

“I have one passion, it is Jesus, Jesus only”-Count Nicholas Zinzendorf

The Moravian Legacy: An Example of the Link Between Passionate Spirituality and the Great Commission

The group of Christians known as the Moravians is relatively small in numbers when compared to larger denominations. However, they have had a tremendous impact on modern Christianity well beyond their actual size. They were a persecuted people for many years but their history reached a dramatic turning point at a revival in 1727 in the community of Herrnhut, under the direction of Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. An explosion of prayer and piety birthed a launch into foreign missions way ahead of its time. Innovations and ideas from the Moravians and their missions effort had profound impacts on future Protestantism especially through the lives of William Carey and John Wesley.

The Moravians were originally known as the *Unitas Fratrum* or the Unity of the Brethren. This group of Christians can trace their roots all the way back to the Hussites or Bohemian Brethren who were followers of John Hus, the fifteenth century pre-reformation reformer. Following Hus' martyrdom on July 6, 1415, they experienced rapid numerical growth. At the time of the reformation, they had about 200,000 members in over 400 congregations throughout Central Europe.¹ In the 1600s, a Roman Catholic became king of Bohemia and began a ruthless persecution against the Moravians. They killed many Moravian leaders and tens of thousands of families became refugees. They remained underground for over one hundred years fleeing

¹ Kenneth B. Mulholland, “Moravians, Puritans and the Modern Missionary Movement,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (April-June 1999): pp 222

persecution.² In 1722, a small group of refugees traveled to Germany and learned of some land on the estate of Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf.

Zinzendorf was wealthy all of his life and had an excellent upbringing. He attended boarding school in Halle, Germany, one of the centers of Pietism. Pietism was an interdenominational and international evangelical movement that countered the rigid and dry Lutheran Orthodoxy with a warm-hearted more experiential spirituality, not focusing on strict doctrinal adherence as much as inner reality of God and ethical living. Pietism sought to revitalize the church through small groups devoted to Bible study, prayer, and accountability.³ A quote by August Hermann Francke captures the agenda of Pietism, “A life changed, a church revived, a nation reformed, a world evangelized.”

Zinzendorf was deeply rooted in the Pietistic movement. His godfather was Philip Spener one of the key early figures in Pietism. August Hermann Francke was his teacher and his tutor was Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, who was the first missionary to Asia. They had daily meetings in professor Francke’s home for worship, prayer, instruction in the word and “edifying accounts concerning the Kingdom of God.”⁴ Through the combination of his teaching, receiving mentoring by a missionary, acquainting himself with several preachers, working with exiles and prisoners, and participating in small groups, at a young age Zinzendorf grew very zealous for the Lord.⁵

Zinzendorf later became a Count and a wealthy landowner. Upon learning of the Moravians’ plight, he allowed the 300 of them to form a community on his estate. During the earlier years of the community, there was rapid growth, which lead to both internal and external

² J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1967), pp 3-5

³ Mulholland, 223

⁴ Hamilton and Hamilton, 7.

⁵ Hamilton and Hamilton, 8.

problems.⁶ Although they were all zealous, many of them came from different backgrounds: Lutheran, Calvinist, Bohemian, Roman Catholic, Pietistic, etc. There was division over issues such as predestination, communion, confession, holiness, meaning and mode of baptism, and more.⁷ They also had problems with a heretical and false teacher that misled much of the community and brought great division. One member of the community by the name of John Kruger was dissuading many to separate from the church and abstain from taking communion with the community.⁸ This division led Zinzendorf to quit his service with the state and give himself to full-time pastoral ministry at Herrnhut. In an effort to bring about unity, Zinzendorf made a number of renewal reforms including a new constitution for the community, which was warmly agreed to on May 12, 1727.⁹ Following the approval of the new constitution and the appointment of elders, spirituality began to significantly increase. They began having seeker-sensitive “stranger meetings” Sunday afternoons as a means of outreach. Many from the community were attracted to them.¹⁰

August 13, 1727 marked the high point of this spiritual renewal. Many usually refer to this day as the “Moravian Revival.” A special communion service was called for the entire community to attend. There was a remarkable sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence accompanied by an outbreak of fervent worship and prayer.¹¹ A Moravian historian commenting on the revival said, “Self-love and self-will, as well as disobedience disappeared and an overwhelming flood of

⁶ John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 69

⁷ John Greenfield, *Power from on High: The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival* (Atlantic City, NJ: The World Revival Prayer Movement, 1927), 23.

Weinlick, 70.

⁸ Weinlick, 73.

⁹ Weinlick, 74.

¹⁰ Weinlick, 76.

¹¹ Weinlick, 77.

grace swept us all out into the great ocean of divine love.”¹² Because of this, the entire community became a closely-knit “religio -socio-economic unit.”¹³ A new fervor for outreach and evangelism also exploded in the community as well as a purity and simplicity in devotion, centering on Christ as the sole passion of living. To continue this new vibrant spirituality they organized into cell groups called “choirs” based on age, sex, and marital status.¹⁴ These groups met daily for worship, prayer, discussion and Scripture. They were quite informal and the meetings were lead according to the Spirit’s moving.¹⁵ This statement by Zinzendorf epitomizes the new Moravian attitude,

“Our method in proclaiming salvation is this: to point out to every heart the Loving Lamb, who died for us and although He was the Son of God offered himself for our sins, as his God, his Mediator between God and man, his throne of grace, his example, his brother, his preacher of the law, his comforter, his confessor, his Savior, in short, his all in all; by the preaching of His blood, and of His love unto death even the death of the cross; never either in the discourse or in the argument to digress even for a quarter of an hour from the Loving Lamb; to name no virtue except in Him, and from Him, and on His account; to preach no commandment except faith in Him; no other justification but that He atoned for us, no other sanctification but the privilege to sin no more; no other happiness but to be near Him, to think of Him and do His pleasure; no other self-denial but to be deprived of Him and His blessings; no other calamity but to displease Him; no other life but in Him.”¹⁶

Possibly one of the most remarkable results of the Moravian revival in Herrnhut was the beginning of what they called “hourly intercession.” Out of this spiritual awakening came a passionate commitment to prayer that manifested itself in these “hourly intercessions,” in which members of the community gathered to pray around the clock.¹⁷ The key verse for this initiative was Leviticus 6:13, “The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go

¹² Greenfield, 14.

¹³ Weinlick, 83.

¹⁴ David A. Schattschneider, “William Carey, Modern Missions and the Moravian Influence,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22 (January 1998): 8-12.

¹⁵ Weinlick, 84.

¹⁶ Greenfield, 47.

¹⁷ Weinlick, 86.

out.”¹⁸ They believed that since the fire in the ancient temple would continually burn, likewise in the church, which is now the temple of God, “wherein the true fire of His Spirit is kindled, the prayers of the saints ought always to ascend to the Lord.”¹⁹ They began with twenty-four men and twenty-four women each committing to at least one hour a day but this number quickly and dramatically increased to over seventy plus many of the children and young people. This intercession continued nonstop for over one hundred years.²⁰ In addition to the round-the-clock prayer ministry, the entire community gathered for worship and prayer every morning and evening.²¹ Many scholars, historians and writers believe that this unceasing prayer was the backbone of and power behind the entire Moravian community and their groundbreaking missions work.²²

Traditionally, Roman Catholic writers such as Robert Francis Cardinal Ballarmino insisted that vital missionary outreach was a necessary sign of the true church. The Catholics have always had such outreach but Protestants in the years following the reformation did not.²³ However, with the renewed zeal for God and fervor for prayer something altogether different came out of Herrnhut. “Prayer of that kind always leads to action,” says John Greenfield. “In this case it kindled a burning desire to make Christ’s salvation known to the heathen. It led to the beginning of modern foreign missions.”²⁴ Many consider William Carey to be the father of the

¹⁸ Leviticus 6:13 NIV.

¹⁹ Ami Bost, *History of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1838), 239.

²⁰ Bost, 240; Greenfield, 28.

²¹ Weinlick, 86

²² Leslie K. Tarr, “A Prayer Meeting That Lasted 100 Years,” *Decision*, May 1977, 16.

Mulholland, 225; Greenfield, 31.

²³ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 9

²⁴ Greenfield, 31.

modern Protestant missions movement in founding the Baptist Missionary Society.²⁵ However, a tremendous move of missions began in Herrnhut some 60 years before Carey's missions work began.

The Moravians were the first Protestants to believe that evangelizing the lost was the responsibility of the entire church, not just its preachers.²⁶ They became committed to witness and world missions as a church, that is, the whole church became a missionary society.²⁷ They began to move away from the territorial view of the church in which churches carried out their responsibility for mission if the church was legally established in any given area. They were determined to spread beyond parochial boundaries.²⁸

To that end, they developed settlement congregations that were self-contained, self-supported towns, meant to be centers of outreach.²⁹ This outreach took on two forms. The first referred to as "diaspora," is when people would go out from the settlement and seek to organize pietistic renewal groups within existing congregations. They also sent out missionaries to foreign nations to form outposts of witness in unreached countries.³⁰ These workers were not educated and ordained ministers but were average people. The first two Moravian missionaries were gravediggers. Subsequent missionaries included potters, carpenters, and people of many other ordinary professions.³¹ They pioneered (if you discount the early Christians) the idea of "tentmaking" as a missionary strategy. They learned trades and commerce to support themselves

²⁵ Mulholland, 221.

²⁶ Mulholland, 222.

²⁷ Paul E. Pierson, "Total Commitment to World Missions." *Christian History* 1 (1982): 6.

²⁸ David A. Schattschneider, "Pioneers in Mission: Zinzendorf and the Moravians," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8 No. 2 (April 1984): 64.

²⁹ Schattschneider, 9.

³⁰ Schattschneider, 9.

³¹ J. Herbert Kane, *A Global View of Christian Missions: From Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 79-80.

as well as provide natural means of interaction with people.³² The ultimate goal of all these labors was to have an indigenous church fully in the hands of local people. The Moravians were the pioneers of this concept as well.³³

The results of Moravian outreach efforts were amazing. Almost immediately following the revival, many community members became itinerant evangelists traveling through Germany and Austria.³⁴ It was not long before they sent out their first foreign missionaries to the West Indies, and soon after that Greenland, India, Ethiopia and other parts of the world. On the first mention of sending missionaries twenty-six people volunteered at once.³⁵ This was the first time in the history of Protestantism that entire communities would send out missionaries with their full support. During the next 28 years before Zinzendorf's death, the Moravians sent out hundreds of missionaries³⁶ across the globe—to every country in Europe as well as many nations in North and South America, Asia and Africa.³⁷ In fact the Moravians did more missions work in 20 years than the entire Protestant church had done since its inception. At one point, the Moravians had three people on the mission field for every one person at home.³⁸ Fifty years before William Carey even founded the Baptist Mission Society, the Moravians had missionaries all over the world.³⁹

Many consider William Carey to be the father of the Protestant missions movement in founding the Baptist Missionary Society. However, his work in establishing the Society did not

³² Mulholland, 224.

³³ Schattschneider *Pioneers*, 67.

³⁴ Weinlick, 88.

³⁵ Schattschneider *Pioneers*, 64; Mulholland, 224.

³⁶ Mulholland, 224

³⁷ Greenfield, 18.

³⁸ Kane, 79.

³⁹ Greenfield, 18.

come out of nothing, it was greatly influenced by amongst other things, the Moravians.⁴⁰ In fact, it was Carey's reading of the Moravian's missions magazine that first gave him the idea of creating a missions society.⁴¹

For modern Protestants it might seem odd to think that at one time the big issue concerning missions was not how much of a priority to give it, or how much money to invest in it, or how to increase its effectiveness but whether it was something that should be done at all. Many of the Protestants at that time were highly influenced by hyper-Calvinism which went as far as to say that if God wanted to convert the world he could and would do so without the help of Christians. The premise was a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the belief that God does not 'need' man to accomplish His purposes.⁴² Carey was quite the oddball to think otherwise and one would wonder where he got such ideas. In the eighteenth century, the Moravians were much involved in the England's revival. They had established settlement congregations at Fairfield, near Manchester; at Ockbrook in Derbyshire and at Fulneck in Yorkshire. By 1741 they had a society in Nottingham and by 1769 they had congregations established in Northampton and preaching stations in neighboring towns including Towcester. These locations were all in close proximity to where Carey lived most of his life—Paulerspury, Northamptonshire.⁴³ Considering this, it would have been very easy for Carey to have run into some Moravians or at least seen some of their literature.

In May of 1792, Carey was preaching at a meeting of Baptist ministers in Nottingham. He preached a stirring challenge for believers to accept Christ's call to preach the gospel to all

⁴⁰ Mulholland, 221.

⁴¹ Greenfield, 19.

⁴² Schattschneider *William Carey*, 10.

⁴³ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 10; Hamilton and Hamilton, 121; 209.

nations.⁴⁴ It was at this meeting that he presented his classic work, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens, in which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings are considered*. Some consider this document to have a comparable watershed effect on the experience and expression of Christianity and the unfolding of Christian history as Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses.⁴⁵ This short eighty-seven-page document is flooded with references to the Moravians. First, he argues that Christ's command to preach the gospel to all is still valid and that only the impossibility of doing it would excuse believers. However, it is entirely possible for,

'have not the popish missionaries surmounted all those difficulties which have generally thought to be insuperable? Have not the missionaries of the Unitas Fratrum, or Moravian Brethren, encountered the scorching heat of Abyssinia, the frozen climes of Greenland and Labrador, their difficult languages and savage manners?'"⁴⁶

In the next section of the book he presents a survey of the efforts to expand the church beginning with Pentecost and continuing up to his own day. He comments,

'But none of the moderns have equaled the Moravian Brethren in this good work; they have sent missions to Greenland, Labrador, and several of the West-Indian Islands, which have been blessed for good. They have likewise sent to Abyssinia.'"⁴⁷

Section 3 is a "Survey of the Present State of the World." It contains twenty-three pages of lists in parallel columns giving the name of the country, its length and breadth, number of

⁴⁴ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 9

⁴⁵ Kane, 85.

⁴⁶ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens, in which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings are considered* (Leicester, England: Baptist Missionary Society, 1792), 11.

⁴⁷ Carey, 37.

inhabitants and religion. In the listing for Greenland, although the length and breadth are ‘undiscovered’ it states that its 7000 inhabitants are either ‘pagan’ or ‘Moravian Christian.’⁴⁸

The final section attempts to counter practical arguments against missions work and give specific suggestions to aid the cause. To the objection that one might be killed in mission service, Carey wrote, ‘No wonder if the imprudence of sailors should prompt them to offend the simple savage, and the offence be resented; but Elliot, Brainerd and the Moravians missionaries have seldom been molested.’⁴⁹

It is clear from Carey’s *Enquiry* that he was well aware of the Moravian missions efforts and even more so, thought extremely highly of them. However, despite Carey’s passionate plea and the arguments presented in *Enquiry*, the ministers he was presenting to were not convinced.⁵⁰ He did however get them to agree to hold another meeting in October of 1792. That October as Baptist ministers gathered in a gesture of passion he threw several issues of the magazine *Periodical Accounts* on the table and cried, ‘See what the Moravians have done! Cannot we follow their example and in obedience to our Heavenly Master go out into the world and preach the Gospel to the heathen?’⁵¹ This magazine, *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Established Among the Heathen*, was a publication that began printing in 1790 to acquaint British evangelicals with the Moravian missions work and solicit their support. Volume 1 of *Periodical Accounts* contained a twelve-page history of Moravian missions, a survey of the contemporary state of missions and statistics about the work. Other editions included reports, letters, diary extracts and news items about Moravian mission work around the world. Apparently that was all the convincing this group of ministers needed because

⁴⁸ Carey. 38, 41.

⁴⁹ Carey, 71.

⁵⁰ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 10.

⁵¹ Greenfield, 19; Joseph E. Hutton, *A History of Moravian Missions* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1923), 3.

that day they officially established the *Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen*, later renamed the Baptist Missionary Society.⁵²

The Moravians not only influenced William Carey in his efforts to form the Baptist Missionary Society but also in many of his missionary practices. Many of his basic practices such as learning the language and culture of the people one is working among, translating the Bible into native languages and teaching indigenous people to run their own churches and be missionaries to their own people were all done by the Moravians some fifty years before.⁵³ Carey also modeled his missionary communities after the Moravian settlement communities. In his mission to India he had six families living in one house, eating meals together, keeping all earnings in a common treasury, making decisions by majority vote, and rotating responsibilities ranging from housekeeping to leading devotionals on a monthly basis.⁵⁴ He also modeled day-to-day mission operations after the Moravians. In his own words, “I have also laid down a plan for the future management of the Temporal Concerns of the Mission which I strongly recommend as the most Eligible way that I can think of and similar to that of the Moravians.”⁵⁵

Overall, the Moravians greatly influenced Carey, even by his own admission. His deep conviction concerning the necessity and possibility of world mission was rooted in the Moravian forerunners. Of them he said,

“I rejoice much at the missionary spirit which has lately gone forth: surely it is a prelude to a universal spread of the Gospel! Your account of the German Moravian Brethren’s affectionate regards towards me is very pleasing. I am not much moved by what men in general say of me yet I cannot be insensible to the regards of men eminent for godliness.”⁵⁶

⁵² Schattschneider *William Carey*, 10.

⁵³ Schattschneider *Pioneers*, 67.

⁵⁴ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 10.

⁵⁵ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 12.

⁵⁶ Schattschneider *William Carey*, 12.

One can only imagine the impact of William Carey's life and missions endeavors on the Christian church today. Not only did the Baptist Mission Society rapidly expand, but it also birthed and encouraged similar missions works in many other denominations and paved the way even more for an exponential proliferation of world missions and evangelism.

The Moravians also had a profound influence on John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination and a leader in the British revival. The young John Wesley's religion was a mixture of Puritan legalism, high church sacramental Anglicanism and practical piety.⁵⁷ However, he had many unsettled issues in his faith, which would be addressed especially in context to his dealings with the Moravians. In fact, it was Wesley's contact with the Moravians in the American colonies and England that led to his heart-warming experience at Aldersgate, without which there would be no Methodism as it is historically known.⁵⁸ John Wesley first met Moravian people when he was a missionary in Georgia. The Moravians had a missionary work established in Georgia. General Oglethorpe, founder of the Georgian colony in America, was powerfully influenced by Zinzendorf and gave land to the Moravians to start a mission there.⁵⁹ His first actual encounter with them was on the ship to Georgia. At one point there was a horrible storm. Wesley went into an utter panic but was shocked that the Moravians had such a strong sense of peace and calm in the face of possible death. While in Georgia the Moravians presented him his need for a personal relationship with Christ.⁶⁰ They pressed Wesley concerning being "born -again," gaining salvation instantaneously and being certain of this salvation through a subjective experience they called the "witness of the Spirit." Pastor Spangenburg of the Moravians asked Wesley if he was sure of his salvation. He could say he intellectually knew the

⁵⁷ F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Religious Roots of the Early Moravian and Methodist Movements," *Methodist History* 24 No. 3 (April 1986): 139.

⁵⁸ Stoeffler, 139.

⁵⁹ Mulholland, 225.

⁶⁰ Mulholland, 225.

truth but had no inner assurance of his salvation.⁶¹ Wesley returned to England profoundly impacted by the Moravians yet profoundly disillusioned with his own spirituality. As Michael Henderson says,

“The depth and tenacity of the Moravians’ faith evoked Wesley’s admiration, but it was also intimidating to Him. He recognized that these unlettered and unknown Moravian exiles had a quality which was basic and essential to Christianity, but was totally beyond his grasp. He had studied theology and biblical literature in the original languages, given himself in charity and service, taken upon himself the reproach of his fellows for the sake of Christ, molded his life to a pattern of ascetic discipline and yet had failed to find that simple faith which sustained the Moravians in the time of crisis.”⁶²

Upon his return to England he penned the famous line in his journal, “I went to convert the Indians, but who, oh who will convert me?”⁶³

In London he had much more interaction with the Moravians, specifically a man named Peter Bohler. For months following his return from Georgia, he sought out meaning and security in issues of spirituality.⁶⁴ Bohler counseled Wesley and urged him to seek instantaneous conversion—salvation by grace through faith. Wesley conducted a thorough investigation of the New Testament concerning whether instantaneous conversion was the Scriptural norm. He also conversed with many others who had experienced such conversion. At the end of his investigation, he concluded that the change of behavior and lifestyle of those experiencing conversion could only be explained “in terms of radical personal and spiritual transformation”⁶⁵ and that salvation was a gift of God freely given to all who sought it. He proceeded to renounce all dependence upon his own works and righteousness and sought saving faith through “a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him as my Christ, my sole justification,

⁶¹ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Napanea, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 53.

⁶² Henderson, 53.

⁶³ Mulholland, 226.

⁶⁴ Henderson, 55.

⁶⁵ Henderson, 55.

sanctification and redemption.⁶⁶” The day after writing this in his journal Wesley had his famous ‘heart -warming’ experience at the Aldersgate Street society. Wesley marked that day, May 24, 1738, as the day of his conversion and the most significant turning point of his life.⁶⁷ Wesley so valued the conversion experience that he discounted all his previous efforts as useless.⁶⁸ Through this experience Wesley was imparted four truths from the Moravians that became central to his life and ministry, that salvation is through Christ’s atonement alone, not through works, that its sole condition is faith, it is often instantaneous, and that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit attests to it.⁶⁹ The ever-important Wesleyan doctrine of conversion became more than simply “a change of direction following repentance,” not only seeking but finding God and having personal assurance of His forgiveness.⁷⁰ Furthermore, this set the precedent for Methodism to be ‘first of all in Wesley’s favorite terms, ‘heart -felt religion,” not merely proper conduct, correct theology, or humanitarian service.⁷¹”

The Moravian influence on Wesley did not cease with his conversion however. He determined to learn as much as he could about the Moravians and visit Herrnhut for himself. On June 13, 1738, only twenty days after his conversion, he set forth from England to the Moravian community in Germany.⁷² He spent several weeks in Herrnhut participating in the life of the community on all levels and observing their organizational structures.⁷³ In his journal on July 7 he wrote,

⁶⁶ Henderson, 55.

⁶⁷ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley Volume 18: Journals and Diaries I (1735-38)* ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 249

⁶⁸ Henderson, 57.

⁶⁹ Greenfield, 40.

⁷⁰ Henderson, 56.

⁷¹ Henderson, 57.

⁷² Wesley *Journals and Diaries I*, 255.

⁷³ Wesley *Journals and Diaries I*, 269.

“God has given me at length the desire of my heart. I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind that was in Christ and who so walk as He walked. As they have all one Lord and one faith, so they are all partakers of one Spirit, the spirit of meekness and love, which uniformly and continually animates all their conversation. Oh how high and holy a thing Christianity is! And how widely distant from that (I know not what) which is so called, though it neither purifies the heart nor renews the life after the image of our blessed Redeemer.”⁷⁴

His stay in Herrnhut powerfully affected Wesley, as did the preaching and the people. Pages and pages of his journal explicitly devoted to copying down conversations, sermons and testimonies evidence this.⁷⁵ The vibrant spirituality and authentically lived-out Christianity filled Wesley with faith and inspiration—as well as many ideas about reformation in England. Wesley left Herrnhut to return to England on August 14, 1738. At that time he wrote in his journal,

“I could gladly have spent my life here; but for my master calling me to labour in another part of his vineyard. On Monday 14, I was constrained to take my leave of this happy place...O when shall Christianity cover the earth, as the ‘waters cover the sea.’^{76,}

Much of what Wesley learned while in Herrnhut he applied to his work in England. Within a few weeks of his return he had organized converts into bands after the Moravian model.⁷⁷ Zinzendorf’s “diaspora societies” served as a model for Wesley’s Methodist societies — centers for instruction, prayer and fellowship, which served for the eventual goal of outreach.⁷⁸ Their basic organizational structures closely parallel each other. The Moravians separated instruction and fellowship (including prayer, confession, accountability, etc.) as two distinct

⁷⁴ John Wesley, *The Letters of Reverend John Wesley, Volume 1 (November 3, 1721 to November 14, 1741)* ed. John Elford (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 271.

⁷⁵ Wesley *Journals and Diaries I*, 271-297.

⁷⁶ Wesley *Journals and Diaries I*, 272. It is important to note that Wesley’s opinion of the Moravians was not entirely positive. It is true that Wesley eventually had a break with the Moravians. To not interrupt the flow of the discussion but still giving a fair presentation of the truth, Wesley’s conflicts with the Moravians will be addressed in the appendix.

⁷⁷ Henderson, 61-62.

⁷⁸ Stoeffler, 140.

functions and thus accomplished them in separate meetings. They received instruction in groups called “choirs.” These meetings were for teaching only. Wesley’s “class meetings” parallel the Moravian “choirs.” The Moravian “bands” were for sharing, confession and prayer —they allowed no teaching. Wesley’s “bands” were identical in nature. ⁷⁹

Another contribution of the Moravians to the Methodists is the inclusion of lay people and women in ministry. In 18th century Anglicanism, the vast gulf between clergy and laity excluded the average person from ministry. It also meant the virtual exclusion of women from ministry of any kind. During Wesley’s visit at Herrnhut, the effectiveness of lay preachers, teachers and ministers—of average, often uneducated people doing real ministry greatly impressed him. He also noted the value of including women in the leadership and ministry of the church. Much of the involvement of lay preachers and women in early Methodism can be traced to the Moravians. ⁸⁰

Another major concept the Moravians imparted to Wesley was “ecclesiolae in ecclesia,” which is Latin for “little churches within the church.” Zinzendorf believed that the best way to bring renewal to the church was through creating independent renewal groups within existing churches. At first Wesley did not plan to create a new denomination. He used this method to “bring new life to the stagnant structures of the Church of England. ⁸¹”

In summary, the Moravians, due to their dramatic revival in 1727 and their commitment to prayer and vibrant spirituality, had a major impact on the future of Christianity. Their zeal for missions and their labors around the world far eclipsed any missions efforts in Protestant history and revolutionized the evangelistic state of the Protestant church. It was the testimony of the

⁷⁹ Henderson, 60.

⁸⁰ Henderson, 61.

⁸¹ Henderson, 61.

Moravian missions that led to the creation of the Baptist Missionary Society, which opened the way for a flood of Protestant missions in the following centuries. Carey also modeled his original missions in India after the Moravian communities. The Moravians also immensely affected John Wesley. Through interactions with them, he finally pursued conversion by faith and received the inner witness of the Spirit, setting the foundation for the ‘heart-felt’ Methodist spirituality, emphasis on salvation by faith, instantaneous conversion, and witness of the Spirit. Furthermore, Wesley based the organization of the Methodist societies on the Moravian structures. All in all, the revival of a small community of exiled religious dissidents and their commitment to fervent prayer and passionate living had a direct influence on the millions of lives forever changed by the Methodist and related movements and the Baptist Missionary Society and all of the missions that sprang forth from it.

Many times throughout its pages, the Bible strategically links piety, prayer in particular, with the Great Commission. Isaiah 56 speaks of the house of God being a ‘house of prayer’ in context to the exiles of the earth being gathered to God. Isaiah 62 links the revelation of God’s heart and setting praying ‘watchmen’ on the wall with establishing Jerusalem as the ‘praise of the earth.’ Micah 4:1-2 speaks of the mountain of the Lord’s temple (the ‘house of prayer’) being established as ‘chief among the mountains’ leading to many nations ‘stre aming to it.’ In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus identifies two parts of fulfilling the Great Commission, ‘praying’ and ‘going.’ Both parts are necessary to complete the work. Paul himself over and over considers it necessary that the people of God be praying so that a door would be open in the Spirit for the proclamation of the Word of God to be effective and powerful (i.e. Col 4:2-4).

Unfortunately, more often than not the church has separated these two functions as mutually exclusive; either the church can devote its time to living lives of prayer and contemplation or giving itself to preaching, teaching and evangelism (the sadder part is that many times neither of these things are done by the majority of Christians). The theory goes that if we give ourselves to pursuing the life like Anna in the temple (Luke 2:36-38) fasting and praying night and day or Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42) sitting at the feet of Jesus, the outreach ministry of the church will be damaged. Unfortunately, there undoubtedly have been times when groups are so caught up in their own pursuit of God that they move out into the mountains (literally or figuratively) never to be heard from again. However, I believe there was divine strategy in action when Jesus told Martha in Luke 10, that there is only “one thing needed” and that Mary had chosen it by sitting at His feet. He obviously did not mean that only thing one should give themselves to is the pursuit of relationship with God, for he commissioned the apostles to go forth preaching, healing, and casting out demons. More likely, what Jesus means by this is that from the place of intimate relationship with God, all other facets of the Kingdom flow. Evangelism works best in the context of passionate piety and fervent prayer.

The Moravians are a prime example of this. It is clear that the Moravians operated in a place of enjoyment and pleasure in God. They knew no concept of sacrifice except being deprived of the presence of Jesus. They truly considered it life at its best to be near to God, to commune in His Word, to seek Him in prayer and partner with Him in intercession. It was from this place of satisfaction in God that they were able to sustain one of the most striking examples of prayer ministry ever in history—continuing twenty four hours a day for over one hundred years. From this place of fervor in prayer and overall spirituality, they became forerunners in Protestant missions and evangelism. It is hard to estimate the complete impact of the prayers of

the faithful at Herrnhut. Those in the community could have hardly imagined the far-reaching effects of the Moravian influence on Christianity and the world we know today.

Upon hearing such an account one might be tempted to think, “well, what the church needs is more prayer—we need to start a prayer meeting at our church!” That is a noble and admirable goal—something definitely worth pursuing, but there is a fundamental piece of the puzzle missing. A number churches throughout America do indeed have regular prayer meetings, not a majority or even a significant minority, but many do. However, in these cases, the great majority of them are sparsely attended. Many other churches have had regular prayer meetings but since have ceased doing so. In my personal experience and research on the subject the reason for this is that many Christians believe that prayer meetings are *boring* or difficult. In fact, they believe that prayer overall is a boring pursuit. The strength of the Moravian spirituality was that they had in the words of Count Zinzendorf, “no other happiness but to be near Him.”⁸² They had come to a place of enjoyment in God and in prayer that sustained and refreshed them in their pursuit of God. They had no need for the common exhortation to “pay the price” in prayer in order to see God work in power, as though God was something one must *endure*. Instead, they had living reality of the concept in Isaiah 56:7 when Isaiah prophesies that God will give his people “joy in the house of prayer.” The church would do well not to skip straight to the prayer meeting, but first to learn simply to enjoy intimacy with God, to freely receive his love and mercy and understand their acceptance in His sight. From this place of freedom and confidence, the church will be able to give themselves to prayer with sustaining strength and power for the reward of prayer will not primarily be the answers but Jesus Himself. There will be no need to pressure, coerce, or use condemnation tactics to get people into prayer meetings; people will

⁸² Greenfield, 47.

want to be there people because their greatest pleasure is in partnership with the Son of God.

When people enjoy prayer, the prayer meetings will fill up overnight. When that happens, when the church of Jesus Christ unites in prayer, it will only be a matter of time until the church is filled with the power of God, radiant in love, blazing in holiness, overflowing with compassion for a broken and hurting world, and boldness in witness. When the community of believers touch the heart of God enabling them to give themselves to prayer, as testified in Scripture and history, with the Moravians and others, missions and evangelism will break forth upon the earth like never seen before.

Appendix: John Wesley's Conflicts with the Moravians

Throughout this paper, the Moravians have been presented in a primarily positive light. Likewise have John Wesley's interaction with and opinions of the Moravians been portrayed. However, Wesley did have a few conflicts with the Moravians and eventually broke relations with the Moravians in London. This issue must be addressed in order to be faithful to the historical record. Conflict first arose when returning from his visit to Herrnhut. He was not permitted to take communion with the Moravians in the Marienborn community. The reason for this is never fully explained but it is mentioned that they said he was a 'restless man.'⁸³ Wesley was somewhat offended by this and did not understand why they would not permit him to take part in the sacrament. He interpreted it as religious exclusivism. Perhaps however as historian J.E. Hutton suggests is that they feared he was being tempted to leave the Church of England and join the Moravian church. The Moravians did not believe in promoting their own denomination but sought first and foremost to bring renewal to other denominations. This is possibly why they called him restless—and thus they did not want him to get too closely knit with their community.

His main issue with the Moravians though, was a theological conflict at the Fetter Lane Society in London. A young man named Philip Henry Molther, who while not being very well grounded in the scriptures but possessing a very charismatic personality, began preaching antinomian heresies and religious exclusivism. Since a number of the Moravians were simple and untrained people, they went along with these false teachings. At its worst point some even said, 'It is impossible for anyone to be a true church outside the Moravian Church.' Wesley was

⁸³ Joseph E. Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (Fetter Lane, London: Moravian Publication Office, 1909), 295.

outraged and disgusted. After arguing for some time, he simply broke all ties with the Moravians.⁸⁴ This clearly was not in line with historic Moravian teaching which emphasized “ecclesiolae in ecclesia,” ecumenicalism, evangelism, missions, outreach and dedication to personal piety.

A misunderstanding between Wesley and Zinzendorf concerning entire sanctification made matters worse. Through much of the conversation Zinzendorf was speaking of imputed righteousness, namely justification and one’s standing before God, while Wesley was speaking of experiential righteousness, namely one’s sanctification unto good works.⁸⁵ Zinzendorf asserted that the Christians righteousness is complete at conversion and cannot increase since Christ is the believer’s righteousness. Wesley believed the Moravians were antinomian while in reality Zinzendorf was speaking of sanctification in terms similar to ones Wesley himself used at his conversion when he said that he had a “full reliance on the blood of Christ...a trust in Him as my Christ; my sole justification, *sanctification*, and redemption.⁸⁶” So the gulf between Wesley and the Moravians grew deeper as Zinzendorf argued using Wesley’s previous confession of Christ as his entire sanctification, while Wesley was fixated on the concept of entire sanctification as perfection in love and holiness.

The ironic part of this whole story is that following Wesley’s departure from the Fetter Lane Society, Molther did as well. James Hutton took over senior leadership and began to restore the society to be more in line with the Moravian fervent spirituality, evicting the antinomianism. They then renewed emphasis on proper teaching and doctrine as well as outreach and missions.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Hutton *Moravian Church*, 296-298.

⁸⁵ Wesley *Journals and Diaries II*, 211-215.

⁸⁶ Wesley *Journals and Diaries I*, 248.

⁸⁷ Hutton *Moravian Church*, 301-302.

Unfortunately, Wesley's relationship with the Moravians did not end on a positive note. Though often presented by those writing from Wesley's perspective, including Wesley himself, as an issue of large differences between Wesleyan and Moravian doctrine, it seems as though it was more a series of misunderstandings concerning the nature, beliefs and practices of the Moravian church. However, this conflict did not negate the massive influence the Moravians did have on Wesley's life and ministry.

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