

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**SHINING LIGHTS:
THE CONCEPTION, CHARACTER AND
CATALYZING INFLUENCE OF THE
MORAVIAN MOVEMENT**

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

SCHOOL OF WORLD MISSION

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“Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” **Ps. 88: 12**

“Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion? Then I thought, to this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.” **Ps. 77: 7-12**

“...That you may be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.” **Phil. 2: 15-16**

“You are meant to incarnate in your lives the theme of your adoration, you are to be taken, consecrated, broken and distributed, that you may be the means of grace and vehicles of the eternal charity.” **-Augustine**

“God hath had it much on His heart, from all eternity to glorify His dear and only begotten Son; and there are some special seasons that He appoints to that end, wherein He comes forth with omnipotent power to fulfill His promise and oath to Him: and these times are times of remarkable pouring out of His Spirit, to advance His Kingdom; such a day is a day of His power.” **-Jonathan Edwards**

The study of history is of vital importance to any people or generation. The venerable wisdom of Santana remains as true today as ever... “He who forgets the errors of history is bound to repeat them.”¹ Although the thought of perusing the dank and dusty corridors of time is often considered boring or monotonous in our self-absorbed, fast-food culture; God expects us to know the failures and foibles, victories and valor of others in history (Ps. 77-78, 1 Cor. 10: 1-13).

The renowned Shakespeare echoed our popular notion when he said, “History is sound and fury meaning nothing.”² While human history gives lengthy endorsement to the reality of man’s fallenness; behind the noise and chaos, the veil of human flesh, is an unmistakably frank providential record revealing the sovereignty of God and the profound influence of men’s lives and ideologies.

English author and lecturer John H. Y. Briggs said, “Historical awareness is essential for the health and well being of any society. It enables us to know who we are, why we’re here, and what we should do. Just as a loss of memory in an individual is a psychiatric defect calling for medical treatment, so too any community which has no social memory is suffering from an illness.”³

Our society and much of “Christendom” is sick... afflicted with chronic amnesia. Blinded by generational ignorance and arrogance, we have fallen headlong into a pit of cultural trendiness and humanistic philosophy. “Our morbid preoccupation with ourselves has created an ambivalence and ignorance of the past, and trapped us under a recalcitrant present... History must be our deliverer.”⁴

Timothy Dwight said it best, “We need to remember and search for our roots in the luminaries, the risk takers and the movements of the church through the centuries...

overcoming the narrowing amnesia that leaves us floundering.”⁵ Historical awareness is redemptive and therapeutic; and those who grasp its lessons live a timeless and inspired existence – marked by a pervading sense of purpose.

In the annals of Christian history, few stand out as prominently as the Moravians of Herrnhut. They shined as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2: 15-16). “It could be argued that they became the most spiritual, noble, self-sacrificing body of believers since the first century church. It could also be argued that the world has probably not witnessed a movement of this quality since.”⁶

There are prophetic parallels found in history that can help to guide us in the necessary preparation for our times. We are going to search the conception, character and catalyzing influence of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians of Herrnhut. As we gain an understanding of the history, background and characteristics of this renewal/missions movement, we will see the historical/context conditions and key people were in place to experience renewal, propagate Gospel and Biblical rediscoveries, and create new spiritual dynamics (re-contextualized) and leadership patterns. Understanding how the foundation was laid in this influential revival can help us understand the foundation and vision God desires for His church today. Now, let’s search the background and conception of the Moravian movement.

As the 18th century was ushering in, the spirit of awakening began to flow over Europe and rest upon men of God. The fruit of their lives and influence merged with cultural conditions and religious complacency to birth Methodism, the Great Awakening and ultimately the modern Protestant Missionary Movement. Lewis Drummond said, “The early germination of the 18th century revival had its conception in a smaller

awakening that began in Saxony, Germany. On the estate of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, God as Father graciously poured out His Spirit, and a movement sprang forth that came to be known as the Moravian Revival.”⁷ Understanding how the foundation was laid in this influential revival can help us understand the foundation and vision the Lord is laying in the church today.

“The Moravians” traced their spiritual ancestry back to Wycliffe and Hus in Bohemia. These two pre-Reformation evangelical preachers were revolutionaries. Wycliffe was possibly the most exalted preacher in all England in the 14th century, and was a Bible professor at Oxford until his dismissal. He was the spiritual father of the Lollards, known for his fiery preaching and passion for translating the Bible into common language. As a scholar and reformer, he set the faith of scripture and claims of Christ over against the superstitions and traditions of the Catholic Church. Because of the rapid spread of his ideas, and his impact on history and his own generation, Wycliffe earned the name “The Morning Star of the Reformation”.

The spark of Wycliffe’s writings ignited a flame in John Hus’ heart. Ordained as a priest, teaching at Charles University (Prague) and preaching at Bethlehem Chapel (near the campus);⁸ Hus became popular with the masses and some influential leaders as well. Although later condemned for denouncing worldly clergy, and exalting Biblical authority and Christ’s headship; his doctrine had affected many – setting a course that would never be reversed. On July 6, 1415, John Hus was burned at the stake. His courageous death, reformation prophecies (pertaining to Luther and the Moravians), and the manuscripts of Wycliffe’s lectures (used for kindling at Hus’ execution) ignited a “fire by night” at the dusk of the Christendom Age (Catholic Domination).

“Despite all efforts of the popes to stamp out this movement, it survived as an independent church, the Unitas Fratrum/Unity of the Brethren.”⁹ “This Church of the Brethren became a sect of German pietists who were exiled from their ancestral home in the 17th century. Because they were aliens and exiles they were commonly known by nationality rather than church affiliation... as the “Moravians”.”¹⁰

After flourishing in Bohemia and Moravia under a “cloud by day” at the dawning of the Reformation, these “Brethren” were nearly crushed during the 30 Years War (1618-1648). Although “Luther had proclaimed a robust doctrine of faith... his followers had fallen under the spell of intellect, and turned faith into a mental exercise. No longer an act of surrender to the mercy of God revealed in Christ, faith had become a formal assent to doctrinal truths set forth by scholars.”¹¹ The resulting cultural syncretism and lack of spiritual conviction became the backdrop of the 30 Years War.

Arising in part as a Roman Catholic attack on rebellious lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Germany), with hopes of recovering lost territories; the 30 Years War drew in most of Europe. Whereas the religious landscape had changed little by war’s end, the conflict was taking its toll on surrounding societies. Latourette says, “By it, much of Germany was laid waste. Prosperous cities and villages were decimated or destroyed and even greater damage was suffered in coarsening and lowering of morals.”¹² With religious persecution, political wars and Christian nominalism and syncretism abounding, the conditions were ripe for renewal. Amidst this seedbed of suffering and corruption, a new movement arose as a “root out of dry ground” (Is. 53: 2) – it became known as “Pietism”.

Having roots in the pre-war past, this movement was a fusion of influences at its inception. Catholic mysticism, Luther’s faith, English Puritanism and Anabaptist

sentiments were all found here.¹³ The Pietists were founded by a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt (1666) named Philip Spener. “He set a new standard for piety by adding to the church services meetings in the home where laity led as easily as pastors.”¹⁴ These home groups known as “collegia pietatis” and the publishing of his book “Pia Desideria” (Pious Desires) caused a stirring of evangelical devotion in Germany. By emphasizing Bible study with life application, the priesthood of believers, personal experience, prayer and missions; Spener had re-contextualized forms of spirituality. These new spiritual dynamics allowed the Pietists to “break radically with the melancholic view of history that had characterized late orthodoxy... combining the joy of a personal experience of salvation with an eagerness to proclaim the gospel of redemption to all.”¹⁵

In Berlin, 1694, Spener and August Francke founded the University of Halle. “In 1701, Francke defined the goal of this renewal movement as the ‘concrete improvement of all walks of life... in all parts of the world.’”¹⁶ The University quickly became the hub for a whole host of ministries. Here, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the German nobleman who was to become the spiritual leader of the Moravian revival, received much of “his distinctive emphasis... on heart religion”¹⁷ and missions.

Count Zinzendorf was Spener’s godson and Francke’s pupil. “In those dynamic days, the University of Halle shone as the pietistic North Star of the Lutheran Church.”¹⁸ “It was from this center that Protestantism embarked purposefully on the cross-cultural missionary task... as two of Francke’s pupils, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau, sailed for India in 1705.”¹⁹ Zinzendorf enrolled at Halle in 1710 and was later able to meet both of these missionaries. Their lives and stories had a profound impact on the young Count.

Upon leaving Halle, the pressure to prepare for his future position of royalty led Zinzendorf to law school at the University of Wittenberg. This citadel of Lutheran orthodoxy enforced a rigorous schedule, literally exhausting the daylight and evening hours. While immersed in study of political science, civil law, history and culture, his mind would wander to the “Acts-like” stories of Ziegenbalg and Plutschau. By graduation, a divine discontentment had settled over his heart. Although equipped with the finest the world could offer (birthright, status, privilege, financial security and academic), a war was waging in his soul. Like Moses and Paul before him, Count Zinzendorf began the process of yielding pedigree to destiny. He would soon hear “the call of God” and lay down earthly prominence and prosperity for heavenly vision and fellowship.

Around 1719, another young man named Christian David began taking evangelistic trips to Moravia. During his trips, he came to sympathize with the “United Brethren”. Seeing the plight of these devoted exiles, he began searching with them for a place of refuge under Protestant influences. These promise seekers (Gen. 13, Heb. 11: 8-10) were clinging to the prophecies of John Hus, trusting God for a move of Biblical/New Testament Christianity. Consequently, Christian David met and approached Count Zinzendorf about the possibility of these “Moravians” settling on his lands.

In 1722, Zinzendorf invited these “exiled Protestants to settle on his estate in Saxony, where they organized as the “renewed fraternity”, dedicated to a religion of the heart and an intimate fellowship with the Savior.”²⁰ Then Christian David, the carpenter/evangelist, earned his name as “the Moravian Moses” by ten times crossing the border to lead groups of brethren to their Promised Land. They called the new community Herrnhut, “The Lord’s Watch”, and envisioned a town solely inhabited by Christians.

Decades of persecution and wandering had cultivated an intense desire for freedom, real fellowship and separation from the “world”. This, in turn, produced a pseudo social monasticism with an emphasis on life, family and spirituality. It wasn’t long before Zinzendorf was interacting with his new neighbors, and many devout people from various backgrounds were flocking to Herrnhut.

By 1725, there were 300 people living in Herrnhut, and problems began to arise. By late 1726, the economic, cultural, and religious issues had escalated into a heated argument over church liturgy (Lutheran vs. Moravian). In response to the bitter disputes, and an isolated Lutheran hating heretic, calling the Count “the beast of Revelation”, Zinzendorf took over the leadership of the community in early 1727. In a few short months, the Count managed to galvanize this fragmented, rag-tag community into a model of spiritual devotion, Christian unity, and missionary zeal. On Wednesday, August 13, 1727, while united at a communion, confirmation service, God poured out His Spirit upon them in what has come to be known as “the Moravian Pentecost” (Zinzendorf was 27). Deep adoration and a mystical sense of God’s “nearness” and redemptive realities were to mark these lives forever.

For over a century, the influence of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians caused Germany to be Protestantism’s leading missionary country. They became “the foundation of all modern revivals, and set the experience of new life in Christ at the center of the Christian message and ministry.”²¹ God used them to shift the perceived essentials of the Christian life and faith; which ultimately caused a world view change and left a distinguishable imprint on evangelical Christianity which remains to this day.

Zinzendorf and the Moravians had something that God used to build the church and advance His Kingdom – a “renewed” wineskin. Jesus said, do not put “new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined: but put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Mt. 9: 17). It seems the great need (then and now) was not “new wine”, but “new wineskins”. God is not requiring the “new” in existence (Gr. Neos), but the “renewed” by process and preparation (Gr. Kainos). Old wineskins were to be properly prepared by soaking them in water (of the word) for softening; and rubbing them with oil (of the Spirit’s anointing) to prevent leaking or evaporation. Consequently, the renewal of the church (its people, leaders, priorities and structures) is vitally linked with all Kingdom increase and expansion.

Dr. C. Peter Wagner has taught me to ask the question, “Why does the blessing of God rest where it does?”²² In response to this... I believe there is a discernible pattern of blessing – a “renewed” wineskin among the “Moravians”. Within this “committed community” we find five governing characteristics: 1) Apostolic Leadership, 2) Profound Christology, 3) Genuine Unity, 4) Cell Ministry, and 5) World Missions. The genesis and emphasis of these prophetic principles melted hearts, molded lives and was destined to impact the world.

Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian revival at Herrnhut, is a most prominent and enigmatic character on the stage of Christian history. Here was a sophisticated man of nobility – royalty used by God to bring an awakening. At first glance, one may think, “what an unusual man, what an unusual name?” However, he serves as one in a long line of voices arising on the “periphery” of the established churches, revealing the fact that “God often chooses surprising people from surprising

places to do surprising things.” Zinzendorf was to become the “young King Hezekiah” (2 Chr. 29-10+) of 18th century Protestantism.

Count Zinzendorf “was a man of great tact and grace, and had outstanding leadership abilities.”²³ As a “wise master builder”, he nurtured apostolic passion, order, and purpose among the Moravians of Herrnhut. He was a “gifted and spiritually sensitive man... of singularly impressive and commanding personality.”²⁴ In 1738, John Wesley visited Herrnhut and observed with great fascination Zinzendorf’s administrative excellence and strong, governing influence (the latter of which he somewhat disliked).²⁵ Let’s take a look at the genesis and fruit of this leadership.

This man’s leadership was the direct result of his spiritual heritage. His natural family and spiritual mentors had succeeded in molding a vessel of honor for the Lord’s Glory. At his dedication as a baby, the Count’s mother asked God to “govern the heart of this child to walk blamelessly in the path of virtue... that his path may be fortified in thy Word.”²⁶ Raised in an atmosphere of worship, prayer and Bible study, his mother, pietist grandmother and aunt then nurtured a discernment, sensitivity and passion in the young Count that produced a respect for both the authority of God and life of Christ in any person. Later, even his courtship, marriage (to devout pietist – Countess Erdmuth Dorethea Von Reuss), and parenting (of their twelve children) became a pattern for the renewed Moravians. Although many moderns have balked at their stringent views of Lordship and courtship, the fruit of their lives and families is undeniable (Lk. 7: 35). Their subjection of choices, interests and relationships to their missionary purpose and the will of God, serves as an example to all who would “set their affections on things above.” “Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values that

are the foundation for our freedom... the strength of our families is vital.”²⁷ With the essence of leadership being influence, we must remember, the most profound and fundamental influence is paternal/familial. The family is a God-ordained leadership laboratory. Therefore, as in the case of Count Zinzendorf, often the single most effective way to produce quality leaders is through godly parenting and family relationships.

The young Count’s passion for Bible study and Jesus was shaped and refined by his spiritual fathers and godly mentors. Spener and Francke planted seeds of stability, strength, love, guidance, and revelation truth in the young disciple. Discipleship is God’s way to reach the world (Mt. 28: 18-20) with the life and truth of Jesus Christ – through one’s personal influence on other individuals by relationship, example, devotion, correction and encouragement. Zinzendorf was no mere believer, he was a disciple. This discipleship established character and practical piety in Zinzendorf while cultivating inner maturity and transformation. Discipleship (then and now) is a Biblical qualification that preceded the Count’s leadership (Lk. 6: 12-13).

Count Zinzendorf’s rich spiritual heritage made him a vanguard leader. Willing to pay the price of pioneering and making changes, while pointing the way in times of complacency and transition. “He always seemed able to find and draw out the best in men while overlooking their faults... enabling him to rise above the petty spiritual politics that thwart so many in their quest for truth.”²⁸ This ability to “examine all things and hold fast to what is good” (1 Thes. 5: 21) allowed him to prophetically unite the strengths of various Christian camps. “Through Zinzendorf, the Protestant-Pietist streams merge with some descendants of Radical Christianity to form the most significant missionary movement of the 18th century.”²⁹ As an Apostolic bridge builder and foundation layer, he was truly an

understanding scribe, instructed/discipled in the Kingdom and bringing forth out of his treasure things new and old (Mt. 13: 51-52).

Revival author Lewis Drummond establishes the unique quality and essence of Count Zinzendorf by making him the focused example of his chapter titled “At Last, A Leader Who Leads!”.³⁰ This prophetic reformer provided the apostolic leadership necessary to birth an awakening and transition the church for renewal and advance. “History is filled with instances when powerful leaders have failed to meet the challenge of the future... often discovering, the world for which they prepared no longer exists.”³¹ However, Count Zinzendorf gained God’s perspective of the past and future, and was able to live and lead with great power.

The secret to Zinzendorf’s leadership power was his passionate love for Jesus. This passion produced a profound Christology that was to characterize the Moravian movement for generations to come. Their theological emphasis, worship, and life was so Christocentric, that it both shocked and attracted (Is. 52: 15). Like the 1st century Christians, their passion for Jesus wrought boldness, humility and an aroma of life (Acts 4: 13, 2 Cor. 2: 14-17). The Moravians were able “to maintain at all times the freshness of their “first love” toward the Savior; to have, like Count Zinzendorf, ‘one passion – Jesus, Jesus only’, to cultivate His continual presence and live always in the sunshine of His smile” (Ps. 37: 4, 91: 14-15).³²

This incredible passion and love for Jesus was the result of Zinzendorf’s godly heritage and a personal experience he had while traveling after graduation. At an art museum in Dusseldorf, the young Count had observed Domencio Feti’s “Ecce Homo” (Behold the Man). The vivid painting of Jesus crowned with thorns bore an inscription...

“I have done this for you. What have you done for Me?”³³ Gripped with conviction, he committed his heart to God, and proclaimed, “I will do whatever He leads me to do.”³⁴ There the Count yielded to the Captain of our salvation and embraced the call of God. As the rich young ruler who said “yes”, Zinzendorf forsook all to follow Jesus and crown Him King.

This commitment flame was later fueled with prophetic hope at Herrnhut as Zinzendorf translated Jon Amos Comenius’ constitution for the “United Brethren”. There he discovered a prophecy by Comenius that Hus’ prophesied “hidden seed” would sprout in 100 years – literally right then for those at Herrnhut. Ignited with a new sense of destiny, Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians immersed themselves in passionate prayer, worship and fellowship that resulted in the “Moravian Pentecost” – Wednesday, August 13, 1727.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, they became witnesses unto King Jesus (Acts 1: 8)... clothed with power to exalt Christ alone (Jn. 16: 14). “Their theology became Christology and their creed – the Cross”³⁵ as they determined “to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Cor. 2: 2). “Witnesses for Jesus and of Jesus was what every Moravian was in those great revival decades.”³⁶

The “calling of the Moravian Church was truly set forth by Count Zinzendorf: ‘I am destined by the Lord to proclaim the message of the death and blood of Jesus, not with human wisdom, but with divine power, unmindful of personal consequences to myself’.”³⁷ This profound Christology/Christocentricity was clearly seen in all Moravian preaching, prayer and hymnody. With overflowing hearts and single eyes, they sought to honor Jesus

in all they said and did. Their rediscovery of Gospel truth and prioritizing of redemptive reality fueled renewal and expansion for decades to come.

The great Moravian Evangelists and Missionaries preached the gospel with remarkable simplicity, clarity and power. “Praise to Christ, adoration of Him as God, proclamation of His virtues and work were their constant theme.”³⁸ They were God’s ambassadors, preaching Christ and the message of reconciliation. Practiced in personal devotion and piety, they were trained to empty self and overflow with compassion for their fellowmen, by: 1) looking at their own sinfulness, 2) discerning the depth of human wretchedness around them, and 3) grasping the love of God in Jesus Christ.³⁹ They possessed a peculiar revelation of God’s love and the precious blood of the lamb. The united cry of their hearts was, “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering” (Is. 53: 10-11).

The Moravians were also known for addressing their prayers directly to the Savior. Their prayer life, power and importunity set them apart as few in history. They were truly a “House of Prayer for all nations”. “Count Zinzendorf had early learned the secret of prevailing prayer. So active had he been in establishing circles for prayer, that on leaving the college at Halle, sixteen years of age, he handed the famous Professor Francke a list of seven praying societies.”⁴⁰ This passion and commitment to prayer, a sign of love for and dependence upon God; made intercession, fasting, and all night prayer as natural as the air they breathed. “In short, the blessing of the 13th of August, 1727, was diligently and earnestly prepared for.”⁴¹ These men and women met daily in each other’s homes for prayer and praise – prompted by love for the Savior, they birthed a 24-hour prayer chain that lasted over a century.⁴²

“The Moravians have always been famous for their church music, which owes its original inspiration to Zinzendorf, who himself wrote many hymns (over 2,000).”⁴³ They were a people “filled with the Spirit... singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord” (Eph. 5: 18-19). God had put a new song in their mouth, even praise to their God... many would see it and fear and put their trust in the Lord” (Ps. 40: 1-3). One who saw it and was changed was John Wesley. During a severe storm at sea en route to a Georgia orphanage, the Wesley’s marveled at the faith and love of the Moravians – as they sang and worshipped amidst the fearful passenger’s screams and vows. This experience opened the door that later led to Wesley’s conversion.

The profound Christology of the Herrnhut Brethren empowered their witness and singularly defined their preaching, prayer and praise. Their passionate love for Jesus set them apart in a day of theological disputes and dead orthodoxy. John Cennick, the best know English Moravian hymn writer, known as a “Revived Paul and second Bunyan”, expressed it this way: “Christ is our Master, Lord and God, the fullness of the Three in One; His life, death, righteousness and blood, Our faith’s foundation are alone, His Godhead and His Death shall be Our theme to all eternity.”⁴⁴

On the foundation of Zinzendorf’s Apostolic leadership and their profound Christology, the Moravians came to live in a unity that “commanded God’s blessing” (Ps. 133: 3). When Zinzendorf had invited the “Brethren” onto his estate in 1722, he was “especially concerned with establishing an international fellowship of true believers belonging to various religious bodies.”⁴⁵ His desire for unity soon inspired an ecumenical harvest. “Lutheran Pietists, former Catholics, Separatists, Reformed and Anabaptists all joined the community, seeking the fellowship of others who were looking for a heavenly

city.”⁴⁶ Like Fuller Seminary today, Herrnhut had become “the most ecumenical place on earth”.

In the midst of subsequent problems, strife and threatened divisions, Zinzendorf set out to meet with every family, house to house. This home/family visitation was a time of fellowship and scriptural counsel. As a result, the Moravian community became united by “the mission in this man’s heart”. These covenant relationships governed by the love and purpose of God produced a unity like the upper room (Acts 2) and led to the signing of a formal “Brotherly Agreement”. As is characteristic of most renewal movements, they became “conscious of being a distinct, covenant based community”⁴⁷ more than ever before. They lived, worked and worshipped together, and serve as a model of community life and possibilities. Their Christian unity, covenant fellowship and unique ecumenism increased over time and became a channel for divine blessing.

The genuine unity of the Moravians was both generated and propagated by their incessant use of home-cell groups. Zinzendorf was “a disciple of Spener’s idea of a ‘church within the Church’.”⁴⁸ In 1670, Spener began searching for a practical way to engender the “sincere faith” of the Bible. Under the influence of the writings of Richard Baxter and Johann Arndt’s “True Christianity”, he began gathering a small group of dedicated believers in his home twice a week. These meetings were to serve a dual purpose of discipling committed Christians and providing a vehicle for church renewal. Although Spener’s infantile innovation contained structural, philosophical and reproductive flaws, it served as an oasis in the desert of dead orthodoxy and cultural corruption. By emphasizing the reality of the new birth and the application of scriptural

truth in daily life, these Christians discovered, “believers are not (to be) passive in spiritual matters, but have a responsibility for building one another up in the faith.”⁴⁹

Raised to experience the presence of God and receive truth from God in regular home gatherings of family and friends, Count Zinzendorf readily adopted Spener’s model. “He established little cell groups in his school (University of Halle) for practical devotion, which he named “The Order of the Mustard Seed”.”⁵⁰ The experience and fruit of these gatherings served to solidify Zinzendorf’s conviction that the way to renewal and revival for Christian institutions was the proliferation of cells. These cells were not to be the Bible study, prayer, sharing, sensitivity, therapy rap sessions of modern American Christianity. They had “apostolic goals... seeking no less than the recovery of truth, life, and power of earliest Christianity, and the expansion of that kind of Christianity.”⁵¹

In May of 1727, following the signing of the “Brotherly Covenant” at Herrnhut, Count Zinzendorf instituted a network of small groups. A synthesis of Spener’s “collegia pietatis”, Francke’s charitable missions and the Count’s apostolic passion; these cells spawned a Biblical devotion, koinonea-fellowship, and acceleration in maturity that became the catalyst for the “Moravian Pentecost”. By emphasizing “personal character and charitable community involvement”⁵², the Moravian cells “established an optimum environment for the development of personal devotion and the cultivation of a radical lifestyle.”⁵³ Each group had an appointed leader, and every man and woman in the community became a part of one.

With total participation in small groups, Zinzendorf instinctively spread the leadership responsibilities broadly across the whole community. The use of unordained, untrained lay men and women in worship, instruction and cell meetings proved to be one

of the most significant leadership innovations of the 18th century. Among the Moravians, the universal priesthood of believers was no mere mental theology, it was a living reality. “All members were expected to carry their part of the priestly role, and the entire community was mobilized in a ministerial corps.”⁵⁴

After his conversion, under the influence of Peter Bohler at a Moravian small group on Aldersgate Street, London, John Wesley took a pilgrimage to Herrnhut in 1738. Upon arriving, the majority of his observations and notations were related to their cell ministry structure and operations. The Moravian’s organizational plan, pastoral care and dual cell structure would soon be adopted and proliferated in the Methodist Movement. Wesley specifically noted the Moravian distinctive of separating instruction and edification. At Herrnhut, everyone participated in two small groups per week; a heterogeneous “choir” entirely for instruction, and a homogenous “band” for intimate sharing, personal encouragement and prayer. This example served as the pattern Wesley was to refine in his “class, society” cell ministry system, the net that was to catch a generational harvest.

It serves us well to remember the Great Awakenings were “grassroots movements, arising out of small cell groups and spreading spontaneously to the masses... We also should remember that the leaders in past Awakenings came to leadership out of a cell group where they learned spiritual discipline and mutual accountability.”⁵⁵ Count Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut Moravians were the pioneers of the cell ministry movement. Their use of small groups sparked renewal by combining “grassroots initiative with Episcopal leadership to maintain a vigorous balance between spontaneity and order, enthusiasm and established authority.”⁵⁶ They inspired apostolic devotion, a “gathered” church mentality, and growth in holiness. Finally, by utilizing lay men and woman leaders

in cells, they provided a context for new methods of ministry and leadership training.⁵⁷ This proved to be revolutionary, tapping an almost unlimited reservoir of laborers and releasing an army of leaders into the harvest fields of the world.

Of all the characteristics of the Moravian movement, the most dramatic and defining was their commitment to world missions. “At the age of 15, Zinzendorf, together with his childhood friend – Friedrich von Watteville, pioneered a “Compact for the Conversion of Pagans”.”⁵⁸ This missionary dream, birthed in the young Count, 78 years before Carey sailed for India, was to become an all consuming fire that raged in the hearts of the Moravians – governing every choice and soliciting utter and universal participation.

Through the stories and influence of Francke’s home missions and the famous Danish-Halle Indian mission of Ziegenbalg and Plutschau; Zinzendorf was able to see beyond the prevailing orthodox views (the great commission was for the 1st century only, the church is already planted everywhere, and the office of the apostle has ceased to exist) that held the church in apathetic bondage.

With clear apostolic/missionary vision (Lk. 19: 10, Rom. 15: 20), and Biblical foundation, Zinzendorf was able to “rediscover” the Gospel message and mission. After meeting Anthony Ulrich, from St. Thomas (at an award ceremony honoring the Count in 1731), the conviction to send someone to share the Gospel with slaves in the West Indies became overwhelming. This overwhelming conviction served in uniting and marrying the Gospel message and mission so that the two, literally became one – birthing an Apostolic/New Testament move of God. Through the Count’s “passion to reach unreached peoples... and his leadership, this group of Moravians was transformed into a major missionary movement.”⁵⁹

“These Moravians had a vision for total commitment to missions... seeing it as the privilege and responsibility of the entire membership.”⁶⁰ “Here was a new phenomenon in the expansion of Christianity, an entire community... devoted to the propagation of the faith... a fellowship of Christians with the spread of the Christian message as a major objective, not of a minority of the membership, but of the group as a whole.”⁶¹ The Moravians came to see missions as a “way of life”, and life as a “way of mission”. With their “aim to live the Gospel, and so to commend it to those who have never heard it,”⁶² and total community cooperation, they were able to pioneer modern Protestant missions and produce global fruit.

“This small church in 20 years called into being more missions than the whole evangelical church has done in two centuries.”⁶³ From the first small group sent to the West Indies in 1732, the Moravians sent more than 100 missionaries in 25 years, were in 28 nations in 28 years, and “by the time of Zinzendorf’s death in 1760, had sent out 226 missionaries. At the height of their missionary zeal they were sending out one missionary for every 10 senders who stayed behind at home in Germany!”⁶⁴

This Moravian Movement from Herrnhut has proved to be an apex in Protestant missions and revival history. There at the estate of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the sovereignty of God and sold-out, spirit-filled believers found a place of convergence – heaven and earth were united again, the Word becoming flesh. The vision of God and vessels of honor were merged to produce a vehicle (sodality structure) that could transfer God’s life and channel divine blessing. “These earnest Christians dared to carry the gospel into some of the most remote and inhospitable regions on the face of the earth... fanning out two by two to win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His

sufferings.”⁶⁵ William Carey, called by many the “father of the modern Protestant missions movement”, said, “See what these Moravians have done... Can we not follow their example, and in obedience to our Heavenly Master, go out into the world and preach the Gospel to the heathen?”⁶⁶

There was a day when the call of God for redemption necessitated and actualized the call to missions (Rom. 15: 14-16, Acts 9: 15, 22: 14-15). We must remember, redemption, like everything God does, is according to a pattern (His ways) and for His purpose. For the expressed purpose of showering His mercy on all families of earth,⁶⁷ God called out a man named Abram, a nation named Israel, a King named David, and a teenager named Mary. Through their faith and obedience, God brought forth His covenant promise: a child was born... our redemptive model – Jesus Christ.

As we repent and believe, fix our eyes on Jesus, die to self and follow Him, there is a release of grace and power that transforms us within and elevates us to a place of influence and bold witness. As born again, spirit-filled Christians, Jesus’ leadership and God’s fathering unites us eternally with the multitudes of saints that were “witnesses of the resurrection”. Remember, at the core of the Christian experience is an empowered and changed life. We are possessors of a new nature, a new identity, a new Father, an eternal life. “The gospel is the most elevating force on earth... it was not given in order to level us all to the lowest common denominator, but to create new creatures, and to give to all the dignity of the sons of God! Men who once were savages are reclaimed and walk as princes.”⁶⁸

Know assuredly this day, the life of God in the soul of man, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit initiates a process of surrender, following, and maturity that produces

supernatural power, sacrificial love and a renovated mind. These attributes are to merge with our stewardship of the life and love, grace and truth of God – that we might yield our rights to the awesome privilege and responsibility of proclaiming Christ. God’s plan is to bless us to be a blessing... that “in you all the nations and families of the earth would be blessed.” We have been redeemed to witness, saved to serve, called to covenant blessings that we might obey God’s great commission. The late Francis Schaeffer said, “In this world a person can only be complacent if he or she is young enough, has money enough, is well enough, and, at the same time, lacks compassion for those about him. As soon as we face reality, the obscenity of the present situation strikes us in the face.”⁶⁹

Count Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut Moravians serve as ensamples to all who would dare to believe and carry the call and commission of God. As we peer at them through the kaleidoscope of history, we are given an opportunity to discern the times and respond to their prophetic wake-up call (Is. 52). Their passionate love for Jesus, sincere faith, covenant relationships, community fellowship, importunate and prevailing prayer, and utter abandonment to missionary advance allows us to gain God’s perspective of reality and life. The five governing characteristics of the “renewed” wineskin of the Moravians (1. Apostolic Leadership, 2. Profound Christology, 3. Genuine Unity, 4. Cell Ministry, 5. World Missions) serve as an apostolic foundation for any generation or time, especially ours!

“Look around at the millions of broken homes, crime, child abuse, drug abuse, and the feelings of hopelessness in American society, and you can see that we live in the midst of intense spiritual warfare with the devil. But when all is said and done, I want to be standing on the side of victory. I may not be able to single-handedly change the world, but

when my life ends I want to be able to declare: “I fought the good fight. I didn’t grow weary and settle for less. I battled to the end.”⁷⁰

You can do this. Your life may be the one that makes the difference. You matter...and the substance of your life and heavenly epitaph can change destiny’s balance and prophesy God’s restoration. Hear this Chinese proverb from the movie *Mulan*: “One grain of rice may tip the scales...maybe one solitary soul can change the entire outcome of this war”. “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The redemption of a great nation can begin with a single and powerful decision by one “ordinary” person that influences others to make similar decisions.”⁷¹

The story of Zinzendorf is one of history’s greatest examples of how a pure love for the Lord can propel a man to a spiritual power that not only impacts his own time, but places his mark dramatically on every century that follows... Born into one of the great families of Europe and destined to sit on the court of one of the continent’s most powerful thrones, he gave it all up and spent his life and fortune to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.”⁷²

It was William Carey that said the Moravians were one of the “faithful messengers of grace that were ‘the seed of the church’ in many places. They being dead still speak through the example of their lives and their legacy of courage and service.”⁷³ Like Puritan great Richard Baxter, Scotch divine Robert Murray McCheyne, Abel, the Apostle Paul, Patrick, Hus, and few others in history, Zinzendorf lived a life of eternal significance and global impact. He was a witness unto Jesus that “knew Christ in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable even unto His death... that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in his mortal flesh – that he might

attain unto the resurrection, and being dead, yet speak” (Phil. 3: 10-11, 2 Cor. 4: 10-11, Heb. 11: 4).

Though Zinzendorf’s “lips have long in silence hung, And death long hushed that sinner-awakening tongue; Yet still, though dead, he speaks aloud to all, And from the grave issues forth his “call”. Like some loud angel-voice from Zion Hill, The mighty echo rolls and rumbles still. O grant that we, when sleeping in the dust, May thus speak forth the wisdom of the just.”⁷⁴

Jesus said, “Go!” (Mt. 28: 18-20, Mk. 16: 15+, Lk. 24: 47, Jn. 15: 16, Acts 1: 8, Rom. 16: 26). If not us, who... if not now, when?... Like the Moravians of Herrnhut, may we embrace the truth – “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor. 5: 14-15). Remember the words of William Wallace, “All men die, but not all men truly live.”

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