

Catch the revival part 2: Prepare the way (holiness movement)

aka Why the Moravians matter as the real Bohemian Rhapsody.

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John Hus being burned at the stake (1415)

Introduction

My breakthrough in writing about this topic of “holiness and preparing the way” was proving to be difficult. I didn’t know where to start. I felt overwhelmed!

But you see it was Jesus who gave me the title so he would know where I should go next. When I called to him, I heard him say “Moravians”. He was giving me the clue to how to use the example of the Moravians to illustrate how to prepare the way.

Now you probably have never heard of the Moravians, but of course you might have heard of:

- “Sunday school” – well this idea arose by Robert Raikes
- William Wilberforce – one of the pillars of the anti-slavery movement.
- Princeton University – one of the “Ivy league” colleges of the US.
- USA – the country. Many historians say the Great awakening or revival encouraged the notion of nationalism and individual rights. ⁱ

Let me tell you what they all have in common. These places and ideas had part of their root in the Christian revival of 1727 called the “Great Awakening” in USA and the “Evangelical revival” in England and the leaders of this revival were impacted by this little-known group of Moravians.

Again and again what I am starting to see is that the Lord of the universe creates big change from a little seed. Today I want to tell you a little bit about this seed of the Moravians and what you can learn as you prepare your own heart to receive God’s revival.

Impact of the revival of 1727.

In order to prepare your heart to sit up and pay attention to what revival can do, it’s best that I start by telling you about how it can impact society. Once I show you the impact, it will prepare your heart for the work that should go into preparing for this impact.

So, the First Great Awakening of America, which in England was called the “Evangelistic revival” started in 1727 and worldwide lasted about 50 years. It resulted in some of the following:

In America

- Impact on the constitution of the US. It was the First Great Awakening in New England that shaped the moral character of the thirteen colonies that were to become the United States of America. It therefore contributed to the American revolution.
- The revival also led to the establishment of several renowned educational institutions, including Princeton, Rutgers, Brown and Dartmouth universities. ⁱⁱ

In England

England, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was in a moral quagmire and a spiritual cesspool. Morally, the country was becoming increasingly decadent. Drunkenness was rampant; gambling was so extensive that one historian described England as “one vast casino.” Newborns were exposed in the streets; 97% of the infant poor in the workhouses died as children. Bear baiting and cock fighting were accepted sports, and tickets were sold to public executions as to a theater. ⁱⁱⁱ

In light of this society, when revival came, it brought about:

- Sunday school and educational reform,
- changes to labor and child welfare laws,
- significant prison reforms;
- the abolition of slavery;
- The creation of missionary societies such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) which became a pioneer in many countries in Africa and Asia. In a way therefore many of the world today can attribute their literacy to revival. I myself was a product of a Christian school, so I am tapping into the root of revival.
- The birth of methodism and thus the Methodist church, whose roots were in John Wesley.

This revival's core personalities in England were 3 men: George Whitefield and the two brothers – John and Charles Wesley.

Charles Wesley published more than 4,500 hymns and left some 3,000 in manuscript; George Frideric Handel wrote music specifically for some of them. Among Wesley's best-known hymns are "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Christ the Lord Is Ris'n Today," "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," "Rejoice, the Lord Is King," and "Jesu, Lover of My Soul."

Handel is the one who wrote what his famous "Messiah" or what is commonly called "Halleluia".

This revival was even bearing fruit over 100 years later for example, the Jamaican Revival (1860) began in a Moravian chapel in September 1860, but quickly spread from there throughout the island and across denominational barriers.

Origins of the revival of 1727

The revival started in In Germany led by the Moravians.

A small group of Moravian Christians in Herrnhut, Saxony (Germany), had gathered to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on a summer evening in 1727. Those who gathered experienced the presence of God so profoundly that the prayer meeting begun a few days later continued twenty-four hours a day **for more than a hundred years**. Out of that prayer meeting, hundreds of missionaries were sent to carry the gospel to unreached peoples around the world.^{iv}

This congregation that experienced the revival was primarily made up of Moravians, who because of religious persecution, were exiled from their homeland of Moravia in 1722 and moved to the Saxony estate of Count Nicolas Zinzendorf.

Bohemia



Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf was a young nobleman converted to Christ early in his childhood. At age four, he wrote and signed his own covenant with God: "Dear Savior, do Thou be mine and I will be Thine." When asked later in life about the driving force of his life, Zinzendorf responded, "I have one passion: It is Jesus, Jesus only." His passion was often expressed in prayer. As a teenager, he established seven prayer groups while studying at the University of Halle. When he graduated at age sixteen, he furthered his education by traveling to various foreign countries.

Zinzendorf had a great love for art, and it was in the Dusseldorf Gallery that he saw the painting that moved him most, a painting of the crucifixion of Jesus. Over the picture was the Latin motto: Hoc feci pro te; Quid facis pro me? which means, "This have I done for you; what have you done for me?" As he stood gazing at the picture, Zinzendorf determined to use his resources and influence in the service of God.

Later, Zinzendorf encouraged a small band of religious refugees to establish a community on his estates in Saxony. The Moravian Brethren saw themselves as the spiritual heirs of Bohemian reformer John Hus. For generations, they had wandered from place to place to escape intense persecution. Many had died for their faith. Others had been imprisoned and tortured.

Fleeing to Germany for refuge, the Moravians found it in Saxony. They named their community Herrnhutt, "the Lord's Watch," as a testimony and reminder of God's watch over them.

Their new home greatly improved their physical conditions, but all was not well spiritually. Early in 1727, the community members were deeply divided and critical of one another. Heated public controversies were not uncommon; it seemed they argued about everything: predestination, holiness, baptism. It was doubtful the community would survive much longer.

Zinzendorf himself chose to intervene, visiting the adult members, urging them "to seek out and emphasize the points in which they agreed" rather than emphasizing their differences. On May 12, 1727, they all signed a covenant agreeing to dedicate their lives to the service of the Lord.

A "Baptism of Love"

While it was one thing to stop fighting, it was something completely different to "have fervent love for one another" (1 Pet. 4:8). To address this need, many began praying for a baptism of love. By July, a number of them were meeting together to worship God by singing hymns and calling on God to visit the community. On the fifth of August, the Count and about a dozen others spent the entire night in an emotional prayer meeting.

They sensed God was about to do something significant. On Sunday, August 10, the community experienced a foretaste of what was on the horizon. While Pastor Rothe led the service, he was overwhelmed by the power of God. As he collapsed to the ground, the whole congregation fell in the presence of the Lord. Prayer, singing, and weeping continued until midnight.

It was with this sense of expectation that the community gathered together three days later to share in a communion service. What took place at that service can be described only as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

According to one Moravian historian, *"The Holy Ghost came upon us and in those days great signs and wonders took place in our midst."* So great was their hunger for the Scriptures in the days following that service that they gathered daily at 5:00 A.M., 7:30 A.M., and 9:00 P.M. for services. One observer noted, *"Self-love and self-will, as well as all disobedience, disappeared, and an overwhelming flood of grace swept us all out into the great ocean of Divine Love."* Many in the community believed the outpouring they were experiencing was the result of increased prayer over the summer. Out of that conviction, twenty-four men and twenty-four women covenanted together to pray continually on August 26. They drew lots and began praying around the clock, each couple praying for an hour.

Others joined in, swelling the ranks of intercessors to seventy-seven. Among the children, a similar emphasis on prayer was begun. The prayer meeting begun on August 27, 1727, outlived any of the people who began it. A century later, one could still find people praying in Hernhutt at any hour of the day or night.

Moravian Missions

Though some church historians think of the celebrated English Baptist missionary William Carey as the father of modern Protestant missions, the Moravian outpouring and hourly intercession that grew out of it gave birth to missions half a century before Carey sailed to India. Within twenty-five years, a hundred missionaries had been sent from Hernhutt to various parts of the world. Carey himself was inspired by mission reports published by Moravian journals, and he challenged British Baptists to follow their example.

So this revival was started by God using people who were in transition, they were refugees, exiles no longer in their original home. Persecuted people often have been refined by the master and thus revival is often birthed amidst pain.

We should not romanticize persecution or affliction. They are evils. However, throughout biblical and church history, we find a consistent pattern: *"glad and generous hearts"* (Acts 2:46) tend to grow best when adversity, often in the forms of persecution and affliction, is part of the church's life. Persecution and affliction provide the gracious and sanctifying opportunities for Christians to experience the love of Christ in very personal ways, as we extend it to and receive it from one another – the opportunities to demonstrate the gospel visibly to a watching world. The gospel becomes more real to us the more we feel our need of it.^v

Fetter lane service (1739)

The beginnings of the "Evangelical Revival," in England as this awakening was called in England, are usually traced to a Moravian Watch Night Service at Fetter Lane on December 31, 1739.

About three o'clock in the morning, the sixty young men who had gathered to pray experienced what George Whitefield later described as "a Pentecostal season." The Fetter Lane outpouring overwhelmed those who experienced it. They left the chapel that morning empowered by the Holy Spirit to change the world as they knew it.

John and Charles Wesley, ministers in the Church of England, were also present at that meeting.

From the Moravians, the Methodists learned to worship God with a new song. The hymns written during the Great Awakening by Charles Wesley and other Methodists are still widely used in the worship of God by evangelical Christians today.

It was in a Moravian chapel on Aldersgate Street in London, just seven months before that fateful Watch Night service, that Wesley heard, understood, and applied the message of the gospel to his own life and received personal salvation.

Moravian principles to prepare the way for holiness

From studying the life and history of the Moravians, I can glean some of the following lessons which we could apply in our preparation for revival.

1. **The Moravians remember their spiritual ancestors.** They trace their spiritual ancestor to be John Hus. John Hus was burned in 1415. John Hus was influenced by John Wycliffe who in the 1300s wrote letters challenging the academics to return to the bible heritage. He denounced him as a heretic. Undeterred his disciples translated the bible into English. It was the first time in a thousand years that the whole Bible had been translated into a European language. Having the bible in their own language energised them to spread the gospel.

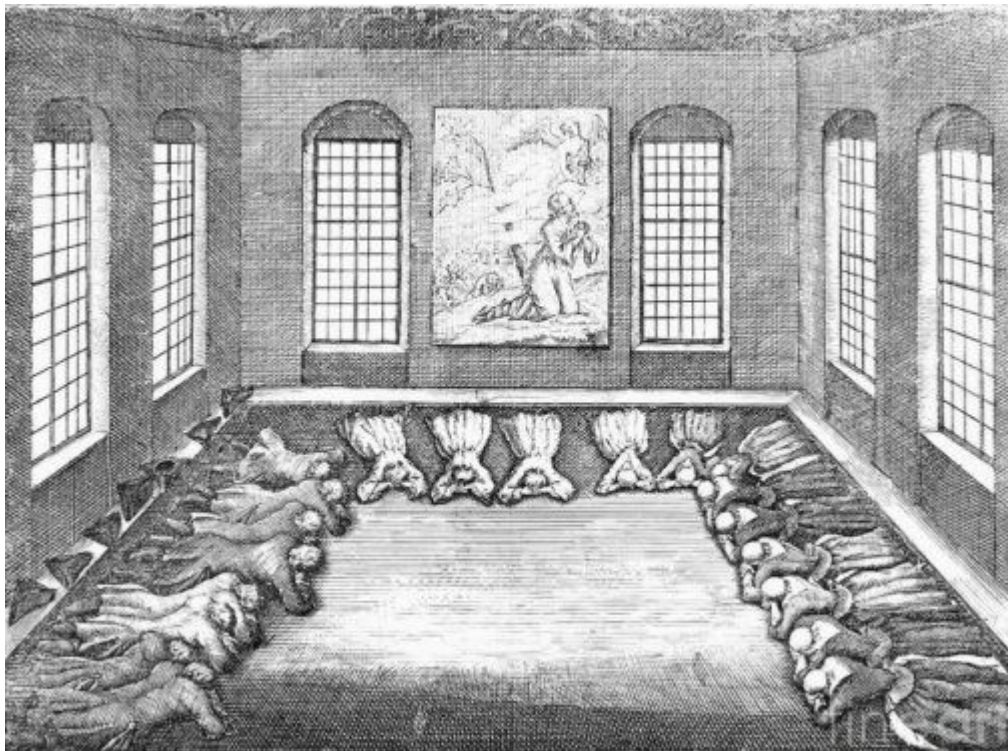
This is how John Hus died:

Crowds filled the meadow on the edge of Constance, Bohemia, to witness the execution that had been anticipated for months. The popular Bohemian preacher was tied to a stake with seven moist thongs and a rusty old chain. Broken pieces of wood

and straw were piled against his body. Then the marshal gave the condemned man one more chance to recant and preserve his life. "What errors shall I renounce?" John Hus asked. "I know myself guilty of none. I call God to witness that all I have written and preached has been with the view of rescuing souls from sin and perdition, and therefore most joyfully will I confirm with my blood the truth I have written and preached." burning torch ignited the dry straw at the base of the pile. Hus prayed as the flames surrounded him on every side.

Lesson for today: The church especially the evangelical church should not forget its roots. A variety of confluent streams created Pentecostalism. The movement owes much to Methodist, Pietist, and the Holiness movements that stretch from the 18th to 19th century. ^{vi}

2. **Prayer is a core part – it must never go out.** The Moravian Community of Herrnhut in Saxony, in 1727, commenced a round-the-clock "prayer watch" that continued nonstop for over a hundred years. By 1791, 65 years after commencement of that prayer vigil, the small Moravian community had sent 300 missionaries to the ends of the earth: ^{vii} Why did the brethren do this? A journal published 95 years after the beginning of the watch further cites Old Testament typology as warrant for the prayer watch: "*The sacred fire was never permitted to go out on the altar (Leviticus 6:13); so in a congregation is a temple of the living God, wherein he has his altar and fire, the intercession of his saints should incessantly rise up to him.*"



Moravians, Male and Female Prostrated in Prayer

3. **They celebrate what Jesus called us to do (e.g Holy Communion).** A key thing they do is celebrate a "love feast", which is a common meal shared before they eat the Lord's supper.

4. They are clear about “essentials” of Christianity vs others^{viii}.

The essentials of Christianity to the Moravians are simple. All others hinge on this. According to Gregory the Patriarch, considered the founder of the fellow ship of the brethren (“Unitas Fratrum”), what made a Christian was not doctrine or what he or she believed, but that a person lived his or her life according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. The leader of the Brethren was a tailor by the name of Gregory, and he insisted that the New Testament tells us clearly what is essential: faith, love, and hope. Everything the church does should be for the purpose of building people up in faith, in love, and in hope. If the church does not do this, it is not really the church. More importantly, if a person has faith, love, and hope, he or she is a Christian regardless of what the institutional church says. From the beginning of the Moravian Church they have distinguished between 3 things: Essentials, Ministerials and Incidentals.

- a. *Essentials*. Faith, hope, love. True Christianity is not based on a certain creed or doctrine; it is grounded in the living experience of faith in Christ, active love for others and joyful hope.
- b. *Ministerials* (These include things like the clergy, sacraments, sacred rites and creeds. They are not “incidental” or “non-essential.” These things lead people to God; they build people up in faith, love and hope. They are sacred gifts of God, but they are sacred only when they lead people to what is essential) and
- c. *Incidentals* such as wearing robes or singing modern songs.

5. Personal piety or holiness is important.

Pietism is a movement within Christianity that stresses personal devotion, holiness, and genuine spiritual experience over mere adherence to theology and church ritual. ^{ix}

Pietism, especially that of the Moravians, stressed a faith life that sought to overcome sin. What Wesley, the Pietists, and later movements such as the Holiness movement ^xall stressed was that living out the Christian life meant that one had to take on the life of Jesus, accepting the scorn as well as the victory that emanated from living a sacrificial life of rigorous practices (prayer, fasting, Bible reading, piety).

6. **Discipline or “steadfast faith” in following the Lord is critical.** Many Christians today are not disciplined in their walk with God and this is point is connected to Pietism narrated above. Many Christians seem to take God as a joke. Just because he is full of love and kindness, doesn’t mean he doesn’t require utmost respect and honour.

Taking God seriously enough was a core part of the Moravian experience and so they if necessary, apply “methods” to their prayer, fasting etc (hence giving the seeds to “Methodism” as a protestant denomination). Some will argue that this brings “legalism” but if you find the right balance with the Holy Spirit’s help you will know that you don’t always “feel” like praying, so it is the discipline of knowing, “I must wake up at 6.00 am” which carries you through to persevere. Discipline yields the fruit of faithfulness. In faithfulness, you persevere – even when it doesn’t seem like that.

Here is an example story of how the discipline of the Moravians inspired Wesley the founder of methodism.

Peter Bohler had met the Anglican clergyman John Wesley and talked with him on board a ship traveling from Georgia to England. That voyage (1738-39) was a time of deep introspection for Wesley. He’d traveled to Georgia believing God would greatly

use him to preach the gospel to the Native Americans, but his ministry experience in the colony was a failure. Returning to England, Wesley had written, "I went to America to convert the heathen. But who will convert my own soul?" Bohler was part of God's answer to that question. During the transatlantic voyage, a vicious storm arose at sea.

Wesley was terrified, but he heard Bohler and the Moravian families on board singing hymns. Wesley was impressed with their **composure and ability to continue praying and worshipping God in the face of imminent disaster**. That experience drew the Anglican pastor into a relationship with this group that lasted several years. Indeed, it was in a Moravian chapel on Aldersgate Street in London, just seven months before that fateful Watch Night service, that Wesley heard, understood, and applied the message of the gospel to his own life and received personal salvation.

Moravians are like the Rechabites in the bible

As I pondered why Jesus had told me to focus on the Moravians, he gave me a second clue. He reminded me of the Rechabites. Now again like the Moravians, you have probably never heard of the story of the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35. Let me tell you about them and the lesson he is showing us:

God does value faithfulness and obedience.^{xi}

The Rechabites (also Rechabite, Rekabite) were a nomadic people group known for their strict rules to abstain from wine, from building houses, from sowing seed, and from planting vineyards (Jeremiah 35:6–7). The Rechabites were faithful to abide by these rules through the generations, all the way from the time of Jehu (2 Kings 10:15) to the time of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 35:8–10)—over 200 years.^{xii}

They were originally Kenites, descendants of Moses' father-in-law Hobab (1 Chronicles 2:55). They took their name from Racab because he was the father of Jonadab, a man famous in his time for **wisdom and right living**. It is thought that they participated in the exodus from Egypt and continued to live in close proximity to Israel from that time forward. They were not, however, Israelites. They were a nomadic people that had no country. They were a small tribe of people. They were poor, relatively insignificant, and historically irrelevant, yet, God told Jeremiah to invite them to one of the most prestigious buildings in Israel, the temple.

Not only were they invited to the temple, but they were escorted to one of the most prestigious rooms in the temple. We read about the Rechabites and what took place next in Jeremiah 35:5-10:

"Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Rechabite family and said to them, 'Drink some wine.' But they replied, 'We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine. Also, you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.' "We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us."

Jonadab lived more than 200 years prior, yet his descendants still lived according to his instructions. That was exactly the point that God was trying to convey to His children, the Israelites.

In verse thirteen of the same chapter we read,

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?' declares the LORD. 'Jonadab son of Recab ordered his sons not to drink wine and this command has been kept. To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command. But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me.'"

God commended and blessed the Recabite family for their faithfulness and obedience to their ancestor, though he was just a man. He was not endorsing the nomadic lifestyle or speaking against the evils of wine consumption. God took the Recabites from obscurity and made them the national focus because they had been faithful and obedient, two qualities that God Himself highly values.

God was saying, "These people, at great cost, are obeying a man, and My people won't even obey their God!"

For their faithfulness, this was reward the Lord God almighty gave these people:

Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Rekabites, "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jehonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.' Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Jehonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me.'" Jeremiah 35: 18-19 (NIV).

This was in some ways similar in promise to what God had told King David by the way. This is what he had told David:

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 2 Samuel 7: 11-13 (NIV).

Conclusion: The real Bohemian Rhapsody

rhap·so·dy / 'rapsədē/

Noun

1. an effusively enthusiastic or ecstatic expression of feeling.

"rhapsodies of praise"

Many of us probably know Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" as a famous song and the most important thing we know about Bohemia but the Lord is telling us to remember the original rhapsody and the carriers of this rhapsody from Bohemia. His faithful Moravians. God rewards faithfulness for his people who work hard to obey the lamb and obey him wherever he goes. May God bless you to be like the Moravians, like the Recabites, like his son Jesus.

END

Revival prayer

Almighty God, your word declares to us this:

"Thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" Isaiah 57:15.

Remember us your lowly servants and teach us to be contrite at heart and humble in spirit. Revive us Lord. Raise up modern day Moravians and Recabites to re-ignite your revival flame to incessantly burn before you in all hours of the prayer watch. Revive us to continue to follow the Lamb of God who has conquered all and let us follow in humility. Amen.

Notes

ⁱ <https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/great-awakening>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/great-awakening>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/evangelical-revival-in-england-11630228.html>

^{iv} Source: "The ten greatest revivals ever from Pentecost to the present", Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, 2000.

^v <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-unexpected-answer-to-our-prayers-for-revival>

^{vi} <https://www.patheos.com/library/pentecostal/origins/influences>

^{vii} <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-1/prayer-meeting-that-last-ed-100-years.html>

^{viii} <https://www.moravian.org/2018/08/in-essentials-unity-understanding-the-essential-things/>

^{ix} <https://www.learnreligions.com/pietism-definition-4691990>

^x https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement

^{xi} <https://www.vvdailynews.com/story/news/local/lucerne-valley-leader/2017/07/18/the-lesson-recabites/20156262007/>

^{xii} <https://www.gotquestions.org/Rechabites.html>