MORAVIANS, PURITANS, AND THE MODERN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT*

By Kenneth B. Mulholland

William Carey is regarded as the father of modern Protestant missions, primarily because he founded the Baptist Missionary Society. That society, begun in 1792—275 years after Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five theses on the Wittenberg church door in 1517—at last gave protestants a vehicle for sending missionaries to the non-Christian world. Carey, however, did not invent the protestant missionary movement out of nothing. He constructed the platform from which the modern Protestant missionary movement was launched out of series of planks hewed during the centuries between Luther and himself.

As noted in a previous article, [1] one such plank was Pietism, an interdenominational, international, evangelical movement that sought to revitalize the existing church through small groups devoted to Bible study, prayer, mutual accountability, and outreach. August Hermann Francke shaped the agenda for Pietism in just twelve words: "A life changed, a church revived, a nation reformed, a world evangelized." [2] Pietism first awakened a missionary vision among Protestants by sending missionaries through the Danish-Halle mission to India and Greenland.

THE MORAVIANS AND MISSIONS

Two other significant planks in Carey's platform were the Moravian Church and the Puritans. 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. Previously, responsibility for evangelization had been laid at the doorstep of governments through their colonial activities. But the Moravains believed missions is the responsibility for the whole congregation.

Paul Pierson wrote, "the Moravians became committed to world missions as a church; that is, the whole church became a missionary society." [3] Because of their deep commitment, this small group furnished over half the Protestant missionaries who sailed from Europe during the entire eighteenth century. Actually Moravian history predates the Reformation. Originally known as the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Unity of the Brethren, these Czech Christians were the followers of the martyred John Hus, a Reformer before the Reformation. [4] He was martyred on July 6, 1415, and Moravians honor his death in their church calendar even today.

After Hus's death, his followers, who were sometimes called Hussites, and sometimes Bohemian Brethren, experienced a resurgence. [5] They reorganized in the year 1457, and at the time of the Reformation there were between 150,000 and 200,000 members in four hundred congregations across central Europe. Then, in the wake of the religious wars of the 1600's, Bohemia came under a Roman Catholic king, who unleashed a fiery persecution against these Moravians. Fifteen of their leaders were beheaded. Church members were sent to dungeons and to mines. Their schools were closed. Their Bibles, hymnbooks, and catechisms, and historical writings were burned. The Moravians were

scattered. In fact 16,000 families suddenly became refugees. For nearly one hundred years they were fleeing persecution. They formed underground networks of little hidden cells.

Years later, in 1722, a small band of these refugees was searching for some place where they could be secure. When they crossed the border into Germany, they heard about a place called Herrnhut, which was a small parcel of land on the estate of Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. They asked if they could stay there. Zinzendorf was not there, but his administrator allowed them to form a settlement on the estate.

Zinzendorf, an aristocrat, had early ties with the Pietist movement. His godfather was Philip Spener. At the age of ten he was sent to boarding school in the city of Halle, where his teacher was August Hermann Francke. While he was there his mentor was Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, the first Protestant missionary to Asia, who was on furlough.

Zinzendorf described his life at Halle in this way: "Daily meetings in Professor Francke's house; the edifying accounts concerning the Kingdom of Christ; the conversation with witnesses of the truth in distant regions; the acquaintance with several preachers; the plight of the first exiles and prisoners; the cheerfulness of that man of God and the work of the Lord together with various trials attending it, increased my zeal for the cause of the Lord in a powerful manner." [6]

While Zinzendorf was at Halle, he was instrumental in forming the first Protestant student mission society called the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed. He went on to study law at Wittenberg because his parents did not want him to be a preacher. When he finished his study of law, he made a grand tour of Europe, which was the custom of the aristocrats of that time. As part of his tour, he went to an art museum in Dusseldorf, Germany, and there he saw a portrait of the "thorn-crowned Christ." He read the inscription below it: "I have done this for you; what have you done for Me?"

This made such a profound impression on him that 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." [7] He returned to Herrnhut where Moravian refugees had formed a community of about three hundred people. Zinzendorf took responsibility not only to oversee it as the owner of the land on which they lived, but also to serve as their pastor. In 1727 an outpouring of God's Spirit united the community.

Five years later, in 1732, Zinzendorf was invited to attend the coronation of the Danish king. (He was related to the royal family in Denmark). While there he discovered the product of the Danish-Halle missions-some converted Eskimos from Greenland and a converted person from the West Indies, a former slave whose name was Anthony. These people pleaded with Zinzendorf, "Can't you do something to send us more missionaries?" His heart was broken. He went back to his community and laid before them the opportunity to send missionary reinforcements to Greenland, India, and other parts of the world where people did not know Christ. Twenty-six people immediately volunteered and the Moravian Missionary Movement was launched. In the next twenty-

eight years more than two hundred Moravian missionaries entered more than two dozen countries to establish missionary work around the world. [8]

Their work was guided by a number of characteristics that distinguished the Moravians. [9] First, they were deeply devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were exceedingly Cristocentric. One time when I was ministering in Nicaragua, the Moravian Christians gave me a wooden plaque with the seal of their church. It depicts the triumphant Lamb in the Book of Revelation. It says, "Our Lamb has conquered; let us follow Him." The Moravians preached Christ. Zinzendorf counseled outgoing missionaries, "You must go straight to the point and tell them about the life and death of Christ." Earlier missionaries had often given elaborate proofs for the existence of God as though they were giving theology lectures. Zinzendorf urged the missionaries simply to tell the story of Jesus. There are numerous accounts of how that story awakened slumbering hearts and brought them to the Savior.

Second, the Moravians, unlike the earlier Pietists, were not highly educated or theologically trained. They were tradespeople. In fact the first two missionaries they sent out were gravediggers by profession! The next two persons they sent were a carpenter and a potter. The Moravians opened the ministry to the laity and opened missionary service to women, preceding J. Hudson Taylor in this development by well over one hundred years.

Third, they established tentmaking as a way of missionary strategy. Many people think tentmaking is recent. Yet the Moravian missionary movement was based on it. After all, how could a village of six hundred people support two hundred missionaries? Answer: They worked for a living. Zinzendorf said farming and factory work tie people down, but commerce and trade give them flexibility. He felt that not only would their practice and teaching of trades lift the economic level of the people to whom they were sent, but they would also provide a way of natural interaction with those same people. The book *Profit for the Lord* chronicles how the Moravians used tentmaking as a strategy for missionary work back in the middle of the 1700's. [10]

Fourth, the Moravians went to people living on the periphery of society. Because the Moravians had been a suffering people they could identify with those who were suffering. They went to those whom others neglected. Hardly any missionaries were sent to the east coast of Honduras and Nicaragua. Those parts of Central America are inhospitable. But that is where the Moravians went. That was characteristic of their missionary vocation. [11]

Fifth, they went to receptive people. Because the Moravians believed the at 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 the them."

Sixth, they put the increase of Christ's kingdom ahead of the denominational divisions of Europe. Zinzendorf did not want to export the denominational divisions of Europe. He

became an ecumenical pioneer, in the best sense of the term, 150 years before anyone ever thought of ecumenism.

Seventh, Moravian missionary work was undergirded by prayer. When spiritual renewal occurred in 1727, they began a round-the-clock prayer watch, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. [12] The devotional *Daily Watchwords*, which is still produced by the Moravian church, [13] is the most widely used devotional guide among European Christians. The Moravian ministry was strongly undergirded by prayer.

The Moravians had missionary work in the state of Georgia because General Oglethorpe had been influenced by Zinzendorf and was part of the student missionary group they had started at Halle. When John Wesley sailed to the Unites States, his ship encountered a ferocious storm. Wesley was terrified. Only the Moravians, who had a sense of peace with God, kept him from panic. It was they who presented to him his need for a personal relationship with Christ. [14]

Returning to England, after a failed ministry in Georgia, he said, "I went to convert the Indians, but, who, oh who, will convert me?" He went to a meeting at Aldersgate—a meeting of Moravians—during which his heart, he said, was "strangely warmed" and he found assurance of salvation . He went to Herrnhut to examine the Moravian work and as a result, he patterned the work of Methodism on the Moravian model. He took for motto the words of Zinzendorf: "The world is my parish."

The Moravians also had a strong influence on William Carey, who had difficulty generating support for the idea of a missions society. Here is an account of how the founding of that missionary society finally came about.

> In the evening a small group of 12 ministers and one layman gathered with William Carey in the spacious home of widow Wallace, known for its hospitality as the Gospel Inn. Again, Carey pressed for action; again the brethren wavered. After all, who were these men? Ministers of poverty-stricken churches to undertake a mission so beset with difficulty, so fraught with uncertainty. At the crucial moment, when all hope seemed gone, Carey took from his pocket a booklet entitled, *Periodical Account of Moravian Missions.* With tears in his eyes and a tremor in his voice, he said, "If only you had read this and knew how these men overcame all obstacles for Christ's sake, you would go forward in faith." [15]

That was it! The men agreed to act. The minutes of the meeting record their decision to form "The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen," also known as the Baptist Missionary Society. Its strength lay in the motivation provided by the account of Moravian missionaries.

Someone once asked a Moravian what it is like to be Moravian. He responded, "To be a Moravian and to further Christ's global cause are identical."

THE PURITANS AND MISSIONS

Most people, when they think of the New England Puritans, probably think of their disciplined lifestyle and the depth of their theological thought, as they sought to glorify the sovereign God. Even Reformed pastors and theological students seldom think of missions when they think of the puritans. Yet the Puritans helped lay the groundwork for the modern missionary movement, both by cross-cultural evangelism among the native American population and by their vision for global missions.

Although Puritan missionary concern focused largely on North American Indians, the lesson learned from that encounter and their commitment to the whole counsel of God produced a dawning missionary consciousness with global dimensions. In fact Puritan missions gave William Carey a workable strategy, and inspirational model, and a conceptual framework for his own missionary endeavors. The writings of John Eliot, David Brainerd, and Jonathan Edwards had a profound impact on Carey. In his *Enquiry*, the Magna Carta of modern missions, Carey mentioned John Eliot by name.

Eliot was the first person to take seriously the sentiment that is expressed on one of the earliest seals of Harvard University (or Harvard college, as it was known then). It is a picture of an American Indian repeating the call of the messenger from Macedonia, "Come over and help us." Eliot sailed to New England from the British Isles in 1631. A graduate of Oxford University, he became the pastor of a Congregational church in the Roxbury district near Boston. There he developed such a deep passion for preaching the gospel to the Indians that he became known as "the Apostle to the Indians." For instance in a sermon to the Indians gathered at a place called the Wigwam of Wabbon, he prefaced his message to them with these words, "We are come to bring you good news from the great God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And to tell you how evil and wicked men may come to be good so as while they live they may be happy. And when they die they may go to God and live in heaven." [16]

In his preaching to the Indians, Eliot emphasized repentance from sin and faith in Christ. The Indians who were converted talked not so much about foreordination and election, but about the fact that all good comes from God's grace and that all evil comes from man's sin. They talked of Christ's death being of infinite value and of God's promise to forgive when one believes. Eliot was moved by the question frequently put to him by the native Americans, "Why has no white man told us these things before?" [17]

Approximately four thousand Indians professed faith in Christ as a result of his preaching. Nearly forty were ordained as Christian pastors, and more than thirty congregations were established by Eliot and his coworkers. His converts were called "Praying Indians" because they followed Eliot's example. Cotton Mather described Eliot with these words: "He was perpetually jogging on the wheel of prayer." [18]

Eliot was also concerned with the temporal well-being of the Indians. He taught them the system of agriculture he had learned in England from his father, who was a farmer. Eliot took extraordinary pains to learn the Algonquin dialect of the Mohican Indian language.

He vehemently rejected the logic of those in his day who argued that the Indians ought to be required to learn English before they received instruction in the Christian faith.

Eliot translated a catechism—the first book ever printed in America—into the Algonquin dialect. Then he translated the entire Bible into that dialect. That was the first Bible published in North America. Soon other books were added, because Eliot believed in the potential of native Americans to learn. This was remarkable work for a busy pastor, ardent evangelist, and tireless church planter. When he reached seventy-six years of age, he decided it was time for a revision of the Bible and so he began to work on his translation of the Bible.

Eliot's life motto was appended to the Algonquin grammar he produced: "Prayer and pains through faith in Jesus will do anything." [19] In innumerable facets of his career Eliot provided a model for Carey: preacher, translator, agriculturalist, reformer, organizer of churches, humanitarian. It was from him that William Carey drew his missionary strategy.

David Brainerd was another person from whom Carey received inspiration for missions. Brainerd was born in 1718 in Haddam, Connecticut. As a youth he was sober and studious, very concerned about the state of his soul. Death was real to him. His father died when David was eight, and his mother died when he was fourteen. In the Great Awakening of 1739 he was converted to Christ and called into the ministry. He went to Yale College to study for the ministry. He was a brilliant student, first in his class. But at that time, Yale College was embarrassed by and opposed to the revivals that were taking place. A rule stipulated that the students were forbidden to attend any services in which George Whitefield was preaching. Of the president of Yale Brainerd remarked, "That man has about as much grace as a chair." [20] Even though he apologized, it got him expelled in the last semester of his senior year and he never graduated.

Nevertheless God was at work in his heart. His diary reflects his deep prayer life and his deep burden for the lost. Here are some entries in his diary in 1742:

> April 2. Sometime I had much pleasure in the prospect of heathen being brought home to Christ and desired that the Lord would employ me in that work.
> April 6. I could think of undergoing the greatest sufferings in the cause of Christ with pleasure.
> April 8. I had raised hopes today respecting the heathen. Oh, that God would bring in a great number of them to Jesus Christ. I cannot but hope that I shall see that glorious day!
> April 12. I was especially assisted to intercede and plead for poor souls and for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom of the world and for special grace.
> April 19. I set apart this day for fasting and prayer to God for His grace especially to prepare me for the work of the ministry, to give me divine aid and direction in my preparation for that great work and in His own time to send me into His harvest. [21]

With that kind of burden it is not surprising that Brainerd was licensed for the ministry by the Presbyterians in July 1742. In November of the same year, at the age of twenty-four, he was approved for missionary service to the Indians.

Though he was unprepared for life in the wilderness and did not know the Indian language, he went to the wilderness of upstate New York. In vain he attempted to preach to the Indians without an interpreter. Finally he secured the services of an Indian interpreter from Stockbridge to assist him. The next year he moved into an Indian village, but he saw little fruit. Hardship and illness characterized his life. On one occasion he got lost in the woods. Another time he fell into a river.

Later he went to Pennsylvania, where he was well received by the Indians. After months of meager success he traveled west to reach Indians along the Susquehanna River.

In the summer of 1745 he heard of a group of Indians in southern New Jersey who seemed more open to the gospel than others, so he went there to preach. Both the whites and the native Americans came to hear him. He baptized twenty-five converts and started a school. Then revival broke out among the Indians and although Brainerd still depended on an interpreter and the Indians understood only the most elemental tenets of Christianity, they responded to his preaching. The emotionally charged scenes so characteristic of the Great Awakening suddenly appeared among the native Americans.

This was an exhilarating time for Brainerd, as he witnessed changed lives. He wrote in his diary, "It was very effecting to see the poor Indians who the other day were shouting and yelling in the idolatrous feasts drunken frolics now crying out to God for an interest in His dear Son." [22]

In the spring of 1746 Brainerd was convinced that the scattered Indians of New Jersey should settle together in nearby Cranbury. A church was established and revivals followed. After a year and half the converts numbered 150.

Then Brainerd's health broke, and his fourth and final journey back to the Susquehanna, although more successful than previous preaching tours, was too much for his frail constitution. In his diary in September 1746 he wrote the following on nine separate days:

> Scarcely ever weaker in my life.
> Bodily strength so wasted today I could do nothing at all.
> Weaker today than ever before.
> I didn't think I could stay on my horse today.
> Coughed up considerable quantity of blood today.
> So weak I couldn't preach today.
> Preached this afternoon from a chair.
> Violent cough and fever; can keep nothing down.
> Attempted to preach today, but extremely weak so went home and went to bed with a burning fever, almost delirious for several hours. [23]

Brainerd spent his last months in the home of his fiancée's father. There he died of tuberculosis. Jerusha, his fiancée, who nursed him for nineteen weeks before his death, contracted tuberculosis from him and died five months later. That father-in-law to be, deeply impacted by Brainerd's piety and dedication, edited and published his diary and assumed the role of his biographer. He was Jonathan Edwards.

Years ago, when I arrived in Latin America as a missionary, I discovered that in many of the Bible schools and seminaries there students were reading Edwards's *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, a book I had not yet read. I wonder if the seeds sown by Brainerd's life and his writings have born fruit in the emerging missionary movement in Latin America.

Jonathan Edwards edited and annotated Brainerd's diary, and had it published and circulated in America, Scotland, and England, where this book greatly impacted Carey's life. If Eliot was Carey's model, Brainerd was his inspiration. Brainerd's diary became almost a second Bible to him. When Carey went to India, one of the few books he carried with him was Brainerd's biography and edited diary. Carey read the diary almost daily. The covenant he and other missionaries drew up as a basis for their lives together in India said, "Let us often look at Brainerd in the woods of America, pouring out his very soul before God for the people."

What influenced Carey most was Brainerd's radical single-mindedness, his passion for souls, his desire to do God's will regardless of the cost. And the extent that Brainerd's thoughts became Carey's thoughts can be seen in many of Carey's writings.

Edwards was more than a biographer. He was also a strong advocate of prayer. In the 1740's he wrote *A Humble Attempt to promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth.* That book, advocating "concerts" of prayer—the visible unity of God's people across denominational lines coming together to pray for world evangelism—circulated widely in England and was received in the very ministerial association to which Carey belonged. Carey adopted the idea of a concert of prayer, and in his pastorate in England he led his people once a month in a concert of prayer. He was deeply aware of the prayer emphasis of Edwards.

In addition, Edwards gave a theological framework to the missionary movement. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that when Edwards left Northhampton, where the great revivals had occurred, this man—perhaps the greatest theologian America has ever known and a great philosopher—became a missionary to the Indians. He assumed the pastorate of a small church on the frontier, through which he had a ministry to native Americans. In his latter years he identified deeply with the native Americans. When there were Indian raids on the settlement where the white church was located and everyone else fled for their safety, only Edwards and his family remained there with the Indians. When the call came to this missionary to the Indians to become the president of Princeton College, he did not want to accept it. He wanted to remain with the Indians. [24]

Persuaded by his friends that he could make a greater contribution to the cause of Christ by leading Princeton, he finally agreed to accept that responsibility. Yet he did not want to leave the Indians. Two months later he was dead.

The contributions of Eliot, Brainerd, and Edwards live on. These Puritan leaders provided a final plank in the platform from which William Carey launched the modern missionary movement. A theme that unites these forerunners of Carey was their dedication: their willingness to risk, to sacrifice and even to suffer for the sake of Christ and His gospel.

At the 1989 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Manila a Russian delegate asked Leighton Ford, who was presiding, "Will you give me nine minutes to speak, one minute for each year I was imprisoned for the cause of Jesus Christ?" Mehdi Dibaj in Iran was sentenced to die for the crime of preaching the gospel in public. As he awaited his execution, Pastor Mehdi said, "It is a shame for a Christian to die a natural death." [25]

This is typical of the many Christians who are willing to die rather than deny their Savior. In 1996 alone, 159,000 Christians around the world gave their lives for their faith. [26] Many others continue to meet secretly in underground churches.

The Book of Revelation speaks of redeemed people of every tongue and nation and tribe and clan standing before the throne of God. This is the result of missionary efforts generated not only by this generation, but also by seldom-recognized forerunners such as the Pietists, the Moravians, and the Puritans. From their planks William Carey hewed the platform from which was launched the modern missionary endeavor.

Kenneth B. Mulholland is Dean and Professor of Missions and Ministry Studies, Columbian biblical Seminary and Graduate School of Missions, Columbia, South Carolina.

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Source: *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (April-June 1999): 221-32.

Notes:

[1] Kenneth B. Mulholland, "From Luther to Carey: Pietism and the Modern Missionary Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (January-March 1999): 86-96.

[2] August Hermann Francke, quoted in "Gallery of Leading Figures," *Christian History* 5 (1986): 13.

[3] Paul E. Pierson, "Total Commitment to World Missions," *Christian History* 1 (1982): 6. This comment appears in a letter to the editor. For a study of the characteristics of the

movement see Colin A. Grant, "Europe's Moravians-A Pioneer Missionary Church," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 12 (October 1976): 219-24.

[4] "A Christian History Time Line," *Christian History* 1 (1982): 10.

[5] For a thorough historical treatment of Moravian origins and history see J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1967).

[6] Ibid., 8.

[7] Ibid., 9. The most comprehensive biography of Zinzendorf is John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956).

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Count Zinzendorf's Theory of Missions," *Christian History* 1 (1982): 3-4.

[10] William Danker, *Profit for the Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

[11] For a discussion of Moravian missionary activity among native North Americans see Karl-Wilhelm Westmeier, "Becoming All Things to All People: Early Moravian Missions to Native North Americans," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1977): 172-77.

[12] Leslie K. Tarr, "A Prayer Meeting That Lasted 100 Years," *Decision*, May 1977, 6-7.

[13] *Daily Watchwords (The Moravian Text Book)* is published annually and is available from the Moravian Book Room, 5 Muswell Hill, London N10 3TH, England.

[14] "The Moravians and John Wesley," *Christian History* 1 (1982): 28-30.

[15] J. Herbert Kane, *A Global View of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 85. For a detailed discussion of Moravian influence on William Carey and other missions leaders of his time, see John Mason, "The Influence of Moravian Missionary Thought on Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement from England, 1792 to c. 1800," *Position Paper Number 18* (Cambridge: North Atlantic Missiology Project, 1996); and David A. Schattschneider, "William Carey and the Moravian Influence" (paper presented at the meeting of the American Society of Church History, Chicago, December 28, 1986).

[16] Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 181.

[17] Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 86.

[18] Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991), 43.

[19] Robert H. Glover, *The Progress of World-Wide Missions* (NewYork: Harper & Row, 1952), 56.

[20] Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya, 90.*

[21] Richard Belcher, "The Life of David Brainerd" (unpublished manuscript), 4-5. Also see Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd,* ed. Norman Petit (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

[22] Belcher, "The Life of David Brainerd," 10.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ronald E. Davies, "Jonathan Edwards: Missionary Biographer, Theologian, Strategist, Administrator, Advocate—and Missionary," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 1997):66.

[25] Jerry L. Parslev, letter to author, February 1994.

[26] David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission, 1996," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1996): 25

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