

The Moravian Revival (1727) By Oswald Smith

One of the greatest outpourings of the Spirit since the days of the Apostles occurred on Wednesday morning, August 13, 1727, among the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut, Germany, on the estate of Count Zinzendorf, in Saxony.

For centuries the followers of John Huss (1373-1415), the martyred Bohemian reformer, had endured persecution and death. Fleeing from imprisonment and torture, they at last found a refuge in Germany where Count Zinzendorf, a young Christian nobleman, offered them an asylum on his estates.

Zinzendorf at the age of four drew up and signed the following covenant: "Dear Saviour, do Thou be mine, and I will be Thine." One day he stood in the Dusseldorf Gallery before a picture of the Christ. Underneath were the words:

"This have I done for Thee,
What doest Thou for Me?"

Turning from the glittering allurements of Paris, he there and then gave himself utterly to Christ, adopting as his motto: "I have one passion; it is Jesus, Jesus only."

Speaking of what occurred that memorable thirteenth day of August, historians tell that they left the House of God "hardly knowing whether they belonged to earth or had already gone to Heaven." Zinzendorf, in his description of it, says: "The Saviour permitted to come upon us a Spirit of whom we had hitherto not had any experience or knowledge. Hitherto we had been the leaders and helpers. Now the Holy Spirit Himself took full control of everything and everybody."

All are agreed that it was a definite, unmistakable outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the entire congregation, so wonderful that it was absolutely indescribable. The brethren had been judging one another; doctrinal disputes were common; heated arguments that threatened division and discord were the order of the day. Instead of love, bitterness. Instead of brotherly unity, strife.

"When God intends great mercy for His people," says Matthew Henry, "the first thing He does is to set them praying." And so it was at Herrnhut. The more spiritual among them, utterly dissatisfied with themselves, commenced to cry mightily to God for help. That their prayer was answered, there is abundant proof. James Montgomery, their greatest hymn writer, gives the following realistic description:

"They walked with God in peace and love,
But failed with one another;
While sternly for the Faith they strove,
Brother fell out with brother;
But He in whom they put their trust,
Who knew their frames that they were dust,
Pitied and healed their weakness.

He found them in His House of Prayer,
With one accord assembled;
And so revealed His presence there,

They wept with joy and trembled:
One cup they drank, one bread they brake,
One baptism shared, one language spake,
Forgiving and forgiven.
Then forth they went with tongues aflame
In one blest theme delighting;
The love of Jesus and His name,
God's children all uniting;
That love our theme and watchword still,
Thy law of love may we fulfil,
And love as we are loved."

Salvation by Faith

The first experience that the revived brethren constantly emphasized and that was passed on through Wesley to the Methodists was a definite knowledge of salvation by faith in Christ alone. They made the discovery that the Church could not save them; that there was no salvation in its creeds, doctrines or dogmas; that good works, moral living, commandment keeping, praying and Bible reading, could not avail; much less culture, character or conduct. They found that Christ alone could save; that He was willing and able to receive sinners at a moment's notice; that justification, the forgiveness of sins, the new birth, etc., were instantaneous experiences received the very moment a sinner believed on Christ; that salvation was through grace and by faith, apart from the deeds of the law; that when a man is saved he has peace with God, and that he receives the assurance of salvation by the witness of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

The second experience that came to the brethren was a personal anointing of the Holy Spirit for life and service. In the power of that anointing they went forth and accomplished impossible tasks.

Results of the Outpouring

The first of the two great results was hymns and spiritual songs. No church, in comparison to its numbers, has ever produced as many hymns as the Moravian. For well over two centuries now we have been singing their hymns. Most of their hymns are prayers to Christ. Many of them are expressions of joy and gratitude for what He has done. In them they portray His sufferings for sinners on the cross. His shed blood is the central theme of their songs. Practically all their hymns are hymns of their own personal experiences of salvation and spiritual blessing. And what is more natural than for the heart to break out in glad praise and love to the one who had done so much!

The other outstanding result of the Moravian revival at Herrnhut was a vision of worldwide missions.

"This small church in twenty years," says Dr. Warneck, "called into being more missions than the whole Evangelical Church had done in two centuries." That this great missionary fervour was the direct result of the mighty outpouring at Herrnhut, and that a new and unquenchable passion controlled the entire movement, is most strikingly set forth by Count Zinzendorf himself:

“Urged by love, to every nation
Of the fallen human race,
We will publish Christ’s salvation,
And declare His blood-bought grace;
To display Him, and portray Him,
In His dying form and beauty,
Be it our aim and joyful duty.”

Again their devoted leader, Count Zinzendorf, imparts to them his vision in the following words:

“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.” But it is in Zinzendorf’s last words spoken on his deathbed, that we get the real spirit of Moravianism:

“I am going to my Saviour. I am ready. There is nothing to hinder me now. I cannot say how much I love you all. Who would have believed that the prayer of Christ, ‘*that they all may be one*’ (John 17:11), could have been so strikingly fulfilled among us! I only asked that for the first fruits among the heathen, and thousands have been given me. Are we not as in Heaven! Do we not live together like angels! The Lord and His servants understand each other. I am ready.” He died at the age of sixty and was buried at Herrnhut, more than four thousand from all parts of the world following his body to the grave.

In the West Indies, among the North American Indians, on the cold, bleak shores of Greenland, far away in dark, benighted Africa, as well as in South America, and practically every country in Europe and Asia, the Moravians planted the cross and won thousands of souls to Jesus Christ. And all this, let it be remembered was some fifty years before the modern missionary movement was launched by William Carey, who in turn got his inspiration from the Moravians.

Thus as in the days of the early Church, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, and immediately “*they went everywhere preaching the Word*” (Acts 8:4) – witnesses unto Christ. And because they were, with Paul, determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, they were eminently successful. They preached the blood to the most savage tribes, and multitudes were convicted and converted. It was the spirit expressed in their leader’s great motto that inspired them: “I have one passion,” exclaimed Zinzendorf, “it is Jesus, Jesus only.”

What about Us?

But now arises the question: what about us? Do we need a revival? What is the greatest need of the Church of our day? Men, machinery, money, organization? No. The supreme need of the hour is a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Oh that there might come upon us a spirit of prayer such as came upon the brethren at Herrnhut over two centuries ago, that we, too, both individually and as a Church, might experience an anointing of the Holy Spirit that would cause the world to wonder at the “signs following!” God grant it may be so!

Arranged from *The Spirit at Work* by Oswald J. Smith.