeners back into that earlier time and views present behavior through the lens of the biblical story; it is inherently self-transcending. By allowing the account of Gethsemane to set the stage for quiet reflection, the Passion music communicates the actualities of vicarious suffering.¹⁰

Orthodox Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach saw his divine calling as that of creating music appropriate to God's praise. His love for Scripture and the Church was translated into a fusion of faith and music, theology and liturgy. He set the Biblical story to music in such a way as to reveal God's presence to the congregation and to bring about a conversation with the Almighty. He demonstrated that the aesthetic side of life affords rich opportunities for experiencing God and communicating with him, and our lives will be made richer by taking advantage of these.

⁸Ibid., p. 205.

⁹Mellers, *Bach* 87–88.

¹⁰Minear, "Bach" 205–206.

III. THE EARL OF SHAFTESBURY AND THE LIFE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS

The labors of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, on behalf of the poor and oppressed in Britain constitute one of the great epics of Christian history.¹¹ Born into a prominent aristocratic family in 1801, he was educated at Harrow and Oxford and entered Parliament at the age of twenty-six. A member of the Tory (Conservative) party, he served in the House of Commons for over twenty years. Upon succeeding his father as Earl of Shaftesbury in 1851, he moved over to the House of Lords and remained there until his death in 1885. During his youth he underwent a life-changing religious experience and was a dedicated member of the evangelical party in the Church of England.

Lord Ashley displayed a single-minded devotion to the causes he regarded as right, and probably no other prominent lay Victorian "was more obviously and unremittingly guided by conscience" than he.¹² As he became increasingly acquainted with the sin, squalor and suffering in which so many people lived, his outlook on life grew gloomy, and he tended to make snap judgments and swing from one extreme to another. Yet he felt a deep need to devote his life to the pursuit of philanthropy and national virtue, even though he never received any salary or financial remuneration for his more than fifty years of public service.

His first exposure to social evils was the treatment of the mentally ill. After viewing first-hand the conditions in the insane asylums he spoke on behalf of reform legislation, was appointed to London's Metropolitan Lunacy Commission in 1828, and secured establishment of a permanent Lunacy Commission for the whole country in 1845, which he chaired until his death.

From 1833 to 1847 Ashley was wrapped up in factory reform, which focused on securing legislation limiting the work of youths between thirteen and eighteen years of age to ten hours per day. He noted in a memorandum that when he was asked to assume the parliamentary leadership of the cause he wanted a day to think it over. Then after meditation, prayer and looking into the Word of God he informed his friend: "I believe it is my duty to God and to the poor, and I trust He will support me." In his diary he commented that "to me it appeared an affair less of policy than of religion."¹³

As part of the campaign, which achieved its goal in 1847 through the adoption of the Ten Hours Act, he conducted probes into abuses of female and child

¹¹Significant treatments of Shaftesbury and his manifold endeavors include E. Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (3 vols.; London: Cassell, 1886); J. W. Bready, *Lord Shaftesbury and Social and Industrial Progress* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964 [1926]); G. F. A. Best, *Shaftesbury* (London: Batsford, 1964); G. Battiscombe, *Shaftesbury: The Great Reformer 1801-1885* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975); K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of Their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Bles, 1962); J. A. Simpson, "Shaftesbury," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 900.

¹²Best, *Shaftesbury* 128.

¹³Hodder, *Shaftesbury*, 1. 148-149.

labor in the textile mills. In the process he became aware of abuses in the coal mining industry and in 1840 launched an investigation into conditions in the mines, which discovered an appalling level of misery and depravity that was almost beyond belief. This resulted in the passage of a bill in 1842 that banned the underground employment of women as well as boys under thirteen. Ashley recorded in his diary the following word of thanksgiving for the victory on behalf of mankind:

Took the Sacrament on Sunday in joyful and humble thankfulness to Almighty God for the undeserved measure of success with which He has blessed my effort for the glory of His name, and the welfare of His creatures. Oh that it may be the beginning of good to all mankind. . . . The more I labour, the more I see of labour to be performed, and vain at the least will be the labour of us all. Our prayer must be for the Second Advent, our toil "that we be found watching."¹⁴

In his later years Lord Ashley shifted his attention from simply the conditions of employment to the human problems of the "poorest" poor. Unmoved by the contemporary obsession with the religious and moral aspects of poverty, he clearly understood that environmental factors were the prime culprit. He was involved in the formation of the Ragged School Union in 1844, which promoted free elementary education for the urban poor. Religious education was a key part of these schools, and some even formed churches to provide spiritual care for the dirty, poverty-stricken children and their parents. Others included day-care centers for working mothers and hostels for homeless youths.

From 1848 to 1854 he served on the Board of Health, which fought epidemic disease through improving urban sewage and water supply systems and eliminating unsanitary procedures in the overcrowded cemeteries. Public health matters had been ignored by earlier evangelical social reformers because they did not see them as connected with morals or religion, but a recent biographer accurately observes:

Shaftesbury was wise enough to realise that public health is a subject which must concern every Christian. He saw clearly that people obliged to live in sub-human conditions could not be expected to live according to ordinary human standards, much less according to the super-human standard demanded of Christians.¹⁵

Another area of enormous need in the cities was housing. Of all the slum dwellings the common dormitories or "lodging-houses" were the most wretched. The stinking, vermin-infested rooms were packed with people, and often as many as eight persons would occupy a single bed, if there were beds at all. In 1842 Lord Ashley helped form the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Class that attacked the problem by erecting model dwellings to show commercial builders how it would be possible to put up accommodations that were reasonably comfortable and healthful and profitable at the same time. He fought the "window tax" that encouraged the building of unsanitary structures, and in 1851 he obtained legislation authorizing local governments to register and inspect all common lodging-houses and to build new ones.

¹⁴Ibid., 1. 431-432.

¹⁵Battiscombe, *Shaftesbury* 233.

Later he was involved in establishing reformatories and refuges for juvenile delinquents and homes for handicapped children and the blind, and he brought an end to the use of children as chimney sweeps (climbing-boys), brickyard workers, and in agricultural labor gangs. He worked to improve conditions for poor bootblacks and street vendors, was a cofounder of the Destitute Children's Society (1867) that provided cheap or free meals for slum children, supported shelters to reclaim street women, created the Cabmen's Shelter Fund (1875) that gave London cab drivers places for rest and refreshment, and although not a teetotaler himself enthusiastically backed the temperance efforts among children.

Shaftesbury's motivation in all these endeavors was spiritual. The Bible was the key influence in his life, as can be seen in a diary entry: "The older I grow the more I love that book. It should be studied, weighed, and prayed over hour by hour by every man in public life." Then he said that this Biblical faith should be applied to day-to-day living: "Love for Christ must necessarily include love for the human race, their temporal and, unquestionably, their eternal interests."¹⁶ Possibly the most moving tribute to this man's faith and accomplishments came from the pens of J. L. and Barbara Hammond, two noted economic historians who hardly were friendly to evangelical Christianity: "He did more than any single man, or any single government in English history, to check the raw power of the new industrial system," and the "chief credit" for the system of factory laws "must be given to his courage, his humanity, and his patience."¹⁷

IV. THE FRENCH HUGUENOTS AND A LIFE OF FAITHFULNESS IN ADVERSITY

The story of the French Protestants and their survival in the face of murderous persecution is a remarkable one. Commonly known as the Huguenots, they were Reformed or Calvinist Protestants who were subjected to pressure from the 1540s onward.¹⁸ Missionary efforts from Geneva (the center of Calvinism) had considerable success among the French nobility, and civil war eventually set in as the militant Catholics tried to stamp out the Huguenots. The most notorious event in this period was the attempt to wipe out the Huguenot leadership in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572. Finally, in

¹⁶Quotations from his unpublished papers in *ibid.*, pp. 314, 318.

¹⁷J. L. and B. Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury* (London: Constable, 1923) 153.

¹⁸An enormous literature exists on French Calvinism. It is surveyed, although not in great depth, in the recent general account by G. A. Rothrock, *The Huguenots: A Biography of a Minority* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979) 191-196. Two older studies that are still useful are H. M. Baird, *The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (2 vols.; New York: Scribners, 1895 [reprinted 1972]); A. J. Grant, *The Huguenots* (New York: Archon, 1969 [1934]). A revisionist study by W. C. Scoville, *The Persecution of the Huguenots and French Economic Development, 1680-1720* (Berkeley: University of California, 1960), downplays the economic impact of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. For evangelical perspectives see J. G. Gray, *The French Huguenots: Anatomy of Courage* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); D. Jellema, "Huguenots," in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 489-490.

1589 the leader of the Huguenot party, Henry of Navarre, came to the throne as Henry IV, and he switched to the Roman Catholic faith in order to secure his position and bring some semblance of peace to the war-torn land.

To insure the safety and loyalty of the Huguenot minority and end the civil strife, Henry issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which granted them full toleration, civil rights, and permission to fortify their towns so they could protect themselves. His assassination in 1610 left them in jeopardy, and revolts in the 1620s resulted in the elimination of their military forces and fortifications. They still had freedom of worship and civil equality, but these rights quickly eroded in the ensuing decades.

The Huguenots became sober, quiet people, loyal subjects of the king, who were mostly of middle-class backgrounds and engaged in commerce and manufacturing. Most were content just to be left alone and allowed to practice their faith and carry on their lives in peace. But King Louis XIV, the grandson of Henry IV, had an exalted conception of monarchical power, and he wanted to bring everything under his absolutistic rule. With their special rights the Huguenots seemed to be a state within a state, and Catholics were urging upon him a restoration to religious uniformity. He chipped away at their privileges and concluded that "heresy" would ultimately have to be banned from his realm. One historian commented that he had found more than 125 documents between 1679 and 1685 that curtailed the liberties or penalized Huguenots in some way, much in the same way that Jews were treated in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1938.¹⁹ Perhaps the most repressive measure was the quartering of soldiers in the Protestant households. They made life so unpleasant for the Huguenot families that some even converted to Catholicism to escape this.

Finally on October 22, 1685, a royal order revoking the Edict of Nantes was put into effect. It required all Reformed pastors to leave the country and churches to be destroyed. Huguenot schools were ordered closed, their children were to be sent to mass regularly, and everyone born into their "false religion" was to be rebaptized. No practice of religion outside the Roman Catholic Church would be allowed, but adults could enjoy "freedom of conscience." Laypersons were forbidden to emigrate because their skills were needed to strengthen the national economy. Attempts at illegal flight would result in the confiscation of one's property and sentencing to the galleys. The era of toleration had come to an end.

There had been innumerable examples of persecution in Christian history, but this one was different. France had done something few other countries had ever done, and that was to allow religious freedom. But now those who did not convert had to worship silently or hold clandestine services in homes or in the woods. Huguenot children were torn from their homes and sent to Catholic schools where they would not be "corrupted" by their "heretical" parents. Man-hunts ferreted out the pastors who chose not to leave, and generally they were hanged. When secret congregations were discovered, troops were ordered to fire into the unarmed crowds. In one instance six hundred people were killed in

¹⁹Grant, *Huguenots* 163-167.

this way. Surviving males were sent to the royal galleys, women to the prisons, and children to Catholic orphanages. The property of those arrested for illicit worship was confiscated and normally given to their Catholic relatives.

Under such pressure, apocalyptic mystics appeared in some areas who preached in trances or spoke in tongues, and an open rebellion (the Camisards) raged in the south between 1702 and 1710. In 1715, eleven days before Louis XIV died, a young man named Antoine Court brought together the first synod of the underground Reformed Church of France, and subsequent meetings followed in spite of persecution. Before long a training school for ministers was founded in Switzerland, and discipline and order returned to the scattered congregations.

Other Huguenots fled France—probably about two hundred thousand, many of whom were skilled craftsmen or experienced soldiers and sailors—and they found refuge in Holland, Prussia, England, South Africa and North America where they contributed immeasurably to the economic life and culture of their new homes. Although France lost only one percent of its population in the illegal emigration, these were among its most productive citizens, and historians have debated ever since just how much damage this did to the social and economic fabric of the nation.

In spite of the hardships, the French Protestant Church had not been destroyed. A large number of its people had remained faithful, and with the onset of the Enlightenment the severity of persecution rapidly waned. By 1787 Huguenots had regained some limited civil rights, and during the French Revolution and Napoleonic era full toleration and religious liberty were granted. The effort to stamp out this hardy band of believers had ignominiously failed, and they demonstrated that Christ's Church would win out in the end.

V. APPRECIATING WHAT GOD HAS DONE

Respected Christian historian Rudolph W. Heinze calls attention to the pitfalls present in commemorative observances. He suggests that while it is right and proper to give attention to the great men and women of the past, "there is always a serious danger that the adulation connected with an anniversary commemoration can result in hagiography rather than a serious effort to learn more about an historical figure in an honest and objective way."²⁰ His point is that Christians all too often succumb to the temptation to falsify the story of Church heroes in order to encourage the faithful of today. This is not only dishonest but unnecessary, because the Church does not need flawless leaders. The Bible teaches that all human beings need forgiveness, and to make these people into spotless saints is to separate them from the realm of normal folks and thereby deprive them of authenticity as role models and people to be emulated.

With this caveat in mind, let us recognize that the great men and women of faith can serve as examples for us. Christianity is an historical faith. The Biblical revelation stands within history, not outside of it, and it deals with

²⁰R. W. Heinze, "Wyclif," *Home Words* (London: June 1985) 12.

real persons and events. The ultimate happening—the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God—was a concrete sequence of events, reported by faithful witnesses acting under the superintending hand of the Holy Spirit. The children of Israel were told over and over again to remember what the Lord their God had done for them, and that great faith chapter, Hebrews 11, by recounting the deeds of faithful men and women of old, reminds us that God is ultimately in charge of what goes on. We are inspired to carry on in spite of adversity and apparent failure because, after all, “such a great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us.

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb 12:1–3 *NIV*).