

# The Moravian Missions Strategy: Christ-Centered, Spirit-Driven, Mission-Minded

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## Introduction

John Mark Terry writes that “though William Carey is rightly regarded as the father of the modern missions movement, the Pietists, especially the Moravians, were really the first modern missionaries”.<sup>1</sup> His contention is right, because Carey did not create the Protestant missionary movement from a vacuum. Sixty years before Carey left for India and 150 years before Hudson Taylor landed in China, the Moravians already had dispatched two missionaries to the West Indian island of St. Thomas to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Within twenty years of the commencement of their missionary activities, the Moravian Brethren had started more missions than Anglicans and other Protestants had during the two preceding centuries.<sup>2</sup> Their marvelous success was largely due to the fact that from the beginning they recognized that the evangelization of the world was the most pressing of all the obligations that rested upon the Christian Church and that the carrying out of this obligation was the “common affair” of the Brethren community.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Mark Terry, *Evangelism: A Concise History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Robinson, *History of Christian Missions* (New York: Scribners, 1915), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, *History of Christian Missions*, 50. Mulholland also makes a similar contention that the Moravians were the first Protestants to put into practice the idea that evangelizing the lost is the duty of the whole church, not just of a missionary society or a few individuals (Kenneth B. Mulholland, “Moravians, Puritans, and the Modern Missionary Movement”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 [1999]: 222). Schattschneider evaluates the mission movement of the Moravians: “The haphazard

The Moravian Church has left a record of world evangelization that is without parallel in the post-New Testament era. Their success in missions was the fruit of committed missionaries and their God-centered heart for lost souls. They were not only God-centered people but mission-driven people. Paul Pierson writes, “The Moravians became committed to world missions as a church; that is, the whole church became a missionary society.”<sup>4</sup> Their legendary dedication to world evangelization raises some questions: Who are the Moravians? What drove the Brethren to set out for unknown lands at the cost of their families and their own lives? Did they have some specific mission methodologies? The answers to these questions will offer readers a better understanding of our precious Christian history and a fuller insight into modern missions.

This paper explores the Moravian missions strategy. First of all, we will briefly survey their origins and historical development. This task will include surveying Reformers like Hus and Pietists such as Spener, Francke and Zinzendorf. We will then explore and analyze the uniqueness of the Moravian missions strategies.

## Historical Development of Moravian Missions

### *1. The Name of the Church*

*Unitas Fratrum* is the ancient name by which the Moravian Church was first known. It is a Latin phrase meaning, “Unity of Brethren”, which is still used as their official name. People of this church are called Moravians because the church got its start in Moravia and Bohemia.

The history of the Moravian Church is usually divided into two eras: first, the time of the Ancient Unity which sprung to life in Moravia and Bohemia after the martyrdom of John Hus; and second, the time of the Renewed Church which flourished in Germany after a party of religious refugees found a safe haven on the estate of Count Zinzendorf.<sup>5</sup>

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attempts of Protestants to undertake crosscultural missionary activity received their first infusion of form and content from Zinzendorf and Moravians.” See David A. Schattschneider, “Pioneers in Mission: Zinzendorf and the Moravians”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8 (April 1984): 63.

<sup>4</sup> Paul E. Pierson, “Total Commitment to World Missions”, *Christian History* 1 (1982): 6.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Spaugh, “A Short Introduction to the History, Customs and Practices of the Moravian Church” [on-line], accessed 19 October 2008; available from <http://www.everydaycounselor.com/archive/sh/history.htm>; Internet.

## 2. John Hus

John Hus, who is regarded by the Moravian Church as one of its main figures, was born of peasant parents in the Bohemian village of Husinec about 1369.<sup>6</sup> He studied at the University of Prague as a theological student, where he became adept with the tools of logic, philosophy and theology. After taking his bachelor's degree in 1394 and his master's degree in 1396, he became a Roman Catholic priest in 1400.



His theology relied heavily upon the writings of Wycliffe, who emphasized the Bible as the primary authority of the church. In those days, the conflict over Wycliffe was becoming sharper at the university. The more Wycliffe was condemned by the entrenched powers, the stronger Hus moved to defend him.<sup>7</sup> His emphasis on the Bible led him to declare that all Christians had the right and duty to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, which is similar to the contention of Wycliffe.

In 1415, Hus was summoned to appear before the Council of Constance to recant his teaching. Hus was ordered to make his choice – recant and be imprisoned for life or refuse and be burned alive. He refused to recant, so on July 6, 1415, Hus was stripped of his rank in the church and led to the site of his execution.

## 3. Formation of the *Unitas Fratrum*

The martyrdom of Hus intensified the anti-Roman feeling in Bohemia. His followers increased; and in March of 1457, they gathered in the village of Kunwald in Bohemia to form a society which they first called “The Brethren of the Law of Christ”.<sup>8</sup> Despite the occasional persecution, the Brethren prospered during the Reformation and increased in number. When Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church and spread the flame of the Protestant Reformation, the *Unitas Fratrum* was delighted with the reforms demanded by Luther. Even though

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<sup>6</sup> John R. Weinlick and Albert H. Frank, *The Moravian Church through the Ages* (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, 1966; revised, 1989), 9. His birth date, however, is somewhat doubtful. Langton writes that it is usually given as between 1373 and 1375. See Edward Langton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Story of the First International Protestant Church* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Weinlick and Frank, *The Moravian Church*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Spagh, “Short Introduction to History”. As some mistook the title for that of a new monastic order, they changed it; and thus the designation became “The Unity of the Brethren” (*Unitas Fratrum*). See Langton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 30.

the merger between the Brethren and Luther did not succeed,<sup>9</sup> the Brethren kept a strong relationship with Luther and other Reformers.<sup>10</sup>

The Brethren grew not only in Bohemia but in Moravia as well. In 1722, two families led by Christian David fled from Moravia because of persecution and by the invitation of Count Zinzendorf settled on his domain of Berthelsdorf in Saxony. Following their settlement, about three hundred Brethren emigrated from Moravia and Bohemia to the new location. They built a town called Herrnhut, “The Lord’s Watch”, which became the center of the renewed Church of the Brethren. We have explored the historical setting of the birth of the Brethren Church, and now we will examine Pietism, which was another factor in the formation of the Moravian Church.

#### 4. Pietism

When the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) ended, Europe was in shambles. Many Protestants had lost their passion and clung to dead orthodoxy. World-wide missions was not a main concern for the Reformers.<sup>11</sup> The Lutheran Church emphasized that only the apostles were privileged to fulfill the Great Commission.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, missions was not considered the responsibility of the church. From the ashes of this situation, a movement called Pietism began to emerge. Pietism tried to complete the spirit of the Reformation by emphasizing the transformation in life. Pietists emphasized spiritual experience and practical application in life.

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<sup>9</sup> Their disagreement revolved over theological issues. Luther believed that man was saved and justified by faith alone, whereas the Brethren believed that faith must be expressed through daily Christian living. They insisted that it was not a matter of faith or works, but of “faith that works”, insisting that faith ought to be visible in the lives of those who profess it. See Spaugh, “Short Introduction to History”.

<sup>10</sup> Bucer, one of the renowned Reformers, once wrote to the Brethren, “I believe ye are the only people at this day, who, together with a pure doctrine, exercise a genuine and well-adapted discipline, which is not grievous, but profitable.” See Langton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Mulholland indicates four reasons why there was no mission movement: theological reasons, geographical reasons, ecclesiastical reasons and organizational reasons. See Kenneth B. Mulholland, “From Luther to Carey: Pietism and the Modern Missionary Movement”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (January-March 1999): 86-87. Tucker also finds some similar reasons of inactive Protestant missions involvement. Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 67.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Scherer, *Justinian Welz: Essays by an Early Prophet of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 28.

*i. Philip Jacob Spener*

Spener (1635-1705), the father of Lutheran Pietism, published his book *Pia Desideria* in 1670, which is considered to be the starting point of German Pietism. In his masterpiece *Pia Desideria*, Spener emphasized the importance of the Christian's inner transformation and its expression in his life.<sup>13</sup> In his call for reform Spener focused on six concrete proposals:



- (1) A more extensive use of the Word of God.
- (2) More exercise of the spiritual priesthood.
- (3) It is not enough to have knowledge of Christianity, for Christianity consists of practice.
- (4) Great care must be exercised in the conduct of religious controversies.
- (5) Seminaries are to be places of spiritual formation, not just places of intellectual exercises.
- (6) Seminaries are to provide practical experience in ministry.<sup>14</sup>

His proposals for reform met a diverse response. At last Spener was forced to leave the church; he moved to Berlin. There he established the University of Halle, near Berlin, where he challenged August Hermann Francke, the leader of Pietism at the University of Halle.

*ii. August Hermann Francke*



Francke (1663-1727) was a younger contemporary of Spener and taught Pietist beliefs at the University of Halle. In his mid-twenties, Francke experienced what he believed to be the new birth.<sup>15</sup> Francke explained the agenda for Pietism briefly: "A life changed, a church revived, a nation reformed, a world evangelized."<sup>16</sup> The University of Halle became a chief center of Pietism. This is the school where Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravians, was educated.

<sup>13</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964). See especially 116-17.

<sup>14</sup> Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 87-122.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 896.

<sup>16</sup> August Hermann Francke, quoted in "Gallery of Leading Figures", *Christian History* 5 (1986): 13.

### iii. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf



Having examined the pre-Reformers and Pietism, we will now turn to Zinzendorf, who is the greatest leader in the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf was born on May 26, 1700, in Saxony, Dresden, into an aristocratic family. He was only six weeks old when his father died; he was only four years old when his mother married again. The young Count Zinzendorf was handed over to the tender care of his grandmother, Catherine von Gersdorf. She had a close relationship with Pietist leaders such as Spener

and Francke. His grandmother's talent was handed down to Zinzendorf, and the relationship with the Pietists cultivated within him deep religious inclinations.

When Zinzendorf graduated from university, his family sent him on a tour of Europe. In the course of his travels, he came to an art gallery in Dusseldorf where he saw a painting entitled *Ecce Homo* by Domenico Feti. This painting had a shocking effect upon him. It was a picture of the thorn-crowned Christ. He read an inscription under the picture: "*Hoc feci pro te; Quid facis pro me?*" (This I have done for you; what have you done for me?) The memory of this question haunted Zinzendorf throughout his life. He wrote in his diary, "I have loved Him for a long time, but I have actually not done anything for Him. From now on I will do whatever He leads me to do."<sup>17</sup>

The opportunity for Zinzendorf to accomplish his zealous Christian service came in 1722, when a group of Protestant refugees sought shelter on his estate at Berthelsdorf. Their leader, Christian David, impressed Zinzendorf with stories of persecution of the Brethren. Zinzendorf invited them to settle on his land, which settlement was named Herrnhut, "The Lord's Watch". This event became a turning point in the development of the Moravian movement.<sup>18</sup>

Even though there were occasional problems owing to the diverse backgrounds of the residents, the whole atmosphere changed in 1727. On August 13, 1727, a period of spiritual renewal was climaxed at a communion service with a great revival, which marked the coming of the Holy Spirit to Herrnhut.<sup>19</sup> This great night of revival immediately replaced the distrust and dissension of the past with brotherly love and brought a new passion for missions, which became the chief characteristics of the Moravian Church.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum 1722-1957* (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, 1967), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Weinlick and Frank write that this memorable communion service on August 13 is regarded as the real birthday of the Renewed Unitas Fratrum. See John R. Weinlick

Zinzendorf invited a slave to Herrnhut to tell his story of the need for the gospel among his fellow slaves. Twenty-six people immediately volunteered, and the Moravian Missionary Movement was launched.<sup>21</sup> Within a year, the first two Moravian missionaries had been commissioned to the Virgin Islands; and in the two decades that followed, the Moravians sent out more missionaries than all Protestants had sent out in the previous two centuries.<sup>22</sup>

## Missions Strategy

It is almost impossible to maintain that before sending out missionaries the Moravian Church deliberately established specific missions strategies on how to preach the gospel or on how to start churches. Their strategy did not derive from an elaborate plan, but it was an accumulated lesson which the missionaries learned when they were ministering on the field. As they pursued the ideal of the apostles of Jesus in the early church, they tried to follow the model employed in the New Testament. This is why modern missions can find many useful strategies that are still applicable today. We will examine their missions strategies.

### *1. Christ-Centered Message*

First Corinthians 2:2, “Christ crucified and nothing else”, may be the most significant and lasting motto for their missionary work. Earlier missionaries attempted to persuade people by offering elaborate proofs for the existence of God in the style of a theology lecture. Zinzendorf, however, urged the missionaries to tell the story of Jesus Christ.

There was a turning point which caused them to emphasize the story of Jesus. In spite of several years of hard work, missionaries in Greenland did not convert any natives. However, the time came when the message of the missionaries was received. They abandoned preaching abstract theological doctrine and simply preached Jesus Christ, and their first successes followed immediately. When Kajarnak, a native of Greenland, heard the story of Jesus, he came forward with his eager question, “What is that? Tell me that again.”<sup>23</sup> The native broke the silence and indifference by showing his interest in the story of Jesus.

In 1740, the Moravian missionaries made an important change in the methods which they had hitherto adopted of presenting the gospel to the Greenland natives. When the great success in Greenland was public knowledge, Zinzendorf rejected the old rationalistic method of preaching and

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and Albert H. Frank, *The Moravian Church Through the Ages: The Story of a Worldwide, Pre-Reformation Protestant Church* (Bethlehem, PA: The Moravian Church in America, 1989), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Mulholland, “Moravians”, 224.

<sup>22</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 71.

<sup>23</sup> Hutton, *Short History of the Moravian Church*, 154.

proclaimed, “Henceforth, we shall preach nothing but the love of the slaughtered Lamb.”<sup>24</sup> Their prayers, their litanies, their hymns, their conversation and their sermons had only one theme: the wounds, the blood and the death of Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

The Moravians became witnesses of Christ and Him crucified. Their theology became Christology, and their creed was two words: “the Cross”.<sup>26</sup> In their preaching they just went straight to the point and told about the life and, especially, the death of Jesus Christ. Since the time of that revival by the story of Jesus Christ, “the foolish doctrine of the Cross” has been the absolute center of their message.

### 2. *Dependence on the Holy Spirit*

The Moravians carried out their mission through the power of the Holy Spirit. They believed that missionary activity is a part of the divine plan of God as He uses committed people of God through the Holy Spirit. There was an event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during their communion in Herrnhut in 1727, which worked as a driving force for the Moravians to focus on foreign missions. Greenfield describes this revival: “He [the Holy Spirit] came upon its members gathered at the table of the Lord and baptized them all into one body, and filled them with a strong, unquenchable passion to execute the Savior’s great commission, and to let all mankind know of His Cross and of His salvation.”<sup>27</sup>

In delivering the message of Jesus Christ, the Moravians depended on the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. They believed that it is the Holy Spirit Who searches the souls for His lost people and opens their hearts to respond to the preaching of the missionary. In this sense, “the Holy Spirit is the only missionary, and human beings are agents of the Spirit”.<sup>28</sup> Missionaries are simply sent to those whom the Spirit has already prepared to accept the Lord Jesus.

### 3. *Fervent Prayer*

Prayer has served as one of the most powerful factors in the Moravian missions strategy from its inception. The Moravians have a strong belief in the power of prayer in their missions. It was from the spiritual renewal in Herrnhut that prayer became a pivotal part of Moravian evangelism. When the spiritual revival occurred on August 13, 1727, a Spirit of grace and

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<sup>24</sup> Spaugh, “Short Introduction to the History”.

<sup>25</sup> John Greenfield, *Power from on High or The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival 1727-1927* (London: Hunt, Barnard & Co., Ltd, 1931), 46.

<sup>26</sup> Greenfield, *Power from on High*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Greenfield, *Power from on High*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> David A. Schattschneider, “Pioneers in Mission: Zinzendorf and the Moravians”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8 (April 1984): 65.

supplication was poured out upon the congregation at Herrnhut. The thought struck some brothers and sisters that it might be well to set apart certain hours for the purpose of prayer.<sup>29</sup> On August 26, twenty-four brothers and the same number of sisters covenanted together to continue to pray from one midnight to the next, dividing the twenty-four hours of night and day. More people were added to pray. Since then, they have begun a round-the-clock prayer watch, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

For over a hundred years, the Moravians shared in the “Hourly Intercession” at home and abroad, on land and sea. The prayer vigil by Zinzendorf and the Moravians sensitized them to attempt the unheard of mission to reach others for Christ.<sup>30</sup> Six months after the beginning of the prayer watch, Zinzendorf challenged them with a bold evangelism aimed at the West Indies, Greenland and Turkey; twenty-six Moravians volunteered for world missions to go wherever the Lord led.<sup>31</sup> It is needless to say that the fervent intercession of the Moravians, which lasted one hundred years, has worked as the main force of world evangelization.

#### 4. Pietism

The Moravians lived a life of Pietism, and it left a great impression on those to whom they ministered on the mission field. Pietists put their emphasis on the Bible as the source of religious authority, religious renewal of the individual, the new life in Christ and the obligation to witness to it day by day.<sup>32</sup>

Mulholland’s indication of the characteristics of Pietist missions well explains how the Moravian missions were executed in the Pietistic manner:

- (1) Pietists educated the people. Pietists established schools wherever they went because they believed people should be taught to read so that they could read the Bible.
- (2) Pietists made the Bible available in the language of the people.
- (3) Pietists sought to know the culture. They insisted that missionaries learn the language and the culture of the people with whom they worked.
- (4) Pietists preached for personal conversion. They endeavored to bring people to a personal decision for Christ.

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<sup>29</sup> Greenfield, *Power from on High*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Tarr, “Prayer Meeting That Lasted 100 Years”, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Tarr, “Prayer Meeting That Lasted 100 Years”, 18.

<sup>32</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, “Religious Roots of the Early Moravian and Methodist Movement”, *Methodist History* 24 (April 1986): 139.

- (5) Pietists advocated church indigenization. They moved quickly to establish local congregations led by native pastors.<sup>33</sup>

The Moravians studied the Bible and put into practice what they learned. They prayed for one another and encouraged each other. Since Pietism teaches that genuine renewal looks outward to the unreached people in a foreign land, the Moravians left for the places where lost souls were waiting. On the mission fields, they lived as Pietists, and their lives touched the natives.

### 5. Contextualization

The Moravians tried to live in each culture like its natives. They became all things to all people in order to lead the people to Christ. Zinzendorf advised his missionaries in Greenland not to speak of Christ as a sacrifice, since shamanism did not know such concepts. He asked the Moravian missionaries not to dominate the natives but to live humbly among them.<sup>34</sup>

Their zealous efforts at contextualization in preaching is explained in Zinzendorf's statement: "If the greatest need of the heathen is a needle, then we should call our Savior a needle."<sup>35</sup> His extreme statement is vulnerable to refutation, but his principle shows how fervently he wanted to reach people utilizing their context.

Zinzendorf hoped that the traditional denominations would simply not be transplanted in new areas of the Christian world.<sup>36</sup> He did not want missionaries to polish up their churches on the mission field and ask the natives to understand what the Christian religion is like. Count Zinzendorf warned, "Do not measure souls according to the Herrnhut yardstick."<sup>37</sup> In the settlement of the Indians, the Moravians shared their life as one community with the natives.

The greatest strategy for contextualization was Bible translation. Moravian missionaries were encouraged to learn the languages of the people whom they served. They resolutely tackled new languages without many of the modern aids. Many Moravians went on to become outstandingly fluent and proficient in these new languages and began translating Scripture and hymns for local use.<sup>38</sup> In the settlement of Georgia, the Moravians appointed two Moravian women to study the Indian language so that they might dedicate themselves to the Indian service.<sup>39</sup> The distribution of the Bible

<sup>33</sup> Mulholland, "From Luther to Carey", 93-94.

<sup>34</sup> Weinlick and Frank, *Moravian Church Through the Ages*, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Tiplady, "Moravian Community, Spirituality, and Mission", in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 505.

<sup>36</sup> Schattschneider, "Pioneer in Mission", 66.

<sup>37</sup> Schattschneider, "Pioneer in Mission", 66.

<sup>38</sup> Grant, "Europe's Moravians", 222.

<sup>39</sup> Fries, *Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1740*, 124.

translated into the language of the natives contributed much to the lasting influence of the revival.

### 6. Tentmaking

The Moravian missionaries established tentmaking as a way of missionary strategy. When they set out for mission fields, they were provided with their fare. On reaching their destination, they had to support themselves.<sup>40</sup> As most of the Moravians were of the artisan class, it seemed natural that the missionaries should take their trade with them when they were sent to foreign lands.

There may be some reasons. First of all, the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut could not afford to support the missionaries. A village of six hundred people had to support two hundred missionaries.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the missionaries worked for a living. Second, they worked for the sake of the transmission of the gospel. Zinzendorf felt that not only would their practice and teaching of trades lift the economic level of the people to whom they were sent, but the exercising of the trades would also provide a way of natural interaction with these same people.<sup>42</sup>

William Danger's *Profit for the Lord*<sup>43</sup> deals thoroughly with the economic activities of Moravian missions in the West Indies, Labrador, Surinam and Africa. This is a sign of recognition that a Christian missionary had an obligation to help his neighbor not only in spiritual needs but also in physical needs. Zinzendorf not only held strong opinions on the necessity of work, he himself was an indefatigable worker.<sup>44</sup> He believed with St. Paul that Christians must work so that they may not become a burden to others but have something to give to the needy. Working for a living or for the benefit of the natives was not always easy; however, it helped the natives to feel the sense of community with the missionaries.

### 7. Layperson Missionary

What surprises us is the fact that all of the Moravian missionaries were lay people who were not given any theological training. They were common

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<sup>40</sup> In order for self-support in the mission fields, most of the Moravian missionaries were artisans such as potters, carpenters, butchers, farmers, doctors or tailors.

<sup>41</sup> Mulholland, "Moravians", 224. Tucker observes that all Moravians were expected to be evangelists, and there was little differentiation between those who ministered on the home field and those who went abroad. It was very natural for the missionaries to work for their survival. See Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 80.

<sup>42</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 80.

<sup>43</sup> William J. Danker, *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

<sup>44</sup> Danker, *Profit for the Lord*, 32.

artisans in those days.<sup>45</sup> Leonard Dober, a potter, and David Nitschmann, a carpenter, were the first two missionaries to the West Indies, and the next two missionaries to Greenland were gravediggers. Like the apostles in the early church, they were unlearned and ignorant men; and like them, they were despised by the cultured people of their day.<sup>46</sup> But they were men of passion and piety.<sup>47</sup> What they lacked in knowledge from theological education they made up in zeal for Christ and love for lost souls.

Zinzendorf did not really pay much attention to the educational qualifications of the missionaries. He emphasized passion and love for Jesus more than formal education. This attitude was influential for a long time in the Moravian Church. The synods of 1818 and 1825 declined the establishment of a college for missionary training. Their decision does not mean that they ignored the need of theological education, but rather that they put more emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and the commitment of the missionaries. The great fruit of the Moravians shows that the best missionaries are those equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit and with a burning heart for the unreached.

Zinzendorf laid emphasis not only upon the spiritual qualifications for a missionary, but he also stressed that they should be men of character. As self-supporting lay persons, the Moravian missionaries worked with the natives, witnessing their faith not only by their words but also by their exemplary lives.

### 8. *Commitment to Mission*

Since the time when they commenced sending out their missionaries, the Moravians have not ceased their fervent heart for unreached people. Zinzendorf used to say, "I have one passion, and it is Him, only Him." Paul Pierson wrote, "The Moravians became committed to world missions as a church; that is, the whole church became a missionary society."<sup>48</sup>

Their single-minded spirit for world evangelization oftentimes affected their family life. Sometimes they left their wives and families behind for the cause of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Young men were encouraged to remain single for an

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<sup>45</sup> In this sense, the Moravians opened the ministry to the lay people, which preceded Hudson Taylor in this development by over one hundred years.

<sup>46</sup> Herbert J. Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 79-80.

<sup>47</sup> Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Paul E. Pierson, "Total Commitment to World Missions", *Christian History* 1 (1982): 6.

<sup>49</sup> Zinzendorf is no exception for this. During his travels abroad and his exile for several years, his wife, Erdmuth, was left alone. When she died, he showed his bitter grief: ". . . the count's sorrow was aggravated by remorse. He had not been fair to Erdmuth. Cynics to the contrary, he had not been unfaithful to her during their long

effective mission; and when marriage was allowed, the spouse was often chosen by lot.<sup>50</sup> The chief example of being single-minded for world evangelization was Zinzendorf himself. His entire life shows how he loved Jesus and tried to win lost souls. He invested his entire life as well as his whole fortune for mission by not only administering at home but also visiting mission fields himself. His word has challenged the Brethren and enkindled their dedication: “My joy, until I die . . . to win souls for the Lamb.” When Sorensen, one of the Brethren missionaries, was asked if he were ready to go to Labrador, he replied: “Yes, tomorrow, if I am only given a pair of shoes.”<sup>51</sup>

### 9. *Seekers Search*

The Moravians went to receptive people. Because they believed that the Holy Spirit is the primary missionary, they counseled their missionaries, “Seek out the first fruit. Seek out those people whom the Holy Spirit has prepared and bring the good news to them.”<sup>52</sup> Zinzendorf wrote in his letter to his friend some months before the departure from Herrnhut of the first missionaries, “[T]he missionaries were not to attempt the conversion of whole nations but were to look for individual seekers.”<sup>53</sup> He believed that Christ is the Lord of the mission, and that the church simply follows Him in bringing the gospel to those whom Jesus has already prepared to hear it through the Spirit. Therefore, the preliminary activity of the Holy Spirit among the hearers is most important for missionaries.

Zinzendorf called the selected souls who respond to the gospel “the first fruit”, “the bundles of the living”, “a lodge in the vineyard”, or “a holy beginning”.<sup>54</sup> He believed that two biblical episodes illustrated how the first fruits would be identified. The first is Cornelius and his encounter with Peter (Acts 10:1-48), and the second is the Ethiopian eunuch and his encounter with Philip (Acts 8:26-39). According to Zinzendorf’s understanding, Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch were seeking after religious truth, which means that the Holy Spirit was working within them. The Holy Spirit also guided the missionaries to those who were seeking after Him.<sup>55</sup> This strategy relieved the missionaries from the burden of unrealistic expectations on the

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periods of separation; but he had been extremely thoughtless. He had forgotten that she was a woman, a wife, and a mother.” See Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 225.

<sup>50</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 72.

<sup>51</sup> Kane, *Concise History of the Christian World Mission*, 80.

<sup>52</sup> Mulholland, “Moravians”, 225.

<sup>53</sup> Weinlick and Frank, *Moravian Church through the Ages*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> S. Baudert, “Zinzendorf’s Thought on Missions Related to His View of the World”, *International Review of Missions* 21 (July 1932): 399.

<sup>55</sup> Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures*, 53.

mission field. When people were not receptive or when they were vehemently opposed to the gospel, the Moravians left for other lands.

### 10. Radical Simplicity

Even though Zinzendorf himself was widely read in a broad range of subjects and fluent in several languages, he did not produce a systematic mission strategy. This philosophy of missions is only found throughout his writings. Zinzendorf, however, believed in the presence of the Savior in missions through the work of the Holy Spirit. The basic thread uniting his ideas can be called “radical simplicity in the Spirit”.<sup>56</sup> His simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit has influenced all Moravian missionaries. Weinlick and Frank write about this simplicity: “Concerning their faith and practice, they sought to maintain simplicity, with emphasis upon everything Christian living.”<sup>57</sup>

We can find their simplicity in three simple questions about their life.<sup>58</sup> First, to whom is the missionary sent? The Moravians believed that a missionary is sent because he is called by God for His chosen people. Therefore, when they are called as missionaries, they did not show any hesitation. Zinzendorf simply followed the commission of Jesus to go to the entire world, which he called “the Savior’s own teaching method”;<sup>59</sup> and the Moravians simply followed the Great Commission. Second, what does the missionary preach? Zinzendorf counseled the missionaries to preach only Jesus. He rejected the traditional method of preaching and urged the missionaries to go to the point directly. Third, how does the missionary live in a new culture? Zinzendorf did not give many instructions about missionary behavior because too many specific rules would be restrictive. They were simply urged to follow the power of the Holy Spirit and to lead a morally blameless life. The life and message of the Moravians was simple, but their fruit was life-saving work.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to explore the Moravian missions strategy. Even though their strategies are not without some weaknesses, they provide much insight into contemporary world evangelization. Their Christ-centered preaching, dependence on the Holy Spirit and fervent prayer served their vision of world evangelization. Their life of Pietism, passion for lost souls and contextualization served as effective means of reaching the native people. Financial independence from their home church naturally led the lay missionaries to mingle with the people for whom they were working. The

<sup>56</sup> Schttschneider, “Pioneers in Mission”, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Weinlick and Frank, *Moravian Church through the Ages*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> See Schttschneider, “Pioneers in Mission”, 65-66.

<sup>59</sup> Schttschneider, “Pioneers in Mission”, 65

emphasis on the individual seekers made them more dependent upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The radical simplicity of their lives and their wholehearted commitment to the Great Commission served as the driving forces for fulfilling their vision of world evangelization.

We are looking forward to seeing the day when the entire congregation of our church recognizes the Great Commission as everyone's task and, like the Moravian Church, carries out the life of a missionary at home or abroad for the expansion of God's kingdom until our precious Lord comes.



*Herrnhut*