

The Worthy Lamb - History of Moravian Missions

John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman are names you may not readily recognize. John was a potter and David a carpenter. Ordinary occupations. Extraordinary men. They are men who left the security of their jobs and families in Copenhagen to become the first Moravian missionaries in 1732.

John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman are unsung heroes. These men were not going on a nice short term mission to the Caribbean, or even Africa or China but they sold themselves into slavery to answer the call 'come and minister the gospel to us'. It gives new meaning to the phrase "sold out for Christ". They became slaves in order to have the opportunity to reach the slaves of the West Indies for their Lord. Their life's purpose was to follow the Lamb who had given His life for them and for all the souls of the world. Their mission statement was "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him."

*One of the men left his wife and children begging on the wharf for him to reconsider and stay. But the call and heart of God for these slaves in the West Indies was even greater than the pull of home. As the ship pulled away from the docks the men lifted a cry, "**May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering**" which became the resonating heartbeat of the Moravian Missions movement.*

The men felt their sacrifice paled in comparison to the sacrifice of their Saviour. They loved Jesus with everything they were and did, and desired to walk in obedience, knowing that the God who called them is the God who gives the courage, grace and anointing for the task. Even to spend a life of hard toil, with meager provisions and hardship. They experienced and modeled the truth of Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The Moravian Movement, that sent out David and John, was founded by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (born in 1720), in the early 1720's. He initially founded it as a refuge for Christians in a papist Europe, but soon it attracted those with a desire for intimacy with God and a zeal for prayer and evangelism.

In May 1727, Count Zinzendorf and the leaders of the community felt God calling them to prayer at a deeper level. They committed themselves to praying round the clock, beginning a 24/7 prayer meeting that lasted over 100 years involving not

only the adults but the children of the movement. In August of that the minister at the Sunday morning service was “overwhelmed by the wonderful and irresistible power of the Lord.” A move of God broke out, with people testifying that “hardly knew whether they belonged to earth or had already gone to heaven. We saw the hand of God and were all baptized with his Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost came upon us and in those days great signs and wonders took place in our midst.” Over 10 years later John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church visited the community where the revival was still taking place. He experienced a powerful encounter with God that was to shape his own personal relationship with God and his ministry. It was in this environment and atmosphere that David and John grew in hunger of God, His Word and His Lost. They epitomized the Count’s personal life motto; “I have one passion: It is Jesus! Jesus Only!” They knew that the secret to been able to sell themselves into slavery in order to minister to their fellow slaves was to be totally in love with their Lord. With their eyes upon Him they could lay their lives down and carry the cross of slavery.

These two men birthed a missions movement, not by persuading men to “Go” via flashy display boards, brochures and messages, but David and John, and the men that followed their example, lived the message and just did it. They lived the “Go”. John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman inspired their generation, and generations to come to lay down their lives for The Lamb.

A TRUE EXAMPLE OF LOVE

As Demonstrated by the Early Moravian Missionaries

The following is written by Robert McCheyne, 1813-1843 [*Memoirs of McCheyne* by Andrew A. Bonar, Moody Press, 1978 edition, pages 40-41]:

The most striking example of self-devotedness in the cause of Christ of which I ever heard in these days of deadness, was told here last week by an English minister. It has never been printed, and therefore I will relate it to you, just as I heard it, to stir up our cold hearts, that we may give ourselves to the Lord.

The awful disease of leprosy still exists in Africa. Whether it be the same leprosy as that mentioned in the Bible, I do not know, but it is regarded as incurable, and so infectious that no one dares to come near the leper. In the south of Africa there is a large lazarus for lepers. It is an immense space, enclosed by a very high wall, and containing fields, which the lepers cultivate. There is only one entrance, which is strictly guarded. Whenever anyone is found with the marks of leprosy upon him, he is brought to this gate and obliged to enter in, never to return. No one who enters in by that awful gate is ever allowed to come out again.

Within this abode of misery there are multitudes of lepers in all stages of the disease. Dr. Halbeck, a missionary of the Church of England, from the top of a neighboring hill, saw them at work. He noticed two particularly sowing peas in the field: The one had no hands, the other had no feet—these members being wasted away by disease. The one who wanted [lacked] the hands was carrying the other who wanted [lacked] the feet upon his back, and he again carried in his hands the bag of seed, and dropped a pea every now and then, which the other pressed into the ground with his foot; and so they managed the work of one man between the two. Ah! how little we know of the misery that is in the world! Such is this prison house of disease.

But you will ask, who cares for the souls of the hapless inmates? Who will venture to enter in at this dreadful gate, never to return again? Who will forsake father and mother, houses and land, to carry the message of a Saviour to these poor lepers? Two Moravian missionaries, impelled by a divine love for souls, have chosen the lazarus as their field of labor. They entered it never to come out again; **and I am told that as soon as these die, other Moravians are quite ready to fill their place.** Ah! My dear friends, may we not blush, and be ashamed before God, that we, redeemed with the same blood, and taught by the same Spirit, should yet be so unlike these men in vehement, heart-consuming love to Jesus and the souls of men?

Robert Sumner, editor of *The Biblical Evangelist*, after reading McCheyne's account, added this note:

I visited a leper colony one time about an hour's drive into the jungle out of Manaus, about 1000 miles up the Amazon. The pastor had been cured and there after a cure you could leave. His wife, however, was a hopeless case and he refused to leave because he wouldn't leave her.

That was love, too!