

Reflections on the 550th Anniversary of the Moravian Church

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Translations from the German by Linda Easter

From Hus to Now: Thoughts on this Year's Anniversaries in the Unity from a Layperson's Perspective

Martin Clemens, Herrnhut

In previous editions of *ITD* I have already expressed myself from a brotherly perspective regarding political and social collaboration as well as lay ministry and office in the Moravian Church. The two anniversary celebrations in the worldwide Moravian Church prompt me to consider the reason and motivation for the aforementioned collaboration in the Church.

Formation of the Moravian Church 550 Years Ago

Already as a schoolboy in Herrnhut I took part in leading tours of the village and God's Acre for groups of visitors, first as the assistant with large bus tours, then on occasion on my own. Therefore it was necessary to study the origins and roots of our church's history, with questions about why we did not join with the Lutherans, why the Moravian Church became a separate denomination under the wings of the Lutheran Count von Zinzendorf, or what is unique about the mission work of the Church?

As an 18 year-old in Bethlehem, PA, USA, in 1957 I experienced with great awareness the 500th anniversary of the Moravian Church

and the first Unity Synod since World War II where, among other things, the Unity Prayer Watch among all 19 provinces was initiated as a continual global event. The following facts in the history of the old *Unitas Fratrum* were particularly important and striking to me:

The martyrdom of Jon Hus in Constance in 1415 for his reformation teachings:

- God's word in sermons and proclamations in the respective language of the country;
- Communion *sub utraque*—in both forms for all believers;
- Abandoning wealth and pomposity of the Church combined with simple, scripture-based priesthood.

The followers of Hus as Taborites (militant Hussites) and Utraquists (centrists) from which the first brothers and sisters who wanted to work in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount gathered under Brother Gregor in 1457 in the Bohemian village of Kunwald.

The Thirty Year War begins with the Defenestration of Prague in 1618, followed

in 1620 by the Battle on White Mountain where the Hussites were crushed, and which ended in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, a disappointment for the Unity.

The Counter-reformation which followed with the emigration of the Bohemian religious refugees under their bishop Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and their dispersion to all parts of Europe. Comenius foresaw the demise of his church in his “Legacy of the Dying Mother, the *Unitas Fratrum*” (1650).

Had I grown up in any other town this Moravian history would likely not have interested me so. In 1960 I was able to visit the old Brothers House in Kunwald with our Czech brother Adolf Vacovski, the preacher of our congregation Usti nad Orlici, who sadly died much too young. During a very intimate communal prayer I myself became aware of being a part of the history of the old Unity. I felt where and how deeply the roots of our belief go. At the same time I asked myself if I would be ready to give up my home on behalf of my faith or to spend two decades in prison for it as Brother Bischof Augusta or other brothers did—not really!

More current to a member of the Herrnhut congregation is the story of the renewed Unity after the establishment of the settlement on June 17, 1722, the workings of Count Zinzendorf and his wife Erdmuth Dorothea, the spiritual events at communion on August 13, 1727, in neighboring Berthelsdorf, and the sending of the first missionaries on August 21, 1732. A testimony to our history which cannot

be overlooked continues to be our meaningful God’s Acre in Herrnhut.

Thoughts on the Beginning of the Herrnhut Mission 275 Years Ago

Thoughts of mission have always been a part of our family. Both sets of my grandparents were missionaries. Our father was born in Gosen, South Africa, in 1899 and our mother in Poo, West Tibet, in 1910. Our great-grandfather, Hermann Clemens, died of malaria in the mission field of Surinam in 1872. Also our grandparents Reinhold and Elisabeth (born Adam) Schnabel, had to bury four children at the mission posts of Kyelang and Poo. One daughter died on the trip home in 1907 and had to be buried in the Red Sea.

I have personal memories of all four grandparents, but especially Grandmother Schnabel who lived in our house in her last years and died on March 5, 1953, just a few days before my confirmation. She could tell very impressive stories about the many dangerous trips between mission posts which often took weeks over 4000 meter high passes and traversed fear-provoking hanging bridges. Nights spent in snow and ice with only a tent and always with small children in tow. She told about fears and protections. Their furniture consisted of the travel cases with which they arrived in north India. In the winter there was no connection to the outside world for six months. After that they were thrilled with bags full of mail!

For us children this was all terribly interesting and exciting just as were the

narrations by Grandmother Clemens who was born in South Africa in 1871 herself and died in Herrnhut in 1965. She told us about treks on oxen wagons and tried to teach us the language of the native South Africans! Only a few single words of that have stayed with me to this day.

When one looks back today on the beginnings of the missions one can just marvel at the faith with which the missionaries went, barely knowing anything about the land to which they were going, very little language training, no immunizations, and no material security...no comparison to the requirements for a secure life we have today!

Had we not been so isolated in the DDR I could have imagined making a mission trip to the Third World, not as a theologian but as a teacher. This original occupational wish of mine was, however, refused as a result of the well-know restrictions of the DDR. In spite of this, in April 1982 I received an unexpected allowance from the state authorities for a trip to England for the 250th anniversary of the Unity. As chairperson of our district synod I had been suggested for this trip by the Unity Board. In additions to visits in seven congregations of our British Province I was able to attend and take part in the May 1982 Anniversary service in Coventry Cathedral.

In school under DDR conditions I had learned no English, but did have to use English mining texts in two semesters of college. I depended on the fact that the representatives from Bad Boll would have command of the English language. Once arriving in England I

soon learned that I was the only representative from our entire province at the Anniversary celebration! I had to build texts for my words of greeting from an English phrasebook the night before my visits to the congregations. I practiced my sermon for the celebratory worship service in Coventry with Bishop Geoffrey E. Birtill with whom I stayed in London and with Sister M. Geddis in Fairfield until I knew it by heart. The remaining conversations went fairly well since I received many invitations and could thus always repeat the same things at each visit! I was even able to visit a coal mine with Brother Malcolm Hily (Secretary of the Moravian Church Foundation, Unity Office) from Fulneck where the comprehension was even better.

I gave reports of this extremely impressive visit with slide shows in various DDR congregations as well as for brigades of my union, for such a trip to the West was very rare indeed. It was not long, however, before I was prohibited from giving these reports by the Ministry for Security!

Since I abided completely by the rules during this trip to the West, e.g. no side trips to relatives or importing of printed materials, etc., the DDR authorities allowed me several additional trips in the following years, even for private purposes. With the political turn of events in 1989-90 such limitations have been eliminated for the citizens of the previous DDR.

And Today? How Does it Continue?

So much for my very personal connections

to the two anniversary celebrations in the Unity this year. Do not we in this province get anxious when we think on the future of our congregations? The demographic changes are continuous. This is clearly seen by the fact that in 2008 for the first time in the recent history of the congregations in Herrnhut and Niesky there will be no confirmations. The decline in membership has been a concern for many churches in Europe for some time now. In some locations this has been a specific result of the departure of brothers and sisters with a more charismatic inclination. In connection with this we are also affected and concerned about the divisive activity in our neighboring Czech province. In the Caribbean and to some extent also in the American provinces there are currently disputes resulting from charismatic and pentecostally-oriented brothers and sisters. In our Herrnhut congregation we have had an additional point of conflict through the settling of "Youth with a Mission," also known as "Strategic Frontiers," in the nearby moated castle of Ruppertsdorf since they knowingly use the good name of Herrnhut, a blessed source of mission work, for their advertising purposes.

However when we look back at the 550 year history of the Moravian Church we have no reason to feel pessimism or resignation regarding the current situation. The already mentioned Defenestration of Prague, the results of the Peace of Westphalia, the beginnings of Herrnhut until the aforesaid 13th of August, and the outcomes of World War II that caused the loss of our Silesian congregations and severe damages in Herrnhut and Niesky were

all events far more serious and perilous to our existence. To see the warning and chastising hand of God in these events should be a goal of our commemorative celebrations. And may we always be able to recognize the God's healing and helping through just such testing.

Do not new changes and activities often come from difficulties? That is how it happened in our Herrnhut congregation in 2006 when 24 youths declared themselves to reaffirm their membership after intensive discussions among our elders. The request for a profile of our congregations rose out of the conflict with the "Christian Center" association and the settlement of the "Youth with a Mission" in Herrnhut. The questions of rebaptism and the emphasis on spiritual gifts in the charismatic groups encouraged me already years ago to seek God's Word and will more fervently. For the past 15 years daily Bible readings have helped me in this regard.

I also see the conversation group "God and World" founded in Herrnhut three years ago in which 12-20 participants deal with ongoing religious, economic and political topics as sustainable. There are atheists from nearby towns who participate regularly also. The following topics have been discussed often: The European situation. How does the Moravian Church deal with unemployment? Is democracy in danger in Putin's Russia? Christian-Islamic dialogue, one evening with representatives of "Youth with a Mission" and on another with a Muslim woman from Dresden. The minimum wage. And how dangerous is Scientology?

Surely there are new activities like this in other congregations as well.

Regarding missions I strongly support the activities of the various synods to become active in our country as well as in others in ways that do not exclude, that establish us as a small but globally effective church promoting a more just north-south balance, and to practice whatever is in our power to do.

Mission activities in our province include not only the new work in the “Stopping Place” in Cottbus, but also the spiritual uprisings in Estonia and Latvia, and the sponsorship of independent schools in Gnadau and Herrnhut. The established schools in the Netherlands, Konigsfeld, and Tossens count to this as well as our kindergartens and other pastoral facilities.

I see no solution to the conflict in the Czech province in the near future. I have a hard time with it personally and am surely not alone in this. The next Unity Synod will need to address this; it may be helpful to take a look at our ancestors in the old Unity.

Finally I am looking forward to and am anxious to experience the seven congregational seminars planned as anniversary events this year, three of which will be held in May and four in the fall of the year. After these seminars perhaps there will be a new perspective on one or the other of these issues.

Martin Clemens was born in Herrnhut in 1939. He studied mining 1958-1963 at the Mining Academy at Freiberg, and served as assemblyman on the last People’s Chamber of the DDR and in the Saxon Parliament.

The Jubilee: 550 Years Of The Moravian Church And 275 Years Of Moravian Mission

The Rev. Angetile Yesaya Musomba, Tanzania

(Edited for style only by Jason Matlack)

This article is meant to articulate a Tanzanian perspective of the Church. This is not a formal statement, but is a personal view written from experience as a Church leader for about thirty years.

Today’s Moravian Church does not clearly show her stand on certain issues surrounding it. Its members pose many questions, and sometimes there is a great endeavor to find

answers, but there is no clear path to them. I would like to write about some of those very confusing issues.

For many years our church has remained locked in a room; it does not want to know what people are thinking about her stand on issues. There have been many conflicts in the world, but her members could hardly hear for what Moravians stood. Since Moravians are not