

CHAPTER 10

A storm howled outside. Rain drummed against the window and branches from the old maple tree slapped the side of the school. “My mom and I are reading an interesting book together,” commented Ashley as she and her friends stood watching their teacher plug in his computer. “It’s about Dr. Albert Schweitzer.”

“Oh, he was one of the true heroes of the last one hundred years,” remarked Mr. Dell as he opened his computer and booted it up. “I would love to have met him. He was brilliant in medicine, but he also excelled in music, writing and theology. I personally admire Albert Schweitzer because he chose to dedicated his life to the African people rather than living a cushy life in Europe.”

“It sounds like he learned to think about others pretty early,” Ashley said. “On his first day of school he noticed that he had nicer clothes than his classmates. He went home and informed his mother that he refused to wear anything that would make him look different from the other kids. One time his mom took him to the city to buy a new hat. She thought he should purchase a sailor hat, but he insisted on one like his friends. The clerk wasn’t too impressed with his taste in hats, but Dr. Schweitzer left the store happily wearing a knit hat pulled down over his ears.”

The boys laughed.

“I remember Dr. Schweitzer telling about a lesson he learned as a young boy,” recalled Mr. Dell as he pulled out his student roster. “A rowdy group of boys made fun of a Jewish man whenever he drove his donkey-cart through their village. On one particular day Albert joined in the jeering. The man drove quietly along, although several times he turned around and smiled kindly at the boys. His silence under persecution made a deep impression on young Albert. He said he learned a life-long lesson from how that Jewish man treated him. Whenever something happened to make him feel angry or mean, Dr. Schweitzer says he remembered that man’s smile and tried to be patient, kind and forgiving.”

“And I’m sure that wasn’t always easy!” Ashley commented. “My favorite story about Dr. Schweitzer is told by a nurse who worked with the lepers. Without her permission, a very sick patient was called to help solve a problem on a building project. When the nurse found her patient at the building site she scolded Dr. Schweitzer in front of all the workers then dragged her patient back to bed. It was then that she realized what she had done! That evening she was too ashamed to go to the dining hall so she stayed in her room. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. When she opened it ... there stood Dr. Schweitzer. He said, ‘Let’s be friends,’ then invited her to come and eat with him. I guess the other workers were pretty surprised when the two of them walked in together as though nothing had happened!”

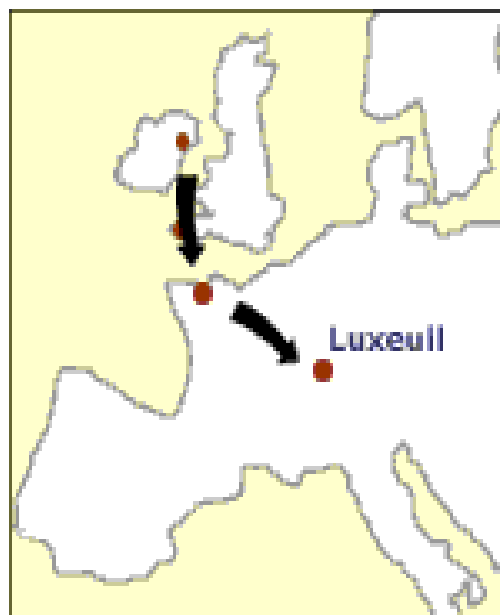
“He sounds like a pretty amazing man!” Carrie said as others nodded in agreement.

Just then the lights flickered as a bolt of lightning zigzagged across the sky. The computer beeped once then fell silent as the classroom was plunged into darkness. “I guess I’ll have to cozy up to the window for class today,” commented Mr. Dell. “We’ll have to forgo our pictures, but I know you will enjoy hearing our story about another of God’s heroes.

“Here are two maps for you today,” their teacher commented as he handed out the papers. “One shows the location of Hadrian’s Wall that effectively separated England from Scotland; while on the other map we will mark the training schools began by Columbanus.



<http://www1.american.edu/ted/images4/czhwukmap.png>



<http://www.monasticireland.com/img/columbanus/travel2.gif>

Straining in the dim light to see the words, Mr. Dell began the chapter entitled:

COLUMBANUS (AD 543 – 615)

In AD 122 Emperor Hadrian began his famous stone wall that effectively divided Britain across one of its narrowest parts. For many years this 73 mile-long wall divided Sabbathkeepers in the north from the Mithra-worshippers in the south. This meant that missionaries trained in the schools of Patrick and Columba had a pure Christianity to share in countries where spiritual darkness had fallen.

One of those famous missionaries was a man named Columbanus. While a student at the school in Bangor he became fluent in Scripture and music and perfected his gift for writing poetry. To keep a strong connection with God, Columbanus often went out alone in nature to study his Bible and pray. He would return strengthened and refreshed much like Jesus did when He spent nights in prayer with His Father.

Although there are no pictures of Columbanus, we are told he was an exceptionally tall, strong and handsome man. There were many women who hoped to win his heart, but Columbanus' first love was for his God. When he heard about the spiritual poverty in Europe he determined to take Celtic Christianity to them.

When Columbanus arrived in France he made an appointment to see King Guntram. Carefully, Columbanus and his twelve fellow missionaries outlined for the attentive king their dream of building a mission school. Pleased with the idea, the king offered the Irish missionaries a half-ruined Roman fort at Anagrates to use as the site for their training center. They gratefully accepted the king's gift and began making plans for its development.

Imagine how much effort and perseverance it took to build a school out of a wilderness! Erecting buildings and preparing the land for planting crops was backbreaking work. Columbanus and the other Celtic missionaries often experienced hunger and exhaustion. It was difficult to do the strenuous work of clearing the land and building classrooms, houses, and a church while having little nourishment. Sometimes they had no food and had to live on the bark of trees or scavenge for berries and edible plants in the forest. Eventually King Guntram heard about their plight and immediately sent provisions to the hungry missionaries. With proper food again, the workers quickly completed their job.

Tidings of the new school spread rapidly throughout France. Citizens were thrilled to have in their own country a training center where students could learn the scholasticism, skills and Scripture of the Irish colleges. Young people from all over the land flocked to Anagrates hoping to be admitted to the school. Many of the students were from noble families. Their educated parents knew the importance of knowledge and learning to combat the superstition and poverty of the illiterate masses.

The students greatly respected their Irish instructors. Pupils often said that living with such loving, modest and patient teachers was like having God dwell with them. Columbanus and his fellow missionaries knew that the secret of their success was to live a flawless life. Their lives must be "a sermon in shoes". They challenged each other to weed pride, haughtiness, laziness and unChristlike tempers out of their characters. And many of their students followed their example.

Before long Anagrates became too small to accommodate the large number of students requesting admission. The missionaries decided it was time to begin another training center. Once again Columbanus visited King Guntram. Once again he received permission to build another school – this time at Luxeuil, at the base of the Vosges Mountains. There in that quiet wilderness area, another old Roman ruin provided the beginnings for the new school.

Once again the felling, clearing, building and planting work was done. Again youth from all over the land flocked to Luxeuil. Soon that school could not meet the demands of the many students seeking an education and once again the missionaries were forced to begin the process of building a new mission. The Irish missionaries felt well repaid as they saw a mighty army of young people graduate from these centers of learning. Students went back to their homes equipped to not only spread the light of the gospel in their communities, but to begin their own missionary centers.

“Columbanus and his friends were sure hard workers,” commented Jay.

“They certainly were,” agreed Mr. Dell. “One of the signs of a good leader is his willingness to 'get his hands dirty' - as the saying goes. When Jesus came to this world He came to serve. Imagine the King of the Universe kneeling down and washing His disciple's dirty feet!”

“That reminds me of a story Mom and I read about Albert Schweitzer,” interjected Ashley. “Is there time for me to tell it, Mr. Dell?”

“Of course. Please share.”

“They were building a new hospital in the jungles of Africa. Dr. Schweitzer, as usual, was helping haul heavy logs from the forest. As they dragged a log onto the building site they saw a well-dressed native man just sitting and watching them work. Needing some extra muscle power Dr. Schweitzer asked the man to lend a hand, but he replied that he couldn't possible do that kind of work because he was an 'intellectual.' Dr. Schweitzer sized up the man then quipped that he had always wanted to be one of those 'intellectuals' but had never quite made it!”

Everyone laughed at the absurdity of the story.

“It is selfishness that causes us to be useless to God,” commented Mr. Dell. “That's why all selfishness must be removed from our characters. Did you know that Mrs. White was allowed a peak inside one of the record books in heaven? In *Life Sketches* she tells us she saw written across the top of the page the word “SELFISHNESS.” Think about it - every other sin we commit comes under that general heading. That should make us look at our actions and motives to see if they are prompted by love for Jesus or by selfishness.”

Picking up the Bible book, Mr. Dell continued with the chapter.

However, not everyone rejoiced at the knowledge enlightening the minds of the common people. While Columbanus' schools lit up France with faith and learning, a heavy darkness had settled over the city of Rome. The papacy issued decrees that eventually forced not only Rome, but all of Europe into academic darkness. Pope Gregory loudly denounced scholastic learning and specifically prohibited the use of the Greek language along with the teaching of mathematics.

As destructive as academic darkness was, however, a worse darkness blanketed the people when the Bibles was removed from their homes. Without the sacred Scriptures it became impossible for the common people to know the ways of God. They had no safe guide to help them distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error. It was in AD 602 that Pope Gregory declared that when Antichrist came “he would keep Saturday as the Sabbath.” During those

Dark Ages the Bible, science, literature and art were suppressed then gradually forgotten.

Although King Guntram was an influential supporter of the Celtic missionaries, Satan was busily working to create hardship for God's humble workers. The king's sister-in-law, Queen Brunhilda of Austrasia, was a staunch Roman Catholic and took a deep dislike to Columbanus when he rebuked her for the evils happening in her court. She vowed to help the bishops with their attacks on the Celtic faith in general and Columbanus in particular.

Columbanus was eventually banished by a royal decree. However, rather than retire in his beloved Ireland, Columbanus went to Soissons, the capital city of King Clotaire II. There he accepted a position similar to that of a prime minister. For years Columbanus traveled extensively and met many influential leaders including King Theodebert who ruled what today is Germany. Using his protection, this godly Irish missionary labored in both Germany and Switzerland to build numerous schools which trained youth and preserved the Scriptures.

At the age of seventy, when most people plan to put their feet up and enjoy some peace and quiet, Columbanus arranged for a special visit with King Agilulf of the Lombards. Some historians believe that it was there in the towering Italian Alps that the Celts of Britain and the Waldenses joined forces to protect the Bible and spread the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. Columbanus was delighted to finally meet fellow descendants of the Antioch Church and they were equally thrilled to have a visit from such a famous Celtic missionary.

At his request, the Lombard king gave Columbanus a ruined church in Bobbio, nestled in the famed Waldensian valleys. There the tireless missionary again set to work creating a school out of forest and lands. Yet, while Columbanus erecting buildings, dug wells, and constructing churches, he did not neglect planning for a solid scholastic education. His carefulness was seen in Bobbio's famous library. We are told that "a tenth-century (AD 900s) catalogue ... shows that at that period every branch of knowledge, divine and human, was represented in this library" (*Truth Triumphant* 193). Those library shelves were home to priceless, hand-copied manuscripts sent as gifts from Celtic schools in Ireland to their Waldensian brethren. Also gracing the shelves was a valuable collection of reference books authored by Columbanus and given as a gift to this, his final school. And most certainly on those shelves were found rare and beautiful copies of the Holy Scriptures which illuminated God's will for His followers.

Because of the renowned legacy of Columbanus – his many schools and books and scholars - plus his pious Christian life and example, the Roman Catholic Church found his memory too strong to erase. They finally had to do for him what they did for Patrick and Columba - they made him a saint and claimed him as their own.

"And that is all the time we have today, class," Mr. Dell stretched as he stood by the window. "Keep an eye on your watches since our bells aren't working. Hopefully the electricity is back on soon. I'll see you at lunch time."

B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1994) Chapter 13

www.albertschweitzer.info

Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., Mountain View, CA, 1915) p. 241