

James Newsom

I have great respect for Dr. Knouse and high praise for the thoughts she presents in “Singing Is Believing: Music at the Heart of Moravian Faith and Life.” Her love for the Lord and her desire for Him to receive the worship, honor and glory that He so richly deserves is evident in her life and work. I am grateful for her realistic look at our denomination’s musical history and find myself in agreement with almost all her suggestions and conclusions. With that in mind I share some thoughts that came to mind after reading her paper.

Although I like many of the popular praise and worship songs and consider myself a fan of several artists in the contemporary Christian music category, there is a lot of music in those genres that troubles me. Many of these songs seem thin on biblical truth and seldom focus on any attributes of God beyond His love (e.g. holiness, justice, grace). Another problem is a lack of proper reverence for God. Some of the songs are so vague as to the object of their adoration that they could just as easily be one of Paul McCartney’s “silly love songs.”

While surfing a youth ministry website, I recently saw a comparison of two current songs which provide a case in point. Both are titled “I Need You”:

Song #1	Song #2
Love, I need love	You’re my only reason,
You are love	You’re my only truth
I need You	I need you like water
Love, You are love	Like breath, like rain
I need love	I need you like mercy
I need You	From Heaven’s gate
You know my	There’s freedom in
deepest fear	your arms
You know when I	That carries me
am scared	through
You can read	I need you
my empty page	
You can feel my rage	

Song #1 is a praise and worship song by the popular Christian group Sonicflood. Song #2 is by the country music singer LeAnn Rimes. When it becomes nearly

impossible to tell the songs of the church from the songs of the world, the church needs to re-think what we are singing and to Whom and for Whom we sing.

Not all modern praise and worship songs are theologically thin. I was pleased to see songs like “Let There Be Praise” and “His Name Is Wonderful” included in the Moravian Book of Worship. I hope that future editions will include more good songs of this type (“Shine, Jesus, Shine” and “He is Exalted” to name just two). If necessary, I would be happy to suggest some hymns currently in our book of worship which could be removed to make room.

My biggest complaint with The Moravian Book of Worship is the presence of so many hymns with tunes that are difficult to sing. I cannot read music, but I can sing and I can hear. And there are a lot of songs in the book of worship that I don’t like to sing or hear! Far too many times in my early years of ministry I searched through the hymnal and found a song with words that fit perfectly with a certain biblical text or sermon topic, only to discover at choir practice (or worse yet, in worship on Sunday) that the tune was a congregational flop. I soon learned to use the metrical index in the back of the hymnal to find alternate tunes which were more familiar and easier to sing.

Dr. Knouse is correct when she says “there is a real need for an identified ‘core repertory’ of Moravian hymnody (texts and tunes), a set of hymns which we would embrace as our own and teach to our children and to new members as part of celebrating our identity.” Once that is done it would wonderful to make those hymns and tunes available on CD and on the web. I would suggest going even further and making all the tunes used in the hymnal available on the web as MP3 files and the entire book of worship (liturgies and hymns) available on CD-ROM. That way, worship leaders would be free to listen to alternate tunes, to edit liturgies, and print out copies suited to the particular needs of their local community. The Episcopal Church already does this with their hymnal and the Book of Common Prayer.

I agree in theory with Dr. Knouse’s contention that “we must expect our members to study and grow in their

knowledge of our tradition.” However, my concern is what that means in a practical sense. Past experience has shown me that many of those steeped in Moravian music approach educating the congregation in much the same way my parents approached educating me about eating cooked spinach. I call this the “here it is, it’s good for you, eat it and be quiet” approach.

Simply put, no amount of historical background on the author of a hymn or tune; no exposition concerning a hymn’s theological depth; and no amount of repetitive singing can make up for the fact that some hymn tunes sound bad and are terribly difficult to sing. If my mom and dad would have served me cooked spinach every day and brought in nutritionists to extol its many virtues, I still would not have liked it. There are other ways to get vitamins, minerals and vegetable fiber inside little boys and there are other ways to get our members to know and appreciate Moravian music.

Having heard Dr. Knouse speak, play music and teach I have every confidence that she knows what needs to be done and is very capable of leading the way. If she and others like her are willing to teach and lead, then I and many others like me, are willing to learn and follow.

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Brian Henkelmann

My initial response to Sr. Knouse’s article was a fervent “Amen!” The accounts of earlier “music in worship” controversies illustrated that we are part of a continuing process and not experiencing a unique phenomenon as we try to discover the most appropriate worship music. Br. Dreydoppel’s “six principles for Moravian worship” provide a wonderful context for discussion of music in worship. The section “Music as Craft and Calling” provided a reminder of who I am as a church musician and my responsibility as a music educator.

In the discussion of “Music, Culture, Worship, Evangelism, Entertainment”, I relived yet again the “balancing act” which is part of being a worship leader

in charge of choosing, teaching and bringing to life the music of the worship service. I was reminded of the statement of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, “Music in Catholic Worship,” in which articles 26-41 state, in part, that any musical component of liturgy must be judged by the following criteria:

a) Musical – Is there an aesthetic and technical quality in its rhythm, harmony, and melody? Besides the quality of the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic elements, is there a concern with the wedding of text to music? b) Liturgical – is the music appropriate to the nature and importance of the liturgy? Is the theological content sound? ... c) Pastoral – Is the music appropriate to the ability of the assembly? Does the music in the celebration enable the assembly to express the faith of the Church, in this place, in this age, in our culture? (Adapted from “The Liturgy of the Roman Rite and African American Worship” by Rev. J-Glenn Murray, S. J. in the hymnal *Lead Me, Guide Me* (GIA, Chicago, 1987).

It is the final section “Intentional identity with integrity;” however, that prompts me to raise some questions to the church at large and offer some my hopes and dreams about ensuring that in the future we will have Moravian musicians who are trained well enough to deal with the criteria mentioned in the article and familiar enough with their Moravian musical heritage to offer its many riches to the Moravian church and the church at large.

I am always intrigued (and slightly disheartened) when I enter a Moravian church that has no Moravian hymnals. Seeing only the 1969 (red) book also leaves me saddened that so many quality worship resources are unavailable to the congregation. But the lack of any Moravian hymnal makes me wonder what part of the worship life at that church is “Moravian”. I realize that with overhead projectors and in-house “songbooks” (PLEASE GET COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS AS NEEDED), some congregations feel no need to have hymnbooks, but I know of nowhere else that the Moravian hymn tradition and the theological teaching it incorporates is available in one book.