

Moravian Moments # 01...

Who are the Moravians?

The Unitas Fratrum, or the Moravian Church, is that branch of the Christian Church which began its distinct life at Kunvald in Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) on the 1st March, 1457. The Unitas Fratrum was founded with a three-fold ideal of Faith, Fellowship and Freedom, and a strong emphasis on practical Christian life rather than on doctrinal thought or church tradition. It was born of the great revival of faith at the close of the middle ages, arising from the national revival in Bohemia.

The man destined to lead the movement for reform in the Roman Catholic Church was John Hus, a Bohemian, a professor at the University of Prague and a priest of the Church of Rome. He began in 1402 to preach openly against the tyranny and abuses of the Church, pointing out, for example, that the Pope must be guided by scripture, that worship should be conducted in the language of the people, that the people should be taught the scriptures, that the Priests should set an example of holy living, that salvation is found through faith in Jesus Christ and not in buying *indulgences* from the Church. In 1410 the Roman Catholic Church authorities forbade Hus to preach, but Hus would not be silenced, and he continued to preach, supported by his freedom-loving countrymen who shared with him a deep dissatisfaction with the tyranny and abuses of Rome. In addition to the Church, the power of the state was called in to suppress them, but persecution furthered their growth. The impact of the Brethren on the spiritual life in their country and over the boundaries of their homeland far exceeded the numerical strength of membership.

John Hus was excommunicated or banned from the Church in 1413. He was arrested, imprisoned and condemned to death without a hearing. On July 6th 1415, he was burned at the stake. His followers, burned with indignation at this treachery on the part of the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, banded themselves together as the *Hussites* to protest against Rome. The Roman Catholic Church relentlessly persecuted the Moravians, killing thousands of them and driving them from their homes and properties into the hills and forests. Next time, we look at the origin of the name Moravian and how did they survive the severe persecution.