

MORAVIAN MISSIONARIES

“I tell you the truth, ‘Jesus replied,’ no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:29-31)

The name Moravian identifies these brethren with the historic church in Bohemia and Moravia. Today the area is known as the Czech Republic. In the mid-ninth century it is said that these countries converted to Christ through the influence of two Greek Orthodox missionaries, Cyril and Methodius. When the institutional church strayed from the Scriptures, godly reformers preached repentance. One of these reformers was John Hus, a professor of philosophy at the University in Prague. His efforts to preach repentance caused him to be burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

The reformation spirit, however, did not die with Hus. It became an integral part of the Moravian movement. In 1457 the followers of Hus gathered in the village of Kunvald about 100 miles east of Prague. This was 60 years before Luther and 100 years before the Anglican Church. The Moravians determined to be *“people who have decided once and for all to be guided only by the gospel and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy apostles in gentleness, humility, patience, and love for our enemies.”*

The Moravian missionary movement was founded in Europe by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. In May 1727, he and other Moravians, felt led to pray for missions. Thus began a prayer meeting that continued 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week, for over 100 years.

The first two Moravian missionaries sent out were John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman. Dober was a potter and Nitschman was a carpenter. These men left from Copenhagen Oct. 8, 1732 and arrived in St. Thomas two months later on Dec. 13th. Moravian missionaries baptized 13,000 converts before any other missionaries arrived on the scene.

There is a popular legend that these men sold themselves into slavery to accomplish their goal. While it is doubtful that white men would be purchased as slaves, it is realistic to conclude that since slaves were denied leisure and free time, the best way to communicate Christ to them would be by working side by side with them in the fields. Bonnie Bartonin, in her book *The Bow and the Cloud*, states: *“This intelligence did not in the smallest degree daunt the devoted young men; they were both ready, not only to be bound, but to die for the Lord Jesus”*.

The dedication of Moravian missionaries was contagious. On his journey to America John Wesley met a company of twenty-one German Moravians. Their simple faith made a profound impression on him. In London when he was introduced to another Moravian, Peter Boehler, this man reportedly led Wesley to Christ. On 24 May 1738, Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed” at a meeting in Aldersgate Street. This experience prompted him to be an evangelist and inspired him to kindle a fire which he prayed would never be extinguished.

A short time later Wesley visited the Moravian settlement at Herrnhut and met Count Zinzendorf. Thereafter, he returned to England and set about his life’s work of reforming the church, the nation, and promoting holiness. He longed to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men.

Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). He was right! Consequently there has never been a time, from then until now, when Jesus was a Shepherd without sheep, a King without subjects, or a General without soldiers. These faithful Moravians are representative of millions of other faithful brethren of whom the world is not worthy!