

among slaves in the Caribbean held up as a supporting example by those who endorsed slavery as well as those who opposed it. The work of C.I. La Trobe was crucial in steering the Church's middle course through this debate. (Some would say a typically Moravian approach!). This discussion provides useful background for understanding the origins of the contemporary Eastern West Indies Province.

In dealing with the second part of his title "...the Missionary Awakening in England ...," Mason describes the impact of all this Moravian activity upon the wider British religious scene. This discussion is a healthy reminder for contemporary Moravians that at one time, at least, Moravians did have an extensive influence far beyond their modest numbers. Thus Mason traces the Moravian influence upon William Carey, John Newton, and other evangelical leaders and the societies they formed, including the 'big three' of the Awakening: the Baptist Missionary Society, the evangelical London Missionary Society and the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society.

So it came to pass that by 1800 the Moravians had completely overcome the 'crisis of 1753.' Through many positive activities, (and by 'moving beyond' some of Zinzendorf's ideas) their good reputation had been restored in the opinion of British Protestants and the British government. The missions in Greenland, Labrador, the Danish West Indies, and the British colony of Antigua were lauded as models. Their influence upon the emerging modern British missionary movement was assured.

Mason's book (as well as Podmore's) is based upon extensive archival research utilizing Moravian material but also British government records as well as a host of other collections, public and private. His study weaves a rich contextual description of 18th century British life into which he skillfully fits the Moravian story. This approach provides a full understanding of his topic and reflects a depth of scholarship not often seen in studies of the Moravians. The book contains a full description of the sources consulted and an extensive bibliography.

The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters. By **Luke Timothy Johnson.** New York: Doubleday, 2003. 324 pages.
Reviewed by Craig Atwood

Luke Timothy Johnson is a name familiar to those who followed the controversy surrounding the Jesus Seminar in the 1990s. In *The Creed*, he continues his mission of promoting traditional Christian teaching against attacks from skeptics and over-zealous believers alike. This is one of those books that seems certain to both delight and offend almost all readers at some point, but in doing so it should provoke all readers to greater examination of their beliefs. "My aim," he writes, "is to make the creed controversial for those Christians who say it but do not understand it and therefore do not grasp what a radical and offensive act they perform when they declare these words" (p. 7). I think he succeeds admirably in this task. This is a work that Christians of all persuasions should be able to discuss, debate, and learn from.

It is odd that so many New Testament scholars are now writing about the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed since it was written over 200 years later than the New Testament. But Johnson demonstrates that there is a benefit in having a biblical scholar offer an *interpretation* of the creed and its significance. He provides a wealth of evidence to show that the creed does flow out of the doctrine of the early church presented in the canon; however, the diversity of the Christology of canonical Christianity is not adequately discussed.

Johnson argues that both skeptics and Christian reactionaries make the same mistake of basing religious truth on notions of historicity that are no longer considered valid even by historians. He embraces the awareness that humans actively construct the world in which we live by a process of interpretation. History itself is a hermeneutical process. Not all readers will accept his understanding of myth as a form of truth, but his assertion that all people must make fundamental claims about the world in order to live in the world is important. When Christians recite the creed, "they affirm that the world as imagined by Scripture and constructed by the creed is the world

in which they choose to live” (p. 61). In choosing this perspective, though, Christians also commit themselves to certain ways of being in the world.

One of the strengths in the creed frequently noted by Johnson is its brevity, especially compared to Protestant confessions of faith and the canons of the Catholic Church. By confining themselves to what was deemed most essential, the bishops at Nicea and Constantinople allowed much room for theological development and imagination. Because so many areas of the Christian life were intentionally left undefined, the creed should help divided Christians become more tolerant of other expressions of Christianity. Theoretically, that is. History has shown that the creed has been as divisive as it has proved unifying.

Johnson’s brief account of the writing and dissemination of the creed is a helpful corrective to the popular image of the creed being merely a tool of oppression by powerful bishops in league with the emperor. The real story is much more complicated; however, in defending the creed, Johnson downplays the fact that it has always been a source of controversy. It was intended to bring doctrinal order to the rapidly expanding Christian church in the early days of Constantine’s reign, but in doing so changed the nature of the church. It was the first creed to declare other beliefs as condemned. For the next century, there would be a power struggle between the Arians and the Nicenes

until the Arians were either converted or exiled. It left the church a legacy of anathema instead of affirmation. Johnson’s book is unlikely to convince those in non-creedal churches to adopt “Constantine’s Creed.”

Johnson’s book should give creedal churches much to think about and discuss. In light of the current Christological controversies in the Moravian Church, Johnson’s book would make an excellent study in congregations and among clergy. It is written for the educated lay-person rather than for theologians. For me, the strongest argument of the book is that this ancient creed, like Scripture itself, presents a strong challenge to the idolatry of the modern, consumer world.

As Johnson puts it, “It is idolatry when much of the world is constructed on the basis of economic and political systems that foster radical individualism, that make competition the supreme value in life, that reward greed, that enslave families to endless work without meaningful rest or spiritual growth, that camouflage such slavery by an endless round of entertainment diverting attention from the deadening boredom of a life dedicated exclusively to acquisition of meaningless things, and that, through its control of the media, progressively convinces all the enslaved that this pattern is ‘natural’ and ‘good’ and ‘free’” (p. 71). If the repetition and study of the Nicene Creed can help us assert freedom in the face of the totalitarianism of the marketplace, then I’m all for it.

The Comenius Forum:

A Discussion Group for Moravian Clergy

2nd Thursday of the Month – 11:00 a.m. – Beginning February 12, 2004

Home Moravian Church, CE Building, room 101

Topic: *The Creed* by Luke Timothy Johnson

Many clergy have expressed a desire to engage in theological discussion in a spirit of mutual trust that bridges the gap between conservatives, liberals, moderates, evangelicals, and just plain Moravians. You are invited to engage in lively discussion with brothers and sisters in ministry, honoring the ordination vow to study. There will be no leader, only participants gathered in the spirit of Jan Amos Comenius. We’ll start with the Nicene Creed, which touches on many of our pressing issues, using Luke Timothy Johnson’s book as a guide for conversation. Call 336-722-6171 for details.