

History Of The Moravian Church  
St. John Historical Society  
Sunday, March 20, 1977  
At Emmaus, St. John V.I. U.S.A.

HOW CHRISTIANITY CAME TO EASTERN EUROPE:

When the Slavic peoples of eastern Europe, specifically those of Bohemia and Moravia--later provinces of Czechoslovakia--wanted Christian teachers, they sent for them, not to Rome but from Constantinople. Constantinople represented a doctrinally sound Christianity at that time. It was also the headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Church. The brothers Cyril and Methodius, of Thessalonica, or Thessalonki, and also priests of the Greek Church were sent to Moravia. Encouraged at first by the Church of Rome, they were able to build up a strong work. But, eventually Rome began to look with disfavour upon this slavic church--for one reason its services were not conducted in the traditional latin. Eventually all the Greek priests were banished and the church in Bohemia and Moravia was forced to conform to the practices of Rome. The repressive measures sowed seeds of discontent which were to bear fruit in rebellion at a later date.

JOHN HUS.

On July 6, 1369 (some authorities conjecture 1373) there was born in the village of Husinec a boy named John who became known as John of Husinec, and later simply as John Hus. He was encouraged by the monks in the monastery where he went to school to become a priest. Hus later attended the University of Prague and eventually became a priest of the Roman Church in 1402.

Hue was a brilliant student and a forceful speaker. His preaching from the pulpit of the Bethlehem chapel shook all of Europe. Being an educated man, he was able to read the scriptures in latin, but he saw no reason why the scripture had to be read in latin, to the common people. He could see that the Roman Catholic Church's practice was not in accordance

with the teachings of Jesus. Hus also noted that the sale of indulgences or attempting the purchase of forgiveness of sins was not scriptural. Hus was now attracting a large following that was sympathetic to his views. As rector of the University of Prague, he had about 8,000 students under his charge. More and more, Hus read John Wyclif's writings, and he delved deeper into Theology. Hus went a step farther when he felt the cup should not be withdrawn from the laity. Then he condemned the papacy. During this period, the papacy had experienced much corruption, and this was divided. Three men were claiming to be pope.

Because of Hus' teaching, the dispute between Hus and the Roman Church was now on. The Roman Church made the first move in an attempt to settle the dispute. In 1414 a council was set up in Constance to hear the dispute. Hus was invited to attend and offered a safe conduct. His friends warned him not to go. However, Hus went, was arrested, and imprisoned. His friends had to arrange for his trial which was a mere mockery. During his trial--the main aim of the Roman church was to get him to change his views. His main views were:

- (a) He taught the Bible should be read in the language of the people.
- (b) He taught the sale of Indulgences was not supported by scripture.
- (c) He taught the Holy Communion was to be observed in two kinds. Hence, the 'cup' should be given to the laity.

For his refusal to recant, he was condemned and burnt at the stake on July 6, 1415. After he was burnt, his ashes were scattered in the Rhine river. Today a granite boulder marks the place where Hus was burnt.

In Moravian congregations the Sunday nearest July 6th is celebrated in memory of the martyrs. For Hus' martyrdom was only the beginning. In Moravian Church History there is 'The Day of Blood' when about 27 persons were beheaded for their faith. Then there was the 30 years war in which many were killed. This 30 years was an example of the persecution and suffering which our Fathers endured.

#### **THE HIDDEN SEED**

After the martyrdom of Hus, and others, it seemed as if the church would die. The Brethren's church had gone underground. The persecution of the church was fierce. It continued until the enemies thought it was

completely destroyed. But the church did not die. There remained a "Hidden Seed", or a remnant. In spite of bitter persecution, there remained a deep love for the old church. These people lived in caves, deep in forests, and in barns, and passed on their faith to their posterity.

#### THE RENEWED CHURCH.

Two men played a very important role in the renewal of the present Moravian Church. One was a poor carpenter. His name was Christian David. He was born December 31, 1690. His parents were Catholic, and he was taught to hate Protestants with a hatred as "hot as a baking oven." In spite of all this teaching, Christian David found the truth. In 1717 in Silesia he became seriously ill. In fact he was sick for twenty weeks. During his illness, Pastor John Schwedler, a Lutheran, led him to Christ as his saviour.

After he was well enough, he made a trip back and forth to protestant communities. He preached the faith that changed his life. He did so at the risk of his own personal safety. Several years passed before his effort bore fruit, but eventually fruit came. In the spring of 1722, Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf heard about him and ask to see him. Eagerly Christian told his story. After hearing Christian's story, Zinzendorf promised to help the early Moravian Brethren with land and money. So eventually these Brethren went to live in their land of promise, Herrnhut.

Count Zinzendorf was the second person who played an important role in the renewal of the church. Zinzendorf was born in Dresden, Saxony in 1700. His grandfather left Austria for the sake of his faith and now the family had become wealthy and highly respected in Saxony.

The young Count was. well educated. He attended Francke's school at Halle. In those days schools were places of whipping and punishment. Hence the Count had experiences of an unhappy nature. While at this school he became impressed with christian ideas, that were later to blossom in his life; making a deeply devout servant of Christ. His interests, closeness, and teachings in the Moravian Church destined him to be one of the church's great leaders.

#### HOW THE MORAVIANS BECAME MISSIONARIES.

In 1731 Count Zinzendorf received an invitation to attend the coronation of Christian VI as King of Denmark. He called a meeting of the Hernnhuters, read the invitation, and preparations got underway. At the Coronation

Count Zinzendorf met Anthony Ulrich, a slave. Anthony Ulrich was brought by his master from St. Thomas to Denmark. Zinzendorf and Anthony had conversations in which, Zinzendorf learnt of the poor conditions under which the slaves lived. Zinzendorf was concerned that they had no missionaries working with them. This conversation was the catalyst that brought the first Moravian missionaries to the western Hemisphere.

In December 1732 Leonard Bober and David Nitschmann landed at St. Thomas. The work grew with much difficulty and hardship, and this we must now by-pass.

In 1741 Moravian missionaries came to St. John. Bethany was the first established, and the likely date is 1754. Emmaus was organized in 1782. Old diaries do indicate that some form of work may have started prior to 1741. e.g. The November 18, 1733 incident is mentioned in "A History of The Moravian Church-Eastern West Indies Province" by Bishop G. Oliver Maynard.

The Church in the V.I. is a part of the Eastern West Indies Province. It has been so for nearly 250 years.

A Moravian is a Moravian anywhere. We are a world-wide Unity of believers in Christ. Today the Moravian Church is found in Tibet, Tanzania, East South Africa, West South Africa, Alaska, East Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, England, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guyana, Surinam, Jamaica, Labrador, Curacao, and in other parts of the world.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

1. A History of The Moravian Church-Eastern West Indies Province-Bishop G. Oliver Maynard
2. Customs and Practices of the Moravian Church-Adelaide L. Fries
3. History of The Moravian Church-renewed-Hamilton (and) Hamilton
4. Through Five Hundred Years-Allen W. Schattechneider
5. Who are the Moravians-Walser H. Allen
6. Zinzendorf, The Ecumenical Pioneer-A.J. Lewis

Note: Information about these books can be obtained by writing to  
Moravian Book Shop, Inc.  
428 Main Street,  
Bethlehem, PA 18018.

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