

Awesome God, Amazing People

Forty Short Biographies of Christian Lives

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Forty Short Biographies of Christian Lives

by
Ethan Magness

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Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY.....	15
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOGRAPHIES.....	37
3. THE ANCIENT CHURCH	
Polycarp d. 155.....	41
Apollonius d. 185.....	45
Perpetua and Felicity d. 203.....	50
Maximilian d. 295.....	53
St. Agnes d. 304?.....	57
Appian d. 305?.....	59
Moses the Ethiopian d. 405.....	63
Abraham Kidunaia d. 5th cent.....	67
4. THE MIDDLE AGES	
Anselm d. 1109.....	73
Hildegard of Bingen d. 1179.....	79
Francis of Assisi d. 1226.....	85
Catherine of Siena d. 1380.....	90
Jan Hus d. 1415.....	94
Julian of Norwich d. 1416.....	99

5. REFORMATION AND CONQUEST

Martin Luther d. 1546.....	103
St. John of God d. 1550.....	108
Basil the Blessed d. 1552.....	113
Galileo Galilei d. 1552.....	117
Anne Hutchinson d. 1643.....	123
Roberto de Nobili d.1656.....	126
Blaise Pascal d.1662.....	133
Marie of the Incarnation d. 1672.....	139
Brother Lawrence d. 1691.....	145
Father Kosmas d.1779.....	150

6. THE MODERN CHURCH

Paul Ni d.1827?.....	155
Maria Gorietti d. 1902.....	159
Charlotte Diggs Moon d. 1912.....	162
Mary Slessor d. 1915.....	169
Archbishop Vladimir d. 1918.....	174
Sadhu Sundar Singh d. 1929.....	177
Edith Stein d. 1942.....	183
Marie Skobtsova d. 1945.....	188
Takashi Nagai d. 1951.....	193
Maude Cary d.1967.....	198

Martin Luther King Jr. d. 1968.....	203
Oskar Schindler d. 1974.....	208
Janini Luwum d. 1977.....	212
Dorothy Day d. 1980.....	218
Oscar Romero d. 1980.....	222
Martin Niemoller d.1984.....	227

Appendix

1. USING BIOGRAPHY TO TEACH SCRIPTURE....	235
2. INDICES OF THE BIOGRAPHIES.....	239

Bibliography

1. SOURCES CITED	245
2. SOURCES CONSULTED	248

INTRODUCTION

Do We Have to Study Church History Again?

Church history has fallen on hard times. In fact, all history has fallen. Our culture is so focused on the now and the new that anything old is assumed to be obsolete. The church has not avoided these pitfalls. It often finds itself in a debate between the traditional and the new, but even in these debates what is called traditional usually goes back only one or two hundred years. Considering that the church is nearing its 2000th birthday, arguing over a tradition that is fifty to a hundred years old seems trivial.

These two thousand years have been filled with so many traditions and so much innovation one might imagine that the churches are feasting on this depth of experience. However many churches have no taste for this history. Independent and evangelical churches often assume that the only Christian history that matters happened between thirty and sixty A.D. Mainline Protestant groups do a little better through their attention to the founders of their movements

and the development of their doctrinal distinctives.

Unfortunately even this does not touch upon the banquet of wisdom that is contained in the history of the universal church.

The reasons for this decline of interest in history are many and varied. For some Christians it merely reflects their participation in the spirit of the age. For others it reflects a subtle theological bias and for others a strict and blatant denominationalism. Others despise church history because they can only see the evils of the past.

The attitude of the culture that has infected our churches rejects history because it fails the standards of relevance. As culture loses a sense of the aesthetic, all things, and sometimes even people, are judged for their usefulness rather than their inherent value and beauty. Many in today's society have looked at history and judged that it has failed this pragmatic criterion of relevance. As people have come to value only skills, it is easy to see how history has lost its significance. It is hard to convince this culture that something is worth doing because it will make

them better people even though it may not make them better at something. The benefits of understanding computers or developing marketable skills are obvious. The benefits of understanding the struggles of people long since dead are less apparent. Some Christians have accepted these ideas from their culture and have therefore lost interest in church history.

Other Christians, even those who may be inclined to study secular history, avoid church history for more theological reasons. Many movements of church reform have had, as part of their impulse, a restoration ideal. They have recognized the deep corruption in the contemporary church and have felt that to be free from this corruption they must understand and restore the apostolic church. In part, this is a healthy impulse. The church must always be recalling itself to the model of the apostolic church, attempting to follow the patterns established there. Regrettably, this impulse has often led to the belief that there has been no church since the days of Paul until their movement regained the faith. My own faith community

struggles with these blinders and often fails to look at the history of the church because of a theological arrogance toward the Christians of the many centuries since the Apostolic age.

Many other communities have deeper ties to history because of their denominational commitments. In many ways these ties are a blessing. Catechetical instruction and the remembrance of important early leaders connect modern Christians with many who have gone before who served God faithfully and bravely. But this denominational focus has led many of these groups to become historically short sighted and they have lost a vision of the whole church and God's work through all Christians. Some have even drifted into sectarianism and have disfellowshipped themselves from the rest of the church.

Christians who avoid church history because of ignorance are in many ways the first victims of this deficiency in the church's education. Certainly, if one has never been told of buried riches to be found, there would be

no reason to dig through the history of the church.

Others have studied just enough church history to be aware of the great evils that have been committed in the name of Christianity. In secular history courses, they have encountered the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, anti-Semitism, the Thirty-Years War and a host of other manifestations of the sins of the church. This negative introduction has led them to despise all church history in an attempt to avoid the memory of these great errors.

Compounding all of these reasons to avoid church history is the reality that church history is often taught in a way that confirms the suspicions of those who thought history lacked relevance. History is reduced to a list of names and dates, wars and councils. Perhaps a bit of interesting theology is thrown in, but not necessarily. When history is learned in this way all of the above objections apply. Why waste time reading about dates and council meetings when you can read about the adventures of Jesus, Peter, and Paul? Why study other denominations when it just requires another boring list of dates and names to

memorize? Additionally, how could any of this be relevant except for a history quiz? How is knowing when a certain pope died ever going to help Christians today serve God today? It is no wonder that people ask, “Do we have to study church history again?”

Why Do We Need Church History?

In the context of all this resistance to the study of church history, it may be tempting to give up on church history. When working with young people, it is hard enough to demonstrate the relevance of scripture. What potential gain could embarking on the study of church history provide? How could church history be of enough importance to try to squeeze it in there among Bible studies, current events, life issues and responding to the latest craze in self-destruction?

Church history is the testimony of the work of God’s Spirit. When Jesus left the earth, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come and that the church would do greater things than even those done by him. This has happened.

The church has preached to more people. The church has healed more people. The church has fed more people. It is not foolish to look back on the history of the church and celebrate God's continued work on earth. Those who fear that church history lacks relevance should tell the stories of the Confessing church in Germany to a church that is facing persecution. Tell the stories of the religious wars in Europe to a church that is dividing over non-essentials. Tell the stories of the thousands of Christians who have left their homes and lived lives of austerity to those Christians who have become complacent in their comfort. Tell the stories of the Christians who have died for their faith to those who grumble and complain about the suffering they endure. Church history is vitally relevant for the church because it is the story of the Holy Spirit in the lives of real Christians, and it is the same spirit which moves in the church today.

Not only does the study of church history refresh our hope in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, but it also challenges all Christians toward greater unity. In the contemporary context it is easy to see the widespread

factionalism of the Church and focus on the differences. It is simple to focus on the doctrinal details that separate Christians from Christians and thus to be driven farther and farther into sectarianism. A healthy understanding of church history prevents and corrects this attitude. Even a cursory analysis of the lives of Christians will show that they have much more in common than they have that separates them. Those who have died proclaiming Christ, have made the same proclamation whether they were Catholics, Orthodox, Presbyterians, Lutherans, or believers from any of a dozen other traditions. Those who have fed the hungry and cared for the sick in Christ's name have not done it differently even though they spoke a different language or had learned a different catechism.

Doctrinal differences are real. Despite these differences, every group of Christians has made the imitation of Christ its goal. In every age and in every language it is for Christ that people have suffered and died. It is through our study of history that this unity of purpose becomes clear and through this clarity that a pathway to

Christian unity appears.

Throughout church history, excellence has been found in those who imitate Christ. The important skill of following Christ is one that can be learned well through the study of church history. Some may object that surely it is the gospels that offer the necessary information for imitating Christ. Wouldn't time be better spent carefully examining the Biblical texts than researching church history? Certainly, it would be wrong for the study of history to replace Bible study. However, it is also wrong for the study of the Bible to become a barrier to the study of church history. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ." Paul knows that the cosmopolitan Corinthians will encounter many situations that Jesus never confronted and that in these situations it may be difficult to determine how to imitate Christ. Despite the message of the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) campaign, this difficulty still exists today. We are called to fill dozens of roles that Jesus never filled. How should Christians parent? Should Christians vote? Should they work in secular jobs? In all of these areas

Christians must look somewhere other than solely to Christ in their attempt to imitate Christ. The church must look to the church, the community of Christ's followers. When a Christian mother needs to know how to pattern her mothering after Christ, she needs to know the story of Mary Slessor who was a mother to many. In the church's communal attempt to imitate Christ, it needs to know and study the lives of those who have imitated the master well.

The church needs to gain a new appreciation for its own history in order to inform the morality of its own members. There is a common error among some Christian communities. These communities emphasize God's grace and human sinfulness in a way that limits the power of the Bible's call to moral living and devotion to God's will. Many Christians find it easy to read the stories of Christ's life and throw up their hands concluding that only Jesus could serve others this completely. Certainly there is merit in the conclusion. Nevertheless, the exemplary lives of Christians throughout the ages demonstrate that through the power of the Holy Spirit Christians can rise to a level of stellar moral

living. Sinfulness is always a part of the human experience. In spite of this, Christ commands, “Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,” God calls, “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good,” and history attests that living in triumph over sin is possible. It is through the study of church history that we are reminded that God redeems human lives and that God has called us to lives of service and self sacrifice.

For these reasons and others the answer is, “Yes, we have to study church history again.”

Telling the Stories of the Faith

Given these important reasons for ensuring that church history is a part of the educational curriculum of the church, it is necessary to discern how church history can be taught so that it can overcome the legitimate obstacles mentioned above. People have been bored with history. People are honestly blinded by theological or denominational commitments. People are afraid to dredge up the dark parts of the church’s past. Great numbers of

people are ignorant that there is even a history out there to be studied. A way must be found to teach church history that can address and combat these built-in areas of resistance.

The example of scripture offers helpful direction. Five books of the New Testament contain historical narratives. Four of these books are explicitly the story of one person. The fifth, Acts, is a more conventional history. Even in this text, Luke has chosen to focus a large part of the story about the growing church around the biographies of the people like Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul. It is helpful to recall the many other options open to Luke. He could have listed all the towns which each apostle visited. He could have related careful minutes of the meeting of the leaders in the Jerusalem church. He could have told the history as a record of founding churches. A chronological list of all the churches established would have given a clear picture of the growing church and would have provided great testing material: In what year was the second church of Smyrna founded? Luke did not use these options because Luke

wanted people to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people and the way that God uses individuals, and so he organized the book around the lives of the great heroes of the early church. This kind of history should be a model for Christians today.

We do not need to teach history by recounting every council, decree, schism, and war. Rather we can introduce ourselves to the many people of great character who have served God in all ages. Through this study we touch the living power of the gospel. This is the same approach that the author of Hebrews takes when he admonishes his readers to greater faith. He does not recite doctrine. Rather he recalls the stories of those who have served in faith, the stories of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and so many others.

In addition to a remarkable consistency with the methodologies of the New Testament, teaching history through biography works well to address the contemporary concern that everything be relevant to daily life. We do not experience our lives as a series of doctrines, dates and councils. We see our existence as a series of circumstances

we encounter and choices that we make. Therefore, we are able to connect readily with biographies of exemplary lives. In the tales of these great people we find corollaries to our own stories. This connection creates relevance and challenges us to make our choices in the same manner that these great Christians have. For these reasons, I offer this collection of brief biographies as a tool to teach church history to youth.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY

In attempting a narrative glance at some of the great stories of church history, there are two errors that must be avoided. The first is to tell these stories with no context or connection with the broader scope of church history. The second error is to insist that the context must be fully understood in order to learn anything from these stories of faith.

The first error allows readers to assume that all Christians have lived in a setting similar to their own. This misunderstanding will inevitably lead to a host of further confusions. Merely the simple fact of knowing the climate can be important for understanding some of the stories of the past. Certainly it is also important to know something about the available technology, the social structure and the relationship between the political powers and the church. All of these facts and much more are the necessary context for stories of the past. With no context there is no hope for

understanding.

The second error is equally deadly. It is possible to be so burdened by the contextual details that the story is lost. Although the stories of the past lose meaning with no context, it is not desirable to withhold the great stories of the faith just because it is difficult to explain situation of world history that affected the story. In addition, an over-emphasis on complete context can work against the relevance of these stories. No detailed context is needed to understand the significance of someone who has forsaken wealth, privilege, and status to care for the poor and oppressed. It is important to begin to understand the forces that led to the poverty and oppression, but this part of the story should not be placed as an intellectual hurdle that stands between the church and its history.

As a way between these two errors, this overview of church history is designed to provide enough social, political and cultural context to place these biographies into the real world. It is designed to answer questions about the historical factors which were influencing the lives and

actions of Christians. This overview is not a detailed outline of all doctrinal and historical developments. More information will be omitted than will be included. Nevertheless, the information that is included should provide enough context so that the lives of these Christian heroes can be understood and emulated.

As a means of organizing the information to be presented, the history of the church is divided into four time periods. In many ways the divisions are artificial. History does not have any clear breaks that conveniently and absolutely divide it. Nonetheless these periods provide a necessary oversimplification that makes understanding the flow of history possible.

The Ancient Church: 100 - 500 AD.

The time of the ancient church was filled with remarkable change and growth. When this era began, the young church was despised by the powerful Roman empire and was constantly under the threat of persecution. Many doctrinal questions were yet to be asked and the New

Testament was yet to be compiled. By the end of this period, the Roman empire was a shadow of its former power and Christianity was the official religion of that part of the Empire which remained. The basic outlines of Christian orthodoxy were defined and a common agreement had been reached about the books of the New Testament.

All Christians since this time owe a great debt of gratitude to the Christians from these early centuries. After the apostles died, these Christians had the difficult task of trying to read the scriptures, to understand their meaning and then to act on that meaning. They faced a number challenges for the first time that we continue to face today. We can look back at their example, but they, with God's help, had to figure out these things for themselves.

Of the several major tasks before them, these early Christians had to settle a plethora of doctrinal questions. Many of these are issues which we now take for granted, but they faced questions that had not been asked before: Was Jesus human or divine? What is the relationship between God and Jesus? Is the Father that Jesus talked about the

same as the God of the Old Testament? To answer such queries, early church leaders would write letters and books discussing these issues, and several times throughout this early period leaders in the church from hundreds of cities would travel to meet together and come to an agreement about certain issues. These meetings were called councils; they tried to build unity in the diverse early church.

While the councils were trying to come to an agreement, they had to discern how to respond to churches and people who disagreed with the main consensus. Sometimes the church decided that the disagreement was too important to ignore. Those people were deemed heretics and rejected by the church. At other times and over other issues the church decided that the disagreement was permissible. This task of deciding how much disagreement is acceptable continues to be an important task for the church.

The churches were also combating heresy in a different way. They were determining what writings were significant and authoritative and should be scripture for the

church. We should not imagine that there was once a big meeting where a group of church leaders sorted through a huge stack of books and decided that some contained God's word and others did not. At the beginning of this period the letters of Paul and some of the Gospels were already in wide circulation; however, many heretics were preaching alternative versions of the Christian faith and supporting their versions either by limiting the number of books they used or by adding books. In response to this, other church leaders began to speak out about the books used in their churches and as a result a consensus developed to affirm the authority of certain books.

The ancient church also experienced upheavals in the relationships between the church and the culture. In the beginning, Christians were often despised and mocked. By some, Christians were considered atheists because they believed in only one God and did not accept the many Roman gods. Others caricatured Christians as cannibals because of the practice of communion. Didn't they say they ate the body and drank the blood? This disdain led to

persecution, sporadic but sometimes widespread. By the end of this period the situation had dramatically changed. The Roman emperors had been converted and Christianity became first tolerated then endorsed by the official government. Paganism continued to exist in Roman society, but Christianity flourished under this new acceptance.

The established churches had to negotiate how they related to society in all kinds of circumstances. In a small persecuted church, many of the leaders devoted their energy to defending themselves to the rest of the culture. Difficult questions arose: What should be done with Christians who denied Christ to save their own lives during persecution? Should Christians rebel against the government or submit and be good citizens? Later when Christianity became the official religion of the government, a new set of dilemmas emerged: Is it right to use state power to enforce Christian morality? Should the state use its power to settle a church controversy? Ever since this time, the church has existed in situations of persecution, government support, or government ambivalence. We can learn lessons for today

from how they dealt with these changing roles.

During these challenges, the church continued to grow. It was strengthened through the witness of martyrs who died for their faith, apologists who defended Christianity against pagan philosophers, and missionaries who preached the gospel as far away as they could travel. Toward the end of this period, when Christianity was no longer being persecuted, many followers of Christ found adventure and Christian challenge by becoming monks engaged in daring devotion to God. Through the efforts of all these people the church was established far and wide in the world.

Because of the great changes faced by the ancient church, this era produced many kinds of heroes. Some were ordinary Christians who bravely held on to their faith in the face of persecution. Some were missionaries who traveled dangerous lands to preach the gospel. Some were theologians who helped in the hard job of seeking Christian unity. Some were apologists who wrote compelling letters to convince people that Christianity should be accepted.

The Middle Ages: 500 - 1500

By the end of the fifth century, the western half of the Roman empire was conquered by a variety of different tribes from the northeast. This political turmoil required great changes for the church in this area. Firstly, these invading peoples needed to hear the gospel and thus missionary work became a major task. Secondly, the church had to rethink its relationship to the political structure.

In the eastern half of the Roman empire, the beginning of this period saw few drastic changes. The Empire lasted here for many more years although it did experience a real threat in the Muslim invasion of the 600s and finally collapsed in the 1400s.

Perhaps the greatest single struggle which the church had in this whole period was dealing with institutional power. After the conversion of the European tribes, the church enjoyed significant influence in the governments of Europe and the Eastern Empire for almost a thousand years. Unfortunately such influence often ends in corruption. As the leaders of the church gained political power some of

them began to use the church for personal gain or to influence politics. At these times, great Christians arose to resist this corruption and call the church back to the gospel.

A connected phenomenon was church organization. During the earlier period, church leaders called bishops, who lived in big cities, began to influence the small town churches around them. They taught and trained other ministers, organized missionary journeys and helped in the process of unifying the whole church. The bishop of Rome became increasingly important. This bishop took the title Pope and claimed to be the chief bishop of the church. Although many of the Greek-speaking bishops in the Eastern empire did not recognize such authority, the pope gained enormous power in western Europe. At times popes stopped wars, reformed the church and promoted Christian devotion. At other times, however, they were corrupted by the power and wealth they controlled and were extremely destructive to the church.

During the Middle Ages, most Christians lived in political and cultural contexts that supported Christianity.

This support made it easy to be a Christian, perhaps too easy. Many people, including church leaders, were Christians in name only. One of the most important responses to this problem was the rise of monastic orders. They resisted the corruption of the church, trained preachers to travel, preached the gospel, and enjoyed a mystical communion with God. All of these groups shared the goal of creating a community of people dedicated to living out the call of the gospel.

This age of relative peace for Christians was also a time of great doctrinal development. The theologians of the ancient church had laid the doctrinal foundation and now Christians were free to build on it. Sometimes this contributed to quibbling about issues. Most of these conversations, however, were valuable; many of these theologians continue to influence Christians today.

Some of these thinkers, a number of them women, built on theology in a new way. Rather than continue to debate and discuss the details of Christian understanding, they embraced the experience of God. These mystics offered

to the church beautiful descriptions of an intimate relationship with God. Many of them were monks and nuns, but others were preachers and housewives, nobles and peasants.

The church committed some dark and deep errors during the Middle Ages. Differences of belief were often met with harsh penalties. Other religions were often met through war rather than the dialogue and preaching like that of the ancient apologists. Corruption entered the church through the power of politics and centralized church structure. In the east, the remains of the Roman Empire collapsed in the growth of new Moslem empires.

Despite these problems, there was great good in this period. Whenever corruption filled the church, reformers arose with correction. In addition to warriors, there were also peaceful, loving missionaries who gave their lives preaching to the world. Mystics, monks and nuns offered a place of refuge for many. The eastern church, despite its crumbling political support, had dramatic missionary

success in Russia and other areas of north-eastern Europe as well as missions farther east.

Reformation and Conquest: 1500 - 1800

The age of reformation and conquest was a period of intense change for the Christian world. Beginning in the 1400s and on into the first two centuries of this period, European explorers were colonizing almost the entire world. Reformers of the Catholic church who had for centuries been working against corruption worked within or broke away and started separate church bodies. These two activities combined with other social and cultural realities to create a period of widespread upheaval.

As the Middle Ages came to a close, the church was in a time of great corruption. In response, reformers arose to call the church back to itself. Some tried to work in the system challenging the church leaders to repent. Many were not satisfied with that approach. When the church did not heed their radical call, they decided to leave. If they could not change the established church from within, they would

go out and form their own communities of Christians. Over these three hundred years dozens and dozens of denominations were started.

Most of these reformers were people of faith with genuine concerns about the purity of the church. Sometimes the main split was over theology; sometimes it came in response to corrupt practice. Always, the goal of the these reformation was to follow God and the teaching of scripture more closely. Unfortunately, once leaving one's present church became an acceptable method of reform, it predominated. As a result, all of the early reform movements were soon divided again. Sometimes these splits were peaceful, but at other times they resulted in bloody wars. Just as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches had become tied to politics, these reform movements quickly became linked to the political structures of the day.

Other reformers worked from within. They resembled the reformers of the Middle Ages. One of the most important reform movements within the Catholic

church was the Jesuits. This new monastic order of preachers and missionaries vowed to defend Roman Catholic Christianity and to spread Christianity throughout the world. They became powerful missionaries and reshaped Christianity on the backs of Spanish and Portuguese trade. Later, the new churches would follow this example. At first they worked to convince other Christians to join their particular fellowship. As these churches grew more stable, they also began to send out missionaries to the many new lands that the Dutch and English were exploring and colonizing.

Sea travel opened up the whole world to European influence and played an important role in the sudden increased interest in missions. Missionaries went to all the continents of the world eagerly excited to find new places where the gospel had never been preached. In some places, such as North America, this colonizing work was particularly connected to the reform movements. Smaller movements, persecuted or marginalized in Europe, saw the possibility to have an easier life in North America.

Two major developments, the rise of new churches and the expansion of European power to the whole world, led to many wars. In Europe, different regions became dominated by different branches of Christianity and these religious differences fueled bitter struggles. Elsewhere in the world, the missionary expansion reflected these conflicts. This connection between the military power of European nations and the Christian missionaries often had a destructive impact, but many of the heroes of this period were missionaries who broke free from European domination and worked effectively with the many peoples of the world.

Many of the reformers questioned the common theological understandings of the Roman Catholic Church. The theological consensus of the ancient church was rarely challenged, but many of the details that had since been discussed were contested. Differing perspectives led to the creation of a wide variety of new faith statements that have continued to shape modern theological conversation.

By the end of this period, Christianity was truly a world religion. It was extremely diverse with dozens of different major fellowships. Most of the churches, and in fact most of the nations, of the world were still dominated by European control. War continued to be a part of the religious and political experience as the European powers fought with each other and their colonies for control.

The heroes of this age served in a wide variety of areas. Many of the reformers, both the ones who formed new churches and the ones who stayed in their tradition were great models of the faith. Faithful missionaries sacrificed the comforts of life and went to preach the gospel. Others dedicated themselves to building bridges between the many splintered Christian groups. Many natives of countries that had recently heard about Christ gave up family, friends and even their lives to follow Christ.

The Modern Church: 1800 - 1980

The trends of reformation and colonization continued into the modern age. For many years, religious wars

continued to plague the church. Europe still dominated world Christianity. Its colonial system compromised the authenticity of Christian mission. New reform movements further splintered the church into more and more groups. By the 1970s however, some of these trends had been stopped or even reversed.

At the end of the 1700s two political events occurred that started the decline of European political influence. The American revolution demonstrated that Europe could not indefinitely control the world as colonies. The French revolution shattered the monarchical system of government as the most effective for the modern age. Although European influence and control continued to grow during early part of this period, it has waned throughout the 1900s. This century has seen dozens and dozens of countries shake off colonial control and begin national self-government. These new countries have often been volatile dangerous places as different groups struggle for control.

War still seems to be an ever present reality in modern society. Many new nations have emerged through

armed conflict, sometimes both civil and international war.

On a larger scale two wars took the title of World Wars.

They affected dozens of nations and were massively destructive. One of the major struggles for the church has been dealing with the legacy of these wars.

Related to this change in the political situation has been a major change in the organization of world Christianity. Ministers, priests, and other leaders were often either from Europe or they were brought to Europe to be trained. Now Christians in these non-European countries have become free to lead themselves. This process, called indigenization, has been one of the most important trends in world Christianity in this period. In fact by the end of this period the majority of the world's Christians were living in countries outside of Europe and America and these churches were self-governing.

This process of indigenization has led to remarkable growth in theology, as new voices have begun to enter the conversation. African, Asian and Latin American theologians have begun to influence the whole Christian

community through different perspectives and new ideas. At the same time, women have begun to be heard in a more open and liberated theological dialogue. These new participants in the churches discourse have at times created tension, but for the most part they have produced better theology and greater faithfulness in the church.

In addition to indigenization, the ecumenical movement has been another major development of the modern period. This movement has specifically addressed the deplorable disunity that has arisen since the reformation period. Those leading the ecumenical movement come from several different fellowships of Christians and share a desire for Christian unity which has manifested itself in many ways. Varieties of Christian groups have talked together, trying to find ways to give a common witness to the gospel. This interest is a hopeful sign for the future of Christianity, but it is darkened by intra-Christian rivalries, sometimes even leading to angry death.

One of the saddest realities of the modern age has been the rise of persecution. With the end of European

dominance, many Christians have found themselves living in countries whose governments are hostile to the point of atrocious persecutions. Like the earliest era of the church, some Christians live in areas where just being a Christian is punishable by death. Others risk their lives if they try to confront injustice. Even western nations have produced modern martyrs.

Perhaps the clearest insight from the modern age is that the life of a Christian has not changed. The same kind of people who were heroes for Christ in the first 1800 years of the church have continued to be model servants in the last two hundred: those who die for justice and live for Christian unity, those who preach the gospel to people who have never heard it, those who bring to repentance the ones who know the gospel but have yet to live it, and those who sacrifice everything for the sake of quiet contemplation and intimacy with God. In every age there are extraordinary examples of living in imitation of Christ and their lives encourage all Christians to be heroes for Christ.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIOGRAPHIES

The biographies collected in this work are designed so that they can be used in a variety of settings. Since they are organized chronologically by date of death, they could be read concurrently with a survey of church history. On the other hand, they are independent of each other and would be excellent illustrations in a variety of educational settings.

Great care has gone into the selection process and the assembled list deserves a word of explanation. No attempt has been made to assemble the biographies of the fifty most important figures of church history. Such a list would be all but impossible to create and as soon as it was created it would become the subject of controversy. There is no clear rule or measure for determining the importance of a Christian' contribution to the life of the church. Any standards that could be and have been used have so many inherent biases that they would ultimately be destructive.

Instead of the greatest or the most important, a different criterion has governed the compilation of this list. The fundamental value is Christlikeness. These people were chosen because in their lives they followed Christ. For some of them this was a lifelong passion. Others mirrored the example of Christ in a single act. Regardless of the differences, all of these people should be remembered because they imitated Christ. Beyond this basic requirement, variety was a high value in the creation of this list.

Many lists of figures from church history become monotonous. They consist of theologians, bishops and reformers. or perhaps, missionaries, martyrs and mystics. In almost every case the lists are primarily of European men. To a degree these accusations can be fairly leveled against the present list of Christian lives. There is a slight majority of men and a more significant majority of Europeans. Nevertheless, a conscious attempt has been made to achieve racial, sexual, temporal and geographic diversity.

This move toward diversity has two immediate effects. First, it requires that some names which might

otherwise appear are not included on the list. Second, it means that readers will be introduced to people who led incredible lives but whose stories have infrequently been told. For instance, more is known about the contributions of early Christian men than women, but there are many stories about women that are known to historians that are not being told to the church. In part this list hopes to address that problem.

To accomplish these two goals -- remembering Christlike lives and portraying a variety of these lives -- a conscious strategy of representation has been used. In every time period an attempt has been made to include at least one example to represent the major kinds of Christian leaders from that period. This list does not include every great medieval theologian, but the life of Anselm represents the great theologians of that period. This strategy has, of course, not been followed slavishly. In each period, some kinds of Christian service have been depicted more than once and others have gone unrepresented. Nevertheless, the attempt has been made to represent a variety of expressions of

Christian devotion in each period.

These biographies are designed to be only an entryway into these lives. At the end of each biography is a reference to the source for the biographies. These sources provide much more information and they in turn will lead to more resources. Hopefully, these brief sketches will be enough to challenge all of us who follow Christ into paths of greater righteousness and service.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANCIENT CHURCH

Polycarp

Have you ever been a witness for God? Have you ever testified to the reality of God in your life? Polycarp witnessed to God through his life and through his death. Because he died for his faith, he is a martyr, a Greek word which means “witness”.

Polycarp lived soon after the time of the apostles. In fact, he knew the apostle John. As an adult he became the leader, or bishop, of the church of Smyrna in Turkey. We don't know much about his service as a bishop, but he must have been a good and effective minister and teacher because even his enemies called him “the teacher of Asia and the father of many Christians,” and his fellow Christians remembered his holiness of life.

Polycarp was a bishop in a time and place when it was very dangerous to be a Christian. Smyrna was ruled by Rome at this time, and most of the people considered Christianity dangerous because Christians would not

worship Roman gods. In particular Christians would not offer sacrifices to Caesar, the ruler of the Roman Empire. The Romans would occasionally arrest people who were suspected of being Christians and kill them if they did not give up their Christian faith, curse Christ, and sacrifice to Caesar.

One day, when many Christians were being killed, a young Christian named Germanicus faced his death with particular courage and faith. This display of courage so angered the crowd that they cried out against Polycarp who was known as the leader of the Christians in Smyrna. When Polycarp heard that they were coming to get him, he wanted to stay and face his accusers. Instead he left, after the people of his church persuaded him to hide at a nearby farm because they didn't want to lose their bishop. For the next three days, the police tracked him and finally found him.

This time he decided not to run away even though he had the chance. He decided to give himself up to the police. He went and greeted them and even fed them supper. After

they had eaten and given Polycarp time to pray, they took him to the arena to be tried.

This trial was open to the public, everyone watched Polycarp was offered the chance to give up his Christianity.

The proconsul, the local Roman ruler, said to Polycarp,

“Take the oath and I will set you free; revile Christ.”

Polycarp answered him, “For eighty six years I have been serving Christ, and He has done no wrong to me; how then shall I dare blaspheme my King who saved me?” The

proconsul threatened him with wild beasts and with fire, but Polycarp continued to proclaim his faith confidently.

Because Polycarp would not deny Christ, he was found guilty of being a Christian. The crowds wanted him to be fed to the lions but the animals had all been put away, so they called out for him to be burned to death.

After they prepared the fire and tied Polycarp to it, he prayed to God a prayer of thanksgiving. He was mainly thankful that he was able to lay down his life for God just as Jesus had done. He knew that being able to sacrifice your life for God is a wonderful gift.

Polycarp was not burned up by the fire so the people cried out for the executioner to stab him. This wound killed Polycarp.

The people of Smyrna, both the Christians and non-Christians, remembered Polycarp's death as a testimony to the faith of Christians. In particular, the people who recorded the story of his martyrdom recognized that he died like Christ and that his example of following Christ was important for all Christians to follow as well.

Apollonius

A quick death was the fate of most martyrs. If a Christian was arrested by the Roman officials and refused to deny Christ, he or she could expect little time to preach the gospel. Apollonius, however, managed to use his trial and death as a witness to the highest levels of the Roman government.

Although many Roman emperors actively persecuted Christians, at times they ignored them. During one of these periods, Christians were able to work in a variety of public areas. Apollonius became a Senator in the Roman Empire and thus one of the most powerful men in the empire. Despite his position, when one of his slaves accused him of being a Christian, he went to trial before the Senate. Even though they were not being actively enforced, the laws against Christianity were on the books.

The leader of the Senate, Perennis, probably expected that Apollonius would quickly denounce the accusation to save his position on the Senate. Instead of denying Christ, Apollonius used this opportunity to argue for the truth of

the gospel in front of the entire Senate. He is called Apollonius the apologist because an apologist is a person who gives a defense of the faith. A record was taken of his defense that still exists today. It demonstrates that he was a thoughtful, articulate man.

When he was brought before Perennis, the interrogation began very simply as Perennis asked, “Apollonius, are you a Christian?”

Apollonius replied, “Yes I am a Christian, I worship and I fear the God who made heaven, earth, the sea and all that is in them.”

Perennis advised, “Take my advice, Apollonius, give in. Take an oath by the destiny of our Lord, the Emperor Commodus.”

Apollonius explained to Perennis that a Christian would not take an oath and that it was enough for him to say yes or no. He also explained that he would not make a sacrifice to the Emperor because this too was forbidden to Christians. Perennis did not want to execute his friend and fellow Senator, so he sent him away, giving him three days

to think. He expected that during that time Apollonius would become scared and would decide to forsake his faith. Instead, Apollonius used the time to prepare an argument, hoping to convince Perennis and all the others present of the truth of Christianity.

When he returned, Perennis again desired that Apollonius give up his faith and reject Christianity. He asked him, "What decision have you made, Apollonius?"

"To remain faithful to God, as you have seen and clearly noted in [our earlier discussion.]"

"In view of the decrees of the Senate I advise you to give up your faith. So honor and worship our gods like we do and you will continue to live among us."

"I know the decrees of the Senate, Perennis. But I serve my God, not idols made with human hands."

Apollonius went on to proclaim that he would neither sacrifice to any idol nor any fruits of nature such as food or a plant, nor the animals or other men. He would worship only God, who created these things.

Perennis then reminded him that it was illegal to be a Christian. Apollonius acknowledged this truth but said he must follow the laws of God rather than the laws of humans. He said that he was not afraid of death, but knew that even in their own history many who were just were condemned by unjust laws. He mentioned that Jesus too, who was perfect, was punished unjustly.

After this bold defense of his actions and the truth of Christianity, Perennis remarked that he had hoped that Apollonius would “say goodbye to [his] folly and worship the gods with us.”

Apollonius responded, “I hoped, proconsul, that these few words which I have spoken to you about my faith would help you, and that my plea would open the eyes of your soul. I hoped that your heart would bear fruit, that you would worship all your days the God who created the world, that you would lift up your prayer only to him without forgetting alms or charity and that this would be the pure and bloodless sacrifice that you would offer to God.”

With this beautiful statement, Apollonius showed that the reason for his careful defense was not an attempt to save his own life, but rather an effort to convert his hearers and thus to save their lives. After this, Perennis gave up hope of changing Apollonius' mind and condemned him to a quick death by beheading. Apollonius was grateful and joyfully went to his eternal life.

Perpetua and Felicity

A martyr is a person who dies for the cause of Christ and through this death is a witness to the truth of the gospel. Two of the most famous early martyrs are Perpetua and Felicity. Their deaths have been remembered and retold for over a thousand years because their bravery and faith are a model for all Christians.

Perpetua and Felicity were arrested along with three other Christians in the city of Carthage, during a series of persecutions against Christians. They knew that unless they denied Christ and stopped being Christians they would probably die. It would have been easy to give in. After all, it would have saved their lives. Besides, Perpetua's father was not a Christian and he was encouraging her to deny Christ and live. While she was in jail, he came to her many times and begged her to change her mind. It was hard for Perpetua to disobey him, because she loved her father very much and he had been very good to her. At the same time, she knew that it would be worse to disobey her heavenly father by denying Christ. It was also difficult for Perpetua

because she had just had a baby and was still nursing. She had to worry about who would nurse her baby if she died. The judge at her trial many times reminded her to think about her baby and deny Christ. Instead Perpetua began to pray to God that the baby would be weaned before her execution. Her prayers were answered and so she was able to give the baby into the care of her mother and brother who were Christians.

Felicity had similar problems. Although she did not have family trying to convince her to deny Christ, she was pregnant. This created two difficulties. First, it made the time in prison very difficult to bear. Second, if she was pregnant she would have to wait in prison until the baby was born before she would be executed. Once she knew that she was to be executed, she wanted to face her death with her friends and fellow Christians and so she prayed that she might have the baby early. She did and a Christian couple adopted the baby.

On the day of the execution, the three men who had been arrested with Perpetua and Felicity were taken to the

arena to face wild beasts. Two of them were eager to face the beasts, and they fought with a leopard and a bear before being killed. The third man was very afraid of the beasts and prayed that God would let him die quickly so that he would not suffer long. God answered his prayer.

Perpetua and Felicity first fought a mad cow which trampled them and badly injured them. The crowd however became impatient and cried out for them to be killed quickly. Guards were called in to execute them.

It is important to know these five did not die for nothing. They were martyrs in the truest sense. Not only did they remain faithful to God, but their faithfulness led many people to conversion. In particular, their jailer, Pudens, became a Christian as a result of the answered prayers and the bold faithfulness of these five martyrs. Just as one of the executioners of Jesus could tell that he was truly from God because of the way that he died, so the jailer of Perpetua and Felicity knew that Jesus was the Son of God because of the way that they died.

Maximilian

Maximilian was being recruited for the Roman army. In those days recruitment meant conscription. That means that if you are the right age and meet the correct physical requirements, the government can make you join the army. He had come with his father for his physical to see if he was fit to join the army. He had not wanted to come because he knew it would be disastrous. He would not join the army for two reasons. All members of the army had to burn incense in honor of Caesar and since he was a Christian he would not give Caesar that kind of honor. His second reason was that as a Christian he could not fight or do harm.

The proconsul Dion was overseeing Maximilian's enlistment and began by asking Maximilian for his name. Maximilian replied, "What is the good of replying? I cannot enlist, for I am a Christian." The proconsul ignored him and ordered that his height be measured. Maximilian said, "I cannot serve, I cannot do evil. I am a Christian." The proconsul repeated the order that his height be measured and he was found to be five feet ten inches tall. Then the

proconsul ordered that he be given a military badge. Butler's *Lives of the Saints* records their conversation.

Maximilian: Never! I cannot be a soldier.

Dion: You must serve or die.

Maximilian: I will never serve. You can cut off my head, but I will not be

a soldier of this world, for I am a soldier of Christ.

Dion: What has put these ideas into your head?

Maximilian: My conscience and he who has called me.

Dion (to Maximilian's father): Put your son right.

Father: He knows what he believes and he will not change.

Dion (to Maximilian): Be a soldier and accept the emperor's badge.

Maximilian: Not at all, I carry the mark of Christ my God already.

Dion: I shall send you to your Christ at once.

Maximilian: I ask nothing better. Do it quickly, for there is my glory.

Dion (to his assistant): Give him the badge.

Maximilian: I will not take the badge. If you insist, I will deface it. I am a Christian, and I am not allowed to wear that leaden seal round my neck. For I already carry the sacred sign of the Christ the son of the living God whom you know not, the Christ who suffered for our salvation and whom God gave to die for our sins. It is he whom all we Christians serve, it is he whom we follow, for he is the lord of life, the author of our salvation.

Dion: Join the service and accept the seal or else you will perish miserably.

Maximilian: I shall not perish; my name is even now before God. I refuse to serve.

Dion: You are a young man and the profession of arms befits your years. Be a soldier.

Maximilian: My army is the army of God and I cannot fight for this world. I tell you I am a Christian.

Dion: There are Christian soldiers serving our rulers Diocletian, Maximian, Constantius and Galerius.

Maximilian: That is their business. I also am a Christian and I cannot serve.

Dion: But what harm do soldiers do?

Maximilian: You know well enough.

Dion: If you do not do your service, I shall condemn you to death for the contempt of the army.

Maximilian: I shall not die, I shall go forth from this earth and my soul shall live with Christ the Lord.

Dion: Write his name down. Your impiety makes you refuse military service and you shall be punished accordingly as a warning to others. Maximilian has refused the military oath through impiety. He is to be beheaded.

Maximilian: God lives.

Maximilian did die that day. He went to his death calling out words of encouragement to the other Christians. His father went home joyfully, knowing that Maximilian had gone to heaven and that he would be joining him soon.

St. Agnes

Have you ever felt trapped by the expectations of all the people around you? Your friends, your family and most people you meet have certain expectations of you. Sometimes this is good, but at other times it is not.

When Agnes was thirteen she had to deal with the expectations of a lot of people. Because she was very pretty and from a wealthy family, everyone expected that she would get married right away. In her day, girls of wealthy families often married quite young. She had many suitors and they were all wealthy and could have been desirable husbands. One can imagine that her friends were jealous and encouraged her to pick one and get married.

Agnes, however, had other ideas. She wanted to give her whole life to Jesus and not get married. She said that she had promised God that she would remain a virgin. This made her suitors very angry and they decided to tell the government that she was a Christian. In her time it was illegal to become a Christian and usually Christians were killed if they didn't quit being a Christian.

She was taken before the governor who tried to convince her to renounce her Christianity and marry one of the suitors. Even though he threatened to torture her, she refused to give up her Christianity. This made the governor so mad that he had her sent to a house of prostitution and forced her to become a prostitute. Even in this situation God protected her, and she was able to remain a virgin. The governor became so angry that he had Agnes brought back to be killed. Nothing could prevent this punishment and Agnes was killed with a sword.

Agnes felt a lot of pressure to give in to the expectations of those around her. When she did not give in, she lost everything that she had including her life. Agnes, however, wanted to live for Jesus and so she stayed firm in her convictions.

Appian

Appian grew up as a spoiled Roman rich kid. When he was old enough, he was sent off to one of the best schools in the Roman Empire: the school of Berytus in Phoenicia. There he encountered the common academic disciplines of his day. He learned Latin and Greek. He studied mathematics and politics. He learned the sports of the day: wrestling, running, and many others. He practiced public speaking and studied famous speeches. He also became a Christian.

The Christian part of his education was highly unusual. There were not many Christians yet in the upper class of Roman society, and his parents were not Christians. We don't know exactly how he heard about Christianity. Maybe there were other Christian students at Berytus, or perhaps a missionary was in the city near the school. However it happened, when he returned home at age eighteen, he was a Christian and he was determined to learn all about the faith. His parents permitted him to go to Caesarea, where he lived with the scholar Eusebius.

Things could have been easy in Caesarea. There were other Christians with whom Appian could learn and worship. Being a part of this Christian community was a nice change for Appian. Unfortunately, the new Roman Emperor felt that to maintain his power it was important to reestablish pagan worship. He instructed his governors to stage massive public sacrifices and require everyone to attend. His goal was to jump start participation in the pagan cults, and, as a consequence, challenge the faith of Christians. Any committed Christian could not participate in the sacrifices--such activity was clearly a sin. However, if someone didn't participate, it was unclear what punishment would be given. The local governors had a wide range of choice in this matter: They could have the disobedient Christians executed, or they could ignore them.

Appian did not intend to be ignored. As soon as he heard about the plan for the mandatory sacrifice, he devised his own response. He hid out where the sacrifice was being held. While the ceremony was in progress, he broke from his hiding place, made his way through the guards

surrounding the governor, and took hold of the governor's arm, stopping the ceremony. As he did so he cried out that it was wrong to sacrifice to idols when they could be worshiping the true God.

Immediately the guards responded. They attacked him and beat him and hauled him off to a dungeon where he lay for the next day and a half with his feet held wide apart by a board. He was allowed out the next day and was beaten beyond recognition, his skin so tattered and torn that his organs could be seen.

In this condition he was brought before the governor to be interrogated. He could say only one thing: "I am a servant of Christ." Because of his obstinate resistance, the torture increased. Burning cloths were wrapped around his feet as the interrogation continued. Finally he cried out, "I confess Christ, the one God, and the same God with the Father." After this, the governor decided that he could not be broken and ordered him to be thrown into the sea with weights tied around his feet. Eusebius tells us that immediately there was a small earth quake which shook that

island and brought the boy's body onto the shore where he was honored and buried.

Moses the Ethiopian

Some say that the great servants of God were weak people who could do nothing else so they turned to religion. The evidence of Christian history shows exactly the opposite. Many were brilliant scholars who would have excelled in any field but chose to devote their minds to God. Others were great leaders of people and could have been politicians but instead used their charisma to share the gospel. Others possessed great physical strength which they chose to use in God's service. Moses the Ethiopian was one of these.

He was not always devoted to God's service. For a while he was the servant of an Egyptian official, but he was so wild and unruly that he was fired. Finding himself without a job he became a thief. He was a huge man and was equally strong and so he soon attracted a group of followers. He led a band of thieves and murderers with great success. A story is told that once one of his thefts was upset by a sheep dog which barked out warning. Moses was so angry that later when he heard that the owner of the dog

was with his sheep across the river, he put his sword in his mouth, swam across the Nile, killed four rams, swam back across the Nile, cooked the rams, ate the rams and then walked fifty miles to rejoin his gang. He was a brutal and ruthless man, perfectly suited for the life of the brigand that he was.

No one knows quite how, but a few years after this Moses repented and became a monk. He was still the same huge, strong, determined man that he always had been. The difference was that now he used his strength for God. He had not become perfect, but he was concerned with his continued sin and was determined to face up to his sin and get it out of his life. He sought the counsel of a wise monk named Elder Isadore. He wanted to know why he still struggled with lust and with a violent temper. Isadore showed him the sunrise and said that just as the light gradually overtakes the darkness, so it is with the soul. This encouraged Moses and so he embarked on a life of physical and spiritual discipline to rid his life of all sin.

One of Moses' duties was to carry water to the monks who lived in isolated huts in the desert. He would work through the night filling the water pots of the monks in the desert. These acts of service taught him humility and kept his body very strong.

He was able to put his strength to good use one day when four robbers attacked him. They probably assumed that this monk would be an easy target. They were wrong. He was able to easily subdue them and tie them up. Then he picked the four men up and set them on his shoulders and carried them to the church. He declared to those present, "I am not allowed to hurt anybody, so what do you want me to do with these?" The four robbers were all so overwhelmed by his behavior that they stayed at the monastery and in time converted and became monks.

As Moses prayed and studied he grew in wisdom as well as strength. Many people from around the region would visit him seeking wisdom and guidance. He responded to all of these requests with humility but offered what help he could. He also became a wise and kind

member of the monastic community. Once when a member of the community had committed a sin, the monks were meeting to discuss if a punishment was necessary. Moses did not want to go because he remembered his great sins and did not feel fit to judge another. Out of obedience he came to the assembly, but he came carrying a great basket of sand on his back. When the other monks asked what the sand was, he replied, "What I am holding behind me represents my own terrible and multitudinous sins. I keep them behind me where I cannot see them and I come to judge my brother for a small fault, which is not a repetitious and constant passion." The other monks could hear the irony in what he said and forgave the brother who had sinned.

Moses could have lived and died as a brigand and probably would have been very successful. However he knew that the way of Christ was a better way. He remained a man of great strength energy and passion, and he used all of this for the work of Christ.

Abraham of Kidunaia

Abraham grew up in a wealthy family. Because his family was rich, he could have enjoyed a carefree and easy existence without any worries. He could have bought anything he needed or done anything he desired. He decided that he wanted to become a monk and dedicate himself to prayer and the study of God. He was having trouble making up his mind until his parents decided that he should get married. He had a hard time convincing them that he didn't want to get married. In fact they had already planned the wedding, and the wedding party had already started, when he ran away and hid in the desert.

When they found him, he was praying and nothing they said could convince him to come back and get married and pursue an easy life. He was devoted to God and to prayer.

Unlike his life as a rich young man, in the desert his situation was very simple. He lived in a small hut wearing only a cloak and a goat skin garment. He gave away all his possessions and kept only a bowl for food and water and a

mat to sleep on. He continued to live this simple existence even after his parents died and he inherited their great wealth. Rather than use the money for himself, he gave it away.

Abraham did not get to stay in his hut forever. Near where he lived there was a town of idolaters who were not Christians, and the local bishop asked Abraham to go there and preach to them. To leave his life in the desert was hard for him, because he preferred to stay at home and pray, but he knew that it needed to be done so he obeyed and went to the town of Kidunaia. In his first several visits to the town he had very little success. They continued to worship idols and did not listen to him. So he decided to change his strategy. He asked the bishop to build a church building, and when the church building was completed he went around and destroyed all the idols and false altars. Of course, this made the townspeople very angry, and they came at him and beat him and threw him out of town. Abraham did not stop. That very night he sneaked back into town and prayed in the church. The next day he went out in

the streets and began to preach to the people again. They again dragged him out of town, and this time they stoned him. He was determined, however, and came back again the next day. This cycle of Abraham preaching and the people responding with insults and beatings continued for three years, but Abraham did not give up. He continued to preach to them even though they rejected him. He knew that Jesus preached to and even died for the people that rejected him.

Eventually, Abraham's preaching paid off and the people began to listen. Abraham's persistence and patience convinced them that he was really a man of God. Finally, he was able to teach them about the gospel, and he baptized a thousand people. He stayed with them for a while and taught them about the scriptures to build up their faith, but after he was confident that they were well established he decided to move back to the desert.

After he moved back to the desert, his niece Mary came to live with him to devote herself to prayer and study as well. Abraham was very good to her, but unfortunately she would not have an easy life. Soon after she came, a

monk came to visit Abraham and while he was there he raped Mary. Mary was overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and felt that now she was evil and couldn't worship God. Because of these ideas she ran away to a town and became a prostitute. For two years Abraham did not know what had happened or where she had gone, but he wept for her and prayed for her every day. Finally he heard that she was living in a brothel and he went to rescue her.

In order to see her he had to pretend to be a customer. When they were alone together, he identified himself and tried to find out what happened and to persuade her to come home. Mary was sure that she had sinned so much now that God would never take her back, but Abraham knew better and told her that "if a spark could set fire to the ocean then your sin could be too much for God." Abraham reminded Mary that Jesus had come to save sinners. Hearing these words of reassurance, Mary decided that she could leave and rededicate her life to God. She went back with Abraham to her hut in the desert to live there and

worship God. Just like Jesus, Abraham Kidunaia never gave up on the people of that town or on his beloved niece Mary.

CHAPTER 4

THE MIDDLE AGES

Anselm

Some people are remembered for being great theologians. Others are immortalized for being great leaders of the church. Still others leave their mark on history by resisting the oppression of the government or fighting against injustice. Anselm did all of these and more.

He is best known for his important theological writings. However, in addition to his writings, Anselm lived as a model of obedience and strength. As a boy he desired to become a monk in a nearby abbey. The leader of the abbey knew this would anger Anselm's father, and so the boy's admittance was refused.

The monk's refusal led Anselm away from religion and into a life of worldliness that he would come to regret. At the age of 27, however, he became attracted to the fame of an abbot, the leader of a monastery, named Lafranc, and joined his abbey at Bec in Normandy. Anselm flourished there, and in three years was given the important position of

prior, a position of leadership just below the abbot. Some of the other monks objected to this promotion because of Anselm's youth and his relatively short stay at the abbey, but the young prior's wisdom and gentleness quickly gained their support.

As a prior at Bec he settled into a happy life of study, prayer, and service. He produced many of his great theological works at the abbey, writing on such deep and lofty matters as the origin of evil and the existence of God, as well as practical concerns, such as the art of reasoning, and how to educate young boys.

Anselm's humble and pious life, as well as his deep theological insight, led to his appointment to abbot fifteen years later. From this position he became reacquainted with his former abbot, Lafranc, who was now the Archbishop of Canterbury in England.

After Anselm had been abbot for ten years, Lafranc died. Instead of finding a new Archbishop, King William decided to take over the church's land and keep the Archbishop's income. Many of the people in England

wanted to have Anselm take over as Archbishop, but the king refused. Three years later, however, King William grew very ill. Because he feared he would die, he indeed named Anselm to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm resisted the appointment at first, feeling he was not fit for the job, but the other bishops urged him to accept the assignment, and so he agreed.

When Anselm arrived in England, things turned bad. King William recovered from his illness and immediately regretted having appointed a new Archbishop. Anselm represented a significant loss of Kingly income. In addition, Anselm was urging that many other vacant ministry positions be filled, more strain on the king's wallet. These concerns, coupled with his basic dislike of the new leadership of the church, convinced the King to begin plotting the Archbishop's removal.

King William tried to dictate who was appointed bishop and tried to remove many of the good bishops in order to control the church. Anselm resisted by appealing to the Pope, eventually traveling to Rome to gain the Pope's

support. While Anselm was in Rome, King William made it clear he would not be allowed to return. Still an Archbishop, but without the church at Canterbury, Anselm settled briefly in a monastery.

At the monastery he completed his most important theological work. Its Latin title is *Cur Deus Homo*, which means “Why God-Man.” It is a detailed discussion of one of the most confusing and amazing beliefs of the Christian faith: that Jesus was both God and human. Anselm writes about how this could be, and, more importantly, why God had to come to earth as a human being to save humanity. Anselm concluded that the great offense of humanity’s sin could only be atoned through the sacrifice of one who was human and divine. Many centuries later, this book remains one the most important treatises on understanding the incarnation.

Soon after Anselm finished this book, King William died. His successor, King Henry, allowed Anselm to return. He was cheered and greeted by the grateful members of his church. Anselm’s relationship with Henry was better than

the one with King William, but not by much. Henry also wanted to control the church, and Anselm would not allow it. Stealing a page from William's book of machinations, Henry waited for Anselm to make another visit to Rome, then forbade his return. However, King Henry changed his mind upon hearing a rumor that Anselm might kick Henry out of the church. As a result, he agreed to meet the exiled Archbishop. They worked out a compromise in which Henry agreed that he would not try to control the selection of bishops or their incomes, and Anselm agreed that English bishops would pay monetary tributes to the King. This arrangement satisfied Henry, and Anselm was able to continue his leadership of the church until his death the following year.

In addition to his accomplishments in the monastic life, in church leadership, and in theology, Anselm was an early crusader for the rights of all humans. As Archbishop of Canterbury, he called a conference to abolish the buying

and selling of humans as slaves. With his whole life he was a follower of Christ, with his heart, mind, body, and soul.¹

¹ Thurston and Attwater, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, vol. 2, 138-41.

Hildegard of Bingen

The church has had a hard time accepting women who were gifted leaders. Many women have been killed for their faith or ostracized and pushed aside. They had to fight for every opportunity to serve God. Fortunately, Hildegard of Bingen was one of the few whom the church embraced, acknowledged and even listened to.

Hildegard's parents were serious Christians. When they had their tenth child, they believed that she should be given to God as a tithe. So when Hildegard was eight, she was sent to live with an anchorite named Jutta to be trained and raised in a life dedicated to God. She was more than eager to enter this life of solitary prayer and devotion and took to it very willingly. Eventually Jutta attracted a number of girls to her care and she began a convent in the Benedictine order. In this little German convent Hildegard lived her life and from it she pronounced judgment on all of Europe.

Hildegard is famous for many things. She was an accomplished theologian and Bible scholar. She composed a

number of beautiful hymns that represented a new style of Christian music. She served as an eager and effective member of the convent and later served as its leader. She organized a large hospital in the convent and wrote a treatise on the use of natural plants in medicine. She spoke out against injustice with a prophetic voice and was almost universally acknowledged as a true mouthpiece for God. She experienced amazing visions of God's light. She lived her whole life in devotion to God and God's will. Just as her parents intended, she was a gift, used by God, just as Jesus gave himself for humanity.

One of the gifts Hildegard used was her writing. While at the convent she composed a series of commentaries on the Gospels that demonstrate her wisdom as an interpreter of the Bible. She published books about the lives of the saints, a variety of scientific topics, original hymns for use by the church and a record of her visions which was widely influential. It was for her life, however, even more than her writing that she is remembered today.

Hildegard lived a life in service to the world. One important aspect of this service was her life in the convent, which included the oversight of the hospital. It is unknown exactly how large the hospital was, but it must have been of considerable size because it had its own chapel where the sick, and the nuns caring for them, could worship. The sick and infirm would come from a wide surrounding area to be treated by Hildegard. A second important part of her convent ministry was her work to start new convents. After she had been the leader for quite some time of the convent which Jutta had founded, she had a vision in which God instructed her to leave and found a new convent. At first she was reluctant to go because she was happy and serving well where she was. However she soon fell very ill and realized that she could not resist God's will. She left with twenty others to go and found a new convent. Later this convent would grow so large that she would start another. Soon after she had successfully established the first of these convents she received a call by God to begin her third stage of service to the convent. She was called to preach. She left

the convent she had founded and spent the next twenty-three years traveling to churches and convents and monasteries, preaching the gospel. She would preach anywhere people would listen to her and she earned renown as a great and bold preacher. She believed that she was called to light the fire in a church that was becoming soft. In her boldness she would approach any topic. She spoke against the moral laziness of the people as well as the corruption of the church. Her preaching had a widespread influence all over Germany as well as in the whole Catholic church.

This preaching ministry was in many ways the full expression of another aspect of her life which had been going on the whole time she served in the convent. She was not only an active leader in the convent, she was a powerful voice of change to all of Europe. Hildegard spent a great deal of her time listening for the will of God. She experienced visions. Some of them were overwhelming experiences of God's light and love. Others included wisdom about the situations of her time. Based upon these

visions she spoke with a boldness that was rare for anyone and for a woman was unheard of in her day. Her visions gave her the strength to speak out against the leaders of the church, against kings and popes and against social injustice in all forms. It would have been easy for the recipients of these condemnations to have her silenced or killed as was done to so many who spoke out against the authorities. She, however, was universally acknowledged as a prophet so instead of rejecting her, the people gave her respect. Even an Emperor who was known for rejecting and resisting the authority of the church did not reject her authority and wrote to ask for her blessing. She responded with a stern warning, reminding him that although he had great power now, before God his power was nothing, so that he should rule well and be filled with God's grace. People from all walks of life flocked to her for advice: rich and poor, kings and commoners, popes and priests. She was always slow to answer, praying and being sure that her answer came from God and not her own wisdom. Her answer included a

personal rebuke and warning against sin as well as encouragement for their lives.

Hildegard's achievements in so many areas are a remarkable testimony to the possibilities open to a person whose life is devoted to God. She was a leader in every field she entered and was a counselor to all who met her. She is well remembered as a great servant of Christ.²

² Lucy Menzies, *Mirrors of the Holy: Ten Studies in Sanctity* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1928), 1-26.

Francis of Assisi

Jesus not only lived his life perfectly, he also walked as a model so that others could follow in his footsteps. Into that path have come many great people who have been dedicated to God. Some of them, like Jesus, have lived their lives in such a way that they became an example to others. Francis of Assisi was one of these people. He lived virtuously, and he also gathered around him a group of Christians and inspired them to lives of greater virtue.

Francis was born in Italy into a family of moderate wealth and grew up in a comfortable lifestyle. He spent all the money he had. He enjoyed the romantic adventures of a young nobleman. He was kind and considerate and faithful to the church, but for the most part he pursued his own pleasure and thought little of the needs of others.

This lifestyle began to change through a long and odd series of events. For one thing, he was captured during a brief battle between the cities of Perugia and Assisi. While a prisoner he endured a long sickness and when he recovered he was a much more serious person. Soon after this, while

on his way to participate in the wars of Southern Italy, he received a vision calling him to “serve the Master rather than the man.” This led him even further toward a passion for devotion to Christ, even though he did not know exactly what the vision called him to do.

His first major ministry came after he received a vision which he understood to be calling him to a ministry of rebuilding churches. His first attempt was to take goods from his father’s warehouse and sell them to pay for the repairs of a local church. He also asked the priest if he could stay and live at the church. His father did not appreciate being robbed or his son’s new home. In response, he found Francis and beat him and chained him up, even though Francis was twenty-five years old at the time. Francis was released and returned to the church. His father came again, confronted him and told him to come home or renounce his inheritance. Francis decided that he would rather serve God than be wealthy, and he gave up all that he had from his father. He even took off the clothes he was wearing since even they had come from his father’s money. Fortunately

one of the church workers present gave him something to wear.

Now he was free to pursue his first ministry. He wandered for two years finding work where he could, but after two years he returned to Assisi to raise money to rebuild the church there. This time he would find the money by begging in the streets rather than stealing from his father. After he had repaired this church, he moved on to another and still another. This third chapel would become his home and the center of his ministry for the rest of his life. This little chapel was called Portiuncula and would become the main chapel of the Franciscan order which Francis would later found.

He received his inspiration for this new order when he was twenty-seven and was in the middle of repairing Portiuncula. His inspiration came from Christ's instruction to his disciples in Matthew 10. Christ sent out his disciples and told them to go and preach, relying entirely on the generosity of those whom they would meet. There were not to take with them any money or extra belongings. Francis

took these commands as the instructions for his life and immediately gave away all that he had except one coat, and he began to travel the countryside begging for food and preaching repentance. This new life surprised many people, but he was an effective preacher and soon won many converts. In particular, he inspired many who were already Christians to join him in his way of life.

In fact, within one year of beginning his new ministry of poverty and preaching, he had a dozen followers who had forsaken all that they owned and were living their simple life with Francis. As a result he wrote down the rules that this group was going to live by and went to the Pope to have them approved as an official monastic order. Some of the Pope's advisors were worried that no group could survive with the kind of poverty that Francis expected, but the Pope decided to approve the Franciscan order.

After receiving formal approval from the Pope, Francis and his followers soon settled back at the chapel of Portiuncula. Around the chapel they built simple huts. They lived lives of strict but happy poverty. Francis

encouraged manual labor for food but never for money. When no work was found they would beg. Francis led his people with a moderate hand. He expected them to live in poverty as Matthew 10 described but he did not expect long fasting or dramatic vows of silence. This lack of moderation, he said, was not for God but for ourselves.

Quickly the Franciscan order grew and spread throughout Europe. Francis soon stepped aside from the formal leadership because he wanted to live a simple life of poverty and service. As the years progressed tensions did arise because it was very difficult for a large and growing ministry to remain faithful to a strict life of poverty and simplicity. The legacy of Francis, however, was never lost and still Christians are inspired by his example of simple obedience to God.³

³ Thurston and Attwater, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, vol. 4, 22-32.

Catherine of Siena

“Nails would not have held God-and-man on the cross, had love not held him there.” With these words, Catherine of Siena described the sacrifice of Christ. She knew that Christ gave himself up for others because of his great love for God and for humanity. Catherine lived the same way.

Catherine was the last of twenty-five children born to a devout Catholic family in Siena, Italy. She was cheerful and a delight to her family. This changed when she turned thirteen and refused to marry because she wanted to devote herself to God. Her father had arranged a match which would improve the family’s fortune, and he was very displeased by her refusal. In punishment she was forced to become the household servant. During this time Catherine developed a skill that would be very important to her devotional life. Because she could not have physical solitude, she practiced having spiritual solitude in prayer and devotion even while she was working. She was able to remain faithful to her prayers even as she complete that

many tasks that were before her. It was also during this time that she developed a unique outlook on the world. Even while she was being mistreated by her family, she decided to treat them as if they were Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus. This life of prayer and this attitude toward her parents allowed her to serve them joyfully and diligently even though the situation was cruel. She would continue to serve the world in this way for the rest of her life.

One day while she was praying and cleaning the house, her father saw her and was struck by the fact that she was a woman of true devotion. He relented from her punishment, and this young teenager was allowed to join an order of uncloistered nuns. She was allowed to live the life of a nun but did not go to live in a convent; she stayed at home. She was given her own room, and for the next three years she stayed there, leaving only to go to church for Mass. She slept and ate very little, spending her time in prayer and meditation. For these three years she focused on one task. She desired that she would love nothing except God. In fact

she had to make herself eat to avoid starvation because she lost the love of food.

After these three years of training through prayer, she began her ministry to the world. This ministry came during a critical time of the church's history. Italy was being torn apart by civil war. The Popes had relocated to France instead of Rome and were being manipulated by the French government. The plague was decimating Italian towns and villages. Catherine responded to all of these needs as she was able. She always gave of herself to any who would accept her gifts.

Immediately upon leaving her three years of solitude, she began to work among the poor and soon attracted a group of followers who recognized her deep spiritual wisdom and compassion. She worked tirelessly in the streets, prisons and hospitals of the surrounding area praying for those in need and through her prayers, leading many to conversion. Later when the plague hit Italy she was in the streets caring for the hundreds of suffering and dying.

She continually risked her own fragile health to care for others.

In addition to her major ministry of compassion for the poor and suffering, Catherine used her wisdom to address the problems in the papacy. Through her loyal students and followers, she wrote hundreds of letters. These letters went to all kinds of people in a variety of situations. She wrote to friends and family but also to corrupt kings and failing bishops, and to the pope. She wrote to Pope Gregory to admonish him to return the papacy to Rome. She also advised him to undertake a number of reforms. He relied on her as a close advisor, and she was particularly instrumental in stopping the wars that had arisen in Italy in response to Gregory. Gregory did return to Rome, but he and his successor were unsuccessful at achieving any lasting reforms. This lack of success did not deter Catherine. She did what she did out of love not for success or power or gain. She had truly sacrificed every love but God, and because she loved God, she loved God's children.⁴

⁴ Menzies, 119-55.

Jan Hus

During the Middle Ages, the church faced serious problems. Although most Christians were faithful to their calling, many of the church leaders were corrupted by power and greed. There were, however, heroic exceptions to this pattern: Some Christians led quiet lives of ministry and contemplation and others led bold proclamations against the corruption of the church. Jan Hus was one of these bold proclaimers. He preached against corruption and evil at the highest levels of church leadership. As a result, he was an important prelude to the reformers of the coming centuries.

Jan Hus was a Czech priest who lived and preached in the city of Prague. He was beloved by the people, and many came to his chapel to hear him preach. He called for social justice and opposed the unethical policies of leaders both in the church and in the government. His main point of objection was to the institution of the Pope. He did not believe that the Pope was necessarily the representative of Christ and Peter, as Catholic doctrine maintained. He said that, “no one is the representative of Christ or Peter unless

he also imitates their behavior.” This statement was daring in his time because it rejected the power of the office of Pope. Hus contended that the Pope’s power and right to lead the church is found in the Pope’s imitation of Christ. This assertion was particularly important because he lived through a series of corrupt Popes. They were using their office for a wide variety of inappropriate activities.

For Hus, the worst of these was the selling of indulgences. An indulgence is the formal forgiveness of a sin. Pope John XXII was selling these indulgences to finance wars. This meant that a rich person could purchase forgiveness instead of truly repenting.

Hus was not a radical because he opposed this Pope. In fact, many of the other church leaders opposed this particular Pope, and he was eventually declared illegitimate. What Hus did was to question the validity of the whole institution by claiming that the character of the individual was more important than the office.

These accusations and others against the church earned many enemies for Hus. Bishops and priests who

were comfortable with how things were running recognized that Jan Hus posed a significant threat to them. After all, he preached about the need for change to the very nature of the church. Hus was not afraid to face them, however, and boldly went to a council of bishops that would later condemn him to death. Because he believed that he was speaking the truth and believed that the truth would prevail, Hus said, "Seek the truth, hear the truth, support the truth, learn the truth, defend the truth to the death." And this is exactly what he would do.

Hus believed that, in the light of illegitimate Popes, fighting bishops, and other signs of a failing church structure, all the church could do was fall back on faithfulness to Christ. This concept was what he wanted to present to the bishops at the conference. He quickly realized, however, that he would have no chance to present his case. He was condemned before he got there. In this time of turmoil, the bishops could allow no dissension. Hus's words of challenge were too dangerous to permit to

continue. Hus did not back down, however. He knew that he must boldly defend the truth until his last breath.

Hus received little opportunity to proclaim his innocence. False charges were brought against him, making up all kinds of false doctrines which could supposedly be found in his preaching. He denied all of these, but was given no chance to defend himself. In a letter to his friends which he wrote during the trial, Hus says, "I ask and exhort you to love God, to honor his word, to hear it readily and to observe it. I ask you to hold to the divine truth that I have explained in writing and that I have preached according to the holy scriptures and the discourses of the Fathers. I also ask that if anyone has heard me say in private or in my preaching anything contrary to the divine truth, or if I have written anything of this sort (although, thanks be to God, that this could not be the case), take no account of it."

Above all else, he taught Christians to love God and give themselves over to the study of scripture for the increase of God's glory, the service of the city and their own salvation, and not to satisfy their greed or their thirst for human glory.

Despite Hus' pleas for understanding, the bishops did not listen to him. He was condemned to death for heresy. In fact, he was dressed up as a king and given the title Heresiarch, or King of the Heretics. As he was led to the fire he boldly and loudly prayed for his persecutors, finally offering a prayer to God for mercy upon all people.⁵

⁵ Chenu, 107-12.

Julian of Norwich

Christ walked the earth in total humility, giving of himself for the sake of others. Julian of Norwich saw this attitude in Christ and desired to copy it. In fact, as a young woman she made three prayers to God all designed to help her better understand Christ's life. She asked to experience Christ's crucifixion as vividly as if she had been there like Mary Magdalene. Secondly, just as Jesus lived for thirty years before he began his ministry leading to suffering and death, she asked that she might experience great suffering when she was thirty and thus understand Christ's suffering. Thirdly, she asked that she might receive three gifts: contrition, compassion and a steadfast longing toward God. She received all of these gifts and they came to mark her entire life.

In many ways, very little is known about Julian's life. What we do know, however, is a remarkable portrayal of a woman who lived her life completely for others. This selfless devotion is evident in her writings and in her occupation.

Julian lived the peculiar life of an anchorite. An anchorite is a person who lives in a small building attached to the outside of a church. She never went outside but instead had two maids who waited on her and they went outside to get anything she needed. The room she lived in had three windows: one faced into the church, one faced into the room where her maids worked so that she could communicate with them and the third faced out into the world but it was covered with a cloth. She lived her whole adult life in this kind of enclosed room.

It may seem that in this kind of separate existence, it would be hard to live for others and that one's life would become entirely self centered. Julian's job, however, prevented that. She committed herself to being at the window that faced into the world so that anyone who needed to talk could come and talk to her. She offered prayer, counsel, comfort, and advice to anyone who came up. Her whole life was a life of service to the community. Whatever she was doing, if someone came to the window and needed to talk or needed advice, she stopped what she

was doing and helped them. Physically she was separated from the world, but spiritually and emotionally she was fully connected to the lives of the entire town and was an important part of the ministry of the church.

Julian's ministry as an anchorite was only part of her giving to others. In addition she wrote with great wisdom and depth and her writings have survived as a gift to Christians of all times. Her writing began when she became extremely sick at the age of thirty, just as she had requested of God. She became so sick that a priest came to offer last rites to her and a woman present believed that she had died. She recovered, but for a time was paralyzed from the waist down. During this time she began to have visions and her wise reflection on these visions led to her book *Revelations on Divine Love*. Just as she had prayed, she was given a deep understanding of the sufferings of Christ through her suffering and through her visions.

Her visions and her reflections were on a wide variety of topics. In many visions she saw the suffering of Christ, such as an early vision that came as she looked a crucifix and

then saw blood begin to bleed out of Christ's wounds. This vision did not lead to morbid reflection but rather led to profound thought about Christ's suffering. "We have a matter for mourning because our sin is the cause of Christ's sufferings; but we also have a matter of joy for the endless love which made him to suffer." In another vision she reflected on the awesomeness of God by envisioning that all of creation was only size of a hazelnut but was maintained out God's love.

Both of these visions demonstrate that for Julian, nothing could be understood except in the context of God's love as demonstrated through Christ. She called the compilation of her visions *Revelations on Divine Love* because for her, all meditation on God led to a recognition of God's love.

Everything that Julian did was motivated by her understanding of God's love and was expressed by her demonstrating love to others.⁶

⁶ Menzies, 92-118.

CHAPTER 5

REFORMATION AND CONQUEST

Martin Luther

Jesus saw hypocrites among the religious leaders of his day and he risked his life confronting them. Martin Luther saw hypocrisy and corruption in the church and he also risked his life and livelihood to challenge it. His ministry of reformation has forever changed the global church. Not only did he start the Lutheran church and give strength to many other reform movements, but his influence has blessed the whole church by calling the church back to the Bible.

Martin Luther did not ever plan to be a revolutionary. He grew up in a poor family and at first made his family very proud through his educational attainments, receiving a Master of Arts degree when he was twenty-two. His parents' pride soon turned into disappointment, however, when they heard that he had decided to enter a monastery. He had been planning to pursue a career as a lawyer, and his parents were not happy with his change.

He decided to enter the monastery for many reasons. One of the reasons was a dramatic conversion experience when he was almost struck by lightning. He would write later, “I have been called by terrors from heaven and become a monk against my own will and desire.” As a monk he joined a group called the Augustinian Eremites. His life as a monk was a strict life of obedience and he took to it well. His conversion experience had made him deeply aware of his sinfulness and he wanted to make up for it through discipline and hard work. He wrote, “I was a good monk and kept the rules of my order so strictly that if ever a monk got to heaven through monkery, I should have been that man.” He did not feel confidence, however, and was very dissatisfied with his understanding of forgiveness and salvation. This dissatisfaction continued even as he continued his studies, eventually receiving a Doctor of Bible degree and going to Wittenburg Seminary to teach. Wittenburg would be his home for the rest of his life.

As a professor at Wittenburg, he had the opportunity to study the Bible with increasing care. As he studied, he

realized that in certain areas it seemed that the doctrine of the church had become inconsistent with scripture. In particular, he concluded that the righteousness of God was not something which people could be judged by or ever live up to. Rather, he concluded that the righteousness of God was something which God gave as a gift through the work of Christ. This understanding set the stage for his later disagreements with the church.

The first major breaking point for Martin Luther came in response to the church's practice of indulgences. An indulgence functioned like a formal permission slip for a person to sin. In Martin Luther's day these indulgences were being sold, and this meant that a wealthy person could pay for forgiveness of sin. It was against this practice that Martin Luther spoke out. He did so by writing down ninety-five things that were wrong with the church and nailing this list to the door of the Wittenburg Cathedral. Many people use this action, to mark the beginning of the Protestant reformation.

The ninety-five theses were relatively uncontroversial, but Luther soon followed these with a broad attack on a variety of central doctrines such as the nature of sin and grace and the source of salvation. These new ideas were a real threat to the established Catholic church and several theologians realized that they must respond. One of them, John Eck, responded by challenging Martin Luther to clarify his position on the authority of the Pope. Martin Luther offered clarification by rejecting the Pope's total authority over Christians. This challenge was enough to begin the process of Luther's excommunication.

Luther's excommunication could have been the end of his ministry, but in fact it was just the beginning. After a short time in hiding, he returned to Wittenburg to lead his growing group of followers on a new experiment in how to be the church. He used his time in hiding to translate the New Testament into German. This translation was very important. The Catholic church used Latin Bibles which meant that only the highly educated and the priests could read the Bible. Because Luther wanted to avoid some of the

errors of Catholicism by relying on the scripture, he wanted everyone to have access to the Bible.

When Luther returned from hiding he continued to work hard, preaching, teaching, studying, and writing to defend his new church and to clarify his understanding of scripture. Many people were using his ideas for destructive ends, and he had to write many careful statements to explain his teaching and prevent abuse.

Martin Luther was a great Christian leader because he was brave enough to read scripture and try to understand it. Then he was brave enough to use his understanding to challenge the church to grow and improve, to be the church of God.⁷

⁷ Frank S. Mead, *Rebels with a Cause* (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 82-99.

John of God

Have you ever wandered if it was too late to make a change? Have you ever felt like you had done too many bad things to ever really turn your life around? John could have felt like that, but he became a great servant of God. When he was a young teenager, he joined the army of a count in Portugal and fought in a number of wars. He had been a nominal Christian as a child but with the influences of his friends in the army he quickly forgot all about it. He lived a very sinful and mean life. After leaving the army, he worked as a shepherd. This job was lonely and hard, but it did give him plenty of time to think. Often his thinking turned to the excesses of his army life and all the great evil that he had done as a soldier. At the age of forty he decided that he would return to the faith of his childhood and try to make amends for the life he had lived.

His first idea was to go to Africa and give himself to be killed there as a martyr. While on his way, a wise pastor in Spain advised him not to throw his life away by seeking to be a martyr. He should use his life for God's work and if it

was in the context of following God, then he could gladly become a martyr. Accepting this advice, he began to work as a peddler selling religious books. He was quite successful and had built a little shop when he heard the famous preacher, John of Avila, preaching about becoming a fool for Christ. John took him literally and immediately began to act insane. He acted so crazy that he was housed in an insane asylum; at that time such places were dark and horrible because mental diseases were poorly understood and poorly treated. Eventually, John of Avila came to him and admonished him to use his life more constructively. Like the wise priest who had prevented his unnecessary martyrdom, John of Avila told John to stop acting crazy and find a way to use his life to help others.

John immediately became well, but he stayed at the hospital for some time helping to care for the other patients. When he left the hospital, he again used his gifts as a salesman to make money. This time he used all the money he made to feed and clothe the poor of the city of Granada. In order to increase his effectiveness he bought a house and

began to welcome anyone who needed a place to stay or food to eat. He cared for the poor and the homeless, prostitutes and beggars, the very old and the very sick. Everyone was invited to his house of rest and comfort.

He spent all day caring for those in his house and would spend the night acquiring the provisions necessary to supply his growing household. He soon gained a reputation for effective and compassionate care and the community of Granada began to bring to him not only those in distress but also the provisions necessary to run his household. Even as he achieved fame, he always said that he was the worst of sinners and was not fit to care for the saints in his home. His humility was apparent to everyone who met him.

John did not just care for the needs of those who came to his hospital. He traveled to assess the state of the poor throughout the region and to provide what help he could. To some he gave gifts, to others jobs, and others he brought back to his growing hospital to treat their sickness. To all, he shared the power of the gospel to change a life. He particularly cared for young girls who could easily be taken

into prostitution. He was known to venture into the worst parts of the city to call hardened criminals and sinners to repentance and then to invite them back to his home to eat or stay.

Occasionally the leaders of the city would complain that John was housing prostitutes and sinners in his home and hospital. He replied boldly and humbly, "The Son of man came for sinners, and we are bound to seek their conversion. I am unfaithful to my vocation because I neglect this, but I confess that I know of no bad person in my hospital except myself alone, who am indeed unworthy to eat the bread of the poor." In the face of such a bold proclamation and such a humble spirit his detractors could do nothing.

Having built and administered his hospital for ten years he became sick after rescuing a drowning man from an icy river. He lived long enough to organize the hospital and say a few final farewells, and then he died while praying at the age of 55.

Although John died, his work did not die with him. Many people had come to join him as his hospital grew. These men became known as the Brothers Hospitallers and they continue to this day to provide care for the poor and needy throughout the world, just as Jesus had done and commanded his followers to do.⁸

⁸ Thurston and Attwater ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, vol. 1, 517-520.

Basil the Blessed

The life of St. Basil the Blessed is shrouded in mystery. He lived in Russia in the time just before the reign of the deadly Ivan the Terrible. He was a devout Orthodox Christian and he was a fool.

This may seem like an odd description of a man who has been remembered as a saint. However, his foolishness was the result of his dedication to Christ. Just as monks and other Christians have given up comfort, wealth, and so much else in order to better serve Christ, Basil and other “holy fools” like him gave up respectability so that they could devote themselves to God and speak his truth.

As a boy, Basil was apprenticed to a shoemaker. It was here that he first realized his special gift of insight. One day when a man ordered shoes, Basil realized that the man would die before the shoes arrived. He could not explain the realization, but he knew it to be true. This ability for insight would stay with him throughout his life.

Soon after this incident, Basil left the shoemaker. He gave away all he had and began to live on the streets,

wearing only a cloth wrapped around his waist. He wandered the streets begging and preaching. He achieved fame rather quickly. Moscow is a cold city and it was quite surprising for a man to wander the streets almost naked. However, he soon became famous for even more.

Have you ever noticed that little kids can say things that no one else can say? Children are able to speak with a frankness that adults can rarely find. Basil was able to do this as well. He would wander into the marketplaces and destroy the goods of dishonest merchants. Other times he would go into shops and gather up goods and then distribute them to the poor. He would throw stones at the houses of the wealthy and chastise them for their sin. At the houses of the poor and those of ill repute, he would kiss the stones of the pavement and say that angels were weeping over them.

Any of these actions might have steered him into grave danger. Many things Basil did were illegal and he could have been arrested. However, he was able to avoid persecution because he lived as a holy fool. Rather than

reject him or punish him, his community respected him for his insight and honesty.

A large part of the tales of Basil deal with his interaction with Ivan the Terrible. It is hard to know if these were really the actions of Basil or actually the doings of some other holy fool whose name has been lost. In either case, the stories are an important testimony to the ability of someone who has given up everything for Christ to proclaim the gospel with a special boldness. Since they have sacrificed everything they have nothing to lose.

One year during the season of Lent, Ivan the Terrible was busying himself with a campaign of killing innocent people. In the Orthodox tradition it is the custom to eat no meat during the season of Lent. However, Basil brought to Ivan a slab of raw meat, telling him that, in this case, eating meat could do no harm. He said, "Why should you not eat meat when you are slaughtering men?"

Most people who questioned Ivan the Terrible were immediately killed. Ivan, however, feared and respected Basil and so did nothing. In fact, Ivan would occasionally

send gifts to Basil, who would then give them away to anyone who was in need.

The life of a holy fool is a peculiar kind of Christian service. Holy fools do not lead great movements, they do not publish great books, but they do lead great lives, because they give up everything for the sake of Christ.⁹

⁹ Jim Forest, "Holy Foolishness," *Parabola* 19 (Winter 1994): 22-23, and

George P. Fedetov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, vol. 2 (Belmont: Norland, 1975), 337-40.

Galileo Galilei

Galileo had a dilemma. He had to decide between two different things. The leaders of the church were telling him to believe one thing and the scientific experiments he was doing were telling him another thing. He had the dilemma for a long time, but it was at its worst when he was called before the church leaders and told to give up his scientific claims.

Long before Galileo's trouble arose, he was known all around Europe as a great scientist. He began his studies as a doctor, but decided he liked mathematics and physics better. He used his mathematics to develop and discover a number of important things. He invented the thermometer, a device which is used to measure temperature. He studied the motion of swinging objects to develop the laws of the pendulum. Both of these discoveries were very important to medicine. The thermometer measures a patient's temperature, which is important for diagnosing an infection, and the pendulum was used to measure changes in a person's pulse, still an important factor of general health.

Even though he wasn't a doctor anymore, his mathematics helped doctors do their job.

None of these discoveries got Galileo into any trouble; in fact these just made him more famous and respected as a scientist. It was with his next two areas of study that he began to question some ideas that people had believed for a long time, and he began to make some enemies. The first area of study that upset a few people was his study of falling bodies. For a long time people had thought that if a heavy object and a light object were dropped from a great height at the same time, the heavy object would fall faster. The people who thought this could easily demonstrate their point by dropping a brick and a piece of paper. However, Galileo thought that weight wasn't what made the difference. He thought it was wind resistance. There is a story that one day he proved that he was right by dropping two cannon balls of very different size off the leaning tower of Pisa and they landed at approximately the same time. Whether it happened exactly this way or not, Galileo did figure out that except for wind resistance, all things fall at the same speed

and that this speed increases at the same rate. This discovery disagreed with the current ideas about how things fell and the disagreements prepared him for the even greater trouble that he would get into once he began using telescopes. Galileo didn't invent telescopes, but he was one of the first people to master them, and he made a lot of improvements to them. Eventually, the discoveries he would make with his telescopes would lead to the dilemma he faced for much of his life.

As a teacher of mathematics he also taught astronomy. For these classes he had to study the common ideas about astronomy that were believed in that day. These beliefs included the idea that the earth was motionless and that everything else in the solar system revolved around the earth. An astronomer named Copernicus had already published a paper claiming that the earth revolved around the sun, but he could not prove it and not many people accepted Copernicus' theory. Galileo however thought that Copernicus' theory explained what he saw through his

telescope better than the common idea that the earth stood still.

In 1610, he published a paper explaining all the things he had seen and discovered with his telescope. These discoveries included the mountainous and rough surface of the moon, four moons rotating around Jupiter, and differences in the brightness of Venus that were similar to the phases of the moon. Most importantly, he defended the Copernican idea that the earth revolved around the sun. This publication was followed three years later by a letter in which he argued that this Copernican idea was not in conflict with the Bible. In response to the letter Galileo was charged with being a heretic, a believer in a false and dangerous doctrine.

Galileo's defense of Copernican astronomy angered the church for two main reasons. It conflicted with what seemed to be common sense. When you look at the sky, it appears that the earth is still and the sun is moving. More importantly the Bible in many places talks about the sun

rising and setting and moving through the sky. Galileo seemed to be saying that it couldn't move, and people believed he was contradicting the Bible.

Galileo was not convicted of heresy, but he was told that he couldn't talk about the Copernican theory as if it were true. This order was the beginning of Galileo's dilemma. He was confident that his scientific findings were correct, but he didn't want to resist the teaching of the church. For sixteen years, Galileo obeyed the church leaders and did not talk or write publicly about his ideas. However, after sixteen years he couldn't wait any longer and he published a book comparing the Copernican scientific ideas with the old ideas of astronomy. He argued that the old ideas were wrong and that Copernicus was right. This publication caught the attention of the church authorities and he was brought in for another trial. In this trial, his accusers did not try to convict him of heresy; they just showed that he had violated his promise not to promote Copernican ideas. He had to say publicly that his book was wrong.

Galileo did not live much longer, but he was able to publish one more book that provided the mathematical basis for the Copernican theory and discussed a few other ideas. This book showed that he still supported the Copernican ideas even though he had said he didn't.

Galileo had a real problem because he wanted to serve the church, but it wouldn't let him talk about what he knew to be true. He never doubted that eventually people would understand that the Bible and Copernican astronomy did not conflict. He was right. His story is a lesson to the church to never shut out people with new ideas just because they disagree with the traditions that we hold so closely.¹⁰

¹⁰ Jerome J. Langford, *Galileo, Science, and the Church* (New York: Desclée, 1966).

Anne Hutchinson

Like many people living in England and Europe during Anne's life, Anne Hutchinson and her family were persecuted for what they believed about the Bible. Many families decided to leave Europe to come to the new settlements in North America. They hoped that by coming to a new land they would be able to worship in peace. Unfortunately, for some the persecution in their new home was worse than it had been in their old home.

Anne and Will Hutchinson crossed the Atlantic during the early years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They were looking for a place where they could safely express their Puritan faith in the company of fellow believers. Anne did not find safety in the new land. In fact, from the first Anne was met with suspicion and persecution.

Anne was the daughter of a minister in England, and she was taught to know the scriptures well and to think hard about what they meant, in a time when very few people were willing to tolerate a woman who wanted to talk about the scripture. Upon arrival in Massachusetts, her husband

Will was immediately accepted into the church. Anne was not, however, because on the boat she had questioned the teaching of one of the ministers. This minister had responded by questioning whether Anne understood the Bible well enough to join the church. Anne's participation in the church was delayed for several months because she had to be examined by several ministers who eventually determined that her understanding was fine.

The Hutchinson family settled into a large and beautiful home in Massachusetts and immediately began to gather friends through their warm hospitality. In addition to their fourteen children, their home was always filled with guests and visitors. It was this hospitality that would eventually lead to Anne's conflict with the local church authorities.

The Hutchinsons held family Bible studies, which Anne would usually lead. Because the Hutchinson household maintained an open-door policy, the studies slowly grew to include a wide variety of people. Women and men, rich and poor, all would gather together in the

Hutchinson house. It became one of the few places where women could discuss scripture, because the leaders of the church looked down upon women who discussed and thought about the Bible.

The Bible studies had been going on for some time when Anne was called before a meeting of eleven ministers. They accused her of using the Hutchinson scripture studies as a forum to condemn their ministries. In those days it was forbidden for anyone to speak against a minister, and even for a man the penalties were severe. For a woman it would be worse. She maintained that she had neither condemned any of their ministries nor spoken against them. Although she did disagree with certain teachings which seemed to misrepresent scripture, she would never attack anyone.

The ministers accused her of luring more and more people, some of them powerful men, to her Bible study in order to cause dissension in the church. Again, Anne denied their false claim. No one had been gathered or invited to her studies; anyone was welcome in her home at any time. It was simply a matter of hospitality.

For a time, it seemed that Anne had defended herself well. No action was taken against her. Some months later, however, a synod, a meeting of church leaders, was called. The principal order of business at this synod was the prevention of the spread of heresy, which means false teaching. The church leaders once again raised the issue of Anne's scripture studies and resolved to put an end to them. Anne's teachings and discussions of the Bible were to be considered heresies, and the punishment for these heresies was banishment or death.

Anne refused to be intimidated by these new developments, although her children begged her to stop for their sake. Anne's husband Will defended and supported her even after his brother-in-law was banished on similar charges. At the age of forty-five, Anne was brought to the General Court of Massachusetts and charged with troubling the peace, speaking against the ministers, and carrying on a condemned meeting in her home. The court threatened to fine anyone who spoke in support of Anne and Anne was not allowed to defend herself. She was sentenced to

imprisonment and the court threatened to banish her if she did not publicly say that she had been wrong.

For six months Anne remained in prison. During that time many of her friends abandoned her to protect themselves. Finally, after she continued to hold fast to her convictions, she and her family were banished from Massachusetts. The Hutchinsons made a new home in Rhode Island. A few years later, Anne died in New York.

Anne Hutchinson was a brave and bold woman. Not only did she fight against great church oppression, but she also fought against a culture that refused to listen to the voices of women. She used her home to teach in a way that the church would not tolerate. Just like Jesus, she was willing to break the conventions of the culture to take the gospel to the people.¹¹

¹¹ Dorothy Ostin, "The Risk of Dissent," *Daughters of Sarah* 14 (Mr / Ap 1988): 16-18.

Roberto de Nobili

Being the first at something is a special thing.

Sometimes it is special because it is fun, like being the first to sled down a hill or sitting in the first car of a roller coaster.

Sometimes it is special because it is an honor, like being picked first for a game. But sometimes being first is special because it is scary and new, like being the first one to explore an unknown land or the first one to taste a new and exotic looking food.

Roberto de Nobili was one of the first at something and it was special, but it was the scary kind of special. He tried something that was new to him and it startled the people around him. He tried a new way of sharing the gospel.

Roberto was born in Italy. Although he scarcely could have imagined what his future would hold, he knew that he wanted to be a part of the growing group called the Jesuits. The Jesuits were some of the boldest missionaries of the church, and Roberto wanted to share their work. So when he graduated from college, he joined the Jesuits at the

age of 19. He was ordained seven years later and received his assignment to go to India as a missionary.

When he arrived in India, the first thing he did was to learn the language of Tamil, which was the language of the common people in that region. He became fluent in Tamil, and as his mission work progressed, he would learn two more languages. The first language was Teluga, which was used by the nobility and the leaders of India. The second language was Sanskrit, which was used by the religious leaders of India. He could now communicate with all the people of southern India in their own language. This was a great advantage to his work and a sign of things to come.

His first assignment was to work with a Portuguese missionary in the Portuguese colony of Madurai. The missionaries of Madurai were considered to be effective missionaries, but whenever someone converted to Christianity they required that this person also live like a Portuguese. They had to dress like the Portuguese, eat like the Portuguese, and even change their names to be Portuguese. This requirement made the other Hindus

despise them, and the mission work was very ineffective. Roberto noticed that in particular none of the leaders of the Indian people had converted because under these rules, converting meant giving up their whole cultural identity. In the Indian society the people were sharply divided into different social and religious classes called castes. Hindu religion made very particular demands upon all Indians and particularly those in the high castes. These differences of diet and dress prevented high caste Hindus from ever even hearing the gospel. It was in response to this situation that Roberto had an idea. He would become like one of the Indians in every way that he could without compromising the gospel.

He lived according to the rigorous laws of diet and purity so that he would be able to associate with strict Hindus. He dressed like the religious men of India so that he could participate in religious conversations. He used his knowledge of the languages to study the Hindu scriptures and would discuss these with Brahmin, who were important religious leaders. Just as Paul had become like a Greek to

reach the Greeks and Jesus had become human to reach humans, Roberto became Indian to reach the people of India. Within a few years he had 60 converts from the high castes.

This success did not mean that things were going easily for Roberto. In fact, he faced opposition from both the Christians and the Hindus. By the Hindus he was accused of being like the other missionaries who tried to destroy the Indian culture. He replied that in fact he was a student of the Indian culture and was living his life according to the strict rules of a sannyasi, or Indian holy man. By Christians he was denounced for preaching a false gospel confused by Indian superstition. He tried to defend himself, but he found himself up against several church leaders who were opposed to his methods. For ten years his ministry was limited by people who were afraid of his new methods of evangelism.

Finally after ten years, both the Pope and the king of Portugal determined that Roberto's mission was good and Roberto was given official approval.

After this vindication Roberto entered a new role in Indian society and a new phase of his ministry. He dressed himself as a wandering holy man and for six years he traveled around India preaching to all who would listen, after which he returned to his work in Madurai with the high caste Hindus. At the age of seventy he became too ill to continue and so he retired to Italy where he was allowed to continue to live as a sannyasi until he died at the age of 79.

Roberto de Nobili and a few other missionaries like him were trying something that seemed new. They were trying to bring the gospel into a culture and share its good news without destroying the culture. In fact it wasn't new because it was just what Jesus and Paul had already done, but at the time its newness led to resistance and even suppression. Today Roberto de Nobili is seen as one of the successful pioneers of modern missions.¹²

¹² Frank K. Flinn and Tyler Hendricks, ed., *Religion in the Pacific Era* (New York: Paragon House, 1985), 31-42.

Blaise Pascal

Blaise Pascal was an explorer of the mind. Just as a detective searches the scene of a crime looking for every clue and leaving nothing unchecked, Pascal searched through the details of anything he investigated. He was a scientist, a mathematician, a social climber, a theologian and a popular writer. In all of these areas he applied his brilliant intellect and his skill for analysis and presentation.

He was not a perfect man. He often succumbed to pride and used his intellectual gifts to destroy his opponents rather than to seek the truth. However on the whole, he left a legacy of effective research and thinking in a wide variety of areas. He was always searching for a clearer understanding of the truth and tried to leave behind him a path for others to follow.

Early in his life he demonstrated his intellect through his gifts in geometry and mathematics. His father was so worried that Pascal was studying geometry at too young an age that he locked up the geometry books and refused to let Pascal read them. This prohibition did not stop Pascal

because he simply wrote in the dust and developed his own geometry. He thought of difficult problems and then solved them. One day when he was particularly proud of a theory that he had proved, he called his father and showed it to him. After this incident his father decided that he would not be able to prevent his son from studying geometry so he unlocked the books and let Pascal study. This kind of approach would mark Pascal all of his life. If a subject interested him, he would study all he could, and if he couldn't find enough to study, he would experiment and discover it on his own.

As a young adult Pascal turned his attention to mechanics and physics. He designed one of the first calculating machines that could add, subtract, multiply and divide. This invention came long before electricity so he relied on a complex system of gears and pulleys to make the calculations. He found that in order to make the machine easy to operate it needed to be complex on the inside. This design became one of the hallmarks of his science and his writing. It was complex underneath but simple to use. This

approach made his scientific and theological writing very easy for anyone to understand.

In the area of physics he investigated the concept of a vacuum. Aristotle had said, "Nature abhors a vacuum." He meant by this that if something starts to get empty something else rushes in to take its place. This is the way a straw works. As you suck the air out of your mouth the water rushes up the straw to fill your mouth. At the same time the air around the glass replaces the water that is being taken away.

Because of what Aristotle said, many scientists assumed that there never could be a vacuum. Around Pascal's time several people had done experiments that seemed to demonstrate that a vacuum was possible. Pascal and some of his friends set up an elaborate series of experiments to prove that a vacuum could exist. As a result of these experiments, he discovered a great deal of useful physics. He invented the barometer; he discovered that air has weight and that air can expand and contract. He showed how a barometer can be used to measure altitude

and to predict the weather. He predicted the development of a hydraulic press (hydraulic means that it uses water) which is used today in a variety of ways.

All of these discoveries made Pascal very famous, but he was not satisfied. Physics did not excite him. It was for him an interesting diversion, but it did not satisfy his deeper questions. Eventually he turned back to mathematics and excelled there just as he had in physics. He published papers in geometry, number theory and probability. However, just as he had gotten bored with physics, he grew bored with mathematics. In the end he felt that it did not matter. In describing geometry he wrote, "I call [geometry] the finest trade in the world, but after all it is only a trade." Pascal knew that his mind was good for geometry and physics, but he wanted something more. He found that something in God.

For most of his life Pascal was impressed with a group of conservative Catholics known as the Jansenists. In support of this group of Christians, he began to write theological works. He wrote a variety of letters defending

the Jansenists against the persecution they faced and attacking their enemies. These letters were highly influential and popular, but they did not stop the condemnation of the Jansenist position. These works were the preparation for his greatest work.

Pascal had spent his whole life excelling in areas of reason. He could think and analyze and discuss ideas that many people couldn't even understand, and then he could explain them in a way that everyone could understand. He wanted more than anything to use these gifts to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. He wanted to show how reason could be a part of faith. He never finished this book but the notes he wrote in preparation for the book were collected and published under the title of *Pensees* which means "thoughts" in French.

The *Pensees* are excellent examples of how reason and faith can intermix in a Christian life and became a model for how to write apologetics, the study of how to argue for the truth of Christianity.

Pascal died before he finished his defense of Christianity. He had been sick his whole life and was particularly ill at the end of his life. He excelled at everything he tried, but never stuck with anything until he found God, because nothing else could satisfy the deepest questions he had.¹³

¹³ Morris Bishop, *Blaise Pascal* (New York: Dell Publishers, 1966).
138

Marie of the Incarnation

Have you ever felt too busy to pray? Have you ever had so much to do that you decided to put off prayer and devotion to God so that you could get things done? This is an easy temptation that many people fall into, but it is avoidable. James told people to pray without ceasing, and to do this you need to learn to pray continually even while you continue to do all the things that are necessary for life.

This rare gift was possessed by Marie Guyard. Most Christians who excelled as visionaries and mystics have done so by withdrawing from the world. Marie's great gift was that she was able to be in a constant state of meditation on God even while she went about the mundane details of her life.

All her life she was a happy and cheerful person who found excitement in everything she did. In fact as a child she was so cheerful and lighthearted that her mother decided that she could never enter a life of religious devotion and married her to a local business man. Despite her mother's analysis of her character, Marie had already

become very serious about her faith by the time she was married. She had grown up following her mother around the family store hearing her mother offer constant prayers to God. This began a pattern of prayer in Marie's life that would never leave her. In addition her mother impressed upon her the importance of preaching. Her mother told her, "God spoke through the lips of preachers." Marie reacted to this by sitting through sermons even as a little girl long before she could understand them.

Despite her deep devotion and desire to know more about God, she married at age 18 instead of entering a convent. Little is known about her husband except that he died three years later, leaving his business in great disarray and leaving Marie with the responsibilities of raising a one-year-old son. She quickly applied her good attitude and cheerful spirit to the affairs of the business and the care of her son. It was during this time that she had her first mystical experience. On the way to her husband's office one day, she had an overwhelming awareness of all the sins that she had committed and was overcome by the truth that she

was personally responsible for Christ's suffering and that if she alone had sinned, the Son of God would still have done for her alone what he did for all the world.

For those who watched Marie on the outside it may have appeared that not much changed. She continued to successfully manage her husband's business back to a good state before leaving it a year later. She continued to rear her only child. However, on the inside she enjoyed a constant communion of prayer with God. She desired greatly to enter a life of religious seclusion, but because of the need to care for her son, she was not able. For a time she lived with her father, but then she went to aid her brother-in-law with his business. She became the manager of a large transport and shipping firm. She worked long hours in an office next to the stables and was responsible for a constant flow of merchandise. The business of her work, however, did not keep her from constant prayer. Working in the midst of a busy, noisy shipping house she continued to experience the paradise of communion with God.

When her son was ten, her desire to fully enter a religious life began to increase. She knew that her sister and brother-in-law would care for her son, and she felt that she had resisted this call of God for long enough. She was not joyous about this separation; in fact it would leave a deep and lasting scar on her life. However, she became convinced that it was God's will and then she could do nothing else. She entered the Ursuline convent which was a group of nuns dedicated to the education of girls. She lived in the convent for eight years, continuing to celebrate God in her prayers while she taught in the Ursuline school.

A new quest came before her with the beginning of mission work in Quebec. The French had recently colonized Quebec and there was a great need for missionaries and schools there. Through the generosity of a local widow, Marie was able to lead a group of three teaching nuns and three nursing nuns to start a mission in Quebec. It is from Quebec that we learn the most about Marie because here she began to write letters to her son who was just entering a

monastery. He saved and later published these letters after his mother died.

In addition to managing the affairs of the mission, Marie's main work was overseeing the education of the Native American girls in her care. The mission house was always open to care for those in need. She and her fellow sisters learned the languages of the girls so that they might better care for them and preach to them. It was here that Marie was able to finally participate in her great love of the preached word. She began to teach these girls the Gospel and even wrote a variety of educational texts in the Algonquin language which she used to teach new Christians. Under her leadership the school grew and flourished. In addition to teaching they provided food, clothing, shelter and medical care to any who came. Marie's uncontrollable light spirit brought joy to everyone who entered their house.

Marie was not an ordinary mystic. She enjoyed a special communion with God, but she did so while serving wholeheartedly in the world. She delighted in deep and

serious devotion on the suffering of Christ, but she was a lighthearted and happy person who brought joy to others. She was called Marie of the Incarnation because she meditated on and modeled the incarnate Christ.¹⁴

¹⁴ Menzies, 258-94.

Brother Lawrence

Sometimes it feels like the only people who matter are the powerful people or the famous people. It is easy to think that you don't matter if you aren't doing big important things. The life of Brother Lawrence proves that this isn't true. He was never a leader in anything. He did not publish great books and he did not change the world. He did love God, and his love for God is remembered even today.

He grew up in the Lorraine region of France and joined the army as soon as he could, but he was very clumsy and not a very good soldier. He was captured by some Germans and almost executed by them as a spy, but he told them, "I am not what you think I am, but since I have committed no crime, it doesn't matter to me whether you kill me or not." The Germans were so convinced that they released him. Not long after this he was wounded in a battle with some Swedes. While he was recuperating from his wounds, he decided to enter a monastery. His uncle was a monk and he decided to join his uncle. He became a lay member of the monastery and was given kitchen duty. Here

he was given the name Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

Monastery life was not easy for Brother Lawrence. His work in the kitchen was very hard. He recalls that he was given the work of two people to do. In addition he was very worried about his own salvation. It may seem odd that a monk would worry about whether or not he was saved, but Brother Lawrence did. He knew that he had sinned in his life, but he did not feel that he had suffered. He thought that surely he must be going to suffer in the afterlife and worried that he would not go to heaven.

Even though he worried about his salvation, he continued to serve and love God. Finally he realized, "I came into religion only for the love of God; I have tried to act only for God. Whether I be damned or saved, I wish to continue to act purely for the love of God. I shall have at least this much good, that until death I will do what I can to love Him."

This attitude became his motto, and eventually he became confident of his salvation. However, he never left

the conviction that regardless of circumstances he would love God. He knew that he did not deserve God's grace in his life but he would not hinder God from giving it. Likewise he would continue to love God even if he suffered.

This same commitment reflected in his work. Since he worked in the kitchen for years, it would have been easy for him to become bitter about his hard, messy work. However, "he was content when he could pick up a straw from the ground for the love of God, since he sought [God] and not [God's] gifts." This means that he was not focusing on trying to receive the blessing of God; he was trying to focus on God and he believed that he could do that just as well by cleaning the floor out of love for God as he could reading the Bible or praying. It was this understanding that made him such a faithful servant of God and of others.

Brother Lawrence never got over his clumsiness and this made his work in the kitchen difficult. It was especially difficult for him when it included long trips to purchase and transport wine for the monastery. He approached all of these tasks as offerings to God and told God that he was

doing them because he loved God and that he would not be able to do them without God's help. Brother Lawrence believed that Christians should speak frankly to God, asking help when they needed it and admitting sin when they had sinned.

It was with directness that he approached not only his work for the monastery but also his spiritual life. Whenever he started to learn a new spiritual discipline he would pray to God, "My God, I will be able to do this if you will help me." He found that immediately God gave him the strength. Likewise, when he sinned he would admit his sin to God and pray, "I will never do anything else, if you leave me to myself. You must prevent me from falling and correct whatever is not right." Then he would not worry about his sin because he knew that God had forgiven him and would give him the strength to resist the sin in the future. In all things, he advised that Christians, "should not worry but do everything out of love for God."

Brother Lawrence spent the rest of his life serving his monastery out of love for God. In time his reputation for

holiness grew and many would come to him searching for advice. He would rarely answer their questions. Instead he would just advise them to seek the presence of God and say again, “Do everything out of love for God.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. Sister Mary David, with a eulogy by L’abbe Joseph de Beafort (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

Father Kosmas

Father Kosmas is one of the most beloved saints of the Greek Orthodox tradition. He was martyred under the Ottoman empire, but his life and teaching are celebrated even more than his death. His preaching, his compassion, and his life of service are remembered even today.

His parents were devout Orthodox Christians, but little else is known about them. Kosmas grew up loving God and wanting to serve God. He was educated in a wide variety of places, finally ending up at a monastery school in Mount Athos. There he studied and eventually became a priest. He loved the monastery and believed that, as a monk, he should stay there. In fact, he believed that once a person made a commitment to be a monk, he could only be saved if he stayed and worked in the monastery.

Despite these convictions, Kosmas left the monastery because he believed that he needed to preach the gospel, even if it meant risking his own salvation. When he was asked why he left the monastery even though he had committed to be a monk, he answered, “I, too, my brethren,

do wrong. But because our race has fallen into ignorance, I said to myself, let Christ lose me, one sheep, and let him win the others. Perhaps God's compassion and your prayers will save me too."

Isn't it amazing that Father Kosmas was willing to give up his own salvation for the salvation of others? No doubt he did not lose his salvation, but his spirit of sacrifice is nevertheless incredible. He was willing to take this risk because he loved Christ and loved the world. So he left the monastery and began to serve the world.

Father Kosmas traveled all over the Greek-speaking world preaching to all people. His preaching proclaimed the love of God and inspired Christians to live out this love in very practical ways. One day while preaching he asked a wealthy listener if he loved God and loved his brothers and sisters. The man replied that he did. Father Kosmas replied that he must not, because here was a poor boy with not enough clothes. This kind of practical teaching challenged his listeners to live out the gospel in action.

Not only did he preach that people should show love to the poor, he also preached against the sexism of his culture. He used scripture to show that in God's eyes men and women are equal. In the culture in which he preached, women were treated extremely poorly. Father Kosmas preached against this treatment. He said that not only were women not inferior to men, but that they often lived lives that were superior to those of men.

This same kind of concern was evident in his teaching about children. In those days, parents often treated children very differently based upon their sex. Father Kosmas challenged parents to love children equally and to live lives of virtue so that their children would become virtuous. The teaching that he gave to parents was connected to a great concern for the education of children. He believed that all children should know how to read so that they could read the Bible for themselves. He founded 200 primary schools and ten schools for higher education. This ministry earned the respect and admiration of all people, even those who

weren't religious, giving Kosmas the opportunity to share the gospel with an even wider audience.

Father Kosmas was a traveling preacher and minister. He did not simply drift around preaching and stirring up the community, only to move on. Instead, he preached and taught in ways that produced deep and lasting change in communities. Schools were built, the poor were cared for, marriages were restored and strengthened, and children were loved more effectively. He knew Christ's love and he brought it to the world.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nomikos Micheal Vaporis, "Father Kosmas and the Gospel of Love," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (Summer 1980): 163-71.

CHAPTER 6

THE MODERN AGE

Paul Ni

Paul Ni was a Christian in Korea. There are a lot of Christians in Korea now, but in Paul's day there were very few and they were heavily persecuted. Despite the persecution they were a strong community with a wonderful story. Unlike most places, which first heard about Christianity when a missionary came to their land, Korean Christianity began when some Koreans heard about a new religion being taught in China and sent Yi-Seung Moon to learn about it. He went to Peking to meet the bishop there, and while he was there, he became a Christian. He changed his name to Peter and returned to Korea bringing several Christian books and an eager desire to share about Christ.

He became the leader of a small community of Christians that slowly but steadily grew in Korea. Paul Ni and his family were some of the early converts in this community. The small church grew so much that within thirty years it became a danger to the government and a

series of harsh persecutions began. Paul Ni's mother and brother were killed at this time. He survived and lived on to become a leader in the Korean church. Korean Christianity survived through this period of persecution because of people like Paul Ni. He trained new Christians and taught them about the faith. He copied books so that other Christian communities could have copies of the Bible and other important Christian writings. He raised money to send people to Peking to see the Bishop there and receive more teaching.

Paul Ni not only worked for the church, but when the time came he was able to proclaim his faith boldly through martyrdom. Twenty-six years after his family had been killed for their faith, he was arrested and accused of being a Christian by an acquaintance to whom he had given some Christian books. He was brought to the police station and then to the governor to be interrogated about his faith. He wrote in a letter to his friends that as he was being taken down the road to see the governor he almost despaired, but he thought, "Jesus Christ was ready to take this road

carrying his cross, so why should I refuse to make this journey? No, I will follow Jesus step by step."

In the presence of the governor and many judges he was interrogated about the beliefs and practices of Christians. He argued for the existence of the creator and implored his captors to look around them and see that the earth must be created. They countered that they could not believe in this creator God unless they saw him. Paul replied that they believed in the builder of the building in which they stood, even though they could not see him. Unpersuaded but also unable to answer his questions, the governor sent him away that day.

Throughout his persecution Paul found strength by comparing his situation to the sufferings of Christ. When he was taken from his cell at night by guards with torches, he recalled the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane. When he was questioned about who Christ was, he recalled Christ's meeting with Pilate. Finally when he was tortured and beaten so that he lost consciousness and they weighted him down with a stone tied to his neck, he recalled how Jesus

was beaten and then forced to carry a cross. When Paul returned to his jail cell and the other Christians there comforted him, he remarked how unfitting it was that Jesus had no one to comfort him in his suffering but that Paul Ni was comforted by his fellow prisoners even though he was a sinner.

Paul Ni's record of his trials and suffering end with that reflection, but we know that soon his suffering ended when he died as a martyr for Christ.¹⁷

¹⁷ Chenu, 135-142.

Maria Gorietti

You may think that you are too young to stand up for your faith. You may think that you are too young to serve God. This is not true. God can use all people. God used Maria Gorietti even though she never lived to be an adult.

Maria Gorietti was killed when she was eleven. She didn't expect to die. It wasn't a time of great persecution, and she was not particularly known for being a Christian leader. Nonetheless, at the age of eleven Maria Gorietti would die for her faith.

A few years before her death, her father had moved with the whole family to southern Italy to work as a sharecropper. A sharecropper works on someone else's land in exchange for part of the food that is raised. Maria's family was extremely poor, and even though her family was very large they shared a house with another family to help pay the bills. Soon after she moved to the area, her father died. Her family continued to live there and Maria was in charge of taking care of the house while her mother and older siblings worked in the fields.

At the age of eleven she was murdered by the son of the family they shared the house with. He killed her because she resisted him when he tried to rape her. He came to her and tried to force her to have sex with him. She cried out to him, "No, it's a sin! God does not want it." He was so angered by her resistance that he responded by stabbing her.

As she lay dying, women from the village called the ambulance and tried to stop her bleeding. It was in this condition that she forgave the boy who had killed her and prayed that she would one day see him in paradise. She did not live much longer, but died from blood loss in the hospital. Years later, in prison, the man who stabbed her had a dream about her and repented and spent the remainder of his life as a caretaker in a monastery.

The story of Maria Goretti does not mean that it is better to die than to be raped. It is not a sin to be raped. Had she been raped and lived she would have done no wrong. Nevertheless, she courageously proclaimed her beliefs in the face of a great evil. Moreover, she chose to forgive the one who wronged her and her act of forgiveness

led to his new life and salvation. Her willingness to confront evil and her forgiveness of her attacker remind us of Jesus and Stephen and many other martyrs throughout history.¹⁸

¹⁸ Kathleen Norris, "Marie Gorietti – Cipher or Saint," in *Martyrs*, Susan Bergman, ed., (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 299-309.

Charlotte Diggs Moon

The life of Charlotte Moon was filled with great obstacles. In fact, many people would have given up in the face of the challenges which she overcame. Charlotte Moon was not the kind of person to give up; she was tough and passionate and was ready to stand up against all sorts of hardship for the sake of the gospel.

Moon defended the gospel in two very important ways. Most directly, she stood up for the gospel by boldly preaching the good news of Christ to the people of China. She also stood up for the gospel through her bold challenge of the way that the church prevented women from serving freely on the mission field. Her message was good news of freedom to hundreds of women in America who were looking for a way to serve God but were being held back by the church.

Moon grew up on a tobacco plantation in central Virginia. Her father died when she was twelve, but her mother continued to oversee the operations of the large farm. Her mother gave Charlotte Moon an example of a

woman who could act independently. She also had the example of her older sister Orianna who became one of the first female doctors in the southern United States.

Moon went to college and there she rejected her strict Baptist upbringing. Her wild times did not last long, however. One night she attended a revival meeting to mock those in attendance, but instead she was convicted and inspired to a committed Christian life. After college and the Civil War, Moon began to teach. Her teaching position did not satisfy her, and she longed for a life that was more exciting. She wanted adventure and Christian ministry and to her this meant the mission field. When Charlotte was thirty-two, her younger sister, Edmonia, sailed to the mission field in China and the next year Charlotte followed.

Edmonia did not last long as a missionary. The stress of missionary life quickly had physical effects on Edmonia and she was practically an invalid during the time she was there. She left after four years. Charlotte, however, loved being on the mission field. Although she at first was burdened with care for her sister and then with loneliness

after she left, Charlotte Moon was committed to the mission to China. She even turned down a marriage proposal from a man she loved because she would then have to leave the work in China.

Despite Moon's enthusiasm for the mission to China, she was frustrated because the tasks she was asked to do were drudgery. Unlike men who were allowed to go out and preach in the countryside, women were only allowed to do a certainly limited number of tasks. Moon had come to China wanting to preach and was only allowed to oversee a small school of children who wouldn't study. In an article published back in the United States she wrote, "What women want who come to China is free opportunity to do the largest possible work What women have a right to demand is perfect equality."

At the time this was a very radical thing for a women to say. This kind of public criticism of the mission organization was extremely rare and many of her fellow missionaries responded to her by saying that the place for a women on the mission field was to be supporting her

husband and raising her children. Moon had no husband nor children and therefore could never meet those standards. She desired to do something more than she was doing but she faced many obstacles. The leaders of the mission would be very unlikely to allow a woman to leave the mission base. It was also very dangerous to go out into the Chinese communities because many of the Chinese disliked foreigners.

Charlotte Moon knew all these things, but she still began to travel into the local villages. At the age of 44 she left the mission compound and moved to P'ing-tu to start a new mission work of her own. In part she did this to free herself from the control of a new field director who had just come to China. He led the mission work with a strict authoritarian style and planned to close the schools. Moon saw that if this was the only mission she was allowed to pursue, she would soon be completely shut out if she did not break away and follow her vision.

Charlotte Moon left the strict controls of the mission community and begin her work in P'ing-tu. This pioneering

mission work was extremely difficult. The Chinese did not like outsiders, and she was called a devil because she preached a different religion. Another obstacle arose because the limited success she did have was mostly with the women of the community. In the Chinese society, women had little independence and it seemed that even if she gained the trust of the women she would not be able to preach unless the Chinese men were also open to what she had to say.

After two hard years of ministry with the women of P'ing-tu, Moon had her first chance to really preach to Chinese men. Three men she had never met came to her from a nearby village because they had heard about the new ideas which were being discussed among the women. They asked her to come back to their village to teach them. Here she had the most exciting experience of her missionary career. Here she met people who earnestly desired to hear about the gospel. Moon stayed there and built a church. She baptized the first converts two years later and very soon she had left the church in the hands of a skilled Chinese pastor,

Li Shou Ting, who baptized thousands of people over the next twenty years.

During these twenty years, Charlotte Moon embarked on her second great mission enterprise. She never stopped evangelizing in China, but she divided her time between this evangelistic work and the task of training new missionaries. She taught in missionary schools and she wrote extensively. In her writing she challenged Christian women to follow her example and enter the foreign mission field. She condemned the men of the Baptist church for not coming to the mission field and she called to women to come in their place. She rejected the restrictions that were still placed on women's service. She called for a special offering to be used to send women into Christian service.

The legacy of Charlotte Moon is seen in the churches she started and in the hundreds of women who were inspired by her message of equality for Christian women.

Through her outspoken call she not only followed Christ but also opened the door for others to follow Christ with her.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 234-39.

Mary Slessor

Would you give up a comfortable life to share the gospel? Many people have done so and their stories give testimony to the power of God to surmount obstacles and enter the hearts of all people. They are a continual witness to the great commission of Christ to go into the world to make disciples. Mary Slessor is one of many women who answered this call and overcame barriers to share the gospel.

The first set of barriers which Mary Slessor had to overcome were the barriers of her family. Her father was an alcoholic and he rarely worked. This meant that her family was very poor and that Mary's mother was often absent trying to find work to feed her family. When Mary was eleven she joined her mom who was working at a textile factory. At the age of fourteen her mother got pregnant again and Mary began to work full time, and for the next 14 years she was the primary wage earner in the family. Throughout these difficult years, Mary turned to the church for comfort. As a child she went to church to escape the dreariness of her home, but as she got older she became

more active in church and more devoted to God. She taught Sunday School, worked in local mission work and eagerly followed the progress of the foreign missionaries which her church supported. Mary and her mother were very interested in missions and hoped the her younger brother John would go to a foreign mission field. When he died, Mary decided that she would go.

There were not a great many opportunities for a single woman on the mission field, but Mary knew that she had a great many skills to offer and she was determined to go. At the age of 27, she applied to the Calabar mission and was accepted. Her first assignment was to teach in the mission school of Duke Town in Nigeria. She received no formal language training but learned as much of the local languages as she could. Although Mary was serving as a teacher, she found herself bored with the assignment. Duke Town had a number of Europeans living in it, but she wanted to be deep in the interior, not surrounded by the comfort of an almost European lifestyle.

After three years in Duke Town she was allowed to go back to visit her family and when she returned to Africa she was given a new assignment in Old Town. This town was farther into the interior of Africa and the lifestyle suited Mary much better. Here she was free to live the life of an African. She lived in a hut and ate African foods. Her assignment included a wide variety of activities and not just teaching. She worked as a nurse and teacher and adopted many unwanted children. She worked so closely with the people that she gained their trust and respect and was often called upon to settle disputes between tribal leaders. Mary worked hard to understand and appreciate the African culture, but she also spoke out against practices which she determined to be unjust.

After three years she fell ill and returned home with one of her many adopted children, a six-month old baby named Janie. When she returned, the people were so interested in her work that her furlough, the name for a missionary's visit home, was lengthened so that she could

speak to more people. Her furlough was lengthened further when her mother and sister fell ill.

Three years later she returned to Africa. Soon after she returned, her mother and sister died. With no family ties she decided that she could risk traveling farther into Africa. Specifically she wanted to travel to the Okoyong region which is in present day Nigeria. No missionary who had ever tried to evangelize there had survived. Many of the mission leaders thought that it would be foolish to send a woman into this dangerous area. Mary disagreed; she thought that a woman might have a better chance because she would not be as threatening to the people who lived there. She was convincing and at the age of 40 she went to Okoyong to be a missionary. She stayed in Okoyong for 15 years. There she served as a teacher and nurse caring for the people as she had in Old Town. She also became more and more famous as an arbitrator. An arbitrator is a person that helps other settle their disputes and this is exactly what Mary did. Tribal leaders and individuals came to her for advice and to seek her judgment. She was so effective at this

role that the British government made her the vice-consul for the region and expanded her ministry of arbitration.

Mary knew that her gift was to be a pioneer and so when she had been in Okoyong for 15 years she left the ministry in the hands of others and moved on to work in another area that no one had been to. Here she met with even more success in her pioneering efforts. She died at the age of sixty-six in a mud hut living among the people and the land to which she had given her life.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid., 158-63.

Archbishop Vladimir

Archbishop Vladimir did not plan to be a famous martyr. He grew up the son of an Orthodox priest and he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. After entering the priesthood he quickly became a bishop, serving in the three most important cities in Russia: Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. He was in Kiev when the storm of the Bolshevik revolution hit.

The Bolsheviks were a group of communists in Russia who used the opportunity presented by an unsuccessful and weak democratic revolution to take control of Russia. They gained power quickly because they promised good jobs, guaranteed employment, and better opportunities for the common people of Russia. In addition, they were highly intolerant of religion. The success of the Bolshevik revolution led to a long series of persecutions against the church. Archbishop Vladimir was one of the first martyrs that this dark time would produce.

Soon after the Bolsheviks occupied Kiev, they also took over the monastery where the Archbishop lived. When

they arrived, they began to terrorize the inhabitants of the monastery mercilessly. They stole anything of value and beat and insulted the monks.

The next day a group of revolutionaries came back demanding to be fed, then refused the food that was offered to them. That night, a group of those who had been there during the day returned to make sure nothing went unpillaged. They searched the cellars and went through the personal property of many of the monks before they began to search for the Archbishop. They quickly found him and forced their way into his quarters. Ransacking the humble room yielded little of value, so they turned to harassing and abusing the Archbishop. They then dressed him up in his formal robes and took him out of the monastery.

Archbishop Vladimir knew that he was being taken to his death. Walking calmly behind his executioners, he called out farewell to his companions. While the preparations were made to shoot him, he prayed, "Lord, forgive my sins, voluntary or involuntary, and receive my soul in your

peace." Then he prayed for his captors, "May the Lord forgive you."

The monks in the monastery could hear the shots but could not imagine that Archbishop Vladimir was really dead. It was not until the next morning that his murdered body was found. In the midst of the monks' burial preparations, more soldiers arrived to take the body away. The Bolsheviks hoped that, by preventing the burial, the Archbishop and his martyrdom would be forgotten. On both counts, the revolutionaries failed--strengthened by the Archbishop's example of faith, the monks continued to serve in the face of persecution.²¹

²¹ Chenu, 164-67.

Sadhu Sundar Singh

No one knows how Sundar Singh's life ended. Did he freeze to death, was he killed by thieves, or was he killed for his faith? No one knows; Sundar Singh disappeared. We do know, however, how his life began. He was the son of a prominent Sikh family and he hated Christianity.

Sundar was the child of a very religious family. His family was very proud of their national heritage, and Sundar was even more so. The Sikh religion is a blend of Islam and Hinduism, and Sundar was trained deeply in the Sikh religion. His mother had told him as a child that he should become a Hindu *sadhu* which means "holy man". This described a particular kind of life of denial and poverty. The Indian *sadhu* was highly respected and was a very important religious calling.

Although his family was committed to their faith, they sent Sundar to an American Presbyterian mission school. They certainly wouldn't have worried that Sundar would become a Christian because he hated Christianity. Sundar's parents had taught him to respect and tolerate the

religious beliefs of others, but nevertheless Sundar despised Christianity.

One day, to demonstrate this hatred he made a public display of burning a Bible. He hated Christianity because it was not beautiful like the temples and ceremonies of Hinduism and because it seemed so western and alien to his mind. This hatred did not last.

Around the time he burned the Bible he was becoming increasingly depressed by the world. He found no peace in the philosophies and beliefs of the Sikh religion. He finally decided that peace could only be acquired after death and he decided to commit suicide. On the evening he determined to take his life he had a vision of Christ that called him to become a Christian. He awoke the next morning determined to serve Christ.

At first his family did not believe that he could be ready to follow this religion which he had so recently despised. When it became clear that he was determined to keep this new faith, they did everything they could to stop him. It was a great dishonor for someone in the family to

forsake the Sikh religion so they even went so far as to poison him to protect their family from this shame. Sundar escaped from his family and was nursed back to health by a Christian family in the area. He left the area and studied two more years at a Christian high school before he was baptized at the age of sixteen.

Soon after his baptism Sundar embarked on an amazing ministry. He recalled his mother's wish that he become a *sadhu* or holy man. He had also shared this dream and now decided to follow this dream as a Christian *sadhu*. He would sacrifice all possessions and all comforts and wander throughout India begging for food and shelter as he went. He wore only a yellow robe and if he was not offered food and shelter, he would fast and sleep outside. In this way he traveled all over India preaching the gospel. Just thirty-three days after his baptism, at the age of sixteen, he left to begin his life as Sadhu Sundar Singh. While traveling throughout India, he had many adventures and preached the gospel to many people. Because he lived like a *sadhu* he was accepted by many people throughout India.

Unfortunately, when he began to preach Christianity instead of Hinduism, he was often rejected and abused. This did not deter him and he continued to travel on foot and preach the gospel.

His most amazing travels came in the desolate and cold land of Tibet. Tibet was well known for being closed to foreigners and many who had gone into Tibet never returned. The land is 16,000 feet high and travel is impossible for nine months of the year. Even during the warmest three months of the year travel was very dangerous because snowstorms could arise at any time. Despite

these dangers, Sundar left for Tibet at the age of seventeen and traveled for three months, preaching to anyone who would listen.

His first trip to Tibet was well received. Several Lamas, leaders in Tibetan Buddhism, allowed him to preach and were eager to discuss this new faith. This eager interest would not last. As he returned to Tibet each summer he met with increasing opposition from the religious leaders

because he was reaching more people with the gospel. In one town, he was sentenced to die for his preaching. He was thrown into the bottom of a dry well and left there to die of thirst. He sat there for three days and prayed to God for his rescue. He had begun to despair when one night the lid of the well was unlocked and a rope was thrown down. When he arrived at the top his rescuer was gone. After resting he began to preach again and the whole town marveled that the man condemned to die was alive and preaching to them. Again he was arrested and ordered never to return to the city.

Sadhu Sundar Singh continued to preach in India and in Tibet for twenty-one years. When he could he received further education in an Indian Seminary and twice took trips to Europe and England to preach in churches there. He never would be gone long, however, because his greatest desire was to wander from village to village preaching the good news of Christ, and always as soon as the weather turned warm enough he would walk over the mountains into Tibet. This journey became increasingly dangerous as

the Tibetan authorities became more and more hostile to his mission.

On his second to last journey into Tibet he became ill while crossing the mountain and was forced to return to India to recover. When he decided that he had recovered sufficiently to return to Tibet, he set out again. From this journey, no report ever came and he was never heard from again. Government search parties and many friends went looking for him during the warm season the next year but no news was ever found. Perhaps he died in the icy mountain passes, or perhaps he was killed as a martyr for his faith. Whatever happened, Sadhu Sundar Singh gave up all he had for Christ and the gospel.²²

²² A.J. Appasamy ed. , *The Cross is Heaven* (New York: Association, 1957), and Marjorie Hessell Tiltman, *Gods Adventurers* (London: George G. Harrap, 1933), 224-45.

Edith Stein

To remember all the people who suffered and died at the hands of Nazis would be impossible. However, Christians must always be remembering. We must confess with sad hearts for the ways that the church contributed to this great evil, and we must recall with celebrant hearts the heroic Christians who stood against the tide of hatred. We must remember all that we can as a testimony to those that have been forgotten. The story of Edith Stein needs to be remembered. In her life is captured the great evils and morbid ironies of the Nazi policy of Jewish extermination.

Edith Stein was reared in a conservative Jewish home. Her mother was a strong woman who raised seven children and ran the family lumber business after her husband died. She was a strict Orthodox Jew and expected her children to follow her. Edith did not accept her mother's faith and was already a committed atheist as a young teenager. Nevertheless, she had deep respect for her mother and continued to attend the synagogue with her.

Edith was a brilliant student and excelled in secondary school and at the University of Breslau where she received a degree in philosophy. For a time Edith left the university to serve as an aid to the German army during the First World War. Like many Jews in Germany, she was a loyal citizen and could never imagine how her country would turn on her and her people in the years to come. When she returned to the university to pursue her doctoral studies, she began to be increasingly influenced by the German philosopher Husserl. He was a Christian and many of his students were also Christians. Edith, as a brilliant philosophy student, valued him mainly as a philosopher but was also impressed by his faith.

Her conversion came in the home of one of Husserl's students. While staying there she read the autobiography of Teresa of Avila and was profoundly struck by the power of her story and the transforming affect the Christ had on her life. The next morning Edith was convinced that Christianity was true. Edith decided to follow Teresa by becoming a Catholic and entering a Carmelite monastery.

At the age of twenty-nine she was baptized and began to prepare to enter a Carmelite monastery.

She did not immediately enter the monastery. Although she desired to devote herself entirely to prayer and meditation as Teresa had been able to do, her superiors were eager for her to use her brilliant philosophical mind to teach in the Catholic universities throughout Germany. She consented to teach although even at this point she began to model her life after the example of Teresa.

She taught for twelve more years until the laws restricting Jews were written, forbidding any Jews to teach in Germany. At this point, for her own safety, Edith and her sister Rosa, who had also become a Christian, were moved to a monastery and Edith was able to pursue the lifestyle she had for so long desired.

This was a terrible time for Edith's mother. She had been terribly hurt by Edith's conversion, even though Edith had continued to attend the synagogue with her. Now Edith would be moving to the convent and would be unable to be with her mother. In addition, the new laws restricting Jews

forced Edith's mother to sell the lumber business. Edith wept for her mother's pain but would not recant her faith and so could do little to comfort her mother.

Edith lived for three more years in the convent. For a time, Jews who were also Christians were protected from the worst evils of Nazi persecution; however when the Catholic Church spoke out against the Nazi injustices toward the Jews, even this protection was lost for Catholic Jews. In August, two German officers arrived at the convent's evening worship service and took Edith and Rosa to a police van. From there they were quickly escorted to a train to be taken to their death. Like so many Jews, they were killed in the death camps of the Nazis.

Brief glimpses of Edith's service after her arrest remain. One survivor described how she would care for the children whose mothers had collapsed from exhaustion and disease. Other stories relate how she would send messages of hope back to the sisters she had left at the monastery. The only fact that is truly known is that shortly after she was

arrested she was led to an inhuman and inhumane death along with over six million other Jews.

Edith Stein is not a Christian martyr in the classic sense. She did not die because of her faith. Rather she died at the hands of those who claimed to be Christians because she was a Jew. However she is a witness to the truth of the gospel through her conversion, and through her death she is a reminder of how hatred and evil can continue to destroy the world if the church sits by and allows it.²³

²³ William Purcell, *Martyrs of our Time* (St. Louis: CBP, 1983), 41-50, and Particia Hampl, "A Book Sealed with Seven Seals," in *Martyrs*, Bergman ed., 197-215.

Marie Skobtsova

During times of greatest horror, Christians can be at their best. Just as Jesus did his greatest work by accepting the cross, so have many saints shone most brightly as they boldly faced the suffering that came to them.

This principle is certainly true for Marie Skobtsova. She ended her life in a German concentration camp caring for the needs of the Russian women trapped in these institutions of death. This service, which was the pinnacle of her lifelong service for Christ, was by no means the beginning. She had already been serving others in Christ's name for many years.

At her birth she was named Lisa Pilenko and she was reared in a middle class Russian family in the years before the Communist revolution. She rejected religion as a teenager after her father died. Instead she became interested in the new politics that were developing in the years just prior to the Communist revolution. She met and married a leader in the moderate socialist movement but soon divorced him after having one daughter. She remained

active in the moderate socialist party, but after the success of the Bolshevik revolution and the Communist takeover, it was no longer possible to be a moderate.

Despite her moderate views, her political background allowed her to become the mayor of her hometown after the Communist takeover. She served well but was regularly getting into trouble with the hard line Communist leaders. Soon she was in enough trouble that she faced a military tribunal. She was able to successfully defend her actions and, in fact, the defense was so successful that the head of the tribunal, Daniil Skobtsova, married her a few weeks later.

Daniil took the family to France where they lived a life of great poverty. Lisa had two more children; however, her third child, a daughter, died while still a baby. After her daughter died, Lisa's second marriage collapsed, and Lisa was again alone. Lisa's long ordeal caring for her dying daughter was the occasion for her return to faith. She found in God comfort in her grief and she dedicated herself to follow the God who bears the cross.

Lisa rejoined the Orthodox Church and began to minister to the many Russian immigrants who lived in abject poverty in France. She, and the people she was with, focused on giving compassion. She said, "They have no need of sermons; they need the most basic thing of all, compassion." She wrote many poems. An excerpt from the poem "Consolation" shows her goals in life:

What is the use of a clever brain,
what is the use of words in books,
when every where I see the dead face
of despair, nostalgia and suicide.

And the poem ends:

The joy of giving is all I seek,
with all my being to console the sorrow of the world.
O may the fire, the cry of bloody dawns
be drowned in the tears of compassion.

This desire was confirmed by the church and soon after her divorce she took vows as a nun and began to care for the poor. At this time she was given name Marie. She

did not want to stay in a convent but to be out in the world caring for anyone who needed it. Soon she was given control of a house in Paris belonging to the church, and this home became a place of care not only for the poor and hurting but also for a growing group of Orthodox Christians who were looking for ways to care for the world. This group called themselves “Orthodox Action” and dedicated themselves to serve men and women as the image and likeness of the creator. Marie was chosen as the president of this new association.

As this group began its activities of care for all people, the Second World War began in Germany and the atrocities committed against the Jews began to be known in the rest of the world. Marie opened her home as a haven to the Jews, and even after Hitler controlled France dozens hid in her home. Finally the Nazis could tolerate her resistance no longer. She was arrested along with her son and a priest who was in her home, and she was taken to Ravensbruck concentration camp.

Marie would not survive the camp; however, witnesses who did spoke of her continual concern for others and particularly her care for the many Russian women imprisoned there. Eventually she, like so many others, was executed by the Nazis. For her continual care for the poor and all who were hurting, she is remembered as Mother Marie Skobtsova.²⁴

²⁴ Chenu, 172-177.

Takashi Nagai

He was already a sick and dying man. He was a doctor, however, and so he used his skills to care for his fellow Japanese who were wounded in the war. As he worked that day in his office at the Medical College he had no way of knowing how many more patients he would need to treat by that evening.

The first thing he saw was the great flash of light, followed by darkness as a giant cloud swelled up into the air. Then he heard the roar as the blast reached the college. Then the building collapsed in a whirlwind of flying concrete and glass. At first he assumed that the Medical College had been directly bombed by the Americans. Only later did he find out that the center of the blast was over five hundred yards away. He immediately realized that hundreds of his patients and students had been instantly killed. In fact, the bomb that hit that day killed over 80,000 people and permanently injured many more.

Takashi Nagai lived in the town of Nagasaki, Japan, which was one of two towns decimated by atomic bombs

during the Second World War. The actual center of the attack was not the Medical College, but the Nagasaki Cathedral in the center of town. Nagasaki was the center of Japanese Christianity at that time and Nagai himself had converted to Catholicism just over ten years before the bomb fell and changed the city of Nagasaki and the life of Nagai forever..

It was from Nagai's deep faith that he formed his response to the bombing. His first response was to begin to care for the wounded. He did this despite passing out from blood loss due to a serious cut on his neck. After he had helped care for the emergency cases, he went looking for his wife and children. His children were safe because they had been evacuated, but his wife had been reduced to a pile of ashes. This was a devastating blow to Nagai. He had contracted leukemia as a result of exposure to radiation in his job. He knew that he would not live long and had counted on his wife to care for their children. Now he had radiation sickness and knew that he would die even faster. He writes, "Then I collected my wife, whom I had asked to

take care of the children after my death but who now had become a bucket-full of soft ashes, from the burnt-out ruins of our house."

After responding to the immediate crisis Nagai dedicated the remainder of his life to researching the effects of radiation poisoning. Unfortunately he had plenty of patients as people poured into his clinic. His work formed the foundation for the modern understanding of the effects of an atomic bomb. Of course this work was also personally motivated. He was now dying much more rapidly because of his own exposure to radiation. He acutely felt the need to stay alive as long as possible to be with his children who would soon be left without a father or a mother.

As long as he could he continued to teach and lecture about radiology. To anyone he could, he would share his findings so that others could help care for the thousands suffering from radiation sickness. When he no longer had the strength to get out of bed he lay in bed surrounded by microscopes and books and writings pads and students, continuing his teaching and his research with every bit of

extra strength he had. When he rested from his studies he would have his children sit with him on the bed so that he might be with them and pray for them.

Although his occupation was as a scientist, he has also had a lasting effect as a writer. He first gained renown by saying that if any city had to be bombed, he was glad it was Nagasaki because it was a predominantly Christian city. He believed that it was providential that clouds obscured the original target that day so that the Catholic section of Nagasaki took the brunt of the attack instead of the industrial district. He did not believe that this testimony justified the dropping of the bomb, but he prayed that the example of Nagasaki would become a message for peace to the whole world.

In the middle of the atomic wasteland he built a house for his family. It was a tiny house which he named *Nyokodo* which means “As yourself.” He gave it this name to remind him of Christ’s teaching to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This was not only his motto for his ministry to the dying of Nagasaki but also the message that he wanted to

the world to hear. Like Jesus, Takashi Nagai was a man who loved his neighbor as himself.²⁵

²⁵ Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 12-14, and Nagasaki City, *The Man Who Loved Others as Himself* (Nagasaki: Nagasaki City, 1999) [website online accessed May 5, 2000]; Available at <<http://www.us1.nagasaki-noc.ne.jp/~nacity/nabomb/nagai/nagae01e.html>>

Maude Cary

In the beginning of modern Protestant missions, many people were hesitant to allow single women to work as missionaries. People claimed that they were too weak or too emotional to successfully work on the mission field. This situation changed as more and more women demonstrated that they were perfectly capable of working overseas. Slowly women were allowed greater opportunities for service. In fact women missionaries became so important to the work of many mission organizations that some groups would have collapsed if it were not for the women who continued to serve faithfully.

Maude Cary was one of these women. She was reared in Kansas, and as she grew up she was always intrigued by the stories of adventure from the missionaries who visited her home. She was, like her mother, an independent woman and at the age of eighteen she enrolled in the Gospel Missionary Union (GMU) training school to prepare to go to Morocco. Morocco is a predominantly Muslim country on the northwestern tip of Africa and at that

time was ruled by France. The mission work in Morocco was difficult and had met with little success, but Cary was very excited to go and serve. The residents of Morocco were usually open to the missionaries personally but were resistant to Christianity and in particular they rarely permitted contact with the Muslim women. Their seclusion was a great frustration to Cary's ministry.

When Cary had been in Morocco for two years, another obstacle appeared. At a field mission conference, Cary learned that most of her fellow missionaries did not like her. She was considered rude, arrogant and selfish. Her fellow missionaries questioned her evangelistic technique and her contribution to the mission. It is difficult to adequately analyze these charges. Certainly there was some truth to them. She was highly competitive as a student and her independence involved a level of stubbornness and pride. For these reasons, Cary certainly took the charges very seriously. On the other hand, it seems that many of her male colleagues behaved in the same ways but their behavior was interpreted differently. Often women are

negatively stereotyped for the same behavior that brings praise to a man: when a woman is called stubborn, a man might be called resolute.

Regardless of how much truth was in these accusations, Maude Cary took them to heart and determined to change her attitude. She chose the motto, “Seek Meekness” and endeavored to serve faithfully with this new resolve. She did not give up her tenacious spirit or her dogged commitment to the mission work, but she was apparently easier to work with because she continued to work in Morocco without a break for the next 21 years. Finally after 23 years on the mission field she went home for a furlough. This was not an easy time for her. A lot had changed in America and she felt out of place. In addition, both her parents died while she was home. Thus it was with some relief that she was able to return to Morocco.

When she returned to Morocco, the work there was filled with joys and difficulties. The joys mainly came from the Moroccan people. More than ever before they were responding to the gospel. In particular, women were able to

free themselves from the social bondage of their culture to come and hear the gospel. The difficulties came because the mission force slowly dwindled as many veteran missionaries went home and few were found to replace them. Within a few years, Cary and one other woman were the only GMU missionaries left in all of Morocco. Just before the Second World War, two more women arrived and for almost six years these four women kept three missionary stations open. They ministered to converts, reached out in evangelism, and discipled the fledgling Christian communities. Finally, after the war ended, eleven new missionary recruits were sent to join them. They were surprised to find a thriving mission work in Morocco thanks to the efforts of these four women who stayed on throughout the war. By now Cary had earned great respect for her leadership through these difficult times and she was in charge of training these new recruits. She continued this ministry of training as well as pioneering evangelism work in a variety of areas until she was 77. She finally retired back to the United States, where she would die at the age of 90.

She had been accused of being too stubborn to be a missionary, but it was precisely her persistence that allowed her to stay and continue to serve when all the other missionaries left. Through her willingness to steadfastly proclaim the gospel she faithfully served the Moroccan church for fifty-four years.²⁶

²⁶ Tucker, 242-46.

Martin Luther King Jr.

Have you ever wanted to be a hero? Have you ever wanted to do something so great that people would still be talking about it years later? In fairy tales people are always running around slaying dragons, defeating wicked queens, overthrowing evil kings and lots of things like that. In movies, people fly to Mars, singlehandedly stop terrorism and ride off into the sunset. In the real world it may be harder to find out what makes a hero.

If you are wondering what it takes to be a hero today, then you should study the life of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a Christian and a preacher and he dedicated his life to boldly, but peacefully, following Christ in the face of great opposition. He is not a hero because he killed dragons but because he led a movement to change the hearts and lives of Americans.

Martin was the son of a minister. After he received his education, he became a preacher too and served as the minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He grew up in a time when race relations in much

of the United States were governed by segregation laws. These laws kept African-Americans and Caucasian-Americans separated in society. African -Americans had to use different bathrooms and different water fountains. They had to sit in the back of buses and in the back of restaurants. In theory, segregation created two separate but equal societies, one for African-Americans and one for everyone else. In fact, these policies were a terrible oppressive force.

While he was growing and maturing as a minister, many African-Americans were beginning to resist these laws, but their resistance created no change and only led to personal abuse. This situation changed in 1955, when Rosa Parkes refused to give up her seat to a Caucasian man who had gotten on the bus she had been riding and she was arrested. King and several other ministers met together to plan a response to this injustice. They organized the African-American citizens of Montgomery to boycott the buses. This boycott was so successful that it eventually led to a Supreme court ruling that enforced desegregation on the buses which allowed everyone to ride regardless of race.

This boycott was a life-changing moment for King. In this event he saw the possibilities of changing America through peaceful resistance to injustice. His whole life he would remain convinced that active, assertive pacifism could change the world. This commitment was one of his key contributions to the movement for civil rights for all Americans. The injustices were so great that it would have been easy for the oppressed peoples to have responded in violence. King instead followed a different way and inspired others to follow with him. He followed the way of Christ.

King was a pacifist, but he was not passive. After the bus boycott, he became a key leader in the growing student movements which were pushing for change. He spoke throughout the United States and was even able to travel to many places in the world. He led the whole country to see a vision of a new American society where people were not divided by race but were equals and bound together by love. This speaking career reached its pinnacle in the summer of 1963. He and thousands of others marched on Washington

and challenged the entire country to correct the evils of racial segregation and oppression. Here he gave his "I have a dream" speech and shared a dream of harmony and peace that is still an inspiring challenge to the racial divisions that damage America today.

King was not content to give speeches. He continued to lead people in the resistance to social evils. In Selma, Alabama, he led the fight to allow African-Americans to register to vote. Many of his fellow demonstrators were killed as a result of their stand against injustice. Martin would soon join them. In Memphis, where he had gone to visit churches and preach, he was killed while standing on the balcony of his hotel. He was killed because he was determined to stand up for justice and compassion. He was killed because he would not give up until perseverance had prevailed over injustice. To the oppression of the world he defiantly proclaimed, "We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate

you, but we will not obey your evil laws. We will soon wear you down by our pure capacity to suffer."

He not only preached this kind of life, he lived it. He modeled a commitment to Christ and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. He showed that long-suffering love can change the world and, like Christ, he loved the world so well that it was forced to become a better place.²⁷

²⁷ Purcell, 107-18.

Oskar Schindler

Has anyone ever thought that you were a bad person and so they assumed that you wouldn't do anything good? Have you ever thought that about someone else? If you had lived in Germany during the Second World War you might have thought that about Oskar Schindler.

The Second World War was a dark time in world history. The German people were carried away by nationalism and hatred, and the German leaders were waging a terrible war against other countries in Europe. This hatred was also directed toward Jews in a particularly evil way. During this time, the German government killed millions of Jews and abused many more by making them work in horrible labor camps to benefit the German war effort.

If you had lived at this time, you might have thought that Oskar Schindler was a part of this abuse, and at first he was. He was a German factory owner, and he knew that when the war began it would be good for his business because lots of things need to be made during a war. He

was a good businessman and knew that he could use the war to get rich. Soon after the Nazis, the ruling party in Germany, occupied Poland, he established a factory there and employed Jews from the ghetto, the community where the Jews were forced to live.

The factory was very successful and Schindler became rich. But the factory also became a safe place for Jews to work. Schindler worked hard to protect his workers and prevent them from being hauled off to be killed as so many others had been. Protecting his workers was very dangerous for Schindler. The Nazis were fierce and cunning rulers and they employed spies everywhere to keep control. Twice Schindler was arrested by the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, and each time he was released because friends protected him. In these cases he was probably helped by his reputation as a profit-loving businessman because no one expected that he would risk his profits to help the Jews.

In spite of others' expectations, that is exactly what he did. As the war progressed, it became harder and harder to protect the Jews who worked for him, and so he was

required to devote more of his time to the task. As a result the business became unprofitable and he had to use his fortune to keep things running.

His work to save these Jews entered its final stage as the war was coming to an end. The Germans knew that they were going to lose the war, so they began to kill the Jews who had been their labor force. These killings went on at a rapid pace and it is likely that most or all of the Jews who worked for Schindler would have been killed. To prevent this Schindler developed a plan. He received permission to move to Czechoslovakia and start a new factory there making weapons for the war. He also asked to be able to take his current work force. Permission was granted and he made plans to take 1100 workers with him to safety away from the death camps of Poland.

While the move was taking place, the train carrying the women was misdirected to Auschwitz. This was one of the deadliest camps in Poland and during this period, almost anyone arriving in Auschwitz could expect to die quickly. When Schindler learned of the error he rushed to

Auschwitz and was able to bribe the guards and secure their release.

During the rest of the war, Oskar Schindler and the people he had saved lived in Czechoslovakia pretending to work. Schindler did not want to contribute to the war effort, but he also needed to convince the Nazis that the factory was really working. To give this impression he used his own finances to keep the company running and to pay all the salaries.

Finally the war ended and the Jews were free to return safely to their homes. Schindler and his family were now penniless. He had used all his money to save these people he loved. He and his family fled to avoid prosecution by the conquering armies. They would never believe that a German businessman had not participated in the abuse of the Jewish people. In fact, very few people would have ever expected Oskar Schindler to act in this way. Just like Jesus, he sacrificed his own way of life and his comfort to save the lives of others. ²⁸

²⁸ Ellsberg, 186-87.

Janini Luwum

The reign of Idi Amin in Uganda was terrible. Thousands of people were killed in the bloody revolution in which he took power, and thousands more were killed by his policies after he gained power.

In particular, it was a time of great danger for Christians. Amin was from a tribe that was predominantly Muslim, and his regime was highly repressive toward all Christians.

In the midst of this danger, Janini Luwum became the Archbishop of the Anglican church of Uganda. One hundred years after Christianity entered Uganda, Janini would be martyred for his faith.

Unlike most of the Christians of his generation, Janini was reared in a Christian home. His father had converted to Christianity and was a leader in the church. His family was poor, but they were able to send Janini to a teacher training college at a nearby mission. He excelled there and was soon sent to be a teacher in a primary school in the eastern part of Uganda.

After he had been a teacher for six years, he encountered a group of revival preachers who preached a simple gospel of repentance, utter devotion to Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He was attracted to their preaching and convicted of his sinfulness and need for forgiveness. Although he was raised in a Christian home, it was at this point that he experienced conversion. He proclaimed, "Today, I have become a leader in Christ's Army. I am prepared to die in the army of Jesus. As Jesus shed his blood for the people, if it is God's will, I will surely do the same." This conversion and bold commitment changed his life.

Janini became very active in this revival movement which was called the Balokole. The movement grew and gained many converts. Unfortunately, many other Christians were worried by the movement because they feared that it would ultimately be a divisive force in the church. Fortunately, instead of trying to fight the movement, some wise Christian leaders thought it would be better if some of the members of Balokole were trained and

became priests and pastors in other denominations so that the good of the revival movement could be shared in the churches without causing division. Janini was a natural choice. He was a gifted leader, a gifted student and an enthusiastic member of the Balokole.

He accepted their offer and went to a local theological college to be trained as a lay reader, the first step on his way to being a priest and a bishop. He returned a year later and served as a reader in St. Philip's Church in Gulu. Here he grew as a Christian and as a leader. Since he had learned English during his studies he was able to act as a translator which was important for the church. After three years as a lay reader he went back to college to study for the priesthood. Three years later he was ordained as a priest.

Shortly after becoming a priest he received his first opportunity to study in England. After one year of study at St. Augustine's college in Canterbury, he returned to Uganda to be a priest in a church in East Acholi. This church served a large area and Luwum found the task to be very challenging. Through his hard work, he established himself

as a man of great character and kindness in the hearts of the people.

He served the church for three years before becoming the Vice Principal of the theological college which he had attended just a few years before. He served at the college for six years, taking off for a short while to pursue more studies in England. He left the college when he was appointed to be the bishop of northern Uganda.

This was a demanding job. As a bishop, he oversaw several churches and even more priests. In addition to administrative work, he worked hard for and with the needy people of his community. In particular, he was loved and respected for his fight against leprosy. Leprosy is a horrible disease which eats away at the body and eventually kills a person. Even though it is a terrible disease, it is also curable and preventable. Luwum set up hospitals and a clinic to fight leprosy and got personally involved with the many people who suffered from it. For this work and others he was loved by the people.

While Luwum was serving as bishop of northern Uganda, great changes were taking place. Uganda had only had its independence for a few years when a general named Idi Amin took over Uganda. Amin ruthlessly killed all the leaders of the old government and began to rule by terror and force. Amin was cruel and would often kill even his own supporters if they failed him. Amin was also a Moslem and he worked to remove all Christians from political power and to repress the Christians of Uganda.

It was in this turmoil that the Archbishop of Uganda retired and a new Archbishop was needed to replace him. Janini Luwum was chosen, and although he knew the grave dangers, he accepted the job. Luwum courageously led the Anglican church of Uganda for three years. During this time false accusations of corruption and resistance were repeatedly directed at him but he avoided them all. He focused on leading the church and aiding those in need.

Three years after he became Archbishop, things turned worse. He was accused of smuggling guns and plotting to overthrow the government. Amin broadcast this

accusation over the radio and in the newspapers. After a false trial, Luwum was called into Amin's office. Luwum was never seen alive again. The government said that he died in a car crash while trying to flee; however, his body showed that he had been shot twice, once in the chest and once in the head. The government would not give up Janini's body to be buried. Nevertheless, an empty grave was dug. On the Sunday following his death those who loved him stood around that empty grave and remembered that Christ's tomb was also empty. They remembered and rejoiced that Janini Luwum had gone to life with Christ after his death just as he had always lived for Christ.²⁹

²⁹ Purcell, 119-29.

Dorothy Day

When you are sick with something very minor, your doctor may give you some medicine to treat the symptoms. When you have a cold, the doctor gives you cough syrup. This doesn't make you well, but it makes you feel better while your body gets rid of the infection. On the other hand, when you are really sick, the doctor can't just treat the symptoms. The doctor must find the cause of the problems and stop the cause.

Dorothy Day thought that the same situation characterized the church. She believed that the church should care for the poor and the homeless. She believed that charity was important, but she believed that it was equally important that the church find out why people were kept in poverty. If a cause was known, the church should not be afraid to fight against the cause and not just treat the symptoms. She was committed to justice as well as charity.

Dorothy came into the church late in life. She grew up impressed by the radical politics of the early 1900s. She worked as a newspaper reporter and was an active protester

against the First World War and in favor of the right to vote for women. For these protests, she was imprisoned and treated quite poorly. This treatment would have a lasting impression on her as she considered how corrupt the government could be. She learned that sinfulness was not manifest just in the specific actions of people, but it could also incorporated into the very structure of society. These realizations would be at the core of her call for justice.

During this time she cared little for Christianity and in fact was warned against it because it would decrease her effectiveness as a reformer. Her early twenties was a dark time filled with several affairs and great loneliness. During this time she had an abortion which would cause her continual guilt. This dark period ended when she became pregnant again and decided to become a Christian. This decision was difficult because it caused her husband to leave her. Besides, she felt that to join the church was in a way to abandon the fight for justice. In the church she found personal peace from her tormented life, but she feared that

the church was too connected to the status quo for her to continue to combat oppression from within the church.

She prayed and sought God's will for how she could serve as a Catholic and still work against injustice and oppression. She knew that the church taught that people should be charitable, but she felt that it was too supportive of the systems that kept the poor impoverished. This unsettled feeling would remain until she met Peter Maurin. He would inspire her to use her journalistic skills to start a magazine that would challenge the unjust system and combat oppression. This time she would not be doing so because of personal idealism. This time she would be arguing based on Christ's radical vision taught in the Sermon on the Mount. This publication, *The Catholic Worker*, was an important voice for justice and reform and gave Day a platform from which to change the world. Through the paper, Dorothy challenged social inequality and encouraged all her readers to be part of the process of transforming society.

In addition to her writing, Dorothy continued to care for the poor around her. When the need arose, she turned her publishing offices into a home for the poor. When the Second World War began she wrote and protested, arguing that a peaceful solution could be found and that war never created a better world.

The impact of Day's journal can never be truly measured. It was a unique voice at a time when the church was too ready to accept the structures of society and just offer handouts rather than change those structures. *The Catholic Worker* argued passionately that this was not enough because Jesus had come to change the world. Dorothy Day was ready to follow the path of Jesus.³⁰

³⁰ William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982).

Oscar Romero

Have you ever been picked last for something that you really wanted to do? Have you ever been picked first for something that you really didn't want to do? That is the way that Oscar Romero might have felt when he was chosen as the Archbishop of El Salvador.

It was a scary time to be a priest in El Salvador. The government was oppressive to the poor of the country and over the past several years the poor had been trying to organize politically. According to the laws of El Salvador, priests were not allowed to comment on the laws of the land or participate in politics in any way. However, the former Archbishop and many of the rural priests were very sympathetic to the horrible situation of the poor. Because of this sympathy, these priests have spoken out in support of more rights for the poor. Some of the priests were leaving the priesthood so that they could participate more fully in the political movements of the day.

This support of the poor made the government and the wealthy landowners extremely angry, and in the few

years before Romero's installation as Archbishop the government had responded by arresting, torturing, deporting and even killing several priests. In the middle of this the current Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador, retired and a successor needed to be chosen. Many of the priests wanted to choose someone who was politically active and would continue to support the poor in their push for free elections and other reforms. However, the church leaders in Rome and the wealthy classes in San Salvador wanted a conservative bishop to be chosen who wouldn't rock the boat, and so Romero was chosen for just that reason. He was chosen because the wealthy and powerful people thought he would be a weak leader who wouldn't cause trouble. They didn't know it then, but they were wrong.

Soon after Romero was installed as Archbishop, the national election results were announced and it was clear that the result were fake. The government candidate won in a landslide, and the people knew that this could only

happen if the election was rigged. A series of protests erupted and they were met by bullets from the military.

These horrible actions by the government led to Romero's first big decision. In a meeting with the other bishops, he wrote a letter condemning the actions of the government. He planned to read the letter at the mass, the Catholic church service, on that coming Sunday. As the Sunday approached he almost decided not to read the letter because he thought that it would anger the wealthy members of the church. This softening attitude changed because on that Saturday a priest who had been one of his good friends was killed. This murder convinced Romero that he must boldly respond to the atrocities that were being committed against the church and against the poor of El Salvador.

Romero's service as bishop of El Salvador did not get any easier after this. Amazingly, as the situation in El Salvador got harder and harder, Romero got stronger and stronger. His leadership seemed to come from two commitments. First, he was committed to working with the

other priests and bishops in El Salvador. He knew that he and he alone was responsible for making many of the difficult decisions, but before he made his decisions, he always sought out the advice of the priests and the Christians serving with him. Second, he remained committed to the situation of the poor. He knew that Jesus had cared particularly for the poor and he wanted to be like Jesus. He did not resist the government because he wanted political power or because he liked control. He challenged the government because he believed that the church has a responsibility to care for the poor. His strength to pursue this leadership in the face of persecution came from his conviction that whenever the church speaks the truth, it will face persecution. On Pentecost, just a few months after he was appointed Archbishop he said, "Persecution is something necessary in the church. Do you know why? Because the truth is always persecuted. Jesus Christ said it, 'If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you.'"

Romero continued to lead the church in its support of the poor. As he did he came under increasing attacks both

from inside and outside the church. The people and most of the priests loved and supported him; however the ruling classes and some of the other bishops opposed his increasingly outspoken condemnation of the government.

On March 24, while he was celebrating a private mass remembering the death of a friend, a single shot was fired from the back of the sanctuary and he was killed. He had heard rumors that someone was trying to kill him, but he refused to stop his work as bishop.

Romero knew that his death was a possibility. He did not fear death because he knew that the resurrection was stronger than death and that if he died his martyrdom would be a testimony that would strengthen the people of El Salvador.³¹

³¹ Purcell, 153-60.

Martin Niemoeller

Being a pastor and a church leader is never an easy job. Martin Niemoeller knew this when he became a minister, but he could never have guessed how hard it would be come. He was a pastor in the years leading up to the Second World War and lived to continue being a pastor in the difficult years of German reconstruction. He led courageously and spoke out boldly against a wide variety of injustices. He became a national figure leading the cause of resistance against Hitler and for world peace.

Martin did not start out his life planning on being a preacher. He grew up in a house next to a creek and dreamed of being a navy captain. He was a gifted student and so he had no trouble following this dream. He graduated at the top of his naval class and went on to be a submarine officer and captain in World War I. Very few submarine crews came back from the war alive and those who did were hailed as great war heroes. Niemoeller was awarded the prestigious Iron Cross award for his military service.

After Germany lost the First World War, Niemoeller left the German military and for a brief period of time he worked as a farmer. He found this dissatisfying and soon after decided to follow his father's profession and become a pastor. At the time, he imagined that he would be able to settle down as a pastor in quiet rural church. However, his first assignment was as the director of a missions organization, and after he tired of this administrative position he became the pastor of a urban church near Berlin. It was from this pulpit that he would change from a mild mannered pastor to a resistance leader.

As the Nazi party gained popularity, very few people realized how dangerous they would be. They talked about rebuilding German pride and affirming the importance of the church. For a pastor who was a retired war hero this message was very appealing and Martin Niemoeller voted for them in two elections. However, as the Nazis gained power he and other ministers began to realize that the Nazi support of the church was fake and they really just wanted to control and corrupt the church. They did this by

organizing the German Christian movement, which mixed the promotion of Christian unity with radical German nationalism and hatred for non-Germans.

Many church leaders were so impressed by the talk of the Nazi leaders and the success of the German Christian movement that they joined and supported the Nazis. As the German Christians gained power, they began to be more controlled by Hitler's agenda rather than by the church. Hitler placed one of his followers in control of the German Christian movement and gave the German Christian movement control over all the Protestant churches in Germany. Martin Niemoeller and several other pastors recognized that things were moving in a dangerous direction, and they gathered together to discuss the situation. These Bible studies grew as more people realized the danger which Hitler and the German Christian movement were.

These Bible studies eventually became the Pastors Emergency League which was organized to formally resist the destructive control which the German Christian

movement was having on the church. Martin's leadership in this group resulted in a formal suspension from his church by the leader of the German Christian movement. He ignored this suspension and continued to lead the Pastors Emergency League and his church. Very quickly the German Christian movement worsened and intensified its program of racism and nationalism. In response, the pastor's Emergency League formalized its resistance as the Confessing Church.

This pattern continued as the bulk of the German churches were overwhelmed by the rhetoric of Hitler. The leadership of the German Christian movement continued to forsake the gospel and follow the will of Hitler. At the same time, the resisting pastors continued outspoken rejection of Hitler's program. At first this resistance resulted in threats and suspensions, but as Hitler gained power, many of the pastors who were resisting Hitler began to disappear. Some were arrested, others fled the country and others were killed. Martin Niemoeller was able to continue to preach publicly against Hitler and the Germans Christians for a

long time, but eventually he was arrested and tried for high treason and for using the pulpit for political reasons.

The trial began as a total farce. The public was barred from the trial and witnesses on Niemoeller's behalf were allowed only for the first day of the trial. Despite the biased nature of the trial, Niemoeller was cleared of the charge of treason and was sentenced to seven months in prison for the charge of using the pulpit to preach politics. Since he had been in prison for eight months while waiting for the trial, the court determined that he should be released.

At this point it became clear how dangerous Niemoeller's preaching had become to the German leaders. Hitler himself intervened and ordered that Niemoeller be imprisoned as his "special prisoner." Niemoeller's days as the spokesman against Hitler seemed to be over. But he continued to find ways to resist Hitler and proclaim the gospel even while in prison and in the concentration camp at Dachau. He wrote letters, preached to his fellow prisoners, recited scripture as he walked in the prison yard, and prayed for Germany.

Niemoeller survived the German prison and lived through the Second World War. He did not, however, retire into obscurity. He remained an outspoken opponent of injustice wherever he found it. He often angered members of his own church because he spoke out boldly when others thought that he should be more diplomatic. He never held back and always spoke his mind. His frank attitude led to many misunderstandings with the press and often conflicted with American political interests, but he never apologized for his honesty although he often found himself needing to come back and explain that he was being misunderstood or misquoted.

Despite his continual participation in one controversy after another, he lived a long and happy life with his wife and children before he died peacefully. As Christ his teacher had done, Niemoeller boldly confronted injustice and hypocrisy wherever he found it. He did not think that he

was a hero. He only tired to be a brave and honest man of God.³²

³² Clarissa Start, *God's Man: The Story of Pastor Niemoeller*, (New York: I. Washburn, 1959; reprint, Westport, Conn. : Greenwood, 1959).

APPENDIX 1

USING BIOGRAPHY TO TEACH SCRIPTURE

These biographies are designed to be used in a wide variety of settings. One of the most important, but often overlooked, settings in which they can be used is Bible study. Biographies act as an applicational bridge between the text and modern life. Jesus often taught in small pithy sayings that are difficult to unpack and apply. The stories of Christians who have lived out these sayings give flesh to Jesus' words and help the church find ways to embody the gospel today.

In this appendix several pairings are offered, joining a passage of scripture with a story from the collection. These connections are offered as a starting point and do not begin to exhaust the many scriptures that could be illuminated through the study of these lives.

For a lesson on the Beatitudes in the fifth chapter of Matthew, a different biography could be offered with each blessing to demonstrate how this blessing has operated in these diverse lives:

John of God - v.3

Paul Ni - v.4

Brother Lawrence v.5

Dorothy Day - v.6

Oskar Schindler - v.7

Julian of Norwich - v.8

Mary Slessor - v.9

Perpetua and Felicity - v.10,11

More generally , all of Christ's teaching can be illuminated by the lives of those who have embodied his words:

Apollonius - Mark 8:34-38

Blaise Pascal - Matthew 13:44-46

Moses the Ethiopian - Matthew 7:1-5

Oscar Romero - John 15:18-21

Abraham Kidunaia - Matthew 19:16-22

Martin Luther King Jr. - Matthew 5:38-48

Sadhu Sundar Singh - Matthew 10:16-30

Takashi Nagai - Mark 12:28-34

Francis of Assisi - Matthew 10:1-15

Hopefully these few examples will challenge all Christians to let the stories of God's people be an important part of the church's continued study of scripture.

APPENDIX 2

INDICES

Geographic Index

Africa

1. Maude Cary
2. Abraham Kidunaia
3. Janini Luwum
4. Maximilian
5. Moses the Ethiopian
6. Perpetua and Felicity
7. Mary Slessor

Asia

1. Appian
2. Charlotte Diggs Moon
3. Takashi Nagai
4. Paul Ni
5. Roberto de Nobili
6. Polycarp
7. Sadhu Sundar Singh

North America

1. Dorothy Day
2. Anne Hutchinson
3. Martin Luther King Jr.
4. Marie of the Incarnation

South and Central America

1. Oscar Romero

Europe

1. Agnes
2. Anselm
3. Apollonius
4. Basil the Blessed
5. Catherine of Sienna
6. Francis of Assisi
7. Galileo Galilei

8. Maria Gorietti
9. Hildegard of Bingen
10. Jan Hus
11. John of God
12. Julian of Norwich
13. Father Kosmas
14. Brother Lawrence
15. Martin Luther
16. Martin Niemoeller
17. Blaise Pascal
18. Oskar Schindler
19. Marie Skobtsova
20. Edith Stein
21. Archbishop Vladimir

Topical Index

Military

Francis of Assisi
John of God
Brother Lawrence
Maximilian
Takashi Nagai
Martin Niemoeller
Edith Stein

Literary

Dorothy Day
Catherine of Sienna
Hildegard of Bingen
Julian of Norwich
Martin Luther King Jr.
Marie of the Incarnation
Takashi Nagai
Niemoeller
Pascal

Medicine

Hildegard of Bingen
John of God
Marie of the Incarnation
Takashi Nagai
Mary Slessor

Science

Galileo Galilei
Hildegard of Bingen
Takashi Nagai
Pascal

Business

John of God
Marie of the Incarnation
Oskar Schindler

Theft

Moses the Ethiopian

Theology

Anselm
Martin Luther
Pascal
Julian of Norwich
Catherine of Sienna

Parenting

Dorothy Day
Anne Hutchinson
Marie of the Incarnation
Martin Luther King Jr.
Takashi Nagai
Martin Niemoeller
Perpetua and Felicity
Marie Skobtsova
Mary Slessor

Education

Maude Cary
Galileo Galilei
Hildegard of Bingen
Anne Hutchinson
Father Kosmas
Martin Luther
Janini Luwum
Marie of the Incarnation
Charlotte Diggs Moon
Takashi Nagai
Blaise Pascal
Mary Slessor
Edith Stein

Politics

Apollonius
Maria Skobtsova

Fools

Basil the Blessed
John of God

Missions

Maude Cary
Father Kosmas
Marie of the Incarnation
Charlotte Diggs Moon
Roberto de Nobili
Sadhu Sundar Singh
Mary Slessor

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