

# This Month in Moravian History

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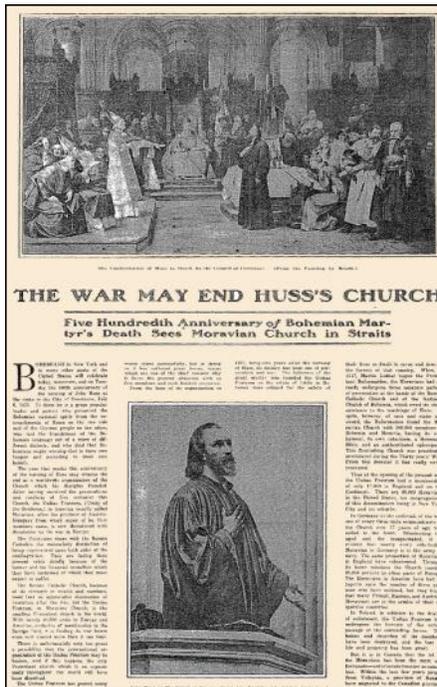
## The End of Huss's Church? - Paul De Schweinitz and World War I

One hundred years ago a headline across the *New York Times* read, "The War May End Huss's Church." Rather than commemorating the martyrdom of Czech reformer Jan Hus (July 6, 1415), a leading Moravian used this forum to voice his greatest fear about the future of the Moravian Church.

On July 4, 1915, the *New York Times* newspaper published an article by Paul de Schweinitz titled, "The War May End Huss's Church." According to the author the 500th Anniversary of Hus's martyrdom was overshadowed by the threat of the Moravian Church's potential "dissolution by the war in Europe." The church's "unique position as an international Protestant denomination" had been greatly compromised by the war. According to the author, "the intimate communications between Germany, America, and England, which the international character of the Moravian organization necessitate," were rendered near-impossible during the War. A friend of de Schweinitz later said that "missions were his first love," and thus it comes as no surprise that he would use this forum to express his fear about the bleak future of the church and its missions.

Br. de Schweinitz was involved in every level of governance of the Moravian Church. His unease over a potential rift in the church reflected a tangible concern among many Moravians. Reading the article, we learn that a third of adult male communicants in Germany and England served in the military. Moravians in other countries were also called to military service. Missionaries working in hostile territories were interned as a consequence of their nationalities. Financial contributions from members in Europe suffered. American fundraising for mission work similarly dropped after the US entered the war in 1917. De Schweinitz and other Moravians recognized that the war

inevitably spawned "intense national feeling" among peoples of the world, but yet in his article from 1915 he remained hopeful for Moravians worldwide.



In his new year's reflection from 1917, de Schweinitz's diary reads: "In no year of my life have I so suffered from mental + spiritual depression as during this year – may 1918 bring better things." Over the next years the fraternal relations among de Schweinitz and other international Moravian leaders, with the help of ecumenical partners, enabled the church to maintain the Unity. Samuel Baudert, a German Moravian and director of the Unity Mission Board in the 1920s, later praised de Schweinitz for the role he had played in strengthening relationships among the various Unity Provinces.

This month marks the 75th anniversary of the death of Paul de Schweinitz. He was born on March 16, 1863, in Salem, NC, to Rev. Robert William and Marie Louise (von Tschirshky) de Schweinitz. He attended the

Moravian Parochial School in Bethlehem, PA, Nazareth Hall, and Moravian College and Theological Seminary. After two years of teaching at Nazareth Hall, he studied at the University of Halle in Germany from 1885-1886. Upon returning to America, de Schweinitz married Mary Catherine Daniel on January 27, 1887. He served his first pastorates at Northfield, MN, 1886-1890, and at Nazareth, PA, 1890-1898, before being called to serve the Northern Province Provincial Elders' Conference (PEC).

De Schweinitz was a meticulous administrator. During the First World War alone he served as the treasurer of the PEC, vice-president and treasurer of the Society of Propagating the Gospel, secretary of the Mission Board and treasurer of Moravian College and Theological Seminary, among several other Moravian and interdenominational offices. He was actively involved with the Pennsylvania German Society, the Nisky Hill Bridge Company, and the Hill-to-Hill Bridge Company, among many other civic organizations.

Three years after the 50th anniversary of service in the Moravian Church, de Schweinitz was consecrated a bishop in 1939. Bishop de Schweinitz passed away the following year on February 8, 1940. He was survived by his wife Mary and their four children: Karl, Helena, Dorothea, and Louise. His influence within and outside the church was widespread. On the day of his funeral, Edith Roosevelt sent a telegram to Mary de Schweinitz which read: "Sincere sympathy from your affectionate friend."

### Sources

Personal Papers of Paul de Schweinitz at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem.

[www.moravianchurcharchives.org](http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org)