

Responses

Rick Cochran

My initial reaction to the author's writing is to say that it is a wonderful thing that he so freely and openly shares his dreams. It's always a risky business to share one's hopes and visions with other people because the possibility of criticism or disagreement is always so great. However, the author supports his views by first analyzing past, present and future issues which face the Moravian Church and other denominations. This creates a solid context for the conclusions drawn. His historical comments also illustrate that the Moravians and Christianity in general have always dreamed of bigger and better things.

Dreams appear throughout human history. In ancient Greece and Israel, for example, dreams were sometimes regarded as revelations from the gods. People often purposely sought divine inspiration through their dreams. In the Bible, we can clearly see the role of dreams as revelation. In the Books of Genesis, Job, Numbers, Daniel and others in the Old Testament, dreams are instrumental in the human interface with the divine. In the New Testament, Paul is given instruction through a dream in the Acts. Similarly, Pilate's wife dreams of Jesus as recorded in the Book of Matthew.

It is critical to note that within the Christian context, it is humans who do the dreaming. We are the recipients of dreams as God attempts to convince us to do his will, and we interpret those dreams through our intellect and emotions. Dr. Hans-Beat Motel illustrates the human factor in religion when he cites the fact that "even the Vatican has a lot of difficulty producing decrees related to (theological) questions that are accepted by the Roman Catholic constituency."

Having worked for a Roman Catholic organization, I appreciate the tremendous dichotomy between

what the Pope expresses as divine and the way the Catholic membership molds such declarations to their individual human needs, options and opinions. As a matter of fact, I often urge fellow Moravians to never say "Catholics believe this or that." The only accurate statement is "the official position of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church thus and so."

Moravians find themselves in a similar situation in regard to the author's call for "a distinct theological profile" or "a clear theological standpoint." He points out several ways in which the Moravian Church is struggling with ethical and theological dilemmas such as homosexuality, equal rights for women, redistribution of wealth, and justice. It appears to me that the Moravian Church comes by these struggles honestly in the sense that it is a denomination which allows a great deal of human freedom. By our very motto, there are a few key essentials, a large number of theological issues which are matters of individual choice, and a command for charity in all things.

Moravians believe that each human being has a unique, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that we have Christ in our hearts and need no intermediaries to relate to the Divine Being. This is a heritage dating from Zinzendorf's time and even before. Consequently, it is difficult for me to envision Moravians having a clear and detailed theological position beyond certain basic beliefs. While we are not as "free wheeling" as some newer churches, the very nature of the denomination seems to preclude the development of much detailed doctrine or dogma.

I readily agree with the author that "the Moravian Church does not have an answer to this challenge because we do not know exactly where we stand, theologically

speaking.” At the same time, however, to describe our theology with great precision would seem a contradiction in our very nature and our reason for being.

Some of the author’s key points involve his dreams of the Moravian Church as a “mediating body,” one which works for peace and non-violence and which seeks “a better exchange of resources,” which would include narrowing the economic gap between the rich and the poor. These are ideas which all true Christians would wholeheartedly endorse, and the author is to be commended for his dedication to noble ideals and his sense of charity. Nonetheless, I am sometimes visited by what I consider the greatest theological contradiction of all, and it seems to temper the author’s dreams to a degree. Although we strive to behave as God would, we are only human. We seemed to be doomed, to a greater or lesser extent, to fail to realize our dreams in this life.

Let me hasten to add that we should not give up trying to build a better world simply because we are only human. However, we must also be careful not to condemn ourselves and others when we fail. We must intellectually embrace the concept that this will never be a perfect world, nor will we always agree on what needs to be done to improve this life or to grow closer to God.

Finally, any exploration of contemporary issues in the Church is probably best undertaken within a broad historical context. Challenges and debates are

nothing new within Christianity, and I have gained a fuller understanding of this fact in recent months. My wife, Terry, is currently enrolled in divinity school, and I have the opportunity to review her texts and term papers. Her most recent course dealt with the theological development of the early Church, and it is clear that the issues then were even more divisive than those we face today. Catholics were killing Protestants, as well as Protestants killing Catholics, in the most civilized nations of the world in their times. Entire nations were plunged into chaos in the midst of Christian theological debate.

In our current times, we are fortunate to have people such as Hans-Beat Motel who challenge us to dream of an even more peaceful and equitable Christian Church and world. I salute his efforts and am glad that he is a fellow Moravian. It seems to me that the real value of his treatise is his belief that “we must dream; we must develop visions; and we must hope to realize some of them.” It is this type of hope which incrementally improves the lot of humans in this life and enables us to do God’s work to the best of our human abilities.

Rick Cochran has been a member of Calvary Moravian Church for 10 years. He was an administrator for colleges and universities associated with the Lutheran, United Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Church of Christ denominations, as well as serving as Communications Director for the process merging four Lutheran groups in Wisconsin into the newly unified Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Gordon Sommers

Reading the 2003 Moses Lectures given by Brother Hans-Beat Motel intrigued and challenged me as it did when I heard it delivered. The sheer expanse of material, historical and contemporary, reflects the energy and encyclopedic knowledge that have characterized the leadership of one of the Moravian Church’s most gifted contemporary leaders. We owe

much to him and we are privileged to experience his continued influence. His lecture is consistent with the wisdom and strength of his spiritual leadership that I enjoyed in Unity Synods and Unity affairs. His writing is clear and refreshing, all the more commendable when we consider that English is not the writer’s first language, but one of five he speaks readily.