

**The 2016 Evangelicals Concerned
Ocean Grove Preaching Festival
Columbus Day Weekend
October 7-9, 2016**

***“Five Centuries of Reformation Proclamation”
“1516, 1616, 1716, 1816, 1916”***

John Foxe John Owen John Berridge Francis Asbury J. C. Ryle Eugenia Price

Dr. Ralph Blair, Speaker

Next year is the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. On the last day of October, 1517, a 33-year-old Wittenberg University theologian, Martin Luther, took his courageous public stand for the Gospel. He posted ninety-five arguments against what he contended were Rome’s unbiblical teachings, such as the papal “indulgences” that he saw as simply scams for enriching the church hierarchy through *financial payments* for the forgiveness of sin. He argued that these shameful shakedowns mocked our “treasury of merit” in Christ alone.

Having long agonized over his own sins, and having finally found full relief in God’s *unmerited* mercy in Christ, he committed himself to confront the ecclesiastical establishment and comfort the ecclesiastically exploited.

In his liberating discovery of God’s grace in Christ alone, clearly revealed in the Bible, he was moved to provoke a *return* to the Christian witness of the early apostles and to move that witness *forward* into the *future*.

As we look forward to the Luther Quintcentenary in 2017, we pause here in 2016, to gratefully reflect on that 16th-century revival’s fruit in continued preaching of God’s Good News through each generation since Luther’s day.

Tonight, we’ll glimpse the ministries of six faithful Christians whose work sprang from the influence of that historically biblical Reformation. These faithful Christians were born or died in 1516, 1616, 1716, 1816 or 1916.

John Foxe (1516 – April 18, 1587)

In Germany, in the year *before* Luther posted his call for *Gospel* purity, there was a call for purity of *another staple* on Luther’s table. He’d quipped: “Whoever drinks beer is quick to sleep; whoever sleeps long, doesn’t sin; whoever doesn’t sin, enters Heaven! So, let’s drink beer!” Germany’s Beer Purity Law, *Das Reinheitsgebot* was adopted in 1516. It became the world’s longest lasting food quality control for more than four and a half centuries – until 1987, when it was ditched by some bureaucrats in the European Union.

Over in England in that same year of 1516, a boy named John Foxe was born. It was the year that England's Master of the Posts, predecessor of the Royal Mail, was set up and the year that Thomas More finished *Utopia*, his fictional "nowhere", so often mistaken as a "good place". Over at Basel, Erasmus was publishing his Greek New Testament, Hieronymus Bosch, the artist of intoxicating triptychs, died, and the cleric and cartographer Martin Waldseemüller produced the *latest* of his world maps. His 1507 version had depicted a *newly* discovered continent that he designated, *Americi*.

In Venice, Jews were being forced to reside inside a district called the "Venetian Ghetto", ever after lending its name to *all* restrained residential neighborhoods. The Ottoman Empire declared war on *other* Muslims in Egypt and Syria and defeated the Muslim owned slave-soldiers of Gaza.

Luther died when Foxe was 30 years old, so, Foxe's more immediate contemporaries among the Protestant Reformers were really Calvin, Beza and Bullinger.

We honor Foxe for his life's consuming work, *Actes and Monuments*. It's a multivolume history of centuries of persecuted Christians. First published in Latin at Basel in 1554, and reprinted for centuries since, it's known today as, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. For many years, among the poor, it was the *one* book they owned besides the Bible. A century later, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* would become the *third* volume in those little libraries.

Jesus had warned his followers: "If they persecuted me, they'll persecute you, too." (John 15:18ff) The persecution took the lives of all of Jesus' first true disciples – all, except for John, who looked after Jesus' mother. And, of course, Paul too was persecuted after having persecuted Jesus' first followers. At one point during his new Christian advocacy, he reported to the Corinthians: "Five times the Jewish leaders had me beaten with 39 lashes; three times Roman officials had me beaten with clubs. Once people tried to stone me to death". He also notes the persecution he experienced from alleged "believers who turned out to be false friends". (II Cor 11:24ff) Finally, he was executed in Rome.

Jesus had explained further that, "those who kill you will think they're offering service to God." (John 15:20; 16:2) And, in the 17th century, the devout Christian and brilliant mathematician and physicist, Blaise Pascal, wrote in historical observation of the evidence of this: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."

Such self-righteous hatred and the misuse of God's name has indeed, "justified" harsh persecution of Christians. And manipulation of *every sort* of *false* "god" and "goddess" – whether *rationalized* in explicitly *religious* terms or in the *idolatrics* of politics, ideology, race, ethnicity, culture or whatever other *excuse* – has been found useful to persecutors' purposes.

Oppressors of Jesus' followers have been self-righteous priests of the Second Temple, Roman Emperors and their proxies, pagan shamanists, French revolutionary mobs, Oriental dynasties, atheist Nazis, atheist Communists, postmodernist progressives and other secularists and materialists as well as plenty of *self-styled* "Christians" in positions of *political* and *ecclesiastical* power.

But no religious persecution in all of history comes close to the level of the massacres and genocides carried out by Muslims for over a dozen centuries and counting. Ever since the rise of Islam in the mid 7th century, millions of Christians have been *massacred*,

enslaved or forced to pay *jizya* “protection” that dhimmis, i.e., subjugated Christians, must pay to the Muslims who subjugate them, whether in cash or other property, including their children who are then sold into slavery to Muslims. Islamic persecution of Christians has, historically, *outlasted all other oppressors* of Christians and, today, the so-called “religion of peace” is still at it.

Foxe summed up all the persecution this way: “We see [Jesus’ warnings] wonderfully to be verified, insomuch that the whole course of the Church to this day may seem nothing else but a verifying of the said prophecy”. Foxe saw both *the what* and *the why*.

An eminent historian observes: “The successive ages of the Church are successive campaigns in this unending war”. (Christopher Dawson) Even so, thank God, it *won’t* go on *forever*.

John Foxe grew up in a comfortable family. In 1535, he was admitted to Oxford’s Magdalen College and elected a Fellow, lecturing in logic, in 1539. Four centuries later, C. S. Lewis would be a Fellow at Magdalen.

In 1545 Foxe resigned his college post since, as a young Protestant, he held beliefs that were now *condemned* by the Church of England. He’d already seen others, including William Cowbridge, put to death for his faith. Of that horrible scene of Christian martyrdom at the hands of so-called Christians, Foxe wrote: “This meek lamb of Christ was brought forth unto the slaughter with a great band of armed men; and, being made fast in the midst of the fire, and contrary to their expectation, he oftentimes called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. With great meekness and quietness, he yielded his spirit into the hands of the Lord.” This horrible but inspiring scene was indelibly stamped into the cells of Foxe’s longterm memory and into the heart of a kindred soul.

Foxe opposed the church’s demand for clerical celibacy, calling it “self-castration”. Wanting nothing to do with that, he married Agnes Randall in 1547. They had six children. Firmly believing in the vital importance of a good marriage, Foxe assumed the role of a helpful matchmaker on the side.

Edward VI ascended the throne the year that Foxe was married and, with the new monarch, the country became safer for Protestants. And yet, the king ignored his pleas to spare accused “heretics” from being burned alive.

When the Roman Catholic Mary came to the throne in 1553, Foxe escaped with his family to the Continent, and just ahead of arrest. “Bloody Mary” condemned some 200 Protestants to death. Among them, Foxe’s brothers in Christ at Oxford, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley. The elder, Latimer, was soon engulfed in flames. But Ridley slowly burned to death since the wood had been packed too tightly for flames to more quickly reach the gun powder tied around his neck. (The account of their martyrdom, is on a leaf from the 1626 edition of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, here on our table.)

Eight years after these cruel deaths of Latimer and Ridley, and with Queen Elizabeth now in power, Foxe returned to England. He repeatedly begged her to reprieve the death sentences of Jesuits and Anabaptists.

The first English edition of Foxe’s martyrology was published in 1563 when he was 47. In his last 14 years on earth, he lived long enough to see his life’s work become second only to the Bible in popularity.

In 1587, Foxe died while serving as rector of London’s St. Giles parish.

Two years ago, the much respected evangelical historian, Mark Noll, of Notre Dame’s faculty, reviewed two books that, as he put it, are “chock full of details – names, dates,

places, circumstances – [that] document the violence against Christian believers that in various forms has been building steadily in many parts of the world.” Noting the dire lack of media coverage and public awareness of these *daily atrocities* committed against Christians, Noll asks: “Why isn’t the world abuzz with outrage over [these] grotesque violations of human rights?” Why, indeed!

Well, of course, the *main* reason is that *this* world’s *indifference* to today’s persecution of Christians is part and parcel of *the ages-old persecution* that Christ *predicted* and *interpreted*. It reveals the deeply rooted *self-righteous* rebellion in the *fallen human heart* and the *self-serving* resistance of the *will of fallen humanity*, for which Jesus paid the price for all.

There is, of course, *less obviously violent* but *nonetheless* just as willfully obligatory *spiritual forces* of hostility to Christ, as Paul noted to Ephesians. (6:12) These days it’s sadly displayed in *spiritually secular* media and elitist disdain for the only Son of God, in pop culture’s obsessions with the idols of triviality, stylish transgressivism and all the other manifestations of *self-styled, self-congratulating self-justification*.

Tomorrow night, we’ll watch some clips of Bob Dylan’s concerts, including a few from this second decade of the 21st-century. Secularists claim that Dylan has left what they mock as his late-’70s “Christian *phase*”. But they ignore, for example, his telling *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2012: “No kind of life is fulfilling if your soul hasn’t been redeemed”. They dismiss how he still rebukes his having been called “Judas” for using an *electric* guitar, as if, he says, *that’s equal* “to betraying *our Lord*.”

Of course, becoming a child of God isn’t by *mere choice*. It’s a *gift*. Jesus “*gave* the right to become God’s children to all who trusted in him ... born not by *natural descent*, nor by *human decision* ... but by God.” (John 1:12f) Jesus said: “No one *can come* to me unless the Father, who sent me, *draws* him.” (6:44) Paul wrote: “By God’s *mercy*, He saved you *through* faith. It’s a *gift* of God. It’s not *your doing*, lest you boast about *yourself*.” (2:8f) It’s about God’s grace. Self-centered fakes don’t like that. We insist, self-righteously, on *our* being gods and resist the obvious fact that we’re not.

John Owen (1616 – August 24, 1683)

A Westminster Seminary historian says that John Owen was “without doubt, not only the greatest theologian of the English Puritan movement but also one of the greatest European Reformed theologians of his day, and quite possibly possessed the finest theological mind that England ever produced.” (Carl R. Trueman) Possibly – though it should be noted that England hasn’t had a really big flock of really *fine theological minds*. Still, Owen’s was indeed a very fine mind, and even an honestly self-aware mind, for as he later wrote in a letter: “All things I thought I knew; but now confess, the more I know, I know, I know the less.”

He was born in Oxfordshire in 1616, the year Shakespeare died. At 12, he entered Queen’s College where he received his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. He then left Oxford, protesting Archbishop Laud’s high-handed High Church dictatorship. A 20th-century historian of Puritanism dubbed Archbishop Laud, “the greatest calamity ever visited upon the English Church”. (Patrick Collinson)

Owen’s contemporaries included John Milton and John Bunyan as well as Roger Williams, Reformed Baptist champion of religious freedom. Sunday marks the 381st anniversary of his banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for spreading “new and dangerous ideas”.

Owen married Mary Rooke in 1644, a year before the most severe stretch of the deadly Maunder, a “prolonged sunspot minimum” or “Little Ice Age”, that would last through the rest of their lives and on into 1715. The Thames was regularly frozen solid and even the summers lacked warmth. The long years of frigid weather took a devastating toll. Within the Owen family alone, of their 11 children, all but one died in infancy.

In 1651, under Oliver Cromwell’s anti-royalist rule, Owen was made dean of Oxford’s Christ Church College and later, he was made vice chancellor of the university. His fame spread to America and he was invited to become president of Harvard and other prestigious schools as well as offered plum pulpits in the most prominent churches. He turned down all of these offers.

He was “a Renaissance man”: scholar, musician and athlete too, proficient in the long jump and javelin throw. And though it eventually took a major toll on his health, for many years he slept only four hours a night so as not to neglect all that he thought he needed to get done. As he put it: “God has work to do in this world; and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements, is to cast off His authority. It is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; but we must also serve our generation, as David did before he fell asleep. God has a work to do; and not to help Him, is to oppose Him.”

(Happily for us, Owen stayed up late enough or got up early enough to pen the letter we have here for your viewing tonight. But his handwriting is so bad, no doubt because he didn’t get enough sleep, that someone thoughtfully copied his letter in full, right alongside Owen’s own poor penmanship.)

One of his many reprinted works is, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. As a Calvinist, he argued against the Arminianism of his day. Yet, in all honesty, he was always ready to revise his theology in light of further *biblical* study. Besides, he humbly and wisely explained: “When we consider *the very being of God*, we find ourselves so far from the true knowledge of it that we cannot come up with the right words and expressions. As we seek to meditate in our minds, and frame thoughts about God as we do about other objects of thinking, we fall so far short that we make an idol in our mind and worship a god of our own making, and not the true God that has made us. We may as well hew him out of wood or stone as form him as a being in our minds, suited to our imaginations.”

Still, Owen held firmly to the *basic Gospel*: “To suppose that whatever God requires of us, we have, in ourselves, the power to do, is to make the cross and grace of Jesus Christ of none effect.” Owen was also confident of this: “The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him is not to believe that he loves you.”

And, as Owen said: “Our times are in God’s hand, at his sovereign disposal. We must accept that as best.” When he was 67, his bones were put in the Nonconformists’ burial ground of Bunhill Fields. But he, *himself*, redeemed by God’s grace in Christ, went Home to his Father who *loved* him and chose him from “before the creation of the world”. (Eph 1:4)

John Berridge (March 1, 1716 – January 22, 1793)

John Berridge was born in the very *last* year of that “Little Ice Age” and the next “Little Ice Age” chilled but the last two of his 77 years on earth. Yet no cold climate could

make much headway on anyone's personal environment so long as this cheerfully warm soul was around.

And Berridge so very gently concealed his deep learning that his ministry was readily accessible to the very least educated of the thousands to whom he preached in the open fields across rural England.

His father, a wealthy farmer, had planned for this eldest son to take over the farm. But John's proclivities were otherwise. An exceptionally bright student, he enrolled at Clare College, Cambridge, and earned two degrees.

As a Fellow at Clare, he also served several parishes, but his work at the village of Everton lasted for 38 years, from 1755 and for the rest of his life.

His earliest preaching was *moralistic*. Then, one day, "musing upon a text of Scripture", as he recalled it, there was something "like a voice from heaven [saying] 'Cease from thine own works'." He encapsulated this in these seven words: "Fled to Jesus alone for refuge. 1756". This fact of his faith would later be inscribed at his Everton grave where the great Charles Simeon of Cambridge preached the funeral service.

While Berridge never neglected his own parish, he'd often ride out on horseback, from county to county, evangelizing through twelve or more impromptu field sermons each week. Jealous clergy displeased themselves over his popularity, defensively calling him "that old devil". It seems *they* knew nothing of the Gospel that *he* preached. So, it served a great purpose when he preached to the folks they were neglecting. One angry bishop once took him to task for preaching outside *his own* parrish "at all hours and on all days". Berridge replied with his typical wit: "My lord, I preach only at *two* seasons." "Which are they?" "In season and out of season, my lord."

Berridge saw the Bible as what he called, "a precious storehouse" where we can read of the "Heavenly Father's love and [the] dying Saviour's legacies. There [we see] a map of [our] travels through the wilderness, and a landscape, too, of Canaan." He focused on what was biblically central and advised fellow clergy: "Avoid all controversy in preaching, talking or writing. Preach nothing down but the devil, nothing up but Jesus Christ!" And he put this poetically: "Some, fast by Calvin hold, / Some for Arminius fight, / And each is mighty bold, / And seemeth surely right: Well, though with Calvin I agree, / Yet Christ is all in all to me."

When a friend asked him to explain how it was that he and the Wesleys differed on some matters of theology, he replied with his usual charm: "The Lord washed our hearts here, and He will wash our brains there."

In a handwritten letter of his (here on display), Berridge wrote to a woman in Pancras Lane, London in 1777. He penned: "How the years roll round, and mercies along with our minutes, and call for Thanksgiving, but frequently call unheeded by us. Nothing sheweth the Heart's Baseness more than its ingratitude to God. We can thank a creature for a trivial favor and feel ourselves obliged, whilst a thousand momentary mercies are received from God with a callous Heart and a silent lip."

He was tactful with overly scrupulous Christians for, as he pointed out: "In the Gospels, Jesus often rebukes weak faith, but never rejects it."

Berridge's wisdom was expressed in common sense geniality to country clergy. He advised: "Keep a barrel of ale in your house. Then, when a man comes to you with a message or another business, give him some refreshment that his ears may be more open

to your religious instruction.”

He'd make another point, too, and again in his own inimitable way. In his house, he'd draw his guest's attention to several framed pictures that he'd put up around his fireplace. They were of eminent men, such as Luther and Calvin. As his guest was carefully inspected these, Berridge would point to another frame, and say, “That one over there is a picture of the devil.” On closer examination, the guest would see that the frame held a small mirror. Berridge would ask, “Is it not a startling likeness of his satanic majesty?”

One of his little jingles put the Gospel this way: “Run, John, run, the law commands / But gives us neither feet nor hands, / Far greater news the gospel brings: / It bids us fly and gives us wings.”

He wrote hundreds of hymns, but few, if any, are sung today. Ahead of his generation, he wrote *these egalitarian* lines for a wedding hymn: “In purest love their souls unite, / That they with Christian care, / May make domestic burdens light, / by taking mutual share.”

But Berridge, himself, never married. He'd quip that, in seeking guidance on this, he opened the Bible at random and what he saw was Jeremiah 16:2: “Thou shalt not take thee a wife.” Perhaps there was more to it than this.

Yet, ever ready with another witty remark, he recounted that a woman from London once told him that the Lord had revealed to her that she was to be his wife. He promptly explained to her that she must be mistaken since the Lord had not told him that he was to be her husband.

Francis Asbury (August 20, 1745 – March 31, 1816)

Francis Asbury was another man who'd never marry. But, as with Berridge, and for all *practicality*, as with Asbury's contemporaries, Wesley and Whitefield, who *technically* were married but lived at great distances from their wives, there was in bachelorhood and great geographical distance, a *freedom* for ministry that obligations of marriage and family can restrict.

Asbury was born into a poor family in the English West Midlands on the day after Bonnie Prince Charlie led an uprising at Glenfinnan, 450 miles to the north. It was a failed attempt to regain the throne for the Stuarts.

Asbury's mother read the Bible to him and taught him to read it by the time he was 6. His father, a gardener, wanted him to get a good education. But Francis was so relentlessly bullied by other boys – as well as by the schoolmaster – that, after six years in school, he refused any more schooling.

In his teens, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith. At 17, he had a dramatic conversion to Christ under the Methodist preaching at Wednesbury.

He then became “methodical”, as Methodists were labeled unflatteringly, and he took his Christian life most seriously. In his early twenties, after the example of both Wesley and Whitefield, he took to Gospel preaching on horseback, covering the circuits of Bedfordshire, Colchester and Wiltshire.

In August 1771, he answered Wesley's call for volunteers to the Methodist mission in America. Eight days into that long voyage on the vast Atlantic, sailing to a land he'd never leave, this 26-year-old missionary journaled these words to himself: “Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No. I am going to live to God and to bring others to do so.”

On October 27, 1771 he wrote in his Journal: “This day we landed in Philadelphia ... [the Methodists] looked on us with pleasure, hardly knowing how to show their love sufficiently, bidding us welcome with fervent affection, and receiving us as angels of God. O that we may always walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called!”

From Philadelphia, he traveled to New York, where, to his disappointment and disgust, he found that, contrary to Wesley’s instructions, the Methodist missionaries were staying close to the safety and comfort of the town instead of taking the Gospel into the regions beyond.

Asbury then did what Wesley called them all to do. He lived “in the saddle”. In good weather and bad, over rough roads and no roads, through dense forests, swamps and over many mountains, he preached the Gospel. He crossed the Alleghenies some sixty times, traveling 5,000 miles each year. While riding along on his horse from one place to the next, he aimed to read 100 pages a day from the books in his saddlebags.

Always *politically* adept, and believing that these colonies would win the war for independence, Asbury, for the good of the American mission, worked to overcome the early colonial suspicions of him, an Englishman.

Like Wesley, Asbury was a fervent abolitionist and he had to deal with supporters of slavery among the Methodists in the South.

For protection from centuries of the brutal Muslim slave pirates of North Africa, the U. S. was paying *jizya* that amounted to 20% of our annual expenditures. And still, an American vessel was seized in 1784.

Also in 1784, Wesley’s emissary, Bishop Thomas Coke, met with Asbury at Barratt’s Chapel in Delaware. (Here, you can handle an old block of wood from Barratt’s Chapel.) The next month, at Baltimore’s Lovely Lane Chapel, since known as the “Mother Church of American Methodism”, Coke ordained Asbury a bishop. (We have a model of that chapel in the form of a music box.) Curiously, this Arminian collectible plays the tune to “Amazing Grace” by John Newton, a Calvinist. But there’s historical evidence that neither Wesley nor Newton would mind.

Asbury’s preaching was plain, as we’d expect from one who wasn’t “a man of letters”. But he knew that mere formal education was, in and of itself, insufficient. As he remarked: “God is gracious beyond the power of language to describe.” Another of his words of wisdom, put so that plain folk easily recalled it: “We should so work as if we were to be saved by our works; and so rely on Jesus Christ, as if we did no works.”

On Asbury’s arrival in America, there were only a few hundred Methodists here. When he died in 1816, there were over two-hundred thousand. They constituted the country’s *largest* church.

Here, in historic Ocean Grove, we’re surround by reminders of Asbury’s ministry. Across Wesley Lake is the town named in his honor and Francis Asbury Manor, a seniors’ facility, is right here in Ocean Grove.

In 1799, Asbury ordained Richard Allen, a former slave, who, five years before, had founded the *African* Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia since that city’s Methodists restricting blacks to *separate* seating. The AME became the country’s first *black* denomination.

Ten days after Asbury’s death in 1816, Richard Allen became bishop of the AME. This is marked this year by the latest in the U. S. Postal Service’s Black Heritage series, (here on display with a statue of Richard Allen).

It was also in 1816 that the American Bible Society was founded. Led by Elias Boudinot, who'd been president of the Continental Congress and was a tireless advocate for prisoners of war, blacks and Native Americans. This Bible society aimed at supplying free Bibles to the many thousands of newly arriving immigrants. *Good News for Modern Man* was the Society's 20th-century New Testament, translated by Robert Bratcher, a friend of EC.

(We have here, autographica from Boudinot and Bratcher as well as a signed letter from Asbury himself, written to his beloved nurse in 1809.)

J. C. Ryle (May 10, 1816 – June 10, 1900)

The day *before* the American Bible Society was founded, John Charles Ryle was *born* in Cheshire, England. That was on May 10, 1816, just a month after Asbury had passed away.

Ryle was born five months before Willaim B. Bradbury was born up in the state of Maine. Last fall, we noted Bradbury's tune for "Jesus Loves Me" as we commemorated Anna Warner, who wrote the poem. His other tunes include, "Sweet Hour of Prayer", "The Solid Rock", "He Leadeth Me" and "Just as I Am". Bradbury's pianos blend organ tones and piano mechanics and are still produced. They were sold in the Bradbury showrooms at Fifth Avenue and 19th Street where his signage is still on the building's west wall.

Well, Ryle's family was wealthy. His father, a banker, was a Member of Parliament. And this eldest son was given the very best education at Eton and then up at Oxford where he excelled in both studies and sports. Of course, it was expected that he, too, would one day enter Parliament.

His family was only nominally Anglican, yet his father had known John Wesley personally. Ryle, himself, would later admit: "I certainly never said my prayers or read a word of the Bible from the time I was seven to the time I was twenty-one."

But, at 21, he was seriously depressed and he began to pray and search the scriptures in earnest. One day, seemingly at random, he wandered into a church service already under way. He was startled to hear these, to him, *unfamiliar* words, read aloud with deliberate pauses for emphasis: "By grace – are ye saved – through faith – and that, not of yourselves – it is the gift of God". (Eph 2:8) This truth from the apostle Paul took hold of him and, in Ryle's own words, "I was fairly launched as a Christian".

While he was studying law, the whole Ryle family was suddenly hit with *economic ruin* in the financial collapse of 1841. All assumptions about what his life would be were overturned overnight. A hitherto financial security of annual income of £15,000 was wiped out, as were any plans on Parliament.

He then chose to go into the Anglican priesthood, believing with what he called "a firm and deep conviction that all was right, though", as he granted, "I could not see it and feel it at the time."

But three decades later, he'd write this: "If I had not been ruined, I should never have been a clergyman, never have preached a sermon, or written a tract or book." Now, it's not reasonable, of course, to speak of roads not traveled. But what *can* be said is that Ryle *did* preach and he *did* write on the road that he *did* travel after his imaginary roads were blocked.

In all his service at several parishes, Ryle preached uncompromisingly *evangelical*

sermons of distinctly *Reformed* theology, informed by the works of John Owen.

Ryle advised: “Value all books in proportion as they are agreeable to Scripture. Those that are nearest to it are the best, and those that are farthest from it, and most contrary to it, the worst.”

He was no saccharine syncretist. He said: “Unity without the gospel is a worthless unity; it is the very unity of hell.” But, with pastoral patience, he mentored young clergy with these wise words: “Our Lord has many weak children in his family, many dull pupils in his school. ... Yet he bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren.”

Ryle also gave this advice, learned from *his* life’s challenges, including the deaths of his first two wives: “Pride comes from not knowing yourself and the world. The older you grow, and the more you see, the less reason you will find for being proud.”

He had a playful sense of humor that was expressed in his not putting up with fastidious ritual that *masked* the message of God’s mercy. And he’d demonstrate his light take on ritual on some highly ritualized occasions.

In 1880, he was made the *first* bishop of Liverpool and he said: “I come among you as a Protestant and Evangelical Bishop of the Church of England but I do not come among you as the Bishop of any one particular party!”

In order that the limited funds of this brand new Anglican diocese not be *squandered* on building some great edifice of a cathedral, he postponed all construction in order to afford to financially help the poor of Liverpool.

Always a very popular preacher, Ryle was celebrated with a *Vanity Fair* caricature by “Spy”, that sophisticated British publication’s most famous artist (and that original page is here with the other memorabilia).

Ryle remained the bishop of Liverpool until his death at age 84 in 1900.

Construction of the Cathedral began in 1904 and it didn’t end until 1978. At over 200 yards in length, it’s the world’s *longest* cathedral, has the world’s *largest* church organ, the world’s *heaviest* bells (31 tons), and the very *highest* Gothic arches ever built. Its website boasts its “stunning architecture” and promises pleasure “even if you are not religious.”

The Cathedral’s architect also designed England’s iconic red phone booths that, as well, no longer fill the function for which *they* were built. But, as “listed” structures, they still *look* as if they do.

Eugenia Price (June 22, 1916 – May 28, 1996)

Halfway into her well-received 1955 spiritual autobiography, *The Burden is Light*, Eugenia Price wrote: “I was born the first time on June 22, 1916, and then I was born the second time on October 2, 1949.” Aware of her own deliberately “sophisticated” disdain for the term, “born again” *before* her own second birth, she added, for such readers: “If this sounds like fantasy still to you, *this* is the part of the book which proves that the second birth is fact.” She called it, “Reality”, with a capital “R”.

Reared in a succession of ever larger upper middle class houses in Charleston, West Virginia, this brash, chain-smoking, beer-drinking daughter of some privilege would later admit she’d been a “spoiled brat”.

She was precocious, but could be neglectful of her studies. Though she'd regularly attended church with her family during childhood, she later styled herself an "atheist" in a class on Comparative Religion at Ohio University.

To get into what she called, a "lucrative" career like her dad's profession of dentistry, and for apparently no other reason, she did enroll in a dental school. She was the only female in her class. But, after three years, she was bored. So, she left to pursue her earlier dream of becoming a writer.

In the 1940s, she worked in radio for NBC and for Proctor and Gamble, writing, directing and producing soaps, and running her own company, Eugenia Price Productions, creating sports shows "designed", she said, "for quick sales to beer and/or cigarette sponsors". But, by 1949, she was, in her words, "tired and overweight and bored and afraid to admit I was afraid".

In August, on a visit to her parents, she was recalling her teenage years and a special friend. So, she postured a casual: "What ever happened to Ellen Riley?" Her mother didn't know, and to her suggestion that Genie might give her a call, Genie camouflaged with a flippant: "Please!" But when her parents left the house, Genie phoned the aunt who'd reared Ellen. She was surprised to find that Ellen was *there* at her aunt's, on vacation from her job in New York City. After chatting awhile, Genie invited Ellen to spend the weekend with her and her parents. And Ellen accepted.

Genie didn't know that Ellen was now a solidly *committed* Christian, working at Calvary House, a ministry of Sam Shoemaker's Calvary Episcopal Church near Gramercy Park. He was a leading *evangelical* Episcopal priest who'd furnished much of the spiritual backbone for AA's Twelve-Step Program.

And now, meeting with Genie after all these years, Ellen sensed the very obvious unhappiness in her old classmate and she took this unexpected reunion as an assignment from her Lord.

As Ellen shared her faith, Genie got herself irritated, even sarcastic, but Ellen handled that *graciously*. So, Genie got herself even more irritated. Yet, on that weekend, they agreed to meet in Manhattan the next month.

From their hilltop house, Genie and her mother could see the airport and they watched as Ellen's plane lifted off and flew on back to New York.

A month later, in her Gramercy Park Hotel room, Genie was a wreck as she struggled with Christ's claims. It was World Series days, Yankees and Dodgers, but this dedicated baseball fan wasn't into *that* this time. There, through Ellen's patient, living witness, the Lord brought to Himself, as Genie would tell it, a proud, resistant yet desperately exhausted "pagan".

Ellen soon moved to Chicago to live there with Genie and they teamed up for Christian witness. Genie offered her experience to the Pacific Garden Mission and wrote and produced a radio drama, "Unshackled!" on WGN. This series of true stories of Christian conversion is still broadcast and is now radio's longest running drama, with 1,800 outlets in 148 countries.

Beginning in 1953 with her book, *Discoveries Made from Living My New Life*, Genie became a bestselling author of devotional books. They were published in rapid succession: *The Burden is Light*, *Early Will I Seek Thee*, *Woman to Woman*, *Beloved World*, *Share My Pleasant Stones*, *God Speaks to Women Today* and many more,

including her personal favorite, *The Wider Place*. In 1956, I gave a couple of these books to my mother for Christmas.

In 1961, Genie and her longtime spouse, Joyce Blackburn, were driving to Florida to another booksellers convention and autograph party – this one for Genie’s book, *Beloved World*. Joyce, author of the *Suki* childrens books and popular biographies, worked at Moody Bible Institute’s WMBI for over two decades. As they drove through Georgia on the day after Thanksgiving, they discovered St. Simons Island.

They were immediately enchanted by the island’s lush beauty and history. Ambling through the Christ Church graveyard, they sensed that this secluded and mystical sea isle that *they’d* just found had already found *them*.

It wasn’t long before they moved from their townhouse in Chicago to St. Simons Island, where they had already purchased their plot in that old graveyard. Genie said that, on St. Simons, she and Joyce learned “how to care deeply for people with whom, at first glance, we had little in common. We were understanding what it really meant to come home.” And it was *home* for their more than thirty years of life and loving together. Today, their remains lie, side-by-side, under the breeze-stirred moss that drapes the sturdy live oaks around Christ Church.

The two are fondly remembered by old Islanders – Genie’s pacifism along with her fierce Atlanta Braves chop and her open disgust over anti-smoking laws: “It’s unconstitutional!” They respected their love for each other, their love for their Lord and their civic support of the Island’s best welfare.

Genie’s readers always felt a *special bond* with their favorite author and they’d often come looking for her and be an unintended hindrance on a day for concentrated writing. So, as Genie put it, “Our storekeeper friends seldom lose their smiles when my readers go on trying to find out where I live.” But one day, a woman come too near their secluded house and she was shoed away. As she removed herself, she called back, “Tell Ms. Price, Elisabeth Elliot came by.” The widow of a victim of the 1956 Amazonian Auca massacre, and an author in her own right, was quickly beacons back.

For 34 years Genie flew all over the country doing book signings. But in 1989, on yet another exhausting signing tour – this, for her novel, *Stranger in Savannah* – she decided that, at long last, this should be her last *signing* tour. (And, we have, here, her signed copy of that novel.)

Just before she died in 1996, Genie finished *Beauty From Ashes*, the last volume of these ten volumes of her *genre-creating* stories of *real* folks from the *antebellum South*. In this last book’s Afterword, this veteran wordsmith whose works sold in the multimillions, wrote that, to express her gratitude for Joyce, she’d “always failed to find adequate words [and was] failing again”. Fifteen years before, in the preface of her book, *At Home on St. Simons*, she’d written: “To Joyce Blackburn, who found St. Simons with me, I owe and owe and owe.”

In 1996, the year Genie died, *Christianity Today* observed its 40th anniversary. To celebrate, the editors featured quotations of ten authors from *CT*’s first year’s pages in 1956. Three of these were naturally from *CT* founders Billy Graham, Nelson Bell and Carl Henry. But *one* of the other seven quotations was from Eugenia Price. *CT* first published it just seven years after her second birth.

On July 9, 1996, *The Advocate*, “The National Gay & Lesbian Newsmagazine”, took note that Eugenia Price had passed away.

That same spring, Christian theocrats celebrated the 80th birthday of R. J. Rushdoony, a leading advocate for turning the U.S. into a “theocracy” based in so-called *biblical law*. He and Genie were both born in 1916, but that was about all they had in common.

Rushdoony, for example, propounded that, “homosexuality is war against God” and claimed, anachronistically, that the Bible called for the death penalty for “homosexuals”.

Twenty years before his birthday bash and Genie’s Homegoing – forty years ago, now – Genie had read *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*. I’d written that in 1972. She wrote to me on the day after her 60th birthday to tell me that what I’d written “had special meaning” for her, and she added: “I wish I had time today (difficult chapter to untangle on the current novel) to go into more detail concerning my excitement and deep, deep appreciation of what you are doing now among homosexuals.”

Then, switching to all caps on her old manual Underwood, she banged out: “YOUR MATERIAL IS, IN MY OPINION, ON DEAD CENTER. True, true, true. I receive so many booklets and literature on projects of one kind or another, I confess I can’t read it all. But I did read yours and am more enthusiastic than these few hastily written (and poorly typed!) lines will convey. Right on, man! Jesus Christ backs you up every step of the way. From my heart (and my mind) I thank you again for sharing with me. The big need in the past has been (in my ‘humble-dogmatic’ opinion) God’s blind people even more than homosexuals. Why set us apart in little villages anyway? Any of us?”

(Here are letters of Genie’s and even a photo of a *scowling* infant Genie, cramped between two dolls. She captioned it: “I’ve always disliked dolls”.)

Three years after she wrote to me, she wrote her book, *Leave Yourself Alone*. It echoes the more mature faith shared by others we’ve glimpsed this evening. As *she* put it: “I am no less certain now than at the time of my conversion to Christ that He *is* the way. Yet today I am far less dogmatic in the sharing of that conviction. And I’m sure God is relieved that I am. . . . God needs no defense from anyone. He is God. And so in any discussion of religion, I am freer than I ever thought possible. Freer of myself. Freed from the dogmatic heart by this God I follow. I have no need of dogmatism. *He is my certainty*. . . . Jesus is God’s explanation for everything.”

(Presented by Ralph Blair at the Evangelicals Concerned weekend at Ocean Grove, NJ, Friday evening, October 7, 2016)