



## Articles and Sermons :: The Moravian slaves

### The Moravian slaves - posted by sdidde (), on: 2007/10/25 0:57

Does anyone know the result of the Moravian brothers who sold themselves to slavery in order to evangelize the West Indies islands? I had heard of it first in the sermon "Ten Shekels and a shirt", by Paris Reidhead. I heard it later on, in other sermons as well, but I could not find any further details of this endeavor.

### Re: The Moravian slaves - posted by iansmith (), on: 2007/10/25 10:17

One website identifies these two men as: John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman.

Quote:  
-----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.

Well almost. Their final words as they departed on their mission are now lyrics in a powerful new Cindy Ruakere song: "Receive".

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 year 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 for God, His Word and His Love. They epitomized the Count's personal life motto; "I have one passion: It is Jesus! Jesus Only!" They knew that the secret to being 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. (text from <http://emancipationofthefreed.blogspot.com/2007/01/john-leonard-dober-and-david-nitschman.html> here )

The Moravian movement is considered by many to be the first and most dramatic protestant missions movement in history. Hundreds of Moravians went to the ends of the world, often packing their meager possessions into coffins instead of suit cases, because they never expected to see their homes again.

Hundreds of Moravian missionaries went out, and the vast majority of them died of tropical diseases within the first couple

e of years. The attrition rate for these young men and women was incredibly high.

But they were seeds that were dropped into the earth, for others to water and for God to reap a harvest.

Many Moravians didn't see results, but their sacrifice led to other missionaries going in later generations.

Nicolaus Zensendorf - the man God used to lead the Moravian movement.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaus\\_Ludwig\\_Zinzendorf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaus_Ludwig_Zinzendorf)

The Moravian Church

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moravian\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moravian_Church)

**Re: - posted by iansmith (), on: 2007/10/25 10:20**

“Even if no one should be benefited, and no fruits follow my efforts, yet I will go, for I must obey my Savior's call.”

— Leonard Dober

**Re: - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2007/10/25 15:46**

I have heard of this story before, but this is the first time I have read that one of these men was married with a wife and children. Somehow leaving his family behind like this does not sit right with me. How were they being provided for in his absence? Were his own little ones less important than the pagans across the sea? Does 1Tim. 5:8 apply here? (1Ti 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.) Well, ah reckon, this is not my call to make....this belongs to God, but it does raise some serious questions in my mind.

Does anyone know the answer to any of my questions? .... especially the one of how his family was being provided for..

ginnyrose

**Re: - posted by iansmith (), on: 2007/10/25 16:21**

The Moravian Christians lived on the estate of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a wealthy landowner in what is now Germany. He provided for the needs of many of the Moravian Christians who lived on his land - I dare say because of the sacrifice of these men their families would be taken care of by the community and by the Count.

As for the sacrifice these men made, I believe it is biblical, because by taking their family they certainly would have been sentencing them to death. They loved Jesus, so they obeyed His call to GO, and they loved their family so they knew not to take them with.

I can't help but thinking about the first chapter of Pilgrim's Progress. These men lived out the allegory in a very real sense.

**Re: - posted by sidde (), on: 2008/1/8 3:54**

Thank you very much for the informative reply. I am somewhat regular to this site but do not quite participate in the discussions. It's nice to know a bit more about the brothers who obeyed God's calling to go the West Indies. I think the fruit of their labor is quite evident in the nations they had set out to evangelize. There are many churches in that land and there are many true believers today.

Ginnyrose posed a very valid question about the family responsibilities. While it's true that family responsibility is also God given, He alone can rearrange the priorities.

We have some examples from the scriptures:

Mat 4:21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

Mat 4:22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

James and John left their father and followed Jesus, upon His calling. According to the tradition, it was their responsibility to take care of their father in his old age. I think Timothy also was in a similar situation. If we seek His kingdom first, then all other needs will be taken care of, according to Matt 6:31-32

In Him,  
Stephen

**The Most Worthy Life - posted by iansmith (), on: 2008/1/8 10:30**

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

-Matt 10:37-39

Oswald Chambers often talks about how foolish those who follow the leading of the spirit appear, even to those in the church. By our humanistic standards these men were horrible fathers and husbands, but in God's Kingdom they are counted worthy of righteousness for their suffering. They took up a heavy cross and dragged it half way around the world to try to save a few men crouching in darkness.

There is great nobility in that.

**Re: The Moravian slaves - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/1/8 23:17**

Ian, thank you for this. Read it earlier at lunch today and like Ginny was also taken with the brother who had left his wife and children behind ... It really brought a great and profound tension. My thoughts also traced back to what it must have been like for him ... some things are just too difficult to say anything to, just to recognize the perplexities and ... anguish.

Did follow through on the original link and came across this from a very nice blog that someone had pointed to and where some of this may have been derived, it seems to tell the rest of the story;

**Pack Your Headstone!**

John Leonard Doper and David Nitschman are names you may not readily recognize. John was a potter and David a carpenter. Ordinary occupations, extraordinary men. They left the security of their jobs and families in Copenhagen to become the first Moravian missionaries in 1732. They sold themselves into slavery, they answered the call 'come and minister the gospel to us' - giving 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." As they departed, the wife and children of one of them stood 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." This cry 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. They experienced and modeled the truth of Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." These two men birthed a Missions movement, not through fancy talk, but by living the message. They lived the "Go". John Leonard Doper and David Nitschman inspired their generation and generations to come to lay down their lives for The Lamb. As it turned out, neither man had to actually sell himself into slavery. The Governor of the island would not have let them. His attitude towards the black slaves there was such that to allow a white man to be enslaved would have been too much for him. The missionaries arrived in St. Thomas in December of 1732. At first, Nitschmann supported the two of them with his carpentry vocation, but he only stayed at St. Thomas for four months. Dober tried to make a living as a potter, but there wasn't any good clay to make pots. He did, however, get a job as the steward of the Governor's household, and later as a watchman, which allowed him to be closer to the slaves. By 1734, a contingent of 18 missionaries arrived to help out and to spread the missionary work to the neighboring islands of St. Croix, St. John and others. Conditions for the missionaries were difficult, and many of the early missionaries died. In fact, Moravian missionaries leaving Europe to go to the Caribbean missions always took two things with them: A Bible and their own headstone. There isn't any rock to speak of on those islands, and the missionaries knew that most of them wouldn't come home. And yet, they went in droves! Talk about fully committed to God's work! Dober eventually went back to Europe as part of the administrative head of Moravian Church. Nitschmann returned to Hernhutt Germany, to his wife and children later becoming a Bishop, and led a group of Moravians to form a colony in America in what is now Georgia. And here's an interesting tidbit: On the voyage over, their ship encountered a hurricane (February 5, 1736). As you can imagine, there was a great deal of panic onboard except with the Moravian group led by Nitschmann. Instead, they sang hymns and were calm. One of the non-Moravians (an Anglican

n, actually) was very impressed by this. He stayed with the Moravians, and later studied with them in England. This was none other than John Wesley, who later went on to form the Methodist Church. Dober and Nitschmann's work was fruitful. Their mission field is now known as the Eastern West Indies Province. There are 52 Moravian congregations still running strongly today. "That the Lamb may receive the reward of His suffering!"

(<http://fireball.lifewithchrist.org/permalink/31808.html>) One Passion.... One Devotion...

**Re: - posted by sdidde (), on: 2008/1/15 16:05**

Thank you for the follow up; So inspiring to know that a Wesley was born out of this movement. Praise to God; how unsearchable are His ways!

**Re: - posted by iansmith (), on: 2008/1/15 16:54**

If I get into grad school I'd love to study the early moravian movement more in depth, but I might have to learn German.

**Re: The Moravian slaves - posted by vico, on: 2008/1/15 17:44**

I listened to a sermon (not on this site) by a man who met a descendant of one of the converts on the slave island. He explained in a little more detail the fruits of the labours of these two men.

apparently all of the slaves on that plantation were born again as a result of their sacrifice. Glory to God. they went forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and doubtless came again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. bringing the rewards of His suffering.

**Re: - posted by mrmike, on: 2008/5/1 0:27**

The story by Paris Reidhead is very exaggerated...

check out the Moravian History Archive site...

[http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/06\\_march\\_dober.pdf](http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/06_march_dober.pdf)

It's amazing how many stories are passed along with people never checking them out....embellished sermons to make a point that doesn't need to be made...

The only stories I believe these days are written in the B I B L E

mrmike

**Re: - posted by JohnnyC, on: 2008/6/24 13:07**

Sadly I have heard accounts of Mahatma Gandhi also that when examined for facts weren't true. It seems we are often quick to find our human illustrations and not so quick to make sure that the human actually did what is professed about them...

Though we errantly love to create icons for ourselves, the story (though not factual according to the moravians) still provoked a lot of conversation and exposed some of our messed up western logic. Someone became critical about leaving wife and children. Jesus, Himself, mentions this, after Peter asks about his reward. We try to take our values and expect that God will back our values. But God has values that are infinitely greater than ours. His ways aren't ours, and He won't change to adjust to our values--even if it offends some people who think differently...

Serving In Christ with Love,

John

But, the

**Re: David Nitschmann - posted by ccMethow, on: 2010/4/17 1:30**

I just watched a movie that is available at Netflix that is called "First Fruits". The film is about these sold out Moravian young men. In the film things are portrayed a little different than what I have read online and heard from Paris Reidhead. David Nitschmann was one of the two first missionaries from the Moravian group but he only stayed on the island of St. Thomas with Leonard Dober for 16 weeks and as far as what I learned so far he intended for this to be a short term mission thus he was not leaving his wife and family for more than a long, "short term" mission. After he left, Leonard fell ill of the same fever of malaria that he had been treating many of the slaves for. While he was feeling this was the end, some of the slaves came to minister to him at Christmas time that year. As he began to recover, the first convert, a young orphan named "Obie" was joined by three others who came to know Christ. Shortly after this another dispatch of 18 Moravians came to relieve him as, according to the movie, he had been elected the chief teaching elder back in Germany. The man who left his family behind, David Nitschmann later, after returning to Herrnhut for a time landed at Philadelphia, in 1741 and was instrumental in the founding of Bethlehem, PA where he died in 1772.

As for Leonard, I have not found what happened to him, but he would have been free to leave the plantation. He realized that he must be willing to be a slave to reach these people and would have sold himself into slavery if necessary but it was illegal to be a white slave in the North Indies Isles. So they were bond slaves of Christ but never actually, as far as I know sold themselves or would have even been able to sell themselves into slavery.

**Re: what happened to these brave men - posted by ccMethow, on: 2010/4/17 1:39**

here is some history of these two missionaries, what was the end of their faith journey

you can read it all at

[http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/06\\_march\\_dober.pdf](http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/06_march_dober.pdf)

Dober and Nitschmann arrived on St. Thomas on December 13, 1732. Nitschmann returned to Europe four months later; Dober remained until 1734 when he was called back to become General Elder, a position he would hold until September of 1741.

Dober served the Moravian Church in many places. He worked in Amsterdam where he tried to evangelize the Jewish inhabitants of that city (1738/39). He was appointed head of Moravian activities in the Netherlands (1741-45), in England (1745-1746) and later in Silesia (1751-58). He was also ordained a bishop of the Church in 1747. After Zinzendorf's death Dober became a member of the Directorate of the Unity Å— a position he held until he passed away in Herrnhut on April 1, 1766.

Dober lost his first wife, Anna Schindler (1713-1739), after only two years of marriage. He remarried in 1743 with Anne Gertraut Engel (1713-1787).

**Re: - posted by learn (), on: 2010/4/22 11:41**

--by Ginnyrose

Ginnyrose, perhaps I can shed some light. The reason why it raises serious questions in your mind is likely because you are understanding the bible verse in a legalistic sense rather than the essence of the bible/God's heart even though I guess you are probably unaware of it.

God is the one that provides us and our family with our physical needs. Many times he gets the head of the family ie the husband to work (ie earn an income). However, there are some that he will call them to go out to become missionaries (leaving their families) or to allow their families to live in poverty/danger so that they can minister to others. When God does that, then God will use other means to provide for the missionary's family (eg :getting other Christian brothers/sisters to

o support them or even through anonymous people etc). Ask God to open up your heart to His truth and not just head knowledge.

I will give real life examples below. But really these examples will still not be enough for one to really understand unless God opens up one's heart (and not just head knowledge) to His truth. Pray to God for this.

1) In Brother Andrew's book *Secret Believers*, recently there were some Christians deaths. One of the Christian missionary was thinking of stopping his work there as he feared for his wife and child's safety. But when he prayed, God wanted him to continue. He asked how about his wife and child's safety--God was silent on it. He continued his Christian work.

2) Read the book *End of The Spear*. There 5 missionaries with their families went to the jungles of Ecuador to minister to the fiercest tribe ie the Huorani tribe (they kill others and killed themselves often). 1 of the missionary's son asked if they will shoot if they are attacked. The missionary (ie Nate Saint) answered that they would not as they were ready to meet God but not the tribe as the tribe did not know God yet (if he were to think how he was going to provide for his family if they were dead instead of doing God's will--it would be better for him to stay at home). They died as they were killed by the tribe members (they refused to shoot the tribe when the tribe attacked them) leaving the wives (either pregnant or with children). Later on, 1 of the wives and 1 of the sister of 2 of the missionaries went and converted them to Christianity. The son Steve Saint also lived with them for a while and now helps the tribe to spread Christianity in far reaching places. When they were making the film (the book is way better than the film), they found out that when the missionaries died, angels were there singing a song which later one of the Huorani tribe member picked out. Also, 1 of the wife was comforted by God that God was still with the missionaries when they died (and she held to that conviction even though when told of her husband's death).

3) View again *Soul Survivor* for China. Google for it. There, there's a woman where her husband was imprisoned. She had to care for a large family and her mother-in-law. When she ran out of money, there was always anonymous people giving her money and even extra money (with the instruction to give to others).

4) The Moravian person--if he was called by God, I'm sure he and any person would have made provisions on how his family were to be provided for--most probably by the other Moravian Christians staying at home. It's very unlikely that he will just leave like that without making any provision. Just because he is not the one providing for the family doesn't mean that it goes against bible teachings.

5) Many Christians in persecuted countries like Asia and Islam countries continuously put their own lives and their family's lives in danger just because they go to church or minister to others. If they held on to the bible verses (in the way you think), then wouldn't it make sense for them not to minister to others, after all they may die and who will take care of their families.

6) Brother Paul Washer related the story of those that were put in (I think that's in Peru) prisons. When the missionaries were captured, if nobody from outside bring them food or clothes they will die. But for those people that bring them food or clothes, there's a good chance that they will be captured and put in prison also. But you know what, these Christians were willing to risk their lives (whether they had family or not).

7) A Christian in Vietnam I think, was imprisoned and tortured for spreading the gospel. But God provided for his wife and child by getting others to provide for her and also by allowing/getting her to work harder. It's not easy, but that's God's will and they will get crowns in heaven.

8) There's another real story where just before Communist China came to confiscate the bible, another Christian was told to go to the family's house and there the family passed him the bible. They were beaten and 1 of their son's died due to beatings. The mother prayed not to take her son's life but He did. But because of this, the people in the hospital believed that their God was real because they saw how the son behaved.

9) An Indian Christian in India had a good job. But on God's calling, he moved his whole family to a very bad slump in India to minister to others. Now, that slump is full of diseases, danger etc. In our eyes, he is putting his family at risk, but don't you realise, God is in control, when He ask you to do something, he will provide for you (though it's very likely that one will encounter physical difficulties eg: diseases, germs, violence etc).

There are plenty of other real life stories too. The thing is we tend to read the bible/judge things based on our own understanding.

standing rather than God's understanding. Only when we have God's understanding, then are our eyes truly open.