

## (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> A bit of context here might help. Paul writes, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22) Clearly what we are to test are prophecies, to see if they are from God or the adversary. Creeds, certainly, don’t fit the category of prophecy. That doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be periodically reexamined to see if they still proclaim the gospel in a way that is understandable to contemporary people. But to suggest, for instance, that we need to continually look at the Nicene Creed’s declaration that Christ rose from the dead to see if it comports with Scripture seems to be a way of asking whether we still believe the gospel, not what it is.

<sup>2</sup> “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11) This was the favorite verse of Mennonite founder Menno Simons, who placed this verse on the title page of his every publication. It makes a nice complement to “in essentials, unity.”

<sup>3</sup> The debate over homosexuality is instructive here. Many in the Church treat the notion of genetically fixed sexual orientation as though it were as definitive as Newtonian gravity. In fact, there are few generally accepted scientific studies to support the idea, and the recent research by Dr. Robert Spitzer of Columbia University (who led the fight to have homosexuality removed from the list of mental illness recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973) indicates that sexual orientation may be more malleable than political activists wish to acknowledge. In fact, there is a growing body of thought in the gay community that disputes the strictly inborn approach to sexuality, claiming that sexual orientation is actually a social

construct that can be challenged and changed by the individual determined to throw off the tyranny of heterosexism. All of which is to say, when it comes to changing historic understandings, teachings, and practices on the basis of new insights: not so fast.

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## Amy Gohdes-Luhman

A few years back the Moravian Church of America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American entered into full communion. In preparation for this move, pastors were encouraged to lead discussions between Lutherans and Moravians throughout the province. Living in the Lutheran Mecca of Northfield, Minn., this was not a difficult thing to arrange. I met with Lutheran pastors and lay people from Northfield. Most of the meetings were held in Lutheran Churches—they are bigger. At one particular meeting the group began to engage in the theological underpinnings of some worship practice. It had been a while since the coffee pot had been around. They continued to chat, each of the various ELCA Lutheran churches being represented.

I noticed that no one had a bar or a cookie. Although it was not my church, I thought perhaps I should get the pot of coffee and the plate of bars and send them around again. Just as I was getting up to perform this important task, one of the pastors piped up: “Well, Amy what do the Moravians think about this important issue?” Unfortunately, the topic had not registered as that

important to my Moravian ears, so I was a bit stuck. “Um well, to be honest, I was just getting up to refresh the coffee and bars...and come to think of it, this is exactly the position where many Moravians would be in this argument. We would be more worried that everyone was comfortable and had enough to eat than about this particularly interesting issue—not that it isn’t important, of course.” The group laughed, and a few indicated that their coffee cups were empty.

Hospitality. Vacancy. Free Space. In his book, *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen includes an essay entitled, “On Hospitality.” In this essay Nouwen concludes that hospitality is the creation of a “free space.” In this free space people come together as friends, fully other. It is a space that does not try to convince, but comfort. It is a space in which one does not diminish or shy from one’s own beliefs, and yet in which one does not require those beliefs to be shared. It is a space without dividing lines. It is a vacancy. There is room in this inn.

The “third way” that Dr. Crouch describes is one that embodies this sort of free space, this hospitality. And interestingly he cites Matthew 25:31-46, the parable of the sheep and the goats, as a biblical confirmation of the fact that how we act rather than how we believe is the very bottom line. I note in this text that the Hebrew ethic of hospitality is made to be salvific in Christ’s parable. It matters if you have cared for those brought into relationship with you. This would be imitating Christ. Christ did not have as much time for the Pharisees and their religious questions as he did for the bleeding woman or the blind man. But he did make some time and he did answer some of their questions. So let’s keep thinking seriously about what we believe.

I believe the “third way” as describe by Dr. Crouch is the right way and the more difficult way. It means I need to shut up on some things and listen more. It means I have to be less arrogant—this is quite difficult (readers who know me are agreeing with this). It means I have to figure out how to create a free space with people I totally disagree with. How do I do that? I don’t have a clue. But the imperative is there. It is Moravian, it may be why our denomination is still here. Hospitality. Creating a vacancy. There is room in this inn. And strangely I would like to argue that no-one is allowed to leave, but I suppose that would be unfair.

But here is the rub, if it is one. In my free space, Jesus Christ is Lord. That is what I believe. I believe that Jesus is God made fully human and fully divine. I believe that he died on the cross and that he rose on the third day. I believe he is the Son of God and that he left for us the Holy Spirit. This I truly believe. So everyone who enters my free space will know this about me, because how can I keep quiet on that one?

The very few times I have been able to have some learning interaction with people of other faiths, I have come away with this almost overwhelming gratitude for Christ. It is not a matter of whether or not that other person is saved; that is for God to decide and act on. Christ said he came to save all people; I’ll take him at his Word. Rather, it is a gratitude for the level of revelation I feel I know through Jesus Christ. It is that I will share in the free space. I will not require there to be any sort of consensus, but I will not shy from proclaiming it as a certain kind of wholeness in my being.

See. I would not want to limit God. I won’t crucify Christ again by requiring the rules of

Christianity to be shared by all as the only way to be saved. Christ is more powerful than the language we have created for speaking of him. But am I thankful for knowing Christ in the way that I do. Yes. Thankful doesn't even begin to describe it.

So whatever mishmash I have come up with here on this question, take it for what it is. I think the coffee is running low and no one seems to have a bar. There is room at this inn.

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## **Wally Yarbrough**

First I thank Br. Craig Atwood for the invitation to respond to my brother's article. I was honored to be asked. Br. Frank Crouch has been, and is, both my teacher and my friend. He ministered to me and my wife, Linda, while we were in Pennsylvania, and continued to minister to us even after we left Pennsylvania to return home to North Carolina. I love him and have nothing but the highest respect for him, his scholarship, and his ministry to the Moravian Church and Moravian Theological Seminary. We have always discussed our differing viewpoints in a climate of mutual respect and love. I pray and believe that nothing will change that, and it is with that understanding that I offer this response.

I say these things because I must respectfully disagree with much of what my brother has written. I agree with him concerning the

profoundly disturbing context of our present exchange. Scripture has become, for some, no longer a source of the Truth, but only a part of the battlefield, or a source of ammunition. Some among us have abandoned any effort at community with one another. The Body of Christ has been wounded and real injuries (loss of income, community, status and homes) suffered by persons we know and love. The painful truth is that the North American Moravian Church is now, like most other mainline denominations, a house bitterly divided against itself.

Those who work in conflict resolution know that a principal rule for any who seek healing is to do no further harm, meaning to avoid actions or language that escalate the conflict. For that reason, given our emotionally and politically charged atmosphere, I must confess that after reading my brother's article I struggled with whether or not to be faithful to my acceptance of Br. Craig's invitation. There were two reasons. The first is that I substantially differ with Br. Frank on many things said in his article. Selfishly, I do not want this very public exchange to harm us or our relationship. But more than this, I suspect that this magazine, the public email discussion group, Unitas, and the exchanges that have occurred in the press and elsewhere have so far contributed more to driving us apart than to bringing us together.

Most of us know that as a conflict grows the debate quickly becomes personalized. The antagonists can then rarely even agree on what divides them. The defining of our issues, instead of giving clarity to our struggle, becomes part of the battleground. Issues are defined and re-defined in terms viewed more favorable to one