

What Moravians Believe. . .

# **The Moravian Idea: “Christ Is All”**

**By the Rev. J. Kenneth Pfohl**

**August 12, 1917  
Home Moravian Church  
Winston-Salem, N.C.**

**Moravian Archives  
4 East Bank Street  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina**

## **Introduction**

Who are the Moravians and what makes them special?

Much has been written on that subject, but for being plain and to the point, this booklet is well worth this reprinting. It is an address that was delivered by Bishop J. Kenneth Pfohl when he was pastor of Home Moravian Church. And fittingly, he gave it on Sunday, August 12, 1917, in observance of the August Thirteenth Festival, the “spiritual birthday” of the Renewed Moravian Church.

This edition is in Bishop Pfohl’s own words, using the language of his time. Only minor editorial and punctuation changes have been made for the benefit of the modern reader.

C. Daniel Crews, Archivist  
Moravian Church, Southern Province  
February, 1994

## **The Moravian Idea: “Christ Is All”**

*“Christ is all and in all.” Col. 3:11*

The history of the Moravian Church falls into two periods — the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* or Unity of the Brethren and the *Renewed Brethren* or Moravian Church. The former had its beginnings in 1457 in the mountain fastnesses of Bohemia; the latter in 1727 in the little village of Herrnhut, Saxony.

So remarkable were the experiences connected with the renewal of the Church that through all the succeeding years — now one hundred and ninety — the Sunday nearest the thirteenth of August has been set apart as a day of special commemoration — the spiritual birthday of the Church — the day on which the real life of the Church was renewed. We speak of it as the *“Festival of the Thirteenth of August.”*

On that thirteenth of August 1727, as a little band of Moravian exiles, after much earnest prayer and heart examination, met around the table of the Lord in the Holy Communion, they experienced such a wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit that they could no longer doubt that God purposed that their sorely persecuted Church, now all but extinct, should live again. To them the experience was as the voice of God saying: “Little flock, your sufferings and tears and prayers have come before me. I have loved you and purposed for you, and today I seal you anew as a Church of Jesus Christ, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

History makes it clear that it was not the intention of the founders of the Moravian Church to establish a separate church. Gregory and his companions in 1457 purposed only a kind of brotherhood or society within the established church which would seek to re-establish the pure and simple Christian life of the apostolic days and purify the church of which they were a part. They went no farther in their organization than to call themselves “Brethren of the Law of Christ.” There was no thought of separation from the church of their day.

But when the church persecuted them and refused to permit them to live as they thought the Word of God and the spirit of the Lord directed them, they were compelled to take the decisive step, though it was ten years after their first beginning.

So it was 260 years later. Persecution had all but wiped the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* out of existence. Her enemies boasted that she was no more. Her church buildings and her schools were gone. Her printing houses and her libraries were but heaps of gray ashes. Her members were dead or scattered so far that not a single congregation existed in the lands where there had been a membership that totaled more than 200,000. The only congregation in all the world in 1727 was an exile congregation in the forest village of Herrnhut, Saxony. And this little company had come together not by pre-arranged plan but strangely led by individual ways to a common meeting place.

They had come under the kind patronage of Count Zinzendorf, who sought to direct their spiritual life and endeavors for the Kingdom. A loyal member of the Lutheran Church, the state church of his time, Zinzendorf did not purpose that a separate church should be established under his patronage. He, too, as Gregory and his companions before him, purposed that they should become a spiritual body within the established church, a spiritual seed or leaven to “leaven the whole lump” of the church, to bring about a purer and better life within the church itself, and he used his strongest influence in this direction.

But again the Lord Himself willed otherwise; and in the wonderful experience of August 13, 1727, He gave the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* new birth, He made her to live again with a life that was divine, He set His seal of approval upon her as a separate Church of Christ in the great sisterhood of churches.

But it is asked: What makes the Moravian Church distinct? How does she differ from other churches? By what marks may we recognize her?

What Moravian but has been frequently asked these questions and many times been puzzled to answering them.

The answer is not easy because there are so many points which are the same in all the churches of Protestantism. Truth is, there is little difference between any of us. Our points of union are far greater than our points of difference. The church is far more nearly one than the existence of many denominations would indicate. As for the Moravian Church, she has *striven* for unity. For hundreds of years she has sought to live up to her great motto: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." We make no profession of being different from others. We do not want to be. To do so would do violence to one of the most cherished principles of the Church for 460 years, the great principle of Unity. We could not do so and at the same time be true to our Lord's great longing as expressed in His fervent High Priestly Prayer: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:20-21)

There can be no higher tribute paid a church than for sincere, earnest Christians of other denominations to be able to say concerning her: "I see no difference in your belief and ours. I feel at home in your services and am conscious that we are one." That is a goal for which every true church should strive, this feeling of oneness between all sincere Christians of whatever name. This is the essence of real Christian union.

Yet we do not hesitate to say that the Moravian Church is different from others, different without trying to be, different because seeking to live up to her light of the knowledge of the truth she cannot help but be. She has her own individuality, her own distinctive marks.

### **A Church More Than Its Forms**

They are not the marks of form and custom and practice. They go much deeper than that. You have many times heard explanation of our Church's individuality that touched only on the outward things. The question is asked, "Who are the Moravians?" And someone makes answer, "They are the people who hold lovefeasts when a bun and coffee are served." Or, "They are the people who have such wonderful Easter celebrations and in the early morning of Easter Day gather on their graveyards for a service commemorating the resurrection." Sometimes we are referred to as a people of "strange customs," having a hymnology peculiarly our own and not heard in other churches, dividing the congregation into choirs or classes that overlook the family tie, making much of band instruments, burying our dead in graves marked only by a small marble slab recumbent on the green mounds. Or others even refer to us as "the people who once used the lot in marriage."

None of these things are untrue of portions of the Church or periods of the Church's life, but they are not the distinctive characteristics of the Church. If they were, the number of our congregations would be still further decreased, for there are many where there is no graveyard, churches where the hymns and tunes of the church universal are regularly sung, churches where no early Easter morning service is ever held.

But however beautiful they may be or however much they may be of service, such customs cannot make a church a means of grace and blessing. They are more like the outer garments, the dress, or the framework of the church. If you want to know a Church you must get close to her heart, you must understand her spirit, you must gain her point of view, you must feel her passion, and you must see her purpose. There is where individuality lies. And there is where you will find that which makes the Moravian Church a Church, one with and yet distinct from her sister churches.

### **The Moravian Idea of Christ Her Distinctive Characteristic**

You have heard how it was said of Napoleon, that, if after death his heart could be laid bare, the word "France" would be found stamped upon it; that if the heart of Livingstone could be examined his own dear "Africa," for which he gave his life, would be found therein. Similarly, if the inmost heart of the Moravian Church could be read aright, the name "Christ" would be found there in imperishable letters. And it is the viewpoint of the Moravian Church concerning Jesus Christ that has made her distinct among the churches. In saying this we make no claim to Christ Jesus above others. But we have been led to give to Him through the long period of our eventful history as a Church — now 460 years — a distinct and peculiar place.

To the Moravian Church "*Christ is all.*"

We speak of our Church as "a Christ-centered church," a church that centers *all* on Him. And we mean it very literally. We mean it with a positiveness difficult to sufficiently make clear. We mean it so certainly that we make Christ and Christ alone our creed. We are not a creedless church, but we are a church of a single creed — "Christ and Him crucified remain our confession of faith." We seek to make Him our all and in all, the one great essential, the one thing needful. Synod after synod, speaking for the Church, has declared it: "*Christ is all.*"

It has never been the desire of the Moravian Church to add another creed to the many creeds of Christendom. We have considered that there were too many already. Our effort has been to unify them around the one essential fact of Christian faith, viz: a crucified Saviour. So we have become a Church of a single faith.

If, for example, a brother comes to us saying, "Your forms of worship, your liturgies, your hymns and music are not like others," we answer, "That is not material. To be found in faith in Christ Jesus is the essential thing."

Or another says, "Your form of government differs from others. They have the congregational, the episcopal, or the presbyterial, you hold to the confessional." Again we would say, "It doesn't matter. We do not consider it one of the essentials. But to have the heart washed clean in the Saviour's blood and to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity is the supreme need."

Or let it be a question of the mode of baptism, the view of the Holy Communion, the right or the wrong of some social practice or individual form of amusement. The Moravian Church would say, "Make Jesus Christ your Lord and Master, seek the guidance of the Word and His Spirit, and we shall have no differences with you. We offer you in all sincerity our Christian fellowship. We call you 'Brother.'"

The Moravian Church holds to a fivefold view of Christ. He is

### **Saviour**

and only Saviour.

We have no new song to sing, save it be in greater praise of the manifest power of Christ. We have no new message to preach, save it be new in its spirit of increasing fervor. The Gospel of the angels is our Gospel: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour

which is Christ the Lord.” The message of the Baptist by the Jordan is our message of hope and promise to a sin-cursed world: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” If there come one asking, “What must I do to be saved?” we answer with the apostle of old: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” If

there come another who asks, “What can lift from my soul this load of sin and bring me peace of mind and heart?” we point him to Christ Jesus. He is the way to peace with God — no heart-ease, no peace of conscience except as He speaks it. If this Christ can’t save, then none can save. We know of no other.

And this Saviour is the Christ of Calvary, the Christ of the nail-pierced hands, of the thorn-crowned brow, of the riven and bleeding side. He is the true paschal lamb slain for the sins of the world. We preach and teach the old, old truth that the heart black with sin is made white and pure only through the cleansing power of the crimson blood applied by faith.

Jesus is Saviour. He is man’s only Saviour. He is a true and sure Saviour. “There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved, save the name of Jesus.” And “He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Our second view of Christ is as

### **Master and Lord.**

He whose sins are washed away through the atoning blood of Christ is filled with loving desire toward His Saviour, and with deep gratitude and devotion he comes to Him praying with one of old: “Lord, what wilt thou have me do?” He is ready for any service and every service his Lord commands. To him Christ’s word is law, and obedience becomes the first rule of his life.

Now look at the history of our Church for the verification of this. Note those humble laymen, Leonard Dober, David Nitschmann, and Matthew Stach; they were potter, carpenter, common laborer. To the first as he listened one evening to a young Negro Anthony, lately from the island of St. Thomas, West Indies, and the condition of the Negro slaves was made known to him, there came a call from his Lord saying, “Dober, I call you to tell them of Jesus and His love.” And he offered himself. Soon he and Nitschmann were on their way.

To Stach, as he worked in the graveyard in Herrnhut there came a like call, but to the people of frozen Greenland. He might have pleaded unpreparedness. He might have said he had not been trained for such service. But no, his Lord had spoken and he must obey.

So it has been with the Church in much of its vast mission enterprise. Calls have come in most unexpected manner, through individuals, through governments, through other denominations to undertake new work among neglected and needy peoples. A small Church already carrying a heavy burden of mission responsibility, she might have answered, “We have all we can do,” but not so, for when the Lord made it clear that He purposed it, there was but one course to be pursued. He was Lord and Master as well as Saviour, and the Church answered with Isaiah of old: “Here am I, send me.”

To the Moravian Church there has been no questioning of the Great Commission. When the Lord said “Go ye!” there was naught else to do.

We go a step further still in our view of Christ. He becomes to the truly converted and consecrated soul a real

### **Passion.**

The Moravian faith has been a warm faith, and you may trace it where you will. In the early days of the *Unitas Fratrum* there was a burning passion in the hearts of its devotees. Had you asked Hus why he suffered martyrdom at the stake, his answer would have been "Christ." Had you stood on the great scaffold in the public square of the city of Prague and asked the venerable Budowa why he yielded his life to the cause of the Church, he would have answered "Christ." Yes to them "Christ was all in all," and to live for Him, to do for Him, to die for Him was the supreme thing. He was better than home or family or wealth or native land. Yes, better than life.

And when the exiles met together in the depths of some mountain fastness to worship God, when they turned their faces away from the land of their birth to be pilgrims in a strange land for Jesus' sake, do you imagine for a moment that there was any lack of warmth or religious fervor in their hearts? Read the hymns that they used to sing, note the spirit in which they, driven from one home, began service for their Lord in the next, and you will know what we mean when we say Christ was their passion.

In the Renewed Church it was the same. It was not merely a cool, deliberate purpose or strong determination to obey the Master's command that sent men and women into every part of the world among heathen people. It was a burning passion of love for Jesus that lit the first missionary lights on tropic island, distant continent, and arctic waste. Something of the very passion of Christ for a lost world impelled them. When Dober declared that he was ready to become a slave himself that he might preach to the slaves on St. Thomas, he was expressing the motive of sacrifice that filled them all as they went forth to bear witness to the crucified Saviour. The passion that impelled them still sounds in their battle cry: "To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His sufferings."

But Christ was to them also an

### **Abiding Presence.**

They believed His words spoken to His followers: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." They believed that He had fulfilled His promise and that He had come in the person of the Holy Spirit to live with them. When they journeyed, He journeyed. When they rested, He rested. When they wrought, He wrought with them. To them there was the same consciousness of the omnipresence of Christ that the Psalmist expressed of Jehovah in the marvelous 139th Psalm: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me."

It made them strong and unafraid in the presence of every sort of danger. Think of that colony of Moravians in their voyage across the stormy Atlantic to Georgia. When others express surprise that they are unafraid, they are themselves surprised. They sing their hymns of faith and trust that the storm cannot silence, and they make explanation of their conduct by declaring simply, "Christ is with us."

Or see the missionary Christian Henry Rauch as he quietly lays himself down to rest and sleep in the tent of unfriendly Indians in New York. What makes him confident of security? Christ is with him.

This viewpoint of the presence of Christ in our life is very precious to us, and we like to carry it into the office or the mill, to the schoolroom or the market place. It is for days of health or days of illness, for times of joy or times of sorrow. It is ever and always the same, our certain, definite reality. Whatever else may be in doubt, this cannot be: Christ is present with me.

You know how beautifully Edwin Henry Nevin has expressed the thought in that hymn that we so often love to sing:

“Always with us, always with us,”  
Words of cheer and words of love,  
Thus the risen Saviour whispers  
From his dwelling-place above:  
With us when we toil in sadness  
Sowing much and reaping none,  
Telling us that in the future  
Golden harvests shall be won.

With us when the storm is sweeping  
O'er our pathway dark and drear,  
Waking hope within our bosoms,  
Stilling every anxious fear:  
With us in the lonely valley,  
When we cross the chilling stream,  
Lighting up the steps to glory,  
With salvation's radiant beam.

We have no exclusive claim in the presence of Christ. All may have Him, as well as we. But to us the thought is exceeding precious: Christ with us.

Finally, the Moravian view of Christ in His abiding presence sees in Him a constant and sufficient

### **Helper.**

Just what the Christ in bodily presence was to the disciples, that the invisible Christ is to those who love and trust Him. He does not leave us helpless.

He is our helper in the stress and strain of the busy day. In the care of the home, He helps the busy wife and mother. In the labor of the shop, the office, or the factory, His counsel and His strength is invaluable. He toils with the toiler and hallows every honorable task by His loving co-operation.

He is our helper too in the presence of fierce temptation. He warns us as He warned Peter. He prays for us as He prayed for him, saying: “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you.” He is the true armor-bearer in the fierce struggle with sin, and when our trust is placed in Him He bears us safely through.

He is our helper-guide, the safe pilot over the stormy sea, the unfailing leader through all the devious paths of life, our helper always in all experiences, sufficient, complete, leaving nothing to be desired.

And to those who place their confidence in Him there is no fear, but peace and assurance.

Therefore we sing with happy heart: “Jesus makes my heart rejoice”; “Jesus still lead on”; “If Christ is mine then all is mine.”

And in this calm loving trust we find peace now and ever in “Christ our all.”

Should not I for gladness leap,  
Lead by Jesus as His sheep?  
For when these blest days are over  
To the arms of my dear Saviour  
I shall be conveyed to rest;  
Amen, yea, my lot is blest.

Amen.

