

THE MOSES LECTURES 2003
The Moravian Church as a Global Community:
Dreams at the Beginning, Challenges Today,
Dreams for the Future
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Introduction

Yes, there were dreams at the beginning of the Moravian Church, both of the Ancient and the Renewed Unity. At present, our small but worldwide church community faces many challenges, but there are also dreams for the future, which means that we have permission to think aloud. We need dreams if we want to do more than merely survive as the Moravian Church. If we want to use our special gifts and opportunities to develop our church further into a global community and to be a living witness of what is meant to be the body of Christ in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12), we need to dream.

Such a dream is different than an “illusion.” An illusion has no chance that it will ever be implemented because it is unconnected to reality. Looking at a dream, one can say, “well, this could happen in the future. It does not exist yet, but let us hope that we will reach a certain point or goal, which then will change our present situation.” Hope is therefore an essential motor of this kind of dreams.

In the parable of the servants to whom different talents are given (Matt. 25 and Luke 19), the most interesting figure to me is the servant who hid his one talent in the ground. Why did he do that? Is he just lazy or a little bit dumb or

what? The key to understanding his behavior lies in his words: “I was afraid.” His fear of his Master paralyzes him, and he is not able to do anything anymore: to think, to be imaginative, to have dreams.

Is this a parable of our Moravian Church today? Do we hide our talents in the ground because we are afraid of losing something? Have we lost hope in our future? Have we forgotten that we still may, still must dream, and use our imagination?

In our time, one of the most famous dreams is still the one of Martin Luther King, delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963:

“We must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free....(but) let us not wallow in the valley of despair....I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is dream deeply rooted in the American dream.” He then refers to the Constitution which claims that “all men are created equal,” and continues, “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.... I have a dream that my

four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.... I have a dream today.” And then, quite significantly, “This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South,” he said after he had stated that by reaching these goals “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”

Hope was the moving element for M.L.King, and he changed history, didn't he?

Part 1 - Dreams of the past

Zinzendorf had the strong desire to renew and restore the church, primarily the Lutheran Church to which he belonged. This must be considered as one of his major dreams, but it also belonged to his major failures. He neither succeeded in renewing the Protestant Church to a significant extent nor prevented the foundation of a new church, namely the Moravian Church.

This dream of Zinzendorf's had three main roots, or better, three negative things, according to his judgement, which he tried to overcome:

Christian Renewal: The Lutheran Church, already more than 200 years old, was, in the eyes of the vivid and emotional count, benumbed and paralyzed. It had become rigid and orthodox in its teaching, bureaucratic in its leadership. Small wonder that attendance was quite poor due to a lack of attractiveness. A revival was highly needed, and Zinzendorf felt this realistically, as did other leaders of the Pietistic movement.

Faith had to come down from the head to the heart. To be a Christian and to believe was a matter of the whole person. This self-evident

assumption had disappeared in the Protestant Church. In order to overcome stagnation, Zinzendorf, a man of a tremendous intuition rather than a systematic teacher, appeared on the Protestant stage with a clear christology: Christ was not just a teacher or a subject for dogmatic evaluation; he was the Saviour of the whole world who died for this world on the cross. A child could understand this. This central message could be written on a tiny little piece of paper.

To make it clear: Zinzendorf's christology was of an inclusive, not exclusive nature. This means that it was not so much of a dogmatic teaching about Christ as much as a strong belief that Christ came to rescue the whole world. Along with this theological conviction, Zinzendorf developed a new kind of spirituality that was characterized by joy and the fundamental experience that Jesus, the crucified Lord of the world, molds our life into something up-lifted. It was a feeling of being liberated. “Others walk when they follow Christ; we dance!”

Before this it was unheard of to sing Easter hymns at a funeral, but in Herrnhut it became soon a significant tradition. Another example of the joyful practice of our faith is the song-services, which the Count himself preferred above all other worship forms. Sometimes, the congregation sang more than 100 verses while the Count walked up and down in the Saal composing new ones to be sung immediately by the congregation. With all this, he tried to shape the church into a more attractive body than the contemporary official Lutheran Church.

Opposition to the Enlightenment: The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement which Zinzendorf opposed strongly. It emphasized the rule of human reason, and it led, among other things, to an optimistic view of the world and the possibilities of humankind. Those influenced by the Enlightenment understood the Bible mainly as a book of moral and ethical guidelines. Zinzendorf criticized the one-sided emphasis of humans as “thinking” creatures. He saw the center of the person in the “heart” instead of the intellect and he tried to come to a spirituality of the heart as an holistic approach to faith.

Opposition to Legalism: The third “opponent” came, interestingly enough, from within the Pietistic movement of which Zinzendorf was a participant. Zinzendorf fought strongly against a legalistic form of faith, such as Halle Pietism, for example, promoted. In such legalistic religion, moral and ethical statements of the Bible were emphasized, and the Christian faith tended to become a “you must not” religion that included the demand for penitence.

On the theological side Zinzendorf objected any kind of “holiness” for human beings, because holiness is only a gift by God. Zinzendorf, however, saw the foundation of Christian faith in the joy rooted in salvation by Christ. Also, the Zinzendorf’s understanding of Scripture was never fundamentalist or “evangelical;” he never supported a legalistic view of the Bible. The renewed Moravian Church never viewed the Bible as a kind of “law,” to be read in a literal sense. For Zinzendorf and his adherents, the Scripture contains the Mystery of Jesus Christ to be revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Community: The tool that Zinzendorf needed to realize and implement the renewal of the church was a strong and sound Christian fellowship. In this respect as well, his dreams became reality, at least to a certain extent. “No christendom without fellowship,” and “a congregation is the only proof against unbelief” belonged to his convictions. The Herrnhut congregation was in the first place a thoroughly structured and well-organized fellowship. There was the choir-system, which prevented members from becoming isolated or lonely. This system prevailed through the centuries, and in some European congregations one may still find traces of it.

Even more important for the Count was the idea and the institution of the “bands,” small groups of six to eight members that met usually once a week. They provided pastoral care and counseling among their members. Everybody had to belong to a “band,” but the choice of which group to join was voluntary. Zinzendorf believed that these small groups could only fulfill their purpose without any force or obligation. The “bands” lost their importance even during the life of the Count, and they disappeared completely because they probably asked too much of their members. Zinzendorf deeply regretted this development: “had I known this, I would not have founded the congregation of Herrnhut,” he said after his return from England in the middle of the 18th century when he discovered that the “bands” did not exist anymore.

Mission: The most important dream of Zinzendorf was to bring the Gospel to other peoples and other nations. It was a real revolution

to insist on that and to try to implement it, but it was a dream he could realize to a large extent. The Moravian Church does celebrate August 13, 1727 as the spiritual birth of our church, but we should also remember August 21, 1732, the day of the sending of the first missionaries to the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. This event, to me, is at least as important as August 13, because it prevented the small Moravian congregation of not more than five hundred souls from circling around its own interests and from spending all its energy to preserve itself. In other words, without this tremendous missionary effort the Moravian Church would not have had a future.

The ideas of Zinzendorf on mission were the ideas of a theological genius. The task, he said, was to proclaim the crucified Lord, which meant to explain to suffering people that there is a God who had suffered himself. “Go to the poorest!” was his advice. Furthermore, he instructed the missionaries (1) to preach in a very open and tolerant way; (2) to convert without any pressure or force; (3) to avoid introducing too many ethical and moral standards that contradicted the respective cultural contexts; (4) to picture the Savior and his deeds as vividly as possible; (5) but to take into account that the “heathens” already know that God exists; (6) not to start or organize a campaign of evangelization; (7) not to develop strategies of 10–40 degree windows; (8) but to touch individual souls who then should become “First Fruits;” (9) and to wait for the Holy Spirit to do His own work; (10) to have patience, knowing that the time for mission lasts until the second coming of Christ; (11) not to apply the “Herrnhut ell;”

(12) but to use the congregation as the “home base,” which not only sent the missionaries, but screened them, judged them and continuously prayed for them. By the way: colonialism has never been used as a means to enable missionary outreach. The Board in Herrnhut at first refused to start a new mission work in Tanzania because it did not want to support German colonialism in Eastern Africa.

Church and mission could not be separated because *church is mission*. Indeed, this was the dream of a genius, and my conviction is that without this dream and the realization of it we would not exist as Moravian Church today. Our spiritual life, the Daily Texts and some liturgical traditions would not have been sufficient to keep us alive. The Moravian Church is still alive because the Christians of the small community Herrnhut crossed geographical and cultural barriers, driven by their enthusiastic faith in the Savior Jesus Christ.

Ecumenism: Another dream I would like to mention here was also the fruit of a genius, but it was much less effective than the dream of Christian mission: the desire of Zinzendorf to bring churches and denominations together and even to foster an understanding for other religions. The Swiss theologian K.Barth has pointed out that Zinzendorf was a real Christocentric, and therefore must also be seen as the first ecumenically-minded theologian.¹

According to Zinzendorf, the unity among Christians and churches is already present because it is founded by the reconciliation and death of Jesus Christ. The objective could therefore never be unification of the churches, but rather to make

visible the already existing unity. The diversity of the denominations (“religions,” as Zinzendorf called them) was not to be seen as a threat but as an enriching element. Truth is not only with the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf composed a hymn on that idea; “Also we do not in truth think that God is only with us; we see how much light shines in other places.”²

Within all churches, Christian truth can be discovered; therefore they could learn from each other and compensate each other. They were like different colors of a shining crystal, which gets its beauty through the different colors. The only task of the Moravian church, which came into being as a legal institution against the will of the Count, was to help to lead the churches to the “central point” of faith: the salvation of Jesus Christ. The various denominations should have their place within the Moravian Church, and they could develop their specific theological views in order to complement the Christian witness, certainly not to show diversity.

The denominations were nothing more than “*tropoi paidaia*,” ways of teaching Christian truth within the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf himself entertained numerous personal contacts in order to learn and also to establish a rich network among Christians and denominations, including the Catholic and the Orthodox Church. And the Pennsylvania Synods, gathering more than a dozen denominations and Christian groups, were not meant to unify churches but to revive them and to enable them to unfold their characteristic treasures.

This dream did perhaps not bear many visible fruits, but up to today the Moravian Church is an

ecumenically open-minded, tolerant church. For this very fact, it is quite highly respected within ecumenical organizations in spite (or because of?) its size.

Peace Witness: To discover one more of the dreams of the past, we have to dig further back into the history of our Church, namely to the ancient Unity. Peace-making efforts have also been a part of our roots, and they are more necessary than ever.

Petr Chelcicky (1390–1456) and his followers praised the beatitudes of the Sermon of the Mount by Jesus, and they withdrew into the forests of Bohemia in order not to participate in any kind of war-waging. And, of course, the church father of the Ancient Unity, J. A. Comenius (1592–1670), who suffered from the disastrous impact of the Thirty Years War, committed himself to peace and reconciliation. For the churches, he suggested an ecumenical council, and for the nations, he developed similar ideas. His revolutionary pedagogical teaching included making children aware of the possibility and necessity of peace.

The political convictions of Comenius were strongly influenced by his thoughts on peace and reconciliation against the background of a disastrous war killed hundreds of thousands of people in central Europe. “War is something beastly,” he claimed, and he was convinced that peace did not only mean the absence of war but also the overcoming of all violence. “Melt guns into church bells,” was one of his famous statements. He also said, “let violence be far from all things.” He therefore rejected sharply everything which leads to violence (e.g. forced obedience) and, of course, all forms of violence

itself. “I am a man of yearning.” With these words, Comenius described his attitude, which was deeply rooted in Christian faith.

The dream of peace was not completely forgotten in the beginning of the Renewed Unity. The first generation of Bethlehem settlers were exempted from military service. In the letter of the Moravian brothers to Mr. Causton in Georgia, the authors explained why they would not participate in a war in their new colony. It was one of their principles, they said, not to bear weapons. They gave two reasons for this: first, this country was not their property, which meant that they did not have to defend it. Second, it was a matter of conscience, but not the most important one.³

Since then, these roots of a peace-making church have been covered over by many layers of history: the history of wars and violence in which Moravians participated. The enthusiasm with which German Moravians marched to the battlefields in World War I is shocking, but is a testimony of their time. The obedience shown before and during World War II to the German dictator and his war and destruction machinery is not less shocking. But this must not hinder us from looking at this dream of the past! We will take it up later.

A Rich Heritage: Let me conclude part one of this paper. Yes, we do have a rich heritage as church! To me, it has, generally speaking, two main dimensions:

(1) The spirit of generosity, liberation and joy for life, deeply rooted in the faith in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord as the essential basis;

(2) The thoroughly positive tension between two foci of one ellipse: the faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, which leads to a close fellowship at one side, and at the same time openness towards the world, which led to mission work among the slaves and other discriminated and forgotten groups.

The strong emphasis of faith in Jesus Christ did not allow narrow-mindedness or a withdrawal from the world but a strong commitment for this world. We should build on the future of our little church on this heritage.

Part 2 - Challenges of the present time

Looking at the present time, there are, as I see it, some quite serious challenges which we have to face as worldwide Moravian Church, if we want to live and not merely survive. To live means to grow as a church spiritually and numerically by following Christ. It means to expand faith, love and hope, and to serve this world, which everywhere waits for help and guidance.

Need for a Distinct Theological Profile: While our ancestors became very creative through their faith in Christ and a distinct theological, Christ-centered profile, the Moravian Church today lacks a clear theological profile. One of the challenges for more than thirty years for all Christian churches globally is the so-called charismatic movement, which has already changed the denominational landscape of Latin America completely.

The Moravian Church does not have an answer to this challenge because we do not know exactly where we stand, theologically speaking.

Sure, there have been efforts to overcome this gap. In 1995, the Unity Synod decided to establish a Theological Committee, and this committee has already dealt with various theological elements of this movement. But a real dialogue, which no doubt would be fruitful for our whole church, has not yet taken place.

On the contrary, when a group, a province or a congregation is confronted with the charismatic movement, our usual response must be described as one of uncertainty and helplessness. This is, no doubt, the case when we look at the development in the Czech Province, but it is also the case in other regions of our worldwide church, for example, in South Africa. According to some leaders there, the majority of congregations have been influenced by the charismatic movement or are already in the grip of it. The reaction is a “we-do-nothing-attitude,” or/and fear (think of the one servant in the parable!).

I shall give you another example. The congregation at Herrnhut, already challenged by the existence of a charismatically orientated “Christian center,” now faces the possible arrival of the U.S. mission organization “Strategic Frontiers,” a branch of “Youth for a Mission.” The Strategic Frontiers people claim they have received a dream from God to start mission work for Eastern Europe at Herrnhut, which would be a kind of home base because of its old missionary tradition. This perspective has deeply troubled the Herrnhut congregation, and the Board of Elders together with members of the Provincial Board have done everything to prevent the arrival and settling of this group,

of course without success. We do live in a free country! The challenge of dealing with another, quite popular, theological position has not been utilized, and a real encounter has been rejected because of a fear of losing ground. Or, to put it differently, because of the lack of our own, clear theological position.

The Southern Province in the U.S. struggles with the question of the exclusivity of Christ and his deeds. In Surinam, the tension between afro-American religious tendencies and traditions and the “clean” Christian way has not been solved, in spite of the long duration of the conflict and of resolutions, even one by the Unity Synod meeting in Jamaica. The last paragraph of the resolution states “That this Unity Synod reaffirms the right of each individual provincial Synod to make decisions regarding ceremonial burials and other related questions in the Light of the ‘Word of God’ as it is interpreted in the local situation.”

After a thorough investigation with the aim of coming to some suggestions in order to make the church of today more attractive, the U.S. consulting firm McKinsey told the large Lutheran diocese of Munich in Bavaria, “your product (the Word of God) is good, but the way you sell it is pretty poor!” I am afraid that a similar opinion would be reached in the Moravian Church with regard to our theological heritage and the way we use it today, perhaps with the exception of Tanzania.

Ethics and Politics: Churches and Christians today are faced with the challenge to take clear positions with regard to ethical issues, and there are many: peace and justice, integrity of

creation, sexual and moral standards, abortion, bio-ethical issues, manipulations of the genes, just to mention a few. Most of the churches are not up to the demands of those issues and with the pressure to find answers. Even the Vatican has a lot of difficulty producing decrees related such questions that are accepted by the Roman Catholic constituency. A current exception was the official position of the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican with regard to the war in Iraq.

To me, the issue of the “Church and Homosexuality” is certainly not the most important subject for churches to discuss, but the deep separation between the various standpoints in this matter reveals, in practically all churches, the inability to deal with such issues in a satisfactory way. It even leads to divisions within denominations, including our own church. This, of course, is also a result of our failure to maintain and express clear theological positions.

The almost complete failure to develop clear guidelines in these ethical matters is one of the reasons that the churches have become rather meaningless in many of our societies, at least in the Northern hemisphere. The World Council of Churches was a forerunner in many ethical issues three decades ago and published prophetic statements, but it has become almost silent, for many reasons, and does not play a role anymore. Again, the Pope took a clear stand in the Iraq issue, and the Vatican became quite active, but the occasions that the WCC tried to intervene or to speak on behalf of peace with a loud voice are long past. But the challenges remain, and people all over the world wait for help, guidance and orientation in ethical issues. The Moravian

Church must contribute to that need, and not hide behind its small size.

How far may a church go in dealing with political issues? “And thus God has loved the whole world” (John 3:16). Nothing, no part of our life, is excluded from the love of God, and our faith must be the guideline also for political opinions and decisions. Therefore the church must help its members find their way from their beliefs to their political ideas and positions. This, to me, is another challenge of the present time.

While Comenius was outspoken in matters such as peace and made clear proposals, for example, towards a peace council, the Moravian Church has taken a political stand only in exceptional cases. There have been resolutions of synods, including the Unity Synod. In 1995, for instance, Unity Synod sent letters to the presidents of China and France expressing its protest against nuclear testing (§ 933 of the 1995 Church Order). To my knowledge, the letters were unanswered. But such occasions have been rare.

Our church remained silent for too a long a time in view of the totally inhuman and unjust system of the apartheid in South Africa, even though one of our provinces with 100,000 sisters and brothers was directly affected. Also, the Moravian Church in South Africa itself did not take a clear position in that vital issue, at least not in the first decades of this totalitarian system. In my opinion, the reason for this was a wrong attitude that church and politics have nothing to do with each other. This attitude was influenced strongly by Lutheran theology and the teaching of the two kingdoms.

Almost the same could be said with regard to the Nazi regime in Germany seventy years ago. Too many Moravians took that dictatorship for God-given. They kept silent believing this to be the right attitude for Christians, and helped in this way to support the Nazis. There were even Moravians who openly followed Hitler, as well as others who joined the Confessing Church that strongly opposed the Nazis. But the majority did nothing, and was probably not even able to discern and recognize what was going on.

To help the church(es) to free themselves from such an attitude, which is still quite common, is one of the challenges of today for our world-wide Moravian Church. That does not mean, of course, that the church should follow a certain political party and its ideas, but it must take a clear stand when Christian values are being neglected or rejected.

Justice: Looking at the challenges, I would like to become more specific in regard to justice in our own church body. To me, this remains one of the most important challenges of our worldwide Moravian church. A minister in Tanzania earns, if he is doing well and if he has served some years, not more than about \$2 a day. In other words, he or she makes what I am going to spend during the next coffee break. The same can be said with regard to my colleagues in Nicaragua or Surinam. Similar comparisons could be made between the Western European, North American, and other provinces.

Last year during Unity Synod, the delegates were invited to attend worship services in Moravian congregations in Bethlehem and the region. Together with two delegates from

Tanzania and one from South Africa, I went to Lititz, where we enjoyed the fellowship with our fellow Moravians very much. During the announcements, the congregation had to be informed that for the next two weeks the parking lot or sections of it could not be used because of new paving. In the audience there were the brothers and the sister from Africa listening to the announcement that the members of the congregation had to park their cars somewhere else for the next two weeks. In Tanzania, such announcements are unthinkable, most likely also in the next decades. Someone who is quite well off in this East African country where nowadays the majority of Moravians lives, owns perhaps a bicycle, made in China or India (or now in Tanzania). More than that, he or she cannot afford. Privately owned cars are, at least in the countryside, a rare exception.

We claim to be one body of Christ, to be a close fellowship of brothers and sisters, clinging to the same traditions and so forth. What does all this mean in view of such huge differences, economically and materially? Sure, many efforts have been made. If I count correctly, the North American and Western European Moravians annually donate an amount of about \$ 1.8 to 2 million, roughly about \$25 per member per year, and one has to add the \$1.5 million coming yearly from the Moravian Church Foundation. I know, of course, that not all problems can be solved by giving money, but to me, the huge gap within our worldwide fellowship remains a great challenge, a wound, which longs for healing. Therefore, we must continue to deal with this challenge, looking and searching for even better ways of sharing.

Not only because of such material differences, but also because of many other causes, such as ethical issues or matters of power, the Moravian Church worldwide faces conflicts. This is nothing special, but my experience within our church is that we are not used to, prepared for or trained to deal with conflicts. Fellowship and brotherhood are most important, and quite often this ideal makes us blind towards conflicts. Or we deny them or we “embed” them in our church life in such a way that they have no chance to appear and to be solved. We do not allow them to come to the surface or to remain there because we are afraid of possible outcomes. And, of course, we do not have enough and efficient instruments to deal with them.

I could mention here the conflicts within the Czech province, but also in other provinces and regions. As chairman of the Unity Board, I received several calls for help from provinces, some of them being very personal issues, and I had no idea how to handle these calls or whom to involve in finding solutions. The statement on the Near East during the last Mission Conference at Herrnhut was, in my opinion, rather tame. Two committees were kept busy with that difficult and delicate issue, and they tried to find a text which was acceptable to a majority. That happens all the time in much more important bodies than the Moravian Church, but it also avoids a real discussion. It avoids revealing one’s standpoints, and it leads to statements with which in the end nobody is satisfied. Dealing with conflicts remains a challenge for our church. To find the right way to really tackle problems would certainly not weaken but strengthen our Unity.

History and Traditions: Another challenge of today for our Moravian Church is our relationship with our own history, or, to be more specific, how to deal with our history and our traditions. The interest in our rich history is, compared to our present situation, immense. About 700–800 visitors per year are admitted at the Unity Archives at Herrnhut. Their main purpose is interest in the history of the Moravian Church, revealed by an almost incomparable treasure of sources: handwritten letters, “Lebensläufe,” diaries, and the like. There are historical societies and periodicals dealing with Moravian history. If only this interest would be similar in our present situation, our present appearance as a church!

You know the story: A church-building burns down. The Baptists say: get water as soon as possible; the Methodists begin to pray; the Lutherans look into the matter to see the theological principle behind it; but the Moravians say: let us do it again next year and make a tradition of it. To be serious, we do have a rich history, we do foster valuable traditions, but I ask myself whether we keep alive those traditions that could lead us into the future. Lovefeasts, candle-light services, hymns by Zinzendorf, liturgical forms, or pride with regard to our history, all this may be important. It might help us to survive with a certain profile, but it does not help us to remain a vivid, growing, attractive church.

I am afraid that we are unable to discern between the really valuable traditions and the more cosmetic ones. I must admit, that to me the phrase of the Ancient Unity: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love”

is, except for the last part of it, not very helpful, because it is too vague. As long as we are not sure what is essential, and what is not, and what Unity means — this phrase serves rather to darken our common understanding and our identity than to show the way to a global church fellowship which deserves this name.

Yet, there are essential elements in our history that are worth being rediscovered and brought to life in a way which is appropriate for our present time and the near future. Some of those historical treasures I tried to mention in part 1 of this paper. When we look at the roots of our mission work, the structuring congregations, the theological thoughts of Zinzendorf, his ecumenical ideas, and the ideas on peace and reconciliation. Much of this is still fascinating and looks very up-to-date. But it cannot simply be repeated; it must be expressed with forms and in a language which is acceptable and understandable today. To really try this would be an enormously fruitful task!

In Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, and also to a certain extent in Great Britain, the Moravian Church was meaningful for many not because it was a small Protestant Church. No, the attraction for many were tasks which clearly led beyond the boundaries of our Moravian denomination. About 3,500 men and women served in the various “mission fields” of the Moravian church from 1732 onwards. They went to the Caribbean, Africa, Central and South America, Labrador, Alaska, India, Australia and other parts of the world: a tremendous number of committed people! Most of them came from outside the Moravian church.

They were not primarily interested in that church but in the tasks and the projects of this church: oversea mission and charitable work and schools. Each congregation, regardless of size, had its own (boarding) school. By the way, many of the servants in the mission areas or the schools became members of our church. Without them, we would be even smaller, number-wise. My point is that our church lived and remained alive because of those tasks. The Moravian church in Germany and other European countries, as well as in the States, was no more than an instrument to fulfill these tasks. Merely as a Protestant church, it never had much weight at all.

Today, at least in the Northern hemisphere, we do not have such a clear task anymore. If we want to live and not only survive, one of the greatest challenges for us is to find again tasks other than self-preservation. Also, there is the danger that we, at least in the North, but also to some extent in the South, have become a “closed society,” at the best a kind of a “wellness Church,” not very attractive to other people or open for new ideas. Our fear of change has to do with the fact that we do not exactly know who we are and what our identity looks like.

Let me summarize the challenges the worldwide Moravian Church faces today:

- (1) The lack of a clear theological profile;
- (2) Weakness in dealing with ethical issues;
- (3) Unclear positions with regard to the issue of church and politics;
- (4) Injustice within our worldwide fellowship;
- (5) Lack of experience in dealing with conflicts;

- (6) An unbalanced valuation of traditions; and
- (7) Lack of a clear, common task.

Part 3 - Dreams for the future:

It is fantastic to be given the chance publicly to dream of the future of our church! Yes, I am an enthusiastic Moravian, and I do believe some dreams will become true. I do not believe, however, that we can continue for long like we are, again perhaps with the exception of our church in Tanzania. Everywhere else and in all other provinces we *must* dream; we must develop visions; and we must hope to realize some of them. Otherwise we might just survive by keeping some of our traditions like canned meat, but we will not live and grow as a church and followers of Jesus Christ.

1. A Stronger Unity Structure: My conviction after having served quite a number of years within the Unity, is that our main treasure is our worldwide fellowship. This is our special gift, our identity as a church, our most important, characteristic feature. I go as far as to state: our international web as church family secures us the right of existence today.

The birth place of our global fellowship is Herrnhut, but Bethlehem in Pennsylvania must be added here, because there in 1957 at the General Synod, as it was called then, the global Unity was born. A dream became true. It was not self-evident that our church would be able to continue after the disaster of two world wars, in which Moravians were forced to fight on different sides, or to survive in the post-modern societies of the Western world. A dream became

true because at this conference, which took about four weeks, decisions were taken to abandon the “mission fields.” A worldwide church, with up to now nineteen provinces with equal rights and equal obligations, was born.

Wherever you show up as a Moravian at one of the congregations of our church, you quickly feel at home among Moravian sisters and brothers. Our church offers a kind of a “global, invisible underground fellowship,” which one can hardly describe, but which can be felt and experienced. Couldn't it be a pattern for our future world? This is something other than waiting to see, as an American or European visitor in Rungwe, Tanzania, or Brokopondo in Surinam, whether “Moravian” elements appear in the liturgy or if a hymn by Zinzendorf is sung.

In spite of this fellowship, our worldwide *Unitas Fratrum* is, according to my conviction, not a strong, automatically healthy body. It resembles a small plant that must be carefully fostered and nourished. My dream, therefore, is to strengthen this body, this fellowship, to strengthen our Unity!

Many positive things have happened during the last four and a half decades since 1957. The *Ground of the Unity* and *The Church Order* have been written. An international structure with continuing (General) Unity Synods, soon also with regularly meeting Unity Boards, and now even an executive committee have been formed, the Unity Seminars (first in the late 1950s, revived in 1991) have seen a revival. International conferences on mission, including conferences for and by women have taken place, and a Unity Youth conference is planned for

2005. The Moravian Church Foundation which administers the property of our church has grown and contributed to the strength of our Unity. Unity undertakings are run and supported by our worldwide church, the New World Witness program, for which all nineteen provinces are responsible rather than a mission board, has been born and has had some positive results.

On the other hand, our weaknesses are obvious: the Unity bodies can make decisions, but they are not binding. Nothing happens when a province does not follow or implement decisions made at a Unity Synod or Unity Board. Nothing happens when provinces do not fulfill their financial obligations. To fulfill the dream of a stronger Unity, we need instruments to improve and change this situation.

The Lutheran World Federation, for example, developed from a “free association of member churches” to what it is today, a communion. This communion also has certain standards, including the instrument of a “*status confessionis*.” It is unacceptable, for example, to refuse the Lord’s Supper to anyone on the basis of race or skin color. Because of this strong element of confession for the Federation, in 1984 the Budapest Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation made the painful but necessary decision to suspend from membership two member churches that continued to practice apartheid within the church.

The possibility of such measures within our global fellowship would not weaken, but rather strengthen our Unity! The Unity Synod last summer in Bethlehem passed the resolution that provinces should assist and help each other if

needed. This contains also the demand for a better and stronger accountability among the provinces, a proposal made by Dr. Paul Wee, who was called by the Unity Board to help to settle the conflict in the Czech Province, in his introduction of the Lutheran World Federation and its structure to the Unity Synod last year.

Bishops: In this context, I dream of a stronger role for our bishops within our Unity. The meaning of the Greek word *episcopos* is to “oversee” (not to rule or to play an authoritarian role). Our Church Order states, that bishops “represent the vital Unity of the Church” (§687 CHOUF), and that this office is recognized and is valid throughout our Unity. One of the main tasks of our bishops is to assist the church “in its faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel” (§ 688 CHOUF).

In the recent past, many steps have been taken to clarify and strengthen the position of the Moravian bishops. For instance, international conferences have now been included in the Church Order, and the Unity must be represented at episcopal consecrations. Nevertheless, I hope that our bishops in their theological work and service to the Unity become more clear and outspoken. The tendency to be as cautious as possible and not to hurt anyone has not been very helpful in the past.

Better Exchange of Resources: By strengthening our Unity, we must work for more justice among us, for a better balanced exchange of our resources. Within our Unity, we still follow a one-way road: the North, materially seen better situated, helps the South, which is materially underprivileged. Unfortunately the gap between

the “rich” and the “poor” is growing rather than getting smaller. There is no doubt that this kind of support must be continued, but there are many more resources than money and finances! Where are the barriers that prevent justice from gaining ground and a real exchange on various levels within our Unity?

The North still dominates the South in many respects, such as the way we work together. Our style of meetings is very much western-orientated. There is always a time pressure, papers play the most significant role, decisions have to be taken before all arguments have been introduced, explained, listened to and discussed. We should also spend more energy and imagination finding ways to use more languages than English when we meet!

There is a lot of individual theological thinking in the Unity, not seldom intermingled with cultural and regional elements, but European and North American theology dominates the Unity. This unfortunately goes so far that even in Tanzania or Nicaragua to be a “good theologian” means to imitate the ideas of the colleagues from the North rather than to develop one’s own vision, which might be in tension with what we as Westerners think and believe. We, in the North, must learn to accept the value of other cultures, and we have to take them seriously. “My God is black” said Brother Norman Bent after a moving description of the extremely difficult situation of his country, Nicaragua, in 1986 at the meeting of Seminary alumni. According to my memory, this confession did not have a serious impact: there was no discussion or questions, only maybe a kind of embarrassment.

Enculturation: One of the problems is that we Europeans and North Americans automatically assert that our way of bringing and proclaiming the Gospel is, so to speak, pure. We think it is the sole word of God without any interference of cultural elements. But, of course, this is not the case. Together with the Gospel, Europeans and North Americans brought their so-called civilization. The Gospel and the way it was brought were like Siamese twins in South Africa and Suriname, in Tanzania and Nicaragua.

The value, importance, and roots of African culture were unknown to the missionaries, and because it seemed foreign to them, were rejected and forbidden. The German missionary Traugott Bachmann in Tanzania during the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was an exception. He tried to understand African social structures like polygamy, African music and traditional instruments, African dancing, and African medicine, and to integrate them into Christian belief, life and teaching. But he, and those like him, were soon called to order by Herrnhut.⁴

Strengthening our worldwide fellowship does not mean to streamline the nineteen provinces! On the contrary, it means taking the cultural elements of all our geographical regions as serious as possible and seeing them as enriching elements of our one body. Our numerically small fellowship allows a real exchange of cultural traditions and of experiences with enculturation of Christian theology. “The word became flesh,” according to John 1, but it does not say anything about European or North American flesh. Our small

fellowship allows the exchange of theologies with African, Caribbean, Latin American and other backgrounds, a wonderful, exciting chance, but we have to use it and be open for new, maybe strange ideas. Maybe we should develop a “theology of encounter” within our worldwide church body, which from the beginning breaks our cultural limitations and boundaries.

Practical Proposals: Let me make a few practical proposals to realize the dream of coming to an even closer, more meaningful international fellowship.

Information on our worldwide church must be spread in a much more effective way! In the North, we are quite spoiled. If we want, we can get the information we need through our periodicals, the internet, and other wonderful inventions. Still, many of our other provinces do not have this privilege. Let us find ways to help to improve this situation and to come to a better balanced access to information in our whole church!

There are members of our church, mainly in Africa and Central America, who are not aware of the fact that they do belong to a worldwide church body, because they do not have access to the sources of information we are used to. This also has a lot to do with justice. One of our “historic” and specific Moravian memorial days is the first of March, the memorial day of the foundation of the Ancient Unity. Let us turn this day into a “Unity Day” where we do not focus on our history, but on our worldwide fellowship in such a way that in each of the 1000 congregations of our global church some identical liturgical elements are used, the same Bible text

serves for the sermons, and information on one of the provinces or Unity undertakings is spread. It also would be a good opportunity to invite guests from other provinces to speak. Anyway, let us on this day celebrate our unity together in order to make all of our members aware of our worldwide fellowship.

Theological education should also be “globalized” in such a way that at the places where the Moravian Church is engaged in theological education, the awareness and the knowledge that we are an international fellowship can be taught and deepened. Not only students should be invited to study at another Moravian seminary, but also guest professors should, for a certain time, at least for one semester, teach at another theological institution. Imagine a teacher from Mbeya, Tanzania, teaching at Bethlehem, lecturing on practical theology and introducing African thinking and theology so that the students learn to understand other cultures, and by this to widen their horizon! A teacher from Surinam spends some time at the Seminary at Heideveld, South Africa, and so on.

Exchange of students must become part of the syllabi, including the chance to achieve a basic knowledge of another language. The meeting of teachers and students of theological institutions, already initiated by the Unity Synod in 1995, is a very important step in that direction. Three years ago the Moravian Church Foundation established a scholarship fund offering the possibility to study at a Moravian theological institution in another province. With one exception, this fund has not been used and has been discontinued.

Unity Conferences: Within the Unity, the number and target groups of conferences have been increased considerably during the last dozen years or so. Let us go on and continue! Our international fellowship must be experienced, must be physically felt, and we should use our imagination to plan meetings to which brothers and sisters from other provinces could be invited. For a number of years, I have dreamt of joint ministers' conferences. If only there were no language barrier! But there are, of course, many other possibilities. The Unity Seminar, reinstalled in 1991 by a motion of the Unity Synod in 1988 coming from the U.S. provinces, has already become a very important instrument. There could be seminars for other groups, not only for ministers. What about church musicians, teachers, Sunday school staff, Christian education people, and so on!

Spiritual Life: Spiritual life could also deepen and intensify our bonds across the continents. Let us learn again together to speak about our faith, about our spirituality. At least in Europe, we are not accustomed to that anymore. That means we need help from other provinces in another cultural context. The Unity Prayer Watch is a strong bond and support for our joint spiritual life. Perhaps the Unity could work on issuing regularly a list of prayer topics to be sent to all provinces.

The Daily Texts should play an even more important role in strengthening our fellowship. According to my knowledge, the use of it is quite different in our nineteen provinces. This, by the way, has also to do with the North-South economic gap. Many Christians can simply not

afford to buy the little book every year. Shouldn't the Unity to help and subsidize the issues in certain provinces? At any rate, the Daily Texts should again become what they originally were: a watchword, a slogan for every day, linking Christians in Europe, Africa, America and Asia and used as spiritual food.

Administration: I do not give up the dream of a more effective administrative instrument within our international church. Compared to other churches, we have almost nothing, and our poor infrastructure does not answer our demands, certainly not the demands of a quick communicative system to support our global fellowship. In recent years there have been improvements in this respect. There have been additional meetings of the Unity Board and the formation of an executive committee that convenes once a year and does a lot by correspondence.

But this is, by far, not enough in our modern world where communication has become one of the most important achievements of our times. Indeed, it was worse in our past. When the South African Province in the 1980s, suffering tremendously under the inhuman apartheid system, asked for a solidarity visit by the Unity chairman, it was not possible because of the lack of a mandate and of financial means. It took more than half a year until the visit of a Unity delegation to Nicaragua, also in the 1980s, could be realized.

Still, on the administrative side, we have almost nothing as an international body, and the quality of the work of the Unity chairman depends on the capacities of his Provincial

office. This situation is simply not bearable any more because it forms an obstacle the further development of our international church fellowship which we want to be. Our Unity needs an office with a General Secretary, elected for five years by the Unity Board, responsible to it, and equipped not only with sufficient technical means but also with a clear mandate. He or she should do all the daily work to strengthen our Unity, and should also take initiatives to intensify our Moravian bonds in four continents.

Furthermore, he or she could represent our church at ecumenical and international gatherings and organizations. Why not look at the Lutheran World Federation as an example? This is a fulltime job because this work cannot be done someone who already has a full load, mostly being the chairperson of a Provincial Board. The Moravian Church Foundation should be asked to finance this post. In this case, our church would not spend gifts and donations earmarked for church work and missionary outreach. I am sure the money spent is worth it.

2. Theology: I dream of a Moravian Church with a clear theological standpoint, based on the strong Christological foundation we have. The crucified and risen Lord is the way to freedom, not to a freedom which permits everything. He frees us from our guilt, from our fears, from our incapability to love each other as he has loved us. The crucified Lord suffers with us, but through his resurrection he demonstrates that God is more powerful than all the powers of this world, and all the powers of death. As I already pointed out, faith in this Lord leads to generosity, to tolerance, to openness, gifts that I discover in the teaching

and the life of our forefathers but which I do not always find in our present church.

I dream of a church, and again, I go back to our roots, where Scripture is read from the “canon within the canon,” as the New Testament scholar E. Käsemann has taught me.⁵ We must read the Bible in the light of the very essential statements of Jesus Christ, beginning with the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:34 ff. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” We must also focus on the statements following from there, especially the Sermon on the Mount and other sayings by Jesus. From these follow the understanding of the whole Scripture.

When we discuss the matter of homosexuality and the church, we must look at this explanation of Scripture by Jesus himself. There is no other way. This is my conviction. And the traditions, the instruments of the world-wide Moravian Church must be judged by whether they allow the Great Commandment with its two branches of love of God and love of neighbor to become true. Let us be careful and willing to make that difference: we do not believe in a book, in the Bible, but in Jesus Christ in our Saviour, from whom we learn and whom we know through the Scriptures.

The Ground of the Unity: This is how we must understand the “Ground of the Unity.” It was very wise to speak of the “sole standard of the doctrine and faith.” A standard is something

very different from a literal understanding of the Bible. “Whoever takes the Bible literally does not take it seriously” is a sentence which I have read somewhere, and with which I fully agree. I dream of a church where the members support each other to learn to talk freely about their faith in the light of the “canon within the canon.”

I dream of a church where theological debates and discussions on our faith take place, without any limitations with regard to the subjects. A church without such open and honest theological work runs the risk of becoming weak and bloodless. The only condition is that such discussions must take place in the sphere of the two-fold love described in the Great Commandment. Paul says, that “if I do not have love I am nothing” or “I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13, 2.3), even with the best theological arguments.

My dream is that we use our worldwide fellowship as the place for such discussions, where we learn to listen to each other. Shouldn't the “Ground of Unity,” adopted by Unity Synod in 1957 and thereafter amended only on a few points, be reviewed, and maybe rewritten? I see the need for that also because the “Ground” is not a Creed, and has never been understood as such, but it is a kind of a theological balance, a status, which must be a guideline for a certain time. It is also subject to theological developments and needs of a certain period. That could be a great task for our theological committee.

For Zinzendorf, the crucified Lord is the center of his faith. According to John 3:16 (a key passage for the Count), the suffering Lord must be understood to be inclusive, not exclusive. His love for the world invites to believe and follow

him, but can never be used to exclude anybody, or even to use force, nor force by words, nor the force of church traditions, or any kind of conditions. The cross can never become a law which must be followed, but remains the most generous invitation ever issued!

Grace comes before sin. This was the discovery of Luther and also of Zinzendorf (“the best Lutheran theologian after Luther” according to G. Ebeling). In the light of grace we are enabled to discern sin, not the other way round. I dream of a church which takes this theological, very biblical doctrine serious. He was a “Christocentric,” and as such open for other confessions, Christian movements, even for other religions!

Theology of the Lamb: Since the Ancient Unity, the Moravian Church preserves a wonderful symbol: the lamb carrying the flag of victory, surrounded by the words “The lamb has conquered, let us follow him.” I have seen this symbol of life in all kinds of pictures, drawings, stamps, seals. I have seen in on the wall of a school in Tanzania, shining on a church roof in Nicaragua, as part of a glass window in Europe or the States, and of course on clothes for the altar, on ties and on letterheads. The lamb appears in very different forms and sizes, but that does not matter.

The lamb, taken from the last book of the Bible, the Revelation, symbolizes the crucified and risen Lord as a creature which is virtually helpless, vulnerable, weak, depending on the help of its mother sheep. This little animal is the opposite of power and discriminative force, the opposite of violence, of military power or any other kind of human strength. Let us be grateful, that *this*

symbol is so well accepted in our worldwide church. It reminds us that our Lord is vulnerable. He is, quite frankly, weak, and he comes without external power because “his kingdom is not of this world.” His power, however, is to bring the love of God to everyone, not by force, but with patience and sensibility for those who need it, for those suffering, for the poor.

My dream is therefore: Let us develop a “theology of the lamb,” staying with this symbol, and making it acceptable and meaningful for our time. In the book of Revelation, the “lamb” takes the same position as the “word of the cross” with Paul. Both symbols, the lamb and the cross, remind us of the great mystery of God coming all the way down into our human life and into our hearts, offering himself and sharing the sufferings of this world. This is not the mighty, powerful Messiah expected by the Jews and coming to overthrow the powers of this world, but God showing his love for the whole creature and for every single creation. Him we may follow!

3. Moravians as Mediators: I dream of a worldwide Moravian Church which uses this openness in theological teaching and doctrine in becoming a mediating Christian body in the ecumenical network. Our openness and tolerance in teaching, which I believe is one of our heritages, can be seen as a weakness. What do you really believe, what is your “creed” or your confession? Quite often, we cannot give a clear answer to such questions. But, this standpoint offers the chance to help to build bridges and to mediate where this becomes necessary. To my knowledge, the Moravian Church in all four continents has repeatedly been asked to serve in

leading ecumenical positions, much more often than its numerical size would justify. This has been the case in Europe, in Tanzania, in South Africa, in the States and elsewhere.

In Germany a severe division occurred between Protestant mission organizations, some following a more liberal direction, some a more evangelical way. For many years, the only church and mission organization which brought the two together was the Moravian Church. Both sides accepted the Moravians, and both sides expressed their hope that our church would be able and willing to mediate also in the future. That was more than 20 years ago. Unfortunately, for several reasons, this was not successful and the relationship between the two groups broke apart. But I must admit that we hadn’t done enough, and that we as bridge-builders gave up too early.

Zinzendorf started numerous contacts with all kinds of church leaders, such as the cardinal of Paris who became the godfather of one of his children. He established relationships with many Protestants, and he sought contacts with the Orthodox Church as well. We are small, we are theologically neutral (in the good sense of the word), and we have no church power. Small is beautiful! That enables us to dream of helping others with conflicts. We may dream of a church which does everything to reconcile where this is necessary in the ecumenical context.

In Bern, Switzerland, our Moravian Church had the courage to begin something very new, and to work on the realization of a dream in a very touchy but highly practical field: the understanding and maybe even cooperation of

different religions. One of our ministers has received the call to develop a plan to help integrate religious and cultural minorities into the Swiss society, especially in the city of Bern. Together with others of different religious backgrounds he works now towards a “House of Religions,” offering space and the possibilities for worship and other activities to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. The better understanding of religions and their adherents is one of the main tasks of our time; the efforts in Bern could contribute to that task. The Moravian minister is financed for five years by a small Moravian legacy earmarked for the work of the Moravian Church in Switzerland. The project has already received a nation-wide interest. Let us see whether or not this dream becomes true!

Very significant is the genesis of this project. There was a post of a minister to be filled in Switzerland again. Since the number of Swiss Moravians is very small, about 280 in total, a “think tank” group in Switzerland, together with the representative of the Provincial Board responsible for this region, developed a plan for the future. Should the Board just call someone and continue with the traditional service or should something really new be realized, with a perspective for the future? The group began to look into the heritage (not into the traditions!) of our church. They looked at Comenius and his teaching on peace and reconciliation as one of the treasures of our past. There existed a lot of tensions in Swiss cities among Swiss inhabitants and people coming from other cultures. What would Comenius say today with regard to these problems? The group decided to do something on reconciliation between the different cultural

groups, and to help to integrate the members of other cultures into the Swiss society. The plan “Bern” was born!

4. Peace Church: I dream of a worldwide Moravian Church which remembers the roots of Comenius (and also of the early Herrnhut and Bethlehem congregation) and becomes a church which clearly follows non-violence and peace. This part of our heritage has been forgotten, and it disappeared in the course of the centuries, as I already mentioned above. That is a real dream: to discover again the teachings of Comenius in this respect. What does it mean that he stands as a statue in front of the main building of the Moravian College in Bethlehem? What does it mean that we use his name for all kinds of Moravian undertakings?

He drew his convictions from the Bible, and a very essential part of his pedagogic teaching was the training for peace. This vision fits tremendously with the focus of Zinzendorf on the crucified, suffering Lord. Let us dig into the past — this is a tradition which is more than ever worth being rediscovered. In the letter by the two chairmen of the U.S. Provinces shortly before the war against Iraq began, we read: “...Jesus of Nazareth always calls us to peace the Moravian Church historically has aligned itself with those churches and Christians around the world who have prayed for, acted for, and lived for peace...” My dream is to omit the word “historically,” and to speak these meaningful words not in the past tense but in the present tense. Let us ask the Unity bodies, the Board or the next Unity Synod to deal with this very specific and essential matter extensively. Let us confess our sins in this point,

and find ways to reanimate the convictions of our forefathers!

5. Justice within the Moravian Church:

Together with peace goes the demand for justice, justice within our own church. I dream of a worldwide church where all members are really equal. I know, we have reached a lot already through our structures, our joint ventures, and through our modest support. But there is no question: even in our small community, the North still dominates the South. Western Europe and North America, where fewer than 15% of our members live, still rule the other parts of the Unity where the majority (85% of our members) live. In this respect, we are a true reflection of the world around us, but my dream is, that we are able to create another “Moravian world,” that we come to another than through economic globalization.

In our small Moravian fellowship, we should learn that there are other opinions than those coming from the North; there are, in the South, other theological ideas, other Moravian “traditions,” other perspectives with equal value. We still live, also within the Moravian fellowship, with some arrogance and hubris, that what is good and important for our future must come from the North. With justice, I mean an equally balanced dealing with each other, a listening to each other, seeing the sister or brother from Surinam or South Africa with his or her own opinions as a necessary aspect of community and not as an additional burden.

It also means that we from the North support our brothers and sisters elsewhere in their struggle for more justice when this becomes vital. I don't

think our Moravian Unity played a very positive role during the Apartheid time, at least not in the first three decades. And it took us a long time to clearly condemn this system. It happened at the Unity Synod in 1974 to a certain extent, and, more outspokenly, in 1988, just a few years before Apartheid fell after some very difficult discussions. I dream of church, where there are virtually no “winners” and no “losers.”

6. Heritage Rather than Traditions: I dream of a church which loves its traditions, but which can clearly discern between the “tree” and the “fruits.” Let us look at the tree, and not only at the fruits, which may change, and may disappear. But our tree is strong enough to produce new fruits! Our forefathers and mothers were imaginative, courageous, and knew that they were on a pilgrimage. We maintain the past, are timid, and stay where we are, spiritually. In Herrnhut a kind of an awakening happened: “Jesus people” made their way into the needy world. Today, we are afraid of changes; on the contrary, we think that changing nothing is “Moravian.” We are often paralyzed by our traditions instead of turning the old treasures into something meaningful for our present time. Here, we also need the help of our worldwide fellowship. Let us not leave the changes only to the so-called charismatics!

We do have a very rich heritage! We must deal with it in such a way, that we *first* make a difference between the tree and the fruits, and, *secondly*, that we not imitate these traditions, but develop them further so that they become useful for our time and for the future. What is, for example, the real meaning of the choir-system? Nobody is left isolated in the

congregation! How can we implement this idea today? I admit, such efforts are more difficult than merely continuing certain aspects of our tradition as if nothing had changed and the needs of the people still are the same as 270 years ago.

7. Rediscovery of Moravian Missions: I dream of a church which rediscovers mission in the original “Moravian” meaning. This is another example of reviving a tradition! Zinzendorf told his missionaries to go “to the poorest,” to go there where nobody else goes, to the slaves, to some forgotten or almost unknown peoples, like Indians in Central America or Inuits in Greenland and Labrador. He did so through his strong belief in the crucified Lord, who suffered for and with the poorest.

The Moravian church never supported a big mission campaign, and never participated in mission visions as the “10–40 window” or anything like it. Zinzendorf today would probably say: go to the AIDS victims, also in your own country, go to forgotten refugees, to the Asylum seekers, to groups who live somewhere at the brinks of societies. He certainly would appreciate the work among the Garifunas in Honduras and the Chuchotka in Eastern Siberia, and he certainly would highly welcome the service to disabled Palestinian children. This group suffers from a double discrimination, as members of a suppressed nation and as handicapped youth. It is wonderful that we do such a work as Moravians. Thank God that we did vote for the New World Witness program in 1998, which is not to be understood as a “campaign,” but as a reanimation of the fact that the Moravian Church is a missionary church.

Let us focus on these and similar missionary efforts! And, by the way, wasn't the mission work as executed by the Moravians, proclaiming the crucified and risen Lord to the poorest and discriminated people of those days, a peace movement, the introduction of God's peace on this earth, according to John 20:21. “Peace be with you,” and then, immediately following, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you?” It contained even political aspects, although Moravian mission work certainly was not considered to be a political action. But, by the way, it did have political consequences, since it without doubt prepared the way to abolish slavery. How can we reach the distressed, the burdened, the burn-outs, and the lonesome people in their abundance? I do not give up the dream that also our Moravian Church will find ways to tell them that Jesus said: “Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 28:11).

8. Mission Rather than Preservation: I dream of a worldwide Moravian church which does not see self-preservation as a main task. In Europe and in North America, but also in Surinam, in South Africa, and in Nicaragua, we do quite a lot in order to keep our church alive and prevent the further decrease of our membership. But this cannot and must not be the main purpose of our existence as Moravian Church. According to D. Bonhoeffer, a church has the right to exist only when it is and becomes a “church for others.” In other words, to be a church always means to serve others, otherwise you do not deserve this name. To me, too much energy has been spent on our self-preservation. Not enough energy goes into the search for tasks

beyond our boundaries as a church. This is what we need: a clear, common task, such as:

- Peace and reconciliation work in our congregations and our pedagogic institutes;
- Mission in the above mentioned sense;
- A clear theological profile which is meaningful for our time and also for other Christians;
- Building bridges within the ecumenical network, but also between religions; and
- Reviving the Church of Jesus Christ with new spiritual discoveries.

Is all this an illusion, going far beyond our possibilities? I do not think so. All this happened and became true in the past! We as Moravians were able to achieve all this. How? By trusting the guidance of the Lord; by fostering a close, personal relationship with him; and from there, developing ideas and visions that have courage and imagination.

9. Equality for Women in the Church: I dream of a church where women finally really get the same rights and possibilities as men! Here again, we may learn from the past. During the time of Zinzendorf, women played officially a significant role: they were ordained and they had leading positions in the Herrnhut congregation. This gender “spring season” collapsed soon after the death of the Count. In the late fifties of the last century, the first woman was ordained in the European Continental Province, other provinces followed soon. At the Unity Synod in 1974 (of course also in 1957) not one single female delegate represented a province or a Unity undertaking! In 1981, there were just three female delegates.

Since then, some changes can be seen in our worldwide church, also supported by good and strong decisions taken by Unity Synods. They were helped by international women conferences, initiated mainly by the U.S. provinces and their womens’ fellowships. It is remarkable, that provinces with another cultural context, such as in Tanzania, women are being trained for the ministry, and also being ordained.

There is still a lot to do. At the board of the Moravian Church Foundation, women were unknown until some weeks ago! Thanks to the African and Surinam Provinces, this has changed! At the Unity Board, there are now three out of nineteen, certainly a step in the right direction, but a satisfactory point has not yet been reached. In the Czech province, women are not being ordained, and there are only two female bishops so far, both elected by the synod of the U.S. Northern Province. Women must be represented “at all levels of church life” so that this representation “reflects the actual participation of women in church life” (§ 910 CHOF, 1995, decided the Unity Synod).

This is not simply necessary, but self-evident and natural. It is also biblical. Jesus was the first who started women’s emancipation when he gave equal rights to women, such as in cases of a divorce. And Paul says: “There is no difference between Jew and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women” (Gal. 3:28). Here again, let us look at our rich heritage!

10. Expectant Waiting for the Lord: I dream of a church which waits for the coming Lord. “To wait,” of course, does not mean to do nothing. It means to live in that perspective, not

that we must “make” or “build” the future of this world and of our church, but that it lies in the hands of our crucified and risen Lord, who has clearly taken sides for life and against death, for the poor and against the mighty ones, for peace and justice against the misuse of power and the contempt of human beings and their rights. And for this Lord, no realm of life is excluded: not politics, nor economy, nor sexuality, since he became one of us. A church which does not wait for this Lord does not deserve the name church because such a church has closed its eyes and has given up hope to be able to prepare the coming of his Kingdom. This coming Lord, and only him, keeps us going and moving, because we have a goal and an orientation. We are waiting for Him, and our dreams are also directed towards this goal.

Again, we may look into our heritage. Comenius, to mention him again in this context, knew that God’s kingdom is coming. That is and remains the great hope. And in the light of this hope it does make sense to live on and live for the smaller hopes. The great Czech bishop and scholar showed this by working on his teaching ideas and methods, and by developing his thoughts on peace and reconciliation. These were proposals for a comprehensive renovation of this world, based on Christian hope. Therefore his ideas were not illusions but Christian dreams. So, let us dream, and let us prepare to await the coming Lord!

Summary of the Dreams:

- Strengthening our worldwide Unity (clarifying the role of the bishop, working for justice, looking at practical points: information, theological education, conferences, spiritual life, administrative instruments);
- A clear theological standpoint;
- To be a mediating body;
- Non-violence and peace;
- Justice: all Moravians are equal;
- Heritage instead of traditions;
- Mission;
- More than self-preservation;
- Women;
- To be an expecting church;
- Developing a theology of the Lamb.

Conclusion

Yes, the heritage of our church is rich, and worthy of being rediscovered. Let us not leave it in our history books, in our safes, or in our archives, but let it be used now! We resemble too much the servant in the parable who has hid his talent in the ground. This is, as we know, not what God wants from us. He wants us to more than a historic society, and to make more of our talents. This is my dream, for the glory of God, and for the sake of his creatures.

Hans Beat Motel served as a pastor in the European Continental Province, was President of the PEC of that province, and served as Chair of the Unity Board.

Endnotes

1 Kirchliche Dogmatik IV, I, p. 762 f.: Es wird schon kein Zufall sein, dass derselbe Mann, der in seiner Predigt, Dichtung und Dogmatik (sofern er eine solche hatte) der grösste – und vielleicht der einzige ganz echte – *Christozentriker* ...der Neuzeit gewesen ist, vielleicht auch der erste echte, d.h. ganz von der Sache her denkende und redende *Ökumeniker* genannt werden muss.

2 Auch denken wir in Wahrheit nicht, Gott sei bei uns alleine; wir sehen, wie so manches Licht auch

anderer Orten scheine Auch denken wir in Wahrheit nicht, Gott sei bei uns alleine; wir sehen, wie so manches Licht auch anderer Orten scheine. Second verse of the hymn “Die Glieder Jesu freun sich sehr,” No. 353 of the German Moravian Hymnbook edited in 1968.

3 See Büdingsche Sammlung, vol. I, III.

4 Traugott Bachmann has published an autobiography under the title “Ich gab manchen Anstoss,” recently republished in 1959 and again in 1964.

5 Käsemann, *Der Ruf zur Freiheit* (Tübingen, 1968).