

This Month in Moravian History

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Zinzendorf in Tuebingen, 1733

In March of 1733 Count Zinzendorf visited the town of Tuebingen in southwest Germany. His goal was to obtain official recognition of the congregation in Herrnhut from the faculty of theology at the University of Tuebingen. 275 years ago this important recognition was achieved.

Ever since the first refugees from Moravia settled on Zinzendorf's estate in 1722 the community of Herrnhut had been experiencing significant growth. Not only Protestant refugees from Moravia and Bohemia were living in Herrnhut, men and women from other parts of Europe had joined the community as well. Inspired by the revival of 1727 the inhabitants of Herrnhut believed God had renewed the church of their ancestors, the Unity of Brethren, in their midst. Although Herrnhut was officially part of the Lutheran parish of Berthelsdorf, the Herrnhuters had developed their own religious life. With their own organization and liturgical forms, the congregation of Herrnhut began to resemble a separate church more and more. For the Saxon government as well as for church officials in Saxony this was a disturbing development.

In order to secure recognition of the community of Herrnhut, Zinzendorf and the other leaders had to find a solution. No one in Herrnhut was willing to give up the special character of the newly founded community, but anything that hinted at "separatism" was not going to be tolerated by the state or church. The steady influx of refugees into Herrnhut, combined with revivals in neighboring villages, caused August the Strong, King of Saxony, to banish Zinzendorf from Saxony early in 1733. While the Count was staying at the house of his wife's family in Ebersdorf, Zinzendorf decided to travel to Tuebingen, where a group of theologians and students seemed to be favorable to the Herrnhuters.

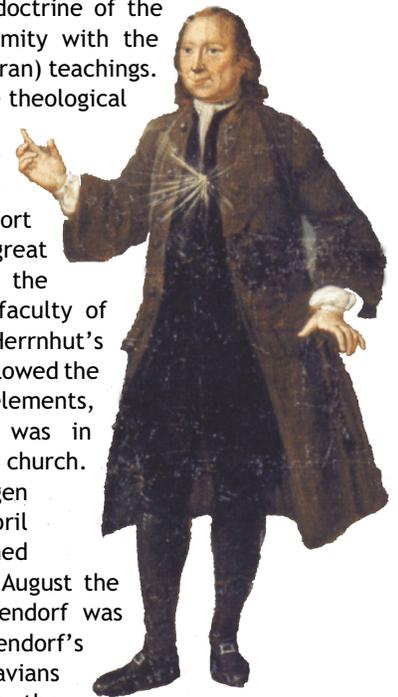
Zinzendorf and his traveling companions arrived in Tuebingen on March 3, 1733. Everywhere they went people seemed to know about Herrnhut. Although Zinzendorf was ill, leading professors visited the Count and spoke with him about Herrnhut. The time seemed to be right to apply for an official certification from the theological faculty. The main question was if "the Moravian Unity of Brethren, provided the accordance with the evangelical doctrine, could keep their 300-

year-old institutions and their well-known church discipline, and at the same time keep their connection with the Protestant church?" Obviously, Zinzendorf wanted recognition for Herrnhut as a congregation with the forms and institutions of the ancient Unity, while maintaining that the doctrine of the Herrnhut was in full conformity with the official Protestant (i.e. Lutheran) teachings.

While the professors at the theological faculty deliberated, Zinzendorf left Tuebingen for two weeks. When the professors finished their report in April it turned out to be a great success for Zinzendorf and the Moravians. The theological faculty of Tuebingen recognized that Herrnhut's constitution and discipline followed the ancient Unity in its main elements, while Herrnhut's doctrine was in conformity with the Lutheran church.

Even before the Tuebingen report was published on April 19, other news had reached Zinzendorf. The Saxon King August the Strong had died while Zinzendorf was away from Saxony and Zinzendorf's exile was lifted. The Moravians were allowed to stay but the Schwenkfelders, another religious group that had found refuge on Zinzendorf's estate, were to leave.

For the time being the dissolution of Herrnhut was averted, but the future of Herrnhut was far from secure, as the Herrnhuters were soon to learn. For now, Zinzendorf hoped the Tuebingen report would help them with future negotiations.



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