

The Moravian Revival of 1727

A Sermon preached August 12th, 1906, in the Moravian Church,
Nazareth, Pa. by Rev. John Greenfield, D.D.

Text: "Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of many generations;
Ask thy father, and he will tell thee;
Thine elders, and they will show thee."

—Deut. 32-7.

Some one has said that Roman Catholics have many fast days; Moravians many festival days. Everything depends upon the motive, aim and fruits of the observance either of fast or festival days. If any real blessing is to come to us from our fasts or festivals, they must be observed "with the spirit and with the understanding." They are both equally unprofitably and worse than useless, if they become mere form and empty ceremony.

In common with all Christians we celebrate the great festival days of the church, such as Christmas and Easter. In fellowship with all Protestants we commemorate the beginning of the great Reformation under Martin Luther, October 31, 1517.

Together with the many millions who adhere to the Lutheran faith, we observe as one of our memorial days the presentation of the "Confession of Augsburg," June 25, 1530.

But we have distinctive denominational festival or memorial days as well. The chief of these occur during the month of August. They commemorate a gracious outpouring of the holy spirit upon our Moravian Fathers in the year 1727. These festival days, which are so cherished amongst us, point to marvelous Pentecostal experiences on the part of our spiritual ancestors. We do well to remember and consider these days of old. Their observance has been known to lead to mighty longings and strong cryings unto God for similar manifestations of His power and glory. We wish to follow our Fathers, even as they followed Christ. But in order to do this we must know God even as they knew Him. Their experience of His grace must be ours. The love of Jesus like a mighty flame, and the fire of the Holy Spirit, must burn within our hearts even as it glowed in theirs. We must experience what our great Moravian poet, James Montgomery, has so well expressed:

"O Lord God, Holy Ghost,
In this accepted hour,
As on the day of Pentecost
Descend in all Thy power.

"The young, the old inspire
With wisdom from above;
And give us hearts and tongues of fire,
To pray and praise and love."

Let us act on the advice of Moses, "The man of God," as in his farewell song to the assembly of Israel he calls upon them to "Remember the days of old."

I.—A REVIVAL OF PRAYER

In studying the account of this greatest revival the Moravian Church has ever known, this wonderful "season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," we are impressed by the spirit of prayer which then prevailed.

The great and good commentator, Matthew Henry, has strikingly said: "When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is to set them a praying." This was precisely what the Lord did in the case of our Fathers. The great Moravian revival of 1727, which reached its climax August 13, was preceded and followed by most extraordinary praying. The spirit of grace and supplications manifested itself in the early part of the year. Count Zinzendorf began to give spiritual instructions to a class of nine girls between the ages of ten and thirteen years. "The Count," so the historian of that period tells us, "frequently complained to his consort that though the children behaved with great outward propriety, he could not perceive any traces of spiritual life among them; and however much might be said to them of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet it did not seem to reach their hearts. In this distress of his mind he took his refuge to the Lord in prayer, most fervently entreating Him to grant to these children His grace and blessing."

What a spectacle! A gifted, wealthy, young German nobleman on his knees, agonizing in prayer for the conversion of some little school girls! Later on we read as follows:

"July 16. The Count poured forth his soul in a heart-affecting prayer, accompanied with a flood of tears; this prayer produced an extraordinary effect, and was the beginning of the subsequent operation of the life-giving and energetic Spirit of God." Not only Count Zinzendorf, but many other brethren also began to pray as never before. In the "Memorial Days of the Renewed Moravian Church," we read as follows:

"July 22.—A number of brethren covenanted together of their own accord, engaging to meet often on the Hutberg, to pour out their hearts in prayer and hymns, and to be subject one to the other in love, so that what might be the idea of one (if resting upon a proper foundation) should be approved by all. The first hymn they sung was 'Our conversation is in Heaven.' This caused a great awakening."

"On the fifth of August the Warden, viz., the Count, spent the whole night in watching, in company of about twelve or fourteen brethren, visiting Hennersdorf as well as Berthelsdorf, and several persons were powerfully affected with his addresses. At midnight there was held on the Hutberg a large meeting for the purpose of prayer, at which great emotion prevailed."

"On Sunday, August 10, about noon, while Pastor Rothe was holding the meeting at Herrnhut, he felt himself overwhelmed by a wonderful and irresistible power of the Lord, and sunk down into the dust before God, and with him sunk down the whole assembled congregation, in an ecstasy of feeling. In this frame of mind they continued till midnight engaged in prayer and singing, weeping and supplication."

No one can fail from the foregoing to note that a wonderful revival of prayer was in progress. This prepared our Fathers for the great blessing of the thirteenth of August. Also after that day did they continue, like the Apostolic

Church, "With one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:14.) There was organized on August 26 in Herrnhut the most remarkable society for united persevering prayer of which we have ever heard. The historian tells us:

"After that distinguished day of blessing, the 13th of August, 1727, on which the Spirit of grace and supplication had been poured out upon the congregation at Herrnhut, the thought struck some brethren and sisters that it might be well to set apart certain hours for the purpose of prayer, at which seasons all might be reminded of its excellency, and be induced by the promise annexed to fervent prayer to pour out their hearts before the Lord."

"It was moreover considered as an important point that, as in the days of the Old Covenant, the sacred fire was never permitted to go out on the altar (Lev. 6:13 and 14) so in a congregation which is a temple of the living God, wherein He has His altar and His fire, the intercession of His saints should incessantly rise up unto Him like holy incense."

"On August 26 twenty-four brethren and the same number of sisters met, and covenanted together to continue from midn'ght to the next in prayer, dividing for that purpose the twenty-four hours of night and day by lot among themselves."

"August 27 this new regulation was put into practice. More were soon added to this number of intercessors, which was thus increased to seventy-seven, and even the awakened children began a plan similar to this among themselves. Every one carefully observed the hour which had been appointed for him. But as it was a principle at Herrnhut that nothing of a forced nature should obtain there, the resolution was taken that if any one could not spend the whole hour in prayer, either because of indigence of spirit or official concerns preventing him, he might sing spiritual songs and hymns of praise to the Lord, and thus bring unto Him, for himself and his fellow brethren, either the sacrifice of thanksgiving or the offering of prayer and supplication. The intercessors had a weekly meeting at which notice was given to them of those things which they were to consider special subjects for prayer and remembrance before the Lord."

This unique society of believers, banded together for the greatest work in the world, continued in existence for many years. Only Eternity can reveal the incalculable blessings which these faithful, praying Moravians brought down upon their own church and community, yea upon mankind at large.

One more instance of the remarkable spirit of prayer which then prevailed, must suffice. On the evening of August the twelfth there was a confirmation service in the church at Herrnhut, at which two sisters made confession of their faith in Christ. The historian tells us:

"On this occasion the grace of God was so powerfully effective upon the hearts of those that were present that some were thereby awakened from death to life, and the whole congregation was most sensibly affected. These two sisters remained all night engaged in prayer."

Was there ever such a praying church since the days of the Apostles? Truly our Moravian fathers had learned "The ministry of intercession." They had tried and found true the Master's promise: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). Apostolic praying was in their case, as indeed it always is, followed by Apostolic power. Earnest, united and persevering prayer is the unalterable price of all spiritual blessing. Are we willing to pay it?

II.—A REVIVAL OF FAITH

St. James wrote concerning certain Christians of his day:

"Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to them that love Him?" (Jam. 2:5), Our Bohemian and Moravian ancestors were poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith, a condition infinitely better than to be wealthy in earthly treasures, but paupers as to spiritual possessions. St. Paul tells us: "All have not faith," (II Thess. 3:2), and our Saviour once exclaimed: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). The Apostles prayed: "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke 17:5). Our spiritual Fathers were men "rich in faith." For Jesus' sake they had forsaken their earthly possessions in Bohemia and Moravia. As poor pilgrims they had come to Germany and been permitted by the pious Count Zinzendorf to settle on his estates. And now, five years after their arrival, though still struggling with earthly poverty, they experienced such a downpour of spiritual blessings that they became preeminently Christians of the Stephen type—"full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 6:5). Their faith approached the marvellous. They believed God implicitly. They took Him at His word, and with childlike obedience did exactly, literally and promptly "as the Lord commanded." (Ex. 39). One illustration of this must suffice. They read the "marching orders" of the great Captain of their salvation "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) and "immediately they endeavoured to go." (Acts 16:10). These poor refugees went forth as foreign missionaries, thus placing the Moravian Church in the very front ranks of "the army of the living God."

Nor was this all. Not only was faith wonderfully increased in the hearts and lives of these believers, but many amongst them began for the first time to trust in Jesus with "a new and living" faith. In other words, conversions began to multiply. As in Jerusalem, so now in Herrnhut, "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." (Acts 5:14). The churches were not large enough to accommodate the crowds that flocked to hear the Word, in consequence of which services were held in the open air, and, as in Antioch of old, "A great number believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:21). Many church members discovered that they were unconverted and fled for refuge to Jesus. Faith ran like a catching fire from heart to heart. A certain writer tells us that "When people awoke in the morning, the first thing they heard was, who had been converted the night before." Truly it was "a revival of faith." Most remarkable and marvellous were the workings of the Spirit of God amongst the children of the congregation. Very many boys and girls began to believe in Jesus to the saving of their souls. First of all one little girl eleven years old, whose name was Susanna Kuehnel, found peace through faith in Christ. Count Zinzendorf's class of nine girls soon passed "from death unto life" in answer to his earnest prayers. The historian of the period, a venerable bishop of the Moravian Church, has given the following graphic description of the work of grace amongst the children:

"Meanwhile the Count did not cease to offer up fervent prayers to the Lord in behalf of the children; and the awakening and conversion of the little girl, Susanna Kuehnel, afforded the first proof of the Lord's having graciously heard and accepted his prayer. This girl, eleven years of age, who lived with her parents at Herrnhut, after having spent three days wrestling with God in prayer, experienced on August 6 such a divine feeling of the grace of our Saviour, and obtained so clear an assurance of her salvation, that neglecting even the necessary

bodily refreshment, she spent the greatest part of that day in proclaiming the praises of her Redeemer. This extraordinary state of her mind was occasioned by the happy departure of her mother, which took place May 2, on which day her soul went over with uncommon cheerfulness into the presence of that Saviour whom she had here rejoiced in as the Sun of Righteousness. The joyful departure of her mother made so deep an impression upon this girl that she spent three whole days, and especially the fore part of the last night, till 1 o'clock in the morning, in weeping and prayer, at which hour she broke out into indescribable joy, called to her father, who slept in the adjoining room, and who had, unknown to her, heard all that passed, and cried out: Now father, I am become a child of God, and I know also how my mother felt and still feels." She, however, did not only relate to her father what great mercy the Lord had shown her, but out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spake to her companions of His loving kindness towards her, and this she did with such energy that they were deeply affected thereby, and felt themselves powerfully drawn to Jesus."

We hear occasionally in our own day of conversions and revivals among children. Some older Christians seem doubtful as to the necessity or advisability of such efforts. They appear to be so fearful of religious excitement as to look with suspicion upon all evangelistic work, and especially upon revivals among the children. But we Moravians know better. Our festival or memorial days serve to remind us every year that the conversion of the children is not only possible but also most desirable. Many of those boys and girls who began to believe on Jesus in the great revival at Herrnhut, became leaders in Christian work and famous missionaries of the Cross. The church diary of that congregation contains the following entry under the date of August 23:

"The children of both sexes felt a most powerful impulse to prayer, and it was impossible to listen to their infant supplications without being deeply moved and affected; a most extraordinary emotion of all hearts prevailed at their meeting on that day, produced especially by the manner in which Susanna Knehnel addressed them, whose zeal and earnestness daily increased in strength and ardour. A similarly blessed meeting of the children took place in the evening of the 26 of August, and on the 29, from the hours of ten o'clock at night until one the following morning, a truly affecting scene was witnessed, for the girls from Herrnhut and Berthelsdorf spent these hours in praying, singing and weeping on the Hutberg. The boys were at the same time engaged in earnest prayer in another place. The spirit of prayer and supplication at that time poured out upon the children was so powerful and efficacious that it is impossible to give an adequate description of it in words. These days were truly days of Heavenly enjoyment to the congregation at Herrnhut; all forgot themselves, and things terrestrial and transitory, and longed to be above with Christ, their Saviour, in bliss everlasting."

Another eye-witness says:

"I cannot ascribe the cause of the great awakening of the children at Herrnhut to anything but the wonderful outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the communicant congregation assembled on that occasion. The breezes of the Spirit pervaded at that time equally both young and old."

III.—A REVIVAL OF LOVE

When the enemy of souls can keep a church or community in spiritual darkness and death, then all is peace, but it is the peace of yonder cemetery. As soon, however as an awakening takes place and souls hitherto "dead in trespasses and sins" begin to awaken and show signs of life, then Satan's device to defeat the

work of the Lord consists chiefly in sowing the seeds of discord among the saints. Such was the case in Herrnhut. Many believers had yielded themselves up to the spirit of jealousy, suspicion and carping criticism. ("Unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" was sadly lacking. But when the revival came all this was changed. The thirteenth of August is particularly noteworthy because of the demonstration of brotherly love. We quote again from the Herrnhut church diary as to what happened at "that never-to-be-forgotten celebration of the Lord's Supper:"

"Before we proceeded to the church a short discourse was delivered at Herrnhut on the subject of the Holy Communion. On the road to Berthelsdorf parties of two or more might here and there be seen of those who had hearts' conversation together; all those who had been estranged one from the other cordially embraced each other, and entered into a mutual covenant of friendship and love. At the church the service was opened with the hymn 'Unbind me, O my God, from all my bonds and fetters,' during the singing of which a very wicked man, who was present as a spectator of the transaction, was overpowered with a feeling of contrition." "Immediately after, the assembly fell down before the Lord, and all, melted together in tears, began the hymn 'My soul before Thee prostrate lie', etc. It was scarcely possible to discern whether it were weeping or singing, but both were mingled together in so affecting a manner that the Rev. Mr. S. Suess, of Hennersdorf, who was administering because Mr. Rothe went with the congregation to the Lord's Table, felt perplexed and overwhelmed. After the conclusion of the hymn some brethren offered up powerful and fervent prayers, in which they laid before the Lord the general grievances of His congregation."

"After the absolution, previous to which the Warden of Herrnhut made a penitential confession in the name of the congregation, we celebrated the Supper of the Lord with bowed yet comforted hearts, and then returned to our several homes about twelve o'clock with feelings of holy ecstasy. The rest of this day, as well as the days immediately succeeding, were spent in a silent and joyful Sabbath frame of mind and in learning the lesson of love."

Yes, they learn to love one another. Our Moravian Fathers furnished the world with the divine proof of their Christianity according to the words of Christ "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35). John Wesley, who visited them several years later, wrote to his brother:

"God has given me at length the desire of my heart. I am with a church whose conversation is in Heaven; in whom is the mind that was in Christ, and who so walk as He walked. As they have all one Lord and one faith, so they are all partakers of one spirit—the spirit of meekness and love, which uniformly and continually animates all their conversation." Returning to England, Wesley wrote to the brethren:

"Glory be to God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for giving me to be an eye-witness of your faith and love and holy conversation."

They had learned to love not only one another as brethren, but also all mankind, especially the poorest and most despised persons. The neglected Eskimos of the frozen North, the wretched Negro slaves of the West India Islands, the scorned and outcast Hottentots of South Africa, the wild and savage Indians of North America, all became objects of their self-sacrificing love. They were willing themselves to become slaves in order to be better able to tell the poor Negroes of "Jesus and His love."

But over and above all they learned to love their blessed Lord. His great love to them, as manifested in His incarnation, words, life, sufferings, bloodshedding and bitter death, filled their hearts and constrained them to live and labor, to sacrifice and suffer, yea even to lay down their lives for Him. With their

great leader, Count Zinzendorf, they could truly say: "I have one passion and it is He, He alone." They lived in Gethsemane and on Mount Calvary. The bleeding, dying love of the Son of God was continually melting their hearts, controlling their wills and shaping their lives. The words were ever ringing in their ears:

"This have I done for thee!
What doest thou for Me?"

Love of money, love of pleasure, love of ease and love of place were all laid upon the altar, and with eyes fixed on the "blood-stained" garments of the Man from Calvary they cried out:

"Our Lamb has conquered;
Him let us follow!"

In His service they counted no work too hard, no sacrifice too costly, no sufferings too great. "Saved to serve" they choose as their emblem an ox with a plow on one side and an altar on the other, and underneath the words "Ready for either." They became a band of witnesses. It might be truly said of them, as of the early Christians: "And every day in the Temple and at home they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:42.) Their noble leader expressed this all-consuming passion of theirs in the stanza:

"Everywhere with shoutings loud,
Shouts that shake the gates of hell.
Thy anointed witness-cloud
Of Thy Great Redemption tell."

Constrained by the love of Christ they went forth to earth's lowest and most forsaken nations. These few, poor and often illiterate Moravians carried the glad tidings of salvation into all the world. England's great poet Cowper, referred to them in his well-known lines on "Hope":

"See Germany send forth
Her sons to pour it on the farthest North;
Fired with a zeal peculiar they defy
The rage and rigor of a Polar sky,
And plant successfully sweet Sharon's Rose
On icy plains and in eternal snows."

A greater than Cowper has said of such as these: "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." (Rev. 12:11).

Brethren, such were our Fathers. Truly, we have no reason to be ashamed of them. Although nearly two centuries have passed by, they still live. What they were, and what they did, can never be forgotten. But how about ourselves? We too are called Moravians. What manner of men are we? Are we serving our day and generation as they did theirs? Does the love of Christ constrain us as it did them? Doctrinally we still occupy the same position as those heroes of the faith. In these lax and falsely liberal days this is much to be thankful for. Our church still sings the stirring hymn of John Cennick, the great English Moravian evangelist of that famous revival period:

"The doctrine of our dying Lord,
The faith He on Mount Calvary sealed,
We sign asserting every word
Which in His gospel is revealed,
As truth divine; for cursed are they
Who add thereto or take away."

"Christ is our Master, Lord and God,
 The fulness 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."

Generally speaking, therefore, our church is still sound in the faith. The "blood theology" of our Fathers has not yet become obsolete among us. What, then, lack we yet? ~~Our~~ need is the same as theirs before the great revival of 1727, the same as that of the Apostolic church before the day of Pentecost. We need the baptism "with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Do we want this? Will we persevere in prayer until the blessing comes? We are living in wonderful times. The age of miracles is not past. Everywhere God is stirring up His people to "cry day and night unto Him," (Luke 18:7), even as our Fathers did. Secret prayer, praying circles of two or three, public prayer-meetings are not uncommon in these days. A little tract recently published in India bears the striking title: "Have you caught the prayer-passion?" Our Fathers had. What say we? Will not some of us with the Patriarch of old turn unto God and tell Him: "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." (Gen. 32:26).

But perhaps your first and greatest need is conversion. Many church members at Herrnhut discovered during that revival that they themselves were unregenerate. This need not surprise us, when we learn that such great ministers as Thomas Chalmers of Scotland and John Wesley of England preached several years before they found out that they had never been born again. You too may discover that you are still lacking in that living personal faith, which justifies and saves. O, let us be honest with ourselves! The Apostle exhorts: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." (II Cor. 13:5). A member of this church was converted three years after confirmation; another nearly thirteen years after. Are you a saved man or woman today? Does the Holy Spirit "bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" (Rom. 8:16). This question is of vital importance. Face it now and face it squarely. Eternal issues are at stake. It means life or death, Heaven or Hell: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found." (Is. 55:6). Seek Him in His Word; seek Him on your knees; seek Him until you find Him, until you can say with that little Moravian girl: "Now I too am a child of God," until with Wesley you can truly sing:

"My God, I am Thine,
 What comfort divine,
 What blessing to know that my Jesus is mine."

"My pardon I claim,
 A sinner I am,
 A sinner believing in Jesus' Great Name."

"In Him I confide,
 His blood is applied;
 For me He hath suffered, for me He hath died."

Originally "published and distributed in memory of Brother John Greenfield by a few who were blest by his ministry", there is presently no known reprint of this sermon currently available in North America. If you wish to share your interest in the Moravian Revival of 1727 or desire for prevailing prayer for God to visit his people again with revival, you may e-mail moravianrevival1727@aol.com. [gmail.com](mailto:moravianrevival1727@gmail.com)