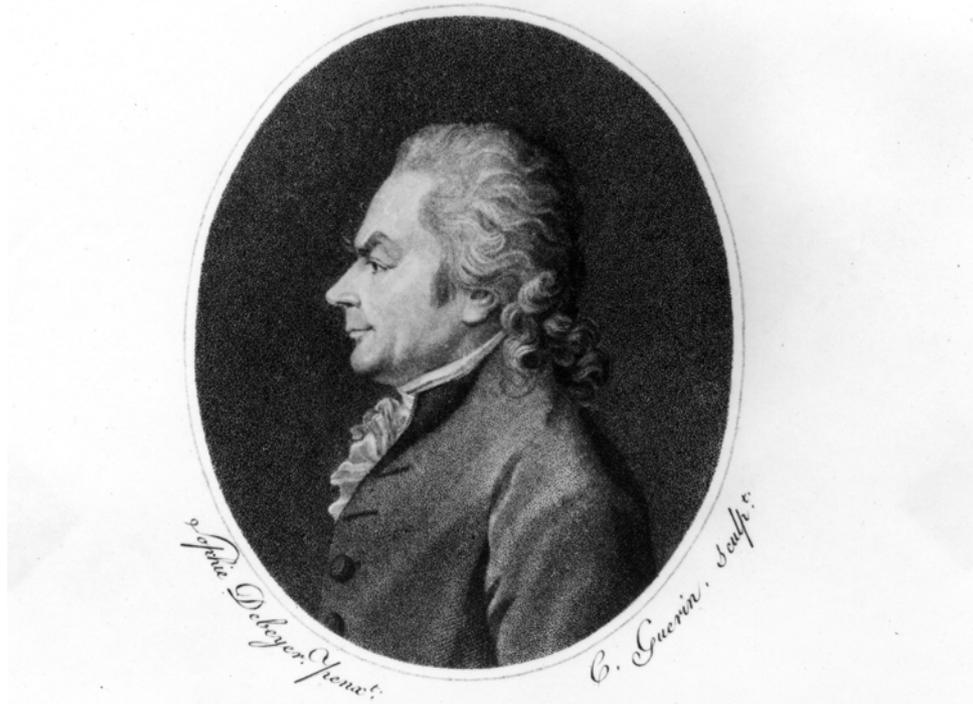


# A History of the Blessig Family

## Life of Dr Jean Laurent (Johann Lorenz) Blessig 1747-1816.

Doctor and Professor of Theology and Philosophy in the University of Strasbourg. French Preacher, Pastor of the Temple Neuf Church. Director in the Strasbourg Consistory, and Lutheran Superintendent.



*Jean Laurent Blessig.  
Docteur et Professeur en Théologie.  
Prédicateur à l'église du Temple neuf Strasbourg.  
né le 15 Avril, 1747, mort le 17 Janvier, 1816.*

### **Education and Travels**

Jean Laurent (Johann Lorenz) Blessig was born at Strasbourg on 15th April 1747, as the eldest in a family of 12 children. He was a cousin of 3rd degree to Philippe Jacques (Philipp Jacob) Blessig who was born at Strasbourg in 1762 and went to St. Petersburg in 1787 and founded the Blessig family there.

Jean Laurent's father was born in 1725 and died in 1781 at Strasbourg. His mother was Susanne Sigwald, born near Selestat (Schlettstadt) in Upper Alsace. They lived in modest circumstances in the Finkweiler suburb of Strasbourg, on the bank of the river Ill, where his father had a fishery business which was not very successful; after some years the father left his family at Strasbourg and endeavoured to start a business at

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Düsseldorf, but that also was unsuccessful. The mother, Susanne Blessig, was a worthy and pious woman who remained with her children at Strasbourg and worked devotedly to support them. She instilled her Christian precepts in the mind of her eldest son at an early age and made great sacrifices towards his education for the Church, and to the end of her life she remained devoted to him, as he was to her.

After preliminary attendance at a Parish School where the instruction was very meagre, J.L. Blessig obtained admission to the Gymnasium (Latin School) and continued there from 1755 to 1762, gaining the first place in his classes each year. Then, at age 15, aided by a Scholarship award, he entered the University. At that period the Strasbourg University was housed with the Latin School in an old building which had been a Dominican Convent, and the Church of that Convent, converted after the Reformation into the Temple Neuf, was later the central point of Blessig's career as a Preacher. At the Latin School and at the University he made contacts which greatly aided his career, and he became a member of a coterie of cultured friends who were all eminent in later life.

Among those friends were the brothers Jean and Bernard de Turckheim, sons of a Strasbourg banker who became an Austrian Baron in 1782, and the two brothers Spielmann, sons of a chemical manufacturer. Jean de Turckheim became Royal Commissioner in Strasbourg in 1778, 1779 & 1787, and in 1789 was Deputy for Strasbourg in the Estates-General in Paris. Disgusted with the trend of the Revolution, he went into Germany, and there became Privy Councillor to the Landgrave of Hessen-Darmstadt, and was his Deputy in the Diet of Ratisbon and at the Congress of Vienna. For the remainder of his life he resided on the Turckheim family estates at Altdorf in Baden. His close friendship with Blessig endured for 60 years, and in 1807 Blessig officiated at the marriage of his daughter Henriette to Count Carl zu Welsperg. Bernard de Turckheim became Mayor of Strasbourg in 1792, but was deposed by the Jacobins after a few months; in 1794, in danger of execution, he escaped with his family into Baden, where he was for some years Finance Minister. Then he returned to Strasbourg, where he became the first President of the Consistory Council, in which office he worked closely with Blessig, and later he was also Deputy for Strasbourg in the Paris Parliament. He married in 1778 Elisabeth (Lilli) Schoenemann, who had been the fiancée of J.W. Goethe for a few months in 1775 and was the subject of the latter's well known poem, (her father, who died in 1763, was the banking partner of J.F. v. Heyder at Frankfort-on-Main). Bernard and Lilli de Turckheim valued their close friendship with Blessig, and in 1813 he officiated at the marriage of their eldest son Jean, to Friederica, Countess v. Degenfeld. The elder of the Spielmann brothers became a distinguished Professor of Medicine at Strasbourg University. The younger brother became

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Professor in Law at the University, and he married Marie Salome de Turckheim, a sister of Jean and Bernard.

At the University, Blessig began with Classical studies, and in 1770 he wrote his thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and in accordance with custom, he expounded and defended his thesis in public debate. In 1772 he completed his studies and first examinations in Theology. During his last two years at the University he became well acquainted with J.W. Goethe, who was there to take his Degree in Law. On leaving the University in 1772 Blessig was awarded the Goll Scholarship, which was given to Theological students of good promise, to enable them to travel abroad and visit other Universities before presenting themselves for a Degree in Theology.

Blessig began his studies abroad with a visit to Vienna, travelling there in company with an Army Commissary named Brunck, whose private hobby was a study of Greek literature. In Vienna Blessig worked on documents in the Imperial Library, and he also attended lectures given by eminent Professors at the University. He became acquainted with the Austrian composer Christoph Gluck, who played to him some of his latest compositions. After a brief visit with friends to Venice and Mantua, he continued his travels through Bohemia into Saxony, where he visited Dresden, and in August 1773 he reached Leipzig and spent the winter there attending lectures at the University. Among various people of note whom he met at Leipzig was the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, grandfather of the future composer Felix Mendelssohn-Barthaldy; and he also met Denis Diderot, the French encyclopaedist, who was en route to St. Petersburg by invitation from Catharine the Great. At Leipzig Blessig was presented to the young Elector of Saxony, Friedrich August, and his charming wife Princess Marie Amelie.

One of Blessig's Strasbourg friends, named Kelb, was staying in Leipzig with a young Englishman, Mr. Desmarests Durnford, who was an Ensign in the Corps of Engineers, and as Kolb happened presently to fall ill, Mr. Durnford asked Blessig to accompany him as travelling companion during the remainder of his continental tour. As Blessig could already speak English quite well he agreed to the proposal. They left Leipzig in May 1774 for Berlin, where they saw Frederick the Great then aged 63, reviewing his troops, but his application to be presented to the King with Durnford was not granted, as he had no official rank. From Berlin they went through Brunswick, Hanover, Gottingen, Cassel, and Munster, into the Netherlands, where they continued via Nijmegen to Utrecht. From there they went by canal boat to Amsterdam, and thence to Haarlem and Leyden, then, through the Austrian Netherlands to Brussels, and from there to Dunkirk, where Durnford embarked for England.

Blessig then returned to visit his old father, who was living in very poor circumstances at Düsseldorf, and stayed for six weeks in his cottage there; he

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made the acquaintance of Canon Jacobi and was asked by him to preach a sermon in the Lutheran Church at Düsseldorf. In September 1774 he returned to Gottingen, travelling through Frankfort, where he saw Goethe again, who was then an impecunious young lawyer, and at Gottingen University he spent the winter attending lectures and making new acquaintances among the Professors there.

In April 1775 he returned to Strasbourg after 3 years of travel which had much enlarged his experience and knowledge. He resided for a while in the hospitable home of his friends the de Turckheim family, and then he took a post as preceptor of the Wilhelmitte College for poor theological students, whose classrooms were above the University Lecture Halls; he had 22 students to teach and soon became highly esteemed by them. He also undertook private tuition of University undergraduates.

### ***Blessig the Preacher***

In this year he was also appointed as French Preacher in the Church of St. Pierre-le-Vieux, and was ordained Deacon. His sermons at this church on alternate Sundays soon attracted a good congregation. Later, he became French Preacher in the Church of St. Nicholas, which was attended by his relatives the Blessigs of the Auberge a la Hache, and he also preached occasionally in the Temple Neuf. But the day on which his talent as a preacher first became widely known, was 20th August 1777, when by order of the City Council he delivered a remarkable eulogy in French, on the occasion of the re-interment of the famous French soldier Marechal Saxe in St. Thomas's Church at Strasbourg. Maurice de Saxe was one of the very numerous sons of the Elector August the Strong of Saxony, and of Aurora Countess of Konigsmark; he died in 1750 at the Chateau de Chambord, and had been buried in the Protestant Temple Neuf. Louis XV commissioned the sculptor Pigalle to create a splendid monument to the hero, and that took more than 20 years to complete; it was so large that there was no suitable place for it in the Temple Neuf, and Louis XVI then authorised the removal of the Marshal's coffin to the chancel of St. Thomas's Church, where the monument was erected over it. The ceremony of re-interment was attended by a great congregation of French and German notables, and four generals, Baron de Wurmser, Baron de Vaux, Graf v. Lausnitz, and Graf v. Walmer, acted as pall-bearers. In his remarkable address, Blessig eulogised the deceased for his heroic deeds, his humane qualities, and generosity toward defeated enemies. The congregation listened with close attention and in deep silence, and when he ended there was an outburst of clapping, led by Princess Christine of Saxony, the dead Marshal's sister, and by Marechal de Contades, Military Governor of Alsace, and many were moved to tears. When Blessig called on de Contades a few days after the ceremony, the latter apologised for

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the clapping, so unusual in a Strasbourg church, saying that it was evoked by heartfelt appreciation of the stirring address. One incident is still recalled in Strasbourg concerning this memorable day; whilst Blessig was speaking, a small boy climbed a ladder outside the church to look in at a window, and when someone took the ladder away the boy was left howling on the window ledge and caused some disturbance, but Blessig did not falter for a moment in his address. Now, when newly ordained Lutheran clergy preach their first sermon in St. Thomas's Church they are exhorted to follow Blessig's example and to hold the attention of their congregation despite trivial interruptions.

Blessig received many congratulations on his eulogy, and in due course a fine silver goblet suitably inscribed was sent to him from Paris by order of Louis XVI. A few critics in the Paris press averred that the oration was somewhat forced and dramatic in style, and Blessig took care to avoid such tendency in his future sermons, but most of the critics were favourable, especially the Abbe Elisee, who was himself a famous preacher in Paris, and all expressed admiration that a German speaking Alsatian was able to use the French language with such good diction and feeling. Blessig himself admitted that it was a difficult task for a man of peace knowing nothing of wars and little enough of France, to compose and deliver to order this eulogy on a great French soldier in the presence of such a distinguished gathering of the late Marshal's relatives and friends. Subsequently he received several offers of appointment as preacher in other cities, notably Vienna and Frankfurt, but he declined them all, preferring to serve in his native city.

In the following year the young Baron v. Medem, of an old Livonian family, died in Strasbourg; he was a youth of high ideals and culture, and was much attached to Blessig, who was his tutor and who gave him comfort in his last days. At his funeral, which was attended by Princes of Hesse-Darmstadt and Hohenzollern, Blessig delivered the oration, and it was published later with a memoir of the deceased, and extracts from his correspondence with his sister Baroness v. der Recke.

In 1779 Blessig made his first visit to Paris, travelling there with a Dr Baer who was preacher in the Swedish Embassy Church in Paris. At Nancy, en route, they visited the Franciscan Church and saw there the black marble mausoleum of the Dukes of Lorraine, and they called on the Abbe Seilleres, who showed them a Carthusian Monastery near Nancy, and they also visited the Military Hospital, where Blessig spoke to wounded soldiers of a Bavarian Regiment, and where he greatly admired the devoted work of the Sisters of Charity.

They arrived in Paris on 13th May. There Blessig further enlarged his knowledge of men and affairs, mixing in all classes of society. He met distinguished savants, visited educational and industrial establishments, libraries and art galleries and palaces and theatres, and the environs of the

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city. He also made close acquaintance with the Catholic clergy and visited some of their churches. In his later life he always showed sympathetic tolerance toward men who did not belong to the Lutheran persuasion, whether these were of the Protestant Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church, or of the Jewish Faith, for he believed that all were working to the same end in bringing souls nearer to God. Among notable Catholic priests whom he met in Paris were the Abbés Guenee, Girard, d'Alembert, Arnaud, and Father Elisee who was a Barefoot Monk. He visited the Royal Library, and the Libraries of the Sorbonne and the Abbey of St. Germain-des-Prés, and he was permitted to borrow manuscripts for private study. Although he regarded with some contempt the frivolities and extravagances of many of the younger aristocrats in the French capital, he was not by any means a killjoy, and he enjoyed rational entertainment. He saw a good many plays at the theatres and recorded lively impressions of some of them; walked on the boulevards, and visited the royal palaces with keen interest. At Versailles on 23rd May he saw King Louis XVI and the Queen and Princes at a Levee of the Cordons Bleus, and later he saw the Royal family again at an Evening Service and was much impressed by their demeanour. On one occasion he drove out to St. Germain and Marly, crossing the Seine by the Pont de Neuilly; at St. Germain he was delighted by the splendid views from the terraces, and he particularly admired the chateau of the Duc de Noailles and thought that if he were a rich man he would like to build a miniature replica of it. At Marly he enjoyed the gardens with their green alleys, pleached hedges, statues, grottoes, and waterfalls; in the chateau there he saw the State Apartments, and also the rooms formerly occupied by Mesdames de Pompadour and Du Barry, and the famous Machine of Marly, with its 14 great water-wheels working 225 pumps to lift water from the Seine to Versailles.

Towards the end of his stay in Paris he found the constant bustle, rounds of visits and hospitality, and sight-seeing, somewhat exhausting, and he became ill with nervous strain, to which he was always prone; but he was pulled round by the care of two good doctors, Tronchin and Herrenschand, and by his friend Professor Haffner who came to Paris and who returned with him to Strasbourg as soon as he was fit to travel. His expenses in Paris were paid partly by the Strasbourg City Council from a fund for travelling students, and partly by the generosity of his friend Baron de Dietrich, later Mayor of Strasbourg.

Blessig made a second visit to Paris in 1803, after the Revolution, as will be mentioned later. During the latter part of his life he visited Switzerland several times, partly for his health, and partly to make contact with literary men there, such as the poet and mystic J.K. Lavater, and others. He also made periodic health visits to small spas in Alsace, Baden, and Württemberg, such as Deinach, Rippoltsau, Griesbach, Niederbronn, and Arbogast. On those

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later journeys he was always accompanied by his wife or by Strasbourg friends.

## ***Blessig the Professor of Philosophy and Theology***

In 1778 Blessig was appointed Professor Extraordinary in Philosophy at Strasbourg University, in 1783 Professor Extraordinary in Theology, in 1786 Regular Professor in Philosophy, and in 1787 Regular Professor in Theology. In 1788 he submitted his thesis for the Degree of Doctor in Theology, and in accordance with custom he expounded and defended his thesis in public debate. He occupied the post of Rector of the University during the winter term of 1786/7, and again in the summer of 1789. In 1794 he became a Prebendary of the St. Thomas Protestant Foundation, that is he was one of the 12 University Professors who received a stipend from that endowment.

Prior to the Revolution, the Feast Day of St. Louis on August 25th was always celebrated in Strasbourg by the reading of a Latin panegyric in the presence of the City Council and representatives of the University and the learned professions. Blessig prepared and read these panegyrics in the years 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788, and 1789, on each occasion extolling the reigning King Louis XVI for some notable act of policy during the past year. He did not however deliver the panegyric during the final two years of the monarchy in 1790 and 1791.

## ***Marriage to Susanne Beyckert***

On 8th May 1780 Blessig married in Strasbourg a lady who for 36 years gave him the greatest happiness as a devoted wife, sharing and inspiring all his work; she was **Susanne Madeleine Beyckert** a tall and handsome woman of great intellectual ability; her father, Dr J.P. Beyckert, was a Professor of Theology in the University, Pastor of the Protestant Temple Neuf, and Vice-President of the Consistory, and in all of those offices Blessig followed in his footsteps. Dr Beyckert retired in 1781 and until his death in 1787 he resided with his daughter and son-in-law in the parsonage house belonging to the Temple Neuf. That house was an old and somewhat dilapidated one in the rue des Tanneurs (Gerbersgraben) near the Place d'Armes (now Place Kleber); the rue des Tanneurs was not a very pleasant residential street at that period, as it had an open canal running along it which carried the strong smelling effluent of the tanneries, and the street canals of Strasbourg were not covered in until about 1840. However, Dr Beyckert also had a country villa which he had built in 1756 in the village of Dorlisheim about 12 miles SW of Strasbourg, near the foot of the Vosges mountains, and he devised that villa to his daughter when he died in 1787. Blessig and his wife, who were ardent lovers of country life, took the greatest

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delight in staying at the villa for as long as duties in Strasbourg permitted; generally they stayed there during the long vacation of the University in August-September, and made brief stays in spring and early summer. The villa had a good garden in which fruit trees of all kinds flourished, and a vineyard which was tended by the gardener Andreas and which yielded annually a good store of country wine. After the autumn long vacation at the villa, with its relaxation from strenuous University work and Church and committee duties, Blessig always felt himself a new man on returning to Strasbourg. But when he was at the villa he did not idle altogether, but busied himself with reading and writing and working in the garden; he and his wife also loved making long walking expeditions into the mountains, especially to the Dreispitz (1150ft) and the Odilienberg (2500 ft), and to Schloss Girbaden, a vast ruined castle of the 13th Century.

Blessig and his wife were harmonious souls, and strove always to be worthy of each other in their daily life and activities. Whenever he went on a long journey she accompanied him if possible, and during his internment in the Revolution she worked untiringly to alleviate his hardships and obtain his release, and by her careful nursing in times of ill health, she prolonged his life for many years to the benefit of all. They had no children.

In the parsonage house in Strasbourg the daily routine was usually this: Blessig rose at 6am in winter months, and earlier in summer; if the weather was fine he went for a short walk and then read the Bible and prayed; at 7am they had coffee, after which he worked until 9.30, when he dressed formally and went to give his lectures at the University. From 11-12 he was busy with Church duties, and then he took another walk, even in the worst weather, and returning home at 12.30 he wrote down his reflections during that walk. At 1 pm was the midday meal, after which he read literary journals, and in later years had a half-hour sleep. Then he made visits to parishioners or called on friends, returning home toward evening for further work. Then supper, and reading of newspapers or light literature. Such was the normal day's routine, although frequently altered by the pressure of special engagements.

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## *The French Revolution.*

Blessig was always a loyal son of his native city, and of France, and in the annual panegyrics which he delivered on St. Louis's Day he stressed the advantages which Strasbourg had gained from its incorporation in the Kingdom of France whilst still retaining some of its former independence as a Free City. As an idealist he was at first inclined to welcome the Revolution in some of its aspects, although not in all. From his favourite studies of ancient Greece and Rome he had become imbued with a belief that an enlargement of freedom would elevate the spirit of mankind, and he hoped that democratic government in a city such as Strasbourg would inspire its citizens with a nobler sense of duty to God and their fellow men, under wise guidance from the established monarchy. In this many of his closest friends differed from him, and they with a worldlier outlook, mistrusted the results which might emerge from the Revolution. When Blessig in due course realised the profound menace to all stability of government and to the monarchy itself, which he held in such high esteem, he began to lose much of his earlier optimism.

The first manifestation of the Revolution in Strasbourg came on 21st July 1789, when the mob attacked and pillaged the Hotel de Ville in the Place Broglie, and confined the magistrates to their private houses, which filled Blessig with dismay. The Lutheran Consistory felt it necessary to send out an admonition to all the Protestants of Strasbourg to return to their civic duty and allegiance, and Blessig prepared this pastoral letter on 5th August, to be read out in all the Protestant churches; the letter was an un-equivocal denunciation of the various atrocities which had already taken place since the National Assembly's arrogation of power on 23rd June, and it contained an equally strong exhortation to maintain good order. The action of the Paris mob in their march on Versailles on 5th October filled Blessig with further misgivings, but he still hoped that good might eventually come from the new order of things, and that once the evil passions of the mob had subsided, the sunshine of freedom would have benign effects.

In Strasbourg his optimism may perhaps have been partly based on the fact that his friend Baron de Dietrich, leader of the Patriotic Party, was elected in March 1790 as the first Mayor of the city under the new constitution. De Dietrich, who was a few years younger than Blessig, and whose ancestors had been Councillors and Magistrates in Strasbourg for several generations, had been appointed as King's Commissioner for Strasbourg during the previous year, and as the moderate parties among the citizens recognised that he was the most able and energetic administrator available for a time of crisis, they elected him as Mayor despite opposition from Jacobin extremists. Blessig himself, with many of his friends, was among the 36 Notables chosen for the

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new City Council at the same time. When the new Mayor and Council attended an inaugural Te Deum, first in the Cathedral, and then in the Temple Neuf, which was the chief Protestant Church, Blessig gave in the latter an earnest address to the assembly, praying that all enmity between parties in Strasbourg would cease, and that unity would prevail in the cause of freedom. That however did not ensue, and gradually the Jacobin extremists seized power from the moderate parties, and in the event de Dietrich and the new City Council were deposed from office in August 1792, and the patriotic first Mayor of Strasbourg was sent to Paris and guillotined at end of 1793.

Meanwhile, the next incident of the Revolution in Strasbourg during 1791 was the election of a new Catholic Bishop under the Constitutional Laws, in place of Cardinal de Rohan, the foolish conspirator in the 'diamond necklace' affair of 1785. Rohan, as Prince Bishop, had refused to subordinate himself to the new Constitution, and had crossed the Rhine into Baden where he remained sulking at Ettenheim, an abbey within his diocese. The election took place in January 1791, and for this and all other electoral purposes the Commune of Strasbourg was divided into 12 Sections, in place of the former Parishes of the city. Blessig was required to vote as a citizen in his Section, but as a Protestant Minister he felt that he could not participate in the choice of the Catholic Bishop and so he did not vote. For that abstention informers lodged a complaint against him at the Jacobin Club, where there was already a grudge against him for writing the pastoral letter to the Protestant churches in August 1789. The Abbe Brendel, a Professor in the Roman Catholic Seminary, was duly elected as the new Bishop.

Blessig now unwittingly became involved in further troubles. He received a letter from a former Catholic priest in Bonn, named Eulogius Schneider, asking him to endorse the latter's application for the post of Vicar to the new Catholic Bishop in Strasbourg. Blessig knew that Schneider was a distinguished scholar, poet, and preacher, and that he had translated the 'Life of St. Chrysostom', and so he recommended the applicant to his friend the Mayor Dietrich and Schneider obtained the appointment. What Blessig did not know was that Schneider was being sent to Strasbourg by German Princes to start a counter-revolutionary movement. The man had a remarkable dual personality, part saint and part sinner, and the latter character soon became uppermost after his arrival in Strasbourg, and he threw in his lot with the Jacobin extremists; during 1792-3 he was Public Prosecutor of a Tribunal which guillotined scores of innocent people in Strasbourg and the surrounding villages of the Commune. Later however Schneider met his fate at the hands of rival extremists and in due course was himself guillotined in Paris, in April 1794.

His disillusionment in this case of Schneider was a further shock to Blessig's faith in the goodness of human nature, and he decided to hold aloof

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from all political questions. Although he remained, in the City Council during 1790-92 he seldom spoke there, and he took no part in the meetings of his Section of the city.

On 25th April 1792 news reached Strasbourg that France was at war with Austria. In the evening of that day the Mayor de Dietrich requested a young engineer Lieutenant named Rouget de Lisle to compose a patriotic marching song for the young soldiers of the Army of the Rhine; early the next morning de Lisle brought his composition to the Mayor's house in the Place Broglie, and de Dietrich found it so inspiring that he invited a special company to dine with him and himself sang the song to them, which was received with acclamation. Thus the great national hymn of France, originally composed for the Army of the Rhine and later named the Marseillaise, was born.

In August, de Dietrich raised a volunteer battalion in Strasbourg, to join the Army of the Rhine. It happened during that month that Blessig chanced to preach in the Temple Neuf on a text from the Gospel of the day which concerned the Fall of Jerusalem, in which the emphasis is laid on the horrors of war; but on the following Sunday his sermon from the Gospel text enlarged upon the purpose of war and the fact that high policies of government must sometimes be achieved through War, thus amplifying his previous sermon. However his Jacobin enemies immediately attacked his first sermon, ignoring the following one, and they maintained that his purpose was to discourage the Strasbourg volunteers who were preparing to defend their native land. No such purpose had been in Blessig's mind, as he himself was a man of high personal courage. Nevertheless the Jacobins scored another black mark against him for this.

The eventful 10th June 1792, when the mob invaded the Palace of the Tuileries in Paris, dismayed the moderate parties in Strasbourg once more, as it clearly showed the lack of control by those who had seized the reins of power, and the overthrow of the monarchy now appeared imminent. On 8th August the Strasbourg City Council had sent to the Paris National Assembly a formal protest against the threat to the monarchy; that protest was signed by many members of the Council, although not in fact by Blessig, and it represented the view of thousands of Strasbourg citizens. The courier bearing the letter arrived in Paris on 12th August, two days after Louis XVI had been deposed and imprisoned with his family in the Temple. The tone of the letter was so outspoken and uncompromising that the National Assembly immediately voted that the senders were enemies of the State, and they decided to send Commissioners to Strasbourg to suspend the Mayor and Council from office. Meanwhile news of the deposition of the King had reached Strasbourg on 13th August, and the Mayor summoned the Council for special sessions on 14th and 15th, to consider measures for preservation of

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order in Strasbourg, anticipating violent reactions. At the first of these sessions Blessig sat in silence listening to the views of others; at the second session he made an extempore speech without prepared notes, contrary to his usual practice; the gist of his speech was a warning of coming anarchy, already voiced by previous speakers, but he concluded by saying that although they had a right to express the views of Strasbourg citizens to the National Assembly, they must bow to the will of the Nation as a whole in regard to the Monarchy.

On 18th August the Commissioners from Paris, Carnot, Prieur, and Ritter, arrived in Strasbourg, and on 22nd, in accordance with the decision of the National Assembly, they suspended the City Council and ordered the Mayor de Dietrich to proceed to Paris and appear before the Assembly there within a week. A Jacobin named Lachaux was appointed Mayor in his place.

Thereafter Blessig took no further part in the political affairs of the city, but he became a threatened man. The Jacobins made complaint against him to the Council of the Bas-Rhin Department, and requested that he should be dismissed from his teaching appointments at the University; but he had friends in the Department Council who protested courageously against the proposed dismissal, and Blessig himself wrote to the Minister of the Interior, M. Jean-Marie Roland, whom he knew personally, and from the latter he received a guarantee of temporary protection.

In December 1792 a new City Council was elected, with Blessig's friend Bernard de Turckheim as Mayor, but shortly afterward two more People's Representatives were sent as Commissioners from Paris at the request of the Strasbourg Jacobins, and the new Mayor and Council were deposed and replaced by a strongly Jacobin Council, with an evil young man named Monet, as Mayor; he was aged 25 and had come to Strasbourg from Savoie.

On 11th February 1793 the Paris Commissioners, who were named Dentzel and Couturier, ordered 15 prominent citizens of Strasbourg to be deported, and among these was Blessig. He chose Nancy for his place of exile, and a house was placed at his disposal there by an old school friend named Muller. Blessig's wife accompanied him to Nancy and looked after his health there with anxious care. A few weeks later the Paris Commissioners were recalled from Strasbourg, and the deportation order was rescinded, in Blessig's case partly by intervention of his former acquaintance Eulogius Schneider, who apparently felt some shame for betraying his trust. Blessig and his wife then returned to Strasbourg and lived quietly there, taking no part in the political struggle which raged with ever increasing violence in the city.

In June began the Reign of Terror in France, directed by the fanatical Robespierre and his fellow members of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris. In September all youths between the ages of 18 and 25 were

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conscripted for army service, and on their departure from Strasbourg for training at Fort Louis, the University classes had to close. In this month also the 'dechristianisation' policy of the Jacobins was put into effect.

On 15th September, whilst Blessig was preaching at Evening Service to a small congregation in the Temple Neuf, a posse of National Guards headed by the young Mayor, Monet, in his tricolour sash and waving a sword, broke into the church and ordered the immediate suspension of all further Services, and the requisitioning of the church as a fruit and vegetable store, as it adjoined the outdoor vegetable market. Men at once began to break up the pews and church furniture with axes and crowbars, whilst Blessig after protesting sadly and dismissing his congregation, withdrew in grief to the parsonage house in the rue des Tanneurs. Thus all his usual activities both in University and in Church were simultaneously suspended and these blows were hard to bear. The 'dechristianisation' policy of the Jacobins, although directed mainly against the Roman Catholic Church who were implacably opposed to the Revolution, was based also on the theory that allegiance to the State must take the place of allegiance to the Church. The Christian Calendar was abolished on 5th October 1793, to weaken the influence of religion, and Year I of the Republic was dated from 22nd Sept. 1792. On 7th November 1793 the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Strasbourg was converted into a 'Temple of Reason' and a ceremony took place in it on that day, at which relapsed priests such as Eulogius Schneider and unworthy others, formally abjured all religion.

In September 1793 also the Law of Suspects was enacted in Paris which vaguely defined six classes of suspects. At the end of October Blessig was placed on the list of persons in Strasbourg suspected of being enemies of the Revolution, on the unsubstantial charges which the Jacobins had previously made against him. According to this Law suspects were either to be deported or thrown into prison, and those who owned property were to be heavily fined. Blessig, who had no property, and only an annual salary of 700 livres from his teaching appointments at the University, was fined 8000 francs in respect of his wife's villa at Dorlisheim, which of course could not be paid. But on the intervention again of Eulogius Schneider, who was now a Public Prosecutor, Blessig and his wife were permitted to reside at Dorlisheim provided they remained quietly there and did not enter Strasbourg. Accordingly, from October onward they lived at the Dorlisheim villa, although it was not suitable for residence in the cold of winter, and there he was much troubled by ill health and nervous strain.

On 17th October two more Commissioners from Paris arrived in Strasbourg. These were Louis Antoine St. Just, a young lawyer aged 26 who was one of the 12 members of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris who now ruled France, and his friend Le Bas who was affianced to his sister. These

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young men were sent to Strasbourg primarily to reorganise the ineffective Armies of the Rhine and Moselle for resistance to the Austrian invaders, and to purge these armies of aristocrat officers, and to attend to the supply of arms, food and clothing for the troops. The latter requirement necessitated drastic measures in Strasbourg with heavy requisitions from its citizens under penalties of fine, prison, or the guillotine. By mid-November the reorganised and re-equipped Army of the Rhine had managed to drive the Austrians out of Alsace, but arrests, fines, and the guillotine continued nevertheless in Strasbourg.

On 24th November Blessig's old friend Dr Fischer, the kindly pastor of Dorlisheim, was arrested on some trivial charge, and was taken thence to Strasbourg and guillotined. Finally, on 2nd. December 1793, Blessig himself was arrested at his Dorlisheim villa. The nominal charge was that he had given refuge there for one night to one of his Temple Neuf parishioners, a young aristocrat who had been placed on the list of Suspects and who was escaping to the Steintal in the Vosges; this information was laid against Blessig by one Jost, a local ruffian and poacher who had a grudge against him for befriending his son and trying to teach him religion; Jost and a few ill disposed men in the village also had their eye on Blessig's store of country wine. So when the Public Prosecutor's Sergeant, a man named D. Stamm, arrived at Dorlisheim, he sent an armed militiaman to arrest Blessig, although there was no formal warrant for the arrest. In the afternoon of that day Blessig was conveyed in a cart with his hands bound and surrounded by his accusers, to Strasbourg, and his wife bravely accompanied him. They arrived at the massive building of the Roman Catholic Seminary in the rue des Frères near the Cathedral, which had been converted into a prison. Blessig's wife was permitted to live in the parsonage house in the rue des Tanneurs, and she parted in sorrow from her beloved husband at the gate of the Seminary prison.

The charge addressed by the sergeant Stamm to the prison governor, citizen Mainoni, was as follows: "Dorlisheim. Le 13 Frimaire, 1 An II de la République Une et Indivisible. I am sending to you a most dangerous man, who since 10th August 1792 has tried to subvert people against the Decrees of the National Assembly, who has assisted in discouraging public spirit among the citizens of Strasbourg, and who since his deportation to this place has used his influence among the villagers, and because he is a Doctor of Theology they regard him as a Commissar of God. It is none other than the famous Blessig. He was not expecting a visit from me. There are several others of his kind in the neighbourhood, and I shall seek them out and send them as a reinforcement to those who help to nourish the poor in the Seminary".

A few days after his internment Blessig appeared before a visiting Tribunal in the Seminary prison; they interrogated him, not without civility,

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but they gave no hint of their decisions. Later he was recorded in the prison register as follows: BLESSIG, aged 47, resident in Strasbourg, married, no children. Detained since 13 Frimaire by order of Civil Commissar Clauer, having been arrested for action against the State; was formerly a Professor of Theology and had a stipend of 700 livres from a church endowment. Associated with the Moderates; signed a Royalist Petition on 12th August 1792; is a member of the counter-revolutionary party formed by Dietrich; at a session of the City Council he delivered a most seditious address tending to induce people to have no confidence in the Legislative Assembly. Was deported from Strasbourg by the People's Representatives Couturier and Dentzel on 11th Feb. 1793". All of the particulars in this record were grossly distorted renderings of Blessig's real actions on the dates mentioned, as was described earlier. It was a coincidence that just at this time retribution fell on the unworthy Eulogius Schneider, whose minion Stamm had arrested Blessig. Schneider was accused by his rival in crime, the Mayor Monet of Strasbourg; both of them were arrested by the Paris Commissioner St. Just, who sent Schneider to Paris, where he was prosecuted by Robespierre and guillotined a few months later, to be followed soon afterward by Robespierre himself, and St. Just. Thus the rivals in a Revolution destroy each other.

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## *Imprisonment*

In the Seminary prison where Blessig was interned there were some 1200 persons of all ages and all classes, most of whom had been arrested on trivial pretexts or without any charge at all. Men and women were allocated to separate buildings. Blessig shared a room on the 3rd floor with a merchant named Emmerich; he was an old friend, and was released after a short time; companions in adjoining rooms were Blessig's good friend Professor Haffner and a cheerful merchant named J.G. Scherz. They engaged a peasant farmer from Dachstein near Dorlisheim, named Keiffel, to act as their orderly, and Keiffel soon became devoted to the "good doctors" Blessig and Haffner, whom he regarded as quite incompetent to look after themselves.

Blessig's wife was able to send supplies almost daily to the gate-porter of the prison by the hand of her faithful maid Rosine, although sometimes there was difficulty in purchasing food, and the scanty fare provided by the prison was almost uneatable. She soon established a means of communication with her husband, by letters pushed into the double bottom of a coffee canister which passed to and fro with the food supplies; this secret post was never discovered by the prison officials during the whole 11 months of Blessig's internment, and it afforded immense consolation to them both. In the year 1881 the whole of their correspondence, carefully preserved for nearly 90 years, was bequeathed to the library of Strasbourg University by Blessig's niece, widow of Dr Louis Schäfer. Conditions in the Seminary were rigorous and unpleasant at first, with armed militiamen patrolling the stone corridors, frequent surprise inspections of rooms and roll calls during the night, and sudden removal of prisoners to an unknown fate. Disciplinary measures were relaxed or reimposed in accordance with the changes of fortune in the Republic's war with Austria. Blessig's favourite solace was constant reading of the Bible and other devotional books which he had been allowed to bring into the prison, and he had long discussions with his friend Haffner, enlivened by the cheery optimism of the merchant Scherz, and by the rustic wit of their peasant orderly Keiffel. Often Blessig used to climb the 60 stone steps leading to an attic window on the top floor, which he called his Belvedere, and from there with a little telescope which a friend had smuggled in to him, he was able to scan the country of the Black Forest and Baden to the E. of the city, but the view westward toward Dorlisheim and the Vosges was blocked by the massive bulk of the Cathedral; towards the N. he could just see the slender spire of his beloved Temple Neuf, and on the day before Palm Sunday of 1794 he had the mortification of observing the removal of the cross and weathercock from the spire, and their replacement by a huge symbolical Cap of Liberty. On Good Friday of 1794 Blessig had unexpected visitors; the poacher Jost from Dorlisheim who had given information leading to his arrest,

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came with his son to beg his forgiveness, kneeling in tears; this Blessig readily granted, and he presented Jost with a psalter bound in leather with silver clasps which had been given to him by his godfather J.M. Hirschel on the occasion of his Confirmation nearly 40 years previously. Blessig's health suffered a good deal from his long confinement, but he bore that with the greatest patience, and he received attention from his friend Dr Spielmann, who acted as medical officer to his fellow inmates.

At midsummer 1794 Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety in Paris fell from power and were guillotined, and the Reign of Terror ended, and the tide of revolutionary fanaticism began to ebb. An order came to Strasbourg for all prisoners except clergy, aristocrats, and war profiteers, to be released, and by autumn most of the prisoners in the Seminary had left, and Blessig and Haffner were among the few remaining. Finally their turn came at last, on 3rd November, and Blessig's wife came into the prison to greet him after their long separation of 11 months. Hand in hand they walked out of the Seminary gate, saluted by the gate-porter Ehringer with cap in hand, and his wife who was overjoyed at the release of "the good doctors", and they returned to the parsonage house in the rue des Tanneurs where their faithful maid Rosine awaited them.

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## *Restoring the Protestant Church*

Life now began again for Blessig. As all the churches still remained closed, he spent the winter of 1794 in assisting to catalogue the vast number of books which had been collected by the city authorities from the libraries of closed religious establishments and from the houses of political refugees. Under the regime of the Directory, which was still somewhat Jacobin in tendency, Christian religion continued to be severely handicapped. No outward signs of worship were permitted, church bells remained silent, and Decadli (Tenth Day) continued to be observed as a day of rest in the place of Sunday. On 21st Feb. 1795 a Decree was issued which nominally restored religious freedom, and the churches in Strasbourg were then allowed to re-open for private worship, but the parishes had to pay all costs for restoring damage and maintaining the buildings in future. That was a crushing burden, as the currency had been debased by streams of paper money, and 100 gold livres were then worth only 10 silver francs, which represented a devaluation of some 240%.

The Temple Neuf, after being used as a fruit and vegetable store had later housed pigs; the stone flags of the flooring had all gone and the pigs had rooted in the soil below; all the church furniture, pews, panelling, pulpit, lamps, and Ironwork, had been removed for use in the Cathedral 'Temple of Reason', or in the municipal offices. Whilst his church was being cleaned and rein-stated as far as possible, Blessig preached his first sermon after the Revolution on 10th March 1795 in the lecture hall of the nearby Protestant Seminary, which was crowded to capacity, and it was evident that his old wonderful preaching power had lost none of its force from his long internment and silence.

Blessig and his University colleague Haffner worked prodigiously during the next few years to restore the shattered Protestant community in Strasbourg. He had considerable talent for organisation and business ability, and was always eager to use those talents, and his advice and help were much sought after. Already in 1790, at the request of the Deputy for Alsace in the Constituent Assembly la Paris, he had prepared a plan for reorganising the Protestant Parishes of Strasbourg, and later working with Professor Christophe Koch he had prepared a similar plan for the country parishes of Alsace. But the Paris Assembly did not pass those plans in time for action to be taken before the Reign of Terror destroyed the whole fabric of the Church in France.

Now when the regime of the Directory restored religious freedom in 1795, subject to the handicaps already mentioned, it was found that the parishes of Strasbourg, as well as those of the country towns and villages in Alsace, had come to regard themselves as independent of any central control, and conditions were almost anarchic. Pastors, frequently quite uneducated

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men, were appointed and dismissed at the whim of the Parish Councils, for political motives. The Lutheran Consistory in Strasbourg therefore assembled representative clergy from the city and from the country parishes, and after long sessions decided on the necessary action to bring the parishes once more into good order and central control, and in this business Blessig took a leading part, working from his 1790 plans.

With the downfall of the Directory in 1799 and the advent of Napoleon as First Consul, the Protestant Church began to receive somewhat better protection, and the political change was at first welcomed by Blessig. He became President of the Temple Neuf Parish Council in 1801, and in 1804 he was made a Superintendent of the Lutheran Church, corresponding approximately to the office of an Archdeacon in the Church of England, and his duties then included the visitation of the 24 town and country churches and 4 Parish Councils, which were affiliated to the Temple Neuf. At the same time he became a Member of the Consistory (Upper Church Council) in Strasbourg, which enlarged his authority. He was held in high esteem by the Pastors and Churchwardens of all the churches and parish councils included in his Visitation, and by his tactful and impartial judgments he settled many difficulties and differences of opinion, and before very long the churches and parishes of Strasbourg, and in the country towns and villages were once more brought into good order and central control.

The restoration of University life, which had been completely destroyed, was another of Blessig's arduous tasks in the post-revolution period. Strasbourg University, founded in 1567, had been suppressed altogether in 1794 by the National Convention in Paris, who regarded it as a stronghold of German elements in Alsace. Under the Directory it received no encouragement to revive, and the University funds remained diverted to other uses, and even the Protestant Church endowments for the Theological Faculty were forfeited by a Decree of 1799. All that Blessig and a few other former Professors could do was to assemble by degrees a small body of students whom they taught privately under considerable handicaps.

In 1803 Blessig undertook his second journey to Paris, accompanied by his friend Bernard de Turckheim who was then a Member of the Chamber of Deputies, and by Professor Christophe Koch who was an eminent jurist; owing to Blessig's standing as a leading figure in the Protestant Church of Alsace, they were able to obtain interviews with Count Portalis, Napoleon's Minister for Religious Affairs, and with Bishop Gregoire, and Canon Jacobi who was President of the Consistory of Aix-la-Chapelle. Their efforts resulted in the obtaining by Portalis of a Decree from Napoleon for the establishment of a Protestant Theological Seminary in Strasbourg, to be housed in the old University buildings, and this Seminary formed no part of the new secular University which Napoleon was planning for Strasbourg. Blessig rejoiced in

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this independent establishment of the Seminary, and he became Rector of it in 1810. He and other Professors presented to it a large number of theological books to form a lending library for students from country parishes. Amongst other administrative work which Blessig under-took of similar purpose, was the re-establishment of the Wilhelmité College for Poor Theological Students in Strasbourg, at which he had been a teacher some 25 years previously; the endowments of that College, amounting to 70,000 gold livres, had been swept into the City Treasury in part payment of Strasbourg's enormous external debts. But Blessig and a few good friends such as Baron Jean de Turckheim, and others, managed with great effort to collect sufficient donations to start the work of the College again.

As a Member of the Lutheran Consistory Blessig worked continuously to raise the standard of education in all the Protestant schools of Strasbourg, and particularly in the Latin School where the instruction was old-fashioned and inefficient. In this and other educational reorganisation however he began to experience much difficulty from Napoleon's numerous edicts in matters of education, and in particular there was a Decree which ordered the transfer of all pupils from the upper classes of the Latin School to the newly established State Lycee in Strasbourg. Blessig fought hard against that Decree and he enlisted the aid of Professor Koch who was a Member of the Institut National in Paris and thus in touch with the Minister of Education. The Rector of the new University in Strasbourg, M. de Montbrison, also supported Blessig, and eventually the Decree was modified to the extent that only pupils who had completed two years in the upper classes of the Latin School were transferred to the Lycee.

Blessig also took in hand the difficult task of improving the instruction in the elementary Parish schools of Strasbourg which were under the direction of the respective parish pastors; the main feature of his improvement was the grouping of the children into classes according to age and ability, and the addition of a special class in which handicrafts would be taught. This was all accomplished and in due course members of the Lutheran Consistory began to make regular half-yearly inspections of the Parish schools. Blessig was also instrumental in founding a Sunday school in Strasbourg, where young artisans and apprentices could receive instruction in drawing, mathematics, history, and natural science etc, from a panel of voluntary lecturers. Finally, with the support of the University Rector, M. de Montbrison, and of the Prefect of the Bas-Rhin, the Marquis Adrien de Lezay-Marnesia, he was able to establish a seminary for Parish School teachers in Strasbourg.

In 1805 Blessig became Chairman of a small Company formed in Strasbourg to print a cheap edition of the Bible, and he prepared a commentary and glossary to be appended to it for the benefit of poorly educated readers; although a proof copy of this Bible and appendices was

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prepared, lack of funds prevented publication, and it was not until the last year of Blessig's life that publication was made possible through a generous grant of £300 from the wealthy British & Foreign Bible Society, founded in London in 1804, which was added to local donations. The rules of the London Society however precluded the publication of commentaries with Bibles issued under their auspices, and so that part of Blessig's carefully prepared work had later to be excluded. In the years following his death some 7,500 copies of this cheap edition of the Bible were issued free to poor people, or at the trifling cost of 50 sous to those who had means to pay, in Strasbourg, and other parts of Alsace.

Blessig associated himself with many charitable projects outside the Church. As far back as 1775 he had become an active member of a Philanthropic Society founded by his friend Jean de Turckheim, for the purpose of teaching poor persons to earn their livelihood in agriculture and handicrafts; that Society later had branches in Paris and other cities of France; a model elementary school was established by it in the Strasbourg Orphanage with funds made available by the disbanded Company of Mastersingers. In his own parish Blessig made frequent and eloquent appeals from the pulpit on behalf of the poor and needy, with notable success; in the hard winter of 1788-89 he allocated a room in his parsonage house for a few poor women and children to work at spinning whilst receiving warmth and food. He always believed that useful work was the best form of charity, and that assistance in kind, such as food, clothing, and utensils, was better than doles of money which would be quickly spent by the unthrifty; and if money was advanced he maintained that some effort should be made to repay it, although that principle was not always popular with the more shiftless type of beggar. He was for many years member of a Committee of churchmen who endeavoured to improve the lot of prisoners in the Strasbourg gaols by education and by finding work for them on release.

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## *Napoleon*

Although Blessig had at first welcomed the coming of Napoleon and his restoration of law and order in France and the defeat of her enemies abroad, he later became disgusted with Napoleon's egoism and ambition, his disregard of humanity, and his continual wars of conquest; he became distressed at having to deliver sermons by order in thanksgiving for bloody victories, and on such occasions he endeavoured to turn the thoughts of his congregation toward matters of deeper and more religious significance. For the prisoners of war he felt Christian sympathy, and with some of his Strasbourg friends he did much to relieve their hardships. In 1806 Napoleon's blockade of Strasbourg caused the destruction by fire of several villages in the city's environs, and Blessig was one of the foremost in organising relief for the displaced inhabitants. The difficulties caused by Napoleonic decrees in the matter of education have already been mentioned. It was with thankfulness that Blessig greeted the abdication of Napoleon in March 1814, and the return of the Bourbon monarchy with Louis XVIII, and on that occasion he preached with much emotion in the Temple Neuf.

The period of joy was however short, and at the end of February 1815 Blessig heard with dismay of the return of Napoleon from Elba. His fears were justified, for Napoleon presently issued a Decree for universal military service, from which not even the clergy were to be exempted. When this order reached Strasbourg, Blessig wrote a memorandum to the city authorities on behalf of the Protestant clergy pointing out that their sacred vocation and the existing laws of France forbade their taking up arms, but he stressed that the clergy were at all times ready to do their duty in giving spiritual comfort to their fellow citizens, and in relieving the sufferers from war. The authorities accepted that memorandum, and in Strasbourg all clergy and theological students, and even pupils at the Latin School who had opted for the Church, were exempted from service.

But Blessig's initiative in this matter brought him ill will from many quarters, and a complaint was made against him to M. Debry who was Napoleon's reinstated Prefect of the Bas-Rhin, and to General Rapp, commander of the Army in Alsace. However the worthy Rapp, who had a high regard for Blessig, protected him from any further animosity.

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## *The Father of the poor children of Strasbourg*

Blessig, who never enjoyed full health and had been something of a hypochondriac in his youth, now began to feel the strain of all his ceaseless activities. He had such a warm heart for his fellow men that -he never refused to help all who brought their troubles to him, and perhaps his only failing was that he tried to do too much. His efforts on behalf of unfortunate persons were a heavy burden in addition to his arduous professional duties. When urged by his friends to spare himself more, he always replied that he could not whilst so much remained to be done. His period of internment during the Revolution had left some after effects, and he had several severe illnesses. In the winter of 1809 he was very seriously ill, and only the devoted nursing of his wife and the skill of his doctors pulled him through, but the spirit still burned in his frail body. He became somewhat deaf, and that was a constant grief to such a sociable man. He had an extraordinarily wide circle of friends and acquaintances, as he was a 'good mixer', and his conversation used to sparkle with wit and vivacity. His friendships were enduring, and separation by distance, or by difference of opinion, never broke them, and that is shown by the strong ties which bound his friends to him from early youth until death. He had an immense correspondence with churchmen, litterateurs, and personal friends. Although he had some talent for authorship his multifarious duties left him no time to write books, and that he much regretted. Nevertheless, between 1770 and his death in 1816, very many of his sermons delivered on special occasions, and various educational treatises, as well as Communion and Ordination addresses and funeral orations, were printed in Strasbourg by the publishers Heitz & Levrault.

As a preacher Blessig had quite exceptional qualities. He had great clarity of exposition, and having always a forward outlook he was able to explain new ideas to his congregation in such simple fashion that they could easily understand them, and he was never prosy or dull. His mind was active in the association of ideas and he made considerable use of metaphors. By temperament he was emotional and always spoke from his heart to other hearts, and perhaps that was what made his sermons so moving and impressive on the minds of his hearers. He used to write out his sermons in full and learn them by heart, and as he had an excellent memory he used very few notes in the pulpit. He had poetical imagination, but preferred to express his poetic feeling in beautiful prose. As previously mentioned, he was fluent in both French and German, but always found that he could express fine shades of feeling best in the idiom of the latter language. He learned English, and also studied Hebrew and Arabic for the purpose of comparing Biblical text.

Blessig was a man of middle height; he had a fine forehead, lively eyes

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and bushy eyebrows, and as a youth was handsome and retained a pleasing appearance in later life. The best portrait of him was a miniature painted by Mlle. Sophie de Beyer of Strasbourg, showing him at age 40; it was done at Blessig's request as a birthday present for his wife; an engraving was later made from it by the Strasbourg artist Christophe Guerin, and that has been reproduced in many books. Sophie de Beyer became the wife of Baron L.J. de Coehorn, a French general, who had an estate in Baden, and they were firm friends and frequent correspondents for many years with Blessig, whom they called affectionately 'Fra Lorenzo'. Another artist named Schuler also did a portrait of him, which was engraved, and that shows him late in life when nearly 70 and so much changed in appearance by years of ill health that the artist had to retouch it from his earlier memory.

Blessig's last illness began in the winter of 1815. On 11th November he had a severe seizure, with spasms of colic lasting throughout the night. Although the gravity of the attack was obvious, he remained imperturbably calm, and during the ensuing days of weakness he was even able and willing to converse freely with his doctor and friends on a variety of matters in which he continued to take lively interest and he bore with resignation the role of a bedridden invalid. His doctor, Professor Lauth, held little hope of recovery; but the attack passed and the spasms ceased after a week, and within a month Blessig had risen once more from his bed. The illness brought him innumerable expressions of affection and sympathy from Strasbourg citizens, French and German, Protestant and Catholic, alike, and whilst it lasted, Blessig's illness was a daily subject of anxious enquiry. His partial recovery gave corresponding pleasure to all, and brought him congratulations and good wishes from all parts of Alsace. That moved him so much that he caused a printed letter of thanks to be sent to all his well-wishers.

The recovery was however short lived, as he himself expected. On Christmas Day 1815 he wanted very much to preach once more in his beloved Temple Neuf, but the effort was too difficult, and so he read a Communion address from the pulpit steps, and that was his last public appearance. Attendance at the church in such cold weather had its inevitable effect, and on 2nd January 1816 the colic spasms returned, mildly at first, but with increased severity on 9th. He lingered on for some weeks, and on 17th February he died. On the previous evening his wish had been only to spare his wife, worn with watching over him, and he begged her to go and rest, as he knew his end was near, but that she would not do; and on the morning of his death he asked her to read to him Schooner's hymn from the Bremer Hymnal, and when she broke off at the 8th verse, deeply affected, he said that was enough, wishing to lighten her burden. Thus with his last breath his thought was of her and not of himself. Often he had thanked God that her age was such that their separation would not be for long, and he spoke much of their

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hope for reunion. He died in his 70th year.

Blessig's death was a great grief to all. The funeral took place on 20th February. It was attended by the Prefect of the Bas-Rhin, the Mayor of Strasbourg, and a great assemblage of distinguished persons, magistrates, professors, and clergy of all denominations, and Protestant preachers from all parts of Alsace and from across the Rhine, by the scholars of the Latin School, the students of the Wilhelmiter College, and the children of the Orphanage, and a great crowd of his parishioners. Eight of Blessig's former pupils of the Protestant Seminary bore his coffin on their shoulders. The Service was in the Temple Neuf, where his friend and former pupil Professor C.M. Fritz, preached the funeral oration, from the text in John IV v. 34, "My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent me and to finish His Work".

He was buried in the St. Gall cemetery near the White Tower Gate of the city; the fine memorial later erected on the tomb by his parishioners had Biblical texts on both sides; the cemetery no longer exists, as the area near the White Tower Gate was destroyed in the 1870 War.

The 'Strasbourg Morning Journal' and many newspapers elsewhere contained long obituary notices of Blessig, and several memorial sermons and addresses, delivered by his former colleagues in Church and University in the weeks following his death, were printed and published. His friend Professor C.M. Fritz wrote and published in 1816 a very full biography of Blessig, from which most of the particulars here given have been extracted.

On 7th November 1819 a monument in memory of Blessig was dedicated in the Temple Neuf where he had preached for five and thirty years; it represents Jesus as the Friend of Children, and below is a medallion portrait of Blessig, who is still remembered as the "father of the poor children of Strasbourg". The Temple Neuf was completely destroyed by fire in the 1870 War, but was rebuilt later in Romanesque style; Blessig's monument and a few others escaped damage in the fire, and can be seen today in the rebuilt Church, together with portrait busts of his good friend and Consistory Council colleague Baron Bernard de Turckheim, and of Dr F.H. Redslob his pupil and successor as preacher in the Temple Neuf. In the Sacristy are the two portraits of Blessig, by Sophie de Beyer and by the artist Schuler. A street in the University Quarter of Strasbourg is named '*rue de Blessig*' commemorating his long years of teaching at the University as Theological Professor.

But the best and most lasting memorials to Jean Laurent Blessig were the many good Churchmen and preachers whom he had trained and who handed on his teaching, and the harvest of good which sprang from the philanthropic works which he initiated. On 15th April 1847, the Hundredth Anniversary of Blessig's birth, "The Blessig Charity for the Education and Assistance of Poor Children" was established at an inaugural meeting in Strasbourg, presided over by Superintendent Edel of the Lutheran Church. Its

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objects were the lodging of necessitous children in the homes of approved families in Strasbourg, with payment for their board, clothing, and education; and assistance was also to be given to other necessitous children not placed with families. The Charity was supported by voluntary donations and annual subscriptions; it had no house property or chattels, and all of its funds were used directly for maintenance of the children. A monthly bulletin was published to record progress of the work, and in the bulletin the children were referred to anonymously by initials or numbers.

In every third year, on 15th April, subscribers to the Charity assembled at a General Meeting, when half the members of the Committee retired and others were elected for the ensuing three years. The Administrator of the Charity was appointed for a period of six years, to ensure continuity in the work. The Charity was under the supervision of the Temple Neuf Parish Council, to whom the annual accounts were submitted. P.J. Blessig of Liverpool made several large donations to the funds.

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