

This Month in Moravian History

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“We Learned to Love”: August 13, 1727

The events of August 13, 1727, when at the conclusion of a Holy Communion service in Berthelsdorf the residents of Herrnhut united into the Renewed Brethren’s Church, are traditionally considered the spiritual birthday of the Moravian Church. Here, in a modern English translation, is the full description of those events as they were recorded in the Herrnhut diary:

“August 13, 1727. The profound and highly uplifting Communion was held on August 13. Beforehand, as we were on our way to church, everyone was talking with each other and here and there pairs were found among the Brethren, willing to unite. The church service started with the hymn: “Deliver Me, My God,” whereby a wicked person, watching the ceremony, was totally overcome. Afterwards Pastor Rothe, supported by the congregation, bestowed a true apostolic blessing upon the two confirmands. Then the congregation fell down before the Lord, and started to cry and sing at the same time: “My Soul Before Thee Prostrate Lies.” One could hardly tell whether we were singing or crying, but it happened with such grace that the officiating minister (because Pastor Rothe celebrated Communion among the congregation) was also totally perplexed by it.

After the hymn was finished some of the Brethren prayed with divine power, laying before the Lord the plight of the congregation and especially that they were at a loss at what to do with those who had left us, doubting they would succeed without sectarianism or separatism, since both are not the right way for the Lord’s house.

We also prayed childlike and modestly, that He should teach us the true nature of



His church and how to live and walk in His law; that we remain unsullied and inoffensive, so that we don’t become solitary but fruitful, and neither violate the loyalty and obedience sworn to Him and His Word nor injure the common love through trivialities. We prayed that He would fully bestow on us the holy order of His grace, and not allow our souls to be led from the blood-and-cross theology, on which our sole salvation depends. We laid before Him especially the worrying circumstances of our neighboring Brethren and of hundreds of souls that were awakened through our household, but now are partly led astray, partly fail to grow in the spirit and only want to burden themselves with knowledge.

Afterwards, as a great anointment flowed over us and we felt not far from Him, we prayed in faithful assurance that He should let our two Elders, Christian David and Melchior Nitschmann (who were in Sorau

with good intentions but with a tragic ending), be powerfully drawn into our fellowship and experience what we were experiencing. Following the absolution, communion was held with humbled and strengthened hearts, and each of us went home, feeling quite beside ourselves. On the way back to Herrnhut a wasp flew at the overseer [Zinzendorf] with rage and stung him hard on the hand just as he was in the process of trying to win over a separatist. We spent this day and the following in calm and joyful composure and learned to love. ...

August 28. Christian David and Melchior Nitschmann came back from Sorau and at once asked us what we had been doing on the morning of August 13. They had been in the orphanage at Sablatt and at 10 o’clock in the morning they received a strong urge to pray. They went up into the house’s small tower with David Schneider, threw themselves down before the Savior, and were overcome with hundreds of tears and sweet thoughts of the congregation. They had never felt like that in their entire lives; they thought, what is happening in our congregation? If they could only know our circumstances!”

Sources

Image: the church in Berthelsdorf near Herrnhut. Herrnhut diary, quoted in Hans-Christoph Hahn and Hellmut Reichel, eds., *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder: Quellen zur Geschichte der Brüder-Unität von 1722 bis 1760* (Hamburg 1977), 106-108.