

CONCLUSION - COMPLEXITY AND SIMPLICITY

This book has been an attempt to understand spiritual formation and direction, to portray life as a dynamic process, to discern its components and complexity, and to explore techniques and practices available for spiritual growth. Frequently different ways of viewing aspects of human existence and process have been offered. Perhaps one will have the feeling of an overwhelming complexity. A friend who talked to a business associate about the contents of this book and course replied, "Keep it simple." I am sure that this will be the feeling of many. In conclusion I would like to deal with "keeping it simple," though at first I need to legitimize the complexity.

Whatever our longing for simplicity, life is complex. The intellectual challenge to grasp human existence and its cosmic context is a legitimate one, though it evidently is not for all. The philosophical and scientific perspectives, the cultural issues, and the historic experience of persons and peoples represent both understandings, which must be considered and integrated, and needs that call for response. The understandings of life our modern methodologies and sciences have provided offer new information which needs to be taken seriously. For example, one can hardly write today without considering the impact of quantum physics and modern psychology. With regard to needs, there are the apologetic needs to come to terms with the meanings of culture and sciences and speak the Christian truth in this context. There are also the experienced needs of persons as they struggle with their existence to make some sense of what they experience within the modern context. In a sense complexity is the arena of the expert, the professional. Someone must do this and understand even if they do not share it all, even if they only reply to ordinary human struggle and the search for faith as the issues arise. And yet one must question the protection of laity and congregations from the issues. The tremendous gap between teaching on the Bible in seminaries and the understanding of the Bible in congregations is a case in point. In no way has this contributed to the development of Christian maturity.

Theological education should prepare future religious professionals to be able to discern the factors of life within the modern context and to be able to assist spiritual formation. It has been the tendency of theological education to provide the biblical, theological and historical disciplines and, since the 1950's, provide pastoral and professional skills. One of the results of the spiritual formation movement, with the advocacy of the Association of Theological Schools, has been to cause seminaries to explore how spiritual formation might be included within the curriculum. Until we discover the various ways of doing this we are not providing students with an adequate education for ministry in the present age. It is a very real question as to whether the church was ever providing adequate preparation without dealing with this. Many of the reform movements within Christian history can be seen as attempts to deal with the experienced realities and formative process of the Christian life.

Having said this, one must recognize that there is another approach which starts with a single focal point and allows the growth of insight as part of a experiential life-long process. Here one asks first what is essential. If what has been argued in this book is valid, it is relationship with God. Out of this relationship all else comes; and when one has this relationship, one has *the one thing necessary which becomes the essential dynamic of the Christian life*. This is the simplicity which makes Christianity accessible to all, even the child, the retarded and the senile elderly, for this relationship is a gift of God, given us to explore and appropriate as we are able.

In the 18th century Moravian tradition, though Zinzendorf himself and others sought to come to terms with the issues of the enlightenment, the main question was: How can *all* have religion? The answer was to accept the relationship the Saviour offered, not as an intellectual act, but as a personal intuitive response in which faith was defined as love and where Christian ethics became its expression. This resulted in a simplicity which is well expressed in the hymn of the 18th century Moravian leader Bishop Augustus Spangenberg:

When simplicity we cherish
Then the soul is full of light;
But that light will quickly vanish,
When of Jesus we lose sight.

He who naught but Christ desireth,
He whom nothing else can cheer
But the joy which He inspireth,
Lending to His voice an ear;

Who sincerely loveth Jesus,
And upon His grace depends;
Who but willeth what Him pleases,
Simply following His commands;

Who to Jesus humbly cleaveth,
Pays obedience to His Word,
Yea, in closest union liveth
With our Saviour, Head and Lord;

Who in Jesus Christ abideth,
And, from self-dependence free,
In naught else but Him confideth
Walks in true simplicity.

He who is by Christ directed,
Trusting the Good Shepherd's care,
From all harm will be protected,
And no danger needs to fear.⁵⁹⁷

Zinzendorf believed that religion which was overly intellectual was available only to the intellectuals, producing an intellectual elitism within Christianity. Moreover, such religion could avoid the issue of personal relationship with the Saviour. As was his own experience, even the child could be religious if religion was recognized to be an experienced relationship, a matter of the heart. His understanding of "heart religion" was that it consisted of a relationship with the Saviour intuitively perceived and then later conceptualized by those who were equipped to do so, expressed differently in various historical contexts and different persons.

⁵⁹⁷. Augustus G. Spangenberg, "When Simplicity We Cherish," *Hymnals and Liturgies of the Moravian Church*, Provincial Synods of the Moravian Church in America, 1969, # 388.

To know Jesus was the essence of religion. Jesus and his helper, the Spirit, would guide the further development of the person as was appropriate.

There (in matters of the soul) each soul addresses itself immediately to the Saviour and allows their theological slip of paper which is prepared for them to be filled out by him and no one else. The greatest part of this slip of paper or memorial is pure Bible. That all people have equally who hold to the Saviour. There Christianity is, in a sense, the same. But what constitutes the especially distinguishing mark between the Saviour and the soul, that the Saviour now speaks with me and not with you, and then another time acts with you and not with me; there no one must be consulted but him.⁵⁹⁸

This conversation with the Saviour is usually mediated through the Spirit who functions like a Mother, to keep the family aware of the Husband and "Father" who is away (i.e. the ascended Christ). Zinzendorf speaks of this in terms of "anointing," as in I John 2:20:

When the Gospel is set forth, than begins the anointing which gives each one his light, his portion of insight which is holy to him, which exercises itself upon this holy ground. And upon this ground (for no other foundation can anyone lay I Cor. 3:11) each one builds his own system; for each one must have his own practical system, each one must be able to speak for himself. That he learned out of the Saviour's heart In John we have an example, that one leaned on his breast, and if one asks he can get the answer to his question.⁵⁹⁹

In defining the relationship of "anointing" and Scripture, he says that "anointing" and "feeling" (the intuitive perception of truth)⁶⁰⁰ can be the norm of faith and life where "*in thesi*" nothing is determined or decreed; or it can be the norm in the application of that which is already Biblically decreed. If something is in the Bible, no one can call on "feeling" against that. However, the definition of the Bible is difficult. Is Habakkuk the Bible, or only a piece of it? And must not all the pieces be together, standing in their right place, if the Bible is to be used?⁶⁰¹ Because of the problems caused by the makeup of the Bible, "feeling" may come to one's help in determining the interpretation of a passage which is not clear or may be merely suited to a particular historical period.⁶⁰²

While faith started simply with the Saviour, he then brings one to an understanding of the Godhead. The Saviour "will tell you, What Family he is of, What a Father he has, then will he explain to you what his Holy Ghost is." It is then the function of the Holy Spirit in the church to care for the Saviour's family and to help them in their growth in truth and life. Thus the church becomes a school of the Spirit:

And when you have comprehended it in general, he will send you afterwards into the Repetition-school of the Holy Ghost, who will then remind you of every Thing in particular, whatsoever you have heard of him; who will, as far as is necessary for you to know, repeat in

598. *Der Predigten die der Ordinarius ... zu London gehalten hat*, Zweyter Band, Abth. VI, (9/22/54), p. 341.

599. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

600. For Zinzendorf "feeling" was not an emotional manifestation, but an intuitive and objective perception of reality.

601. Zinzendorf, buying into the historical criticism of his day, viewed the Bible as a puzzle whose pieces stood together in a unity only when the image of Christ was placed upon it. One of the problems with the Bible is that the books were not arranged in the order of their historical origin. Thus one could not readily see how God was dealing with people differently in different historical periods.

602. A. Spangenberg, *Apologetische Schluss-Schrift*, (Synodal Protocoll 1750), pp. 471f.

your Ears what concerns the Heavenly Father, keeping Liturgy to the heavenly Father in your Hearts, altho' ye yourselves might not be able to find Words sufficient for it.

This is the Consolation, which we may give Mankind our Hearers from the World, who want with all their Hearts to be saved; altho' we do not directly preach the holy Trinity to them. Our little Children, who are baptized in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, who grow up where they were hatch'd (born from his holy Side) who know no where to betake themselves to, but to Him; and to whom a thousand Notions prevailing in the World remain hidden; but who Day and Night converse with the dear Lamb, and are habituated to his Conversation, cleaving even at their third and fourth Year to Him with Heart and Mind, closer than to their own Life, (so as could not be brought about with ever so much Pains and Study in fifty years, if it was to be effected by a continual Delineation of it to them, or if one was to produce it even in his own Mind mechanically) these little Scholars of the Holy Ghost, I say, doubtless get acquainted with their *Abba* and divine Mother too at the same Time, as soon as ever they are capable of thinking; this is very natural.⁶⁰³

This approach means that God is in control of the learning process which begins in simplicity with Christ and then unfolds as God wishes. Since this is God's process, one does not need to learn everything at once.

We have a principle that is different from the theologians: we believe that the whole theology, with which we can stand before all holy angels without shame, can be written upon an octave page with large letters. Who neglects this theology is without salvation in this time.

That was the first point. The disciples allowed an ignorance. Today this is no longer allowed: one no longer ignores anything. One can not experience a matter other than at the source, at the original. Other guides, if they have honest intentions, cannot give one much of an answer which, by the distribution of ideas which happen by the inexpressible wisdom of God, should fill out the page so that my book is my manual. That no one can fill out himself for his use; each one must get it filled out by him alone. They will all be taught by God. John 6:45.⁶⁰⁴

This understanding of the spiritual formation process was broadly applied within the mission of the 18th century Moravian Church, both in its creation of societies within the state churches of Europe and elsewhere and in its broad-spread mission work. Zinzendorf also understood this as describing his own process of arriving at an experiential understanding of theological issues, such as his understanding of the meaning of the Spirit for the life of the church.⁶⁰⁵

603. *Twenty One Discourses or Dissertations on the Augsburg Confession*, (12/16/47), pp. 25-26. The comment on not preaching the Trinity to the world is to be understood from the perspective that he believed Christ has always been the mediator of the Trinity, in OT times and in the world in general. Therefore one cannot talk about the Trinity until persons have accepted the one who mediates it. The discussion of the Trinity should only take place within the church and is not part of the church's message to the world.

The allusion to Jesus' side-wound is part of Zinzendorf's use of the "language of the wounds" to make the suffering Saviour perceptibly real. For him the spiritual birth of the Christian, as the origin of the Spirit, is from the side wound. One must take this as symbolic and mystical language indicating that the spiritual life of the Christian originated in the wounded Saviour. For Zinzendorf, as in John 20, the resurrected Jesus will always bear his wounds.

604. *Der Predigten die der Ordinarius ... zu London gehalten hat*, Zweyter Band, Abth. VI, (9/22/54), pp. 337f.

605. *Ibid.*, (5/24/52), pp. 39-40.

He says that he did not know what he should make of the Holy Ghost at first until the Saviour gave him the first explanation in 1738 in the hymn, "O, Pray God the Holy Ghost...". He confesses to being a simple sheep in the area of theology and that what his heart did not understand, that he did not know though he believed what was in Scripture. Since he did not understand the divinity of the Spirit, he therefore never spoke of it, but simply believed he was the third person of the Trinity. He had no idea as to how he was the third person and merely thought of him abstractly.

He then goes on to say that the Holy Ghost must always interpret the Bible as one does to a catechetical student, and so he proceeded step by step. If the Saviour gives him to understand something, it is as sweet as honey to him and he rejoices greatly over it. But one must be patient. Theologians make the mistake of trying to understand everything at once.

Before he came to his understanding of the Spirit, he desired to give the Spirit a place in the Church so that the members might "get a feeling of Him". Thus he gave him the title "*Hege*" ("protector, preserver") and later "*Kämmerer*" (meaning "servant in a chamber" which Zinzendorf says is derived from the idea of the "friend of the Bridegroom"). However, these two terms were "liturgical." Only when he knew him as "Mother," then it was "*naturell*" to him. The full explanation of the Spirit came to him while he was on ship during his second trip to America in 1741. In the term "Mother" one has an "*ökonomisch*" word⁶⁰⁶ which would be good for the heart as "Abba" is for the heavenly Father and "Mann" (Husband) for the Saviour.

To do in our century what Zinzendorf did one must come to terms with the problem of the historical Jesus. Though Zinzendorf came to terms with the historical critical study of Scripture in his day, he could not have anticipated the difficulty of modern scholarship in determining the authentic Jesus. Today one would immediately ask, from which presentation of Jesus in the Gospels should we take our understanding of Jesus? Perhaps the church and scholarship can help with this, and perhaps we can sense the mystery of the person of Jesus who is behind these presentations.

If Christianity does begin in a relationship, although this relationship could be defined in terms of Jesus, the Father or the Spirit, Jesus and his story does provide us with the concrete representation of the nature and offer of relationship. Though I have previously tried to present some of the problems of Christocentrism, on a practical level Jesus does lead us to the Father and teach us to pray "Abba, Father." On this simpler level do we really have to struggle with whether it is *only* through Jesus rather than appreciating the function of Jesus?

If a simpler way is wanted for simpler folk, perhaps the Moravian approach of the 18th century may provide insight. Yet complexity and simplicity are not only alternatives. They are two poles of the journey to and with God that must be held in tension. Those who deal with complexity must never forget how simple it may all be. Like Martha we may be "anxious and troubled about many things" while "one thing is needful." *Seated at the feet of Jesus, like Mary, our heart tells us that we are close to the Source of life.*⁶⁰⁷ *Unless we repeatedly do this, complexity alone may lose us the way.*

⁶⁰⁶. By *ökonomisch* Zinzendorf meant a term which was suited to the needs of the time. The term "Mother" of the Holy Spirit was part of Zinzendorf's search to find experiential language to apply to the Godhead and religious experience, for abstract terms did not suffice. He used *Abba*, Father; Saviour, Bridegroom or Husband for Jesus; and Mother for the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁰⁷. Luke 10:38-42.