

not because of any change in cultural politics. The Synods that restricted the roles and activities of our sisters did so to accommodate Moravian practice to the politics and cultural norms of their day. This is precisely what many of us see happening in the Church today.

While much is left to be said, it seems we have already reached an impasse. It appears my brother and I cannot even agree on what divides us, let alone on how to understand the relevant texts. So where do we go from here? Is the love I have for him, and that he has shown to me, enough? Is the life and the love that Jesus Christ gives us both sufficient? Or must we part company, each of us seeking politically and culturally more compatible communions?

I pray this is not so. I don't believe it needs to be. However there are two things I believe must happen and happen very soon. The first is we must agree to cease doing things that offend and wound one another. The victory we are given in Christ is not a victory of one of us over the other. The second is that we must recognize that unity is possible only in our Chief Elder. With apologies to Peter, there is no other name given us by which we can be healed/saved, save the Name of Jesus. May Christ and Him crucified remain our confession of faith.

(Footnotes)

¹ Rudolf Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren*, trans. C. Daniel Crews, (Bethlehem: The Moravian Church in America, 1992), p. 364.

² A discussion of the Pharisees and their attempts to enforce "traditions" concerning the Law can be found in E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York, Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 44-46. Sanders also argues on p. 215 that it is improbable

that anyone would have considered Jesus' healing, at least in the case of the man with the withered hand, Mark 3:1-6, a violation of the Sabbath law.

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Hartmut Beck

With appreciation I do comply with the editor's invitation to respond with about 1000 words to Dr. Crouch's initial article of 6500 words on a subject for which one would like to write a book. The issue is important and controversial, not only within the Moravian Church. The German Protestant Churches (EKD – Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) have recently issued a paper (*Denkschrift*) with the title "Christian Faith and other Religions."¹ These are no longer only in the "regions beyond" but right in our midst. We must reconsider our relationship to them.

For the Old Testament Israel is the "chosen people" (Isaiah 43:20,21, *passim*) amongst all peoples (Hebrew: the *goyim*)—not because of its own merits but for love's sake by the Grace of God (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). In the New Testament the followers of Christ (*ecclesia* — those who are called) are the chosen priestly people of God (1 Peter 2:9, 2 Peter 1:10, *passim*). The biblical texts reflect this self-understanding. After Christianity had become official religion in the Roman Empire people of other forms of religion were considered as "pagani" (uneducated rural people) or in English "pagans". The Enlightenment, Romanticism and Secularisation changed this perspective. In the 18th Century when Moravian missions got on their way, there was a growing appreciation (by Jean Jacque Rousseau and others) for the so-called "primitive"

people and their human and cultural qualities.

Wilhelm Schmidt promoted the theory of an original idea of a Supreme God (Hochgott) that deteriorated into a great number of distorted false religions.² Karl Barth was uncompromising on this issue of the legitimacy of other religions.³ Besides the only one real God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and Jesus Christ, Karl Barth, at least in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, saw no room for real tolerance and recognition of other religions.⁴ Prof. Peter Beyerhaus (missiology, Tübingen) mitigated this evaluation considering foreign religions as systems which possibly helped to protect life in the human society in which otherwise without recognition of some transcendent authority there might have been limitless mutual killing and fraud.

The present age of dialogue has done much to equalize other religions with Christianity in popular understanding. In the comparative science of religion Christianity is only considered as one of the many possible forms of religion each of which has its own standing and right. From there the idea of a “pluralistic theology of religion”⁵ continued to develop, in which even theologians, such as the Roman-Catholic Hubert Halbfass suggested that Christian Missions should not aim at the conversion of people to formal Christianity.⁶ He proposed that the Church should encourage people to become more faithful in their own religions because these all ultimately lead men to God like the spokes of a wheel directed towards the same center. In such a perspective, any idea of uniqueness of Christ might seem arrogant. But in accepting this perspective, the Christian faith would deny its essential core.

In the New Testament the final understanding of Christ as he was revealed (not just conceived by human ideas) is that of the Savior for mankind. This is how the early Christian Church looked at him. This should not be considered only as traditional and conventional but as essential and lasting. What the NT bears witness to as salvation (Greek *soteria*) aims not essentially at physical healing but rather to eternal blessedness of man in spirit and soul. With regard to the healing of the body (blindness, paralysis, deafness, numbness etc.) it must be remembered, that Christ healed physically only a few individuals. Many continued to be sick and handicapped. He did not initiate a new general health scheme. He rather opened the way of temporal and eternal salvation for all people, although not all people knew this or know this now.

The woman who was divorced (John 8:1-11) was finally told not to sin any more. The healing of the paralytic man (Mark 2:1-12) ends up with the forgiveness of his sins. In John 9 (vs. 1-41) the healing of the blind man does not end with his restored sight but with the comment that now he knew that “this man (Jesus) really is from God” (vs. 33), and he said “Lord, I believe” and bowed before him (vs. 38).⁷ In Acts 4:12 the most essential thing is not that here a man was restored to renewed physical health but that to him the message of Christ who died on the cross and was raised from the dead was preached (vs. 11).

In John 2 with the miraculous conversion of water into wine Jesus, did not only help a man out of his prevailing plight nor did he initiate an age where now water with the right method can be turned into wine. The evangelist commented: This was the first sign (*semeion*) by which Jesus

revealed his glory (John 2:11). And all the further miracles (semeia) which St. John does report serve the same purpose. Most important is not miracle itself and the fact of healing but the revelation of Christ as Savior.

The question whether women should speak in the congregation or have their head covered (and so of women's ordination) however is of different kind and does not pertain to salvation but to the cultural environment only and can be adapted accordingly.

In John 14:6 the self-understanding of Jesus and that of the early Christian believers indicate clearly that Jesus Christ (here I do consciously speak of Christ and not of Christianity) is seen as essential for the way to God-Father and to salvation, for which he should be known and accepted. Preaching salvation in Christ, however, does not mean we condemn others, who were born and live in very different situations, as if by no means whatsoever they never could be saved. Who could dare to say that people of all other forms of faith, especially beginning with the Jewish faith and tradition, would be "lost for ever"? Nevertheless after Christ has appeared we cannot consider all other religions as equally good and valid for salvation.

This belongs to what sometimes appears as paradox in Christian faith and doctrine. When we are saved, we are saved through grace only, not for our merits' sake. But if we are not be saved it would be because of our sins, not because God's grace has failed upon us. This sounds illogical but it is essential in Christian dogmatics. We do believe in Christ as the only way and source of salvation, but we respect and try to understand

people of other religions. In the way in which God has led us to see Him with Christ as Savior for all mankind (Matthew 28:18-20) however we shall be faithful to His word and revelation and to His calling as we know it.

With the whole dispute which now is underway in our Moravian Church I wonder whether this aspect (also a kind of third way) can satisfy both contradicting parties, although for slightly different arguments than what Dr. Crouch (with whom I here have my dialogue although without permanent quotations) suggests.

I add two important perspectives on this matter. One is from a Greek Orthodox Professor from Athens who once, in a two-hour lecture, developed the whole Orthodox theology under the governing aspect of "filia" (divine love).⁸ A second one is from the former Bavarian Lutheran Bishop Chr. Dietzfelbinger,⁹ who stated that nothing which does not constitute separation from Christ should be qualified as heresy and be a reason for separation from the church. Therefore I think and hope very much that on this ground of divine love and union in Christ, we will and can stand together.

(Footnotes)

¹ EKD Texte 77, *Christlicher Glaube und nichtchristliche Religionen*, 25 pages, published August 2003. Hannover, Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).

² Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (12 Vol., 1912-1955) and *Handbuch der vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte* (3 Vol., 1930) developed the idea of a Supreme God (*Hochgottglaube, Urmonotheismus*) which was thought originally to be held by all mankind.

³ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, KD II/1, pg. 636: the religions of the heathen people are false religions; KD IV/1, pg. 537: “religion” is a deed of sinful man, *passim*

⁴ KD III/4, pg.549: dull tolerance only reduces certainties to some unsatisfactory relativistic quality.

⁵ Paul Wess, *Sind alle Religionen gleich wahr? Eine Antwort auf die Pluralistische Religionstheologie*, in “Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft”, EOS Verlag St.Ottilien, 1996, Heft 1, pg.26-43.

⁶ H.Halfas, *Fundamental Katechetik*, Grünewald/Patmos Publishers, 1973, 236 pages.

⁷ All Bible quotations are taken from the NEB (New English Bible) 1972.

⁸ Lecture by Prof. Elias Voulgarakis (University of Athens) in the Greek Orthodox Academy at Moni Gonia in Crete on 29.06.1983 which I happened to attend.

⁹ Chr. Dietzfelbinger, *Was ist Irrlehre?*, Series “Theologische Existenz Heute” No.143, Chr. Kaiser Verlag München, 1967, 64 pages.

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Worth Green

The Rev. Dr. Frank Crouch has given us a powerful demonstration of scholarship in the service of the church. I am particularly thankful that he has taken care to root his own method of interpreting the Scriptures in the method he sees in the New Testament itself.

More importantly, the Dean of Moravian Seminary has successfully identified the theological presuppositions underlying our current debate. When Frank says that one side fears “a disregard for Scripture” and the other side fears “a lack of openness to God’s ongoing revelation”, it is easy to think not just in terms of individuals who might fall into one camp or another, but in terms of our two North American provinces.

I found Frank’s hermeneutic, exegesis, and conclusions in dealing with this question quite satisfying. I would differ in one primary point. I would not assign to the debate over “salvation through Christ alone,” the same level of conflict as I would assign to other issues we are debating, especially the issue of homosexuality. I am aware of many Christians, living and dead, who have gladly professed their allegiance to *Sola Scriptura*, while handily agreeing with Frank. These persons would insist on two mutually inclusive truths: 1) “Jesus died for the sins of the world” and “all who saved will be saved through him,” and 2) God is a just and merciful God who may, “acting in sovereign freedom,” save whomsoever God wills. “There is wideness in God’s mercy,” they say.

Frank argues along similar lines, making a distinction between “salvation through Christ,” and “salvation through Christianity.” The position that Frank puts before us is not only