

Samuel Eric Propsom

Except for a sentence about Zinzendorf's understanding of Scripture not being "evangelical," I am in basic agreement with Brother Motel's first lecture. For lectures two and three, however, I have a few comments. I disagree with Brother Motel's claim that we "lack a clear theological profile." Our predecessors felt that the great ecumenical creeds, our synod-approved documents, (i. e. *The Brotherly Agreement* and *The Ground of the Unity*), our liturgies and hymns sufficiently expressed our theology. These set the theological context of a solid classical Christian position, allowing breathing room for every member to work out the particular, non-essential matters, as they are led by the Holy Spirit. This is the genius behind the Moravian system. When particular policy matters arise, the ever-present temptation is to respond with legislation instead of trusting the Spirit to work in the hearts of individuals. We are driven, by fear, to react.

This fear is clearly manifested by Brother Motel in his section on, "The Ground of the Unity." He states that, "...whoever takes the Bible literally doesn't take the Bible seriously." This perspective is the heart of all the current problems in the Unity, not that we don't have a clear theological profile. We shy away from any identification with evangelicals and charismatics because they are perceived as anti-intellectual and it is robbing us of the rich thought currently being produced by a significant part of Christendom. Relying solely on one perspective has moved the "northern" Moravian church in the unhealthy direction of accepting only methods of Biblical interpretation that require complex analysis, theories and speculations that effectively place a filter over the Scriptures. Only the highly educated can really understand the Scriptures properly. As a result, we piously question the faith, intellect, and sincerity of the majority of Moravians around the world who actually believe the Scriptures, who actually have the integrity to believe what they pray in our own liturgies and what they affirm while singing our ancient hymns.

Without the input of evangelicals we have no dialogue in our Unity, and the inevitable result is our current one-sided theological intellectualism intent on embracing a worldly wisdom, which is causing us to drift away from our theology of the heart. Those who came before us in the faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, formed a foundation of corporate discernment and interpretation, based largely on a literal reading of the Bible. New insights on the Scriptures came, but they fit perfectly on the foundation. This process took dialogue and discernment. Our contemporary northern-led church, however, without the serious input of evangelicals, tips this model on its ear and the result is the perceived need adjust the foundation to accommodate the "new and improved" insights.

We don't need to respond to evangelicals and charismatics, we need to embrace and accept them, absorbing them into their rightful place in the Unity. When we Moravians follow our inherent teachings, are adaptable in our forms of worship, and above all, are tolerant and charitable we boast a membership with a rich and diverse theological perspective. We don't need a clearer theological profile. We need to return to and apply what we already have.

Now, at this point, I want to make it clear that, although I strongly disagree with Brother Motel on a few very important matters, I stand in solidarity with his practical proposals, including those on improved communication, global theological education, more frequent Unity conferences, joint spiritual life formation, increased bishop responsibilities, and resources for improved administration. I can even swallow most of what Brother Motel has to say about theology, even though, as I've already mentioned, I believe that we already have a clear theological standpoint.

Brother Motel and I would agree that we need to discuss matters like homosexuality in the context of love, but we cannot simply toss out the troubling parts of Scripture that go against the grain of the

current mindset of worldly thinking. In serious matters of policy such as the ordination and marriage of homosexuals we need to consult the wisdom of the entire Unity. The question is, as I've already stated in the previous section, are we in North America and Western Europe willing to trust the discernment of those without our enlightened "northern" theology, who may give us an "un-enlightened" answer, based on their literal reading of the Bible? Again, the heart of the matter is not homosexuality, but hermeneutic, how we read the Bible.

The next part of the lecture that I'd like to address concerns Brother Motel's call for a "theology of the Lamb." I assert that we already have this theology at our core; it just needs to be taught, absorbed and lived. Having said this, I do not agree completely with Brother Motel's interpretation of the theology of the Lamb. For example, I cannot accept Brother Motel's call to be a "Peace church," if being that type of church means abdicating our responsibilities to bring justice to others through supporting an occasional use of force. Look, I am all for peace, but I will not stand behind the skirts of my fellow human beings while they stand in harm's way, in my place, while I enjoy the fruits of their valor. I absolutely and flatly reject a universal call to pacifism for Moravians. If someone breaks into my home, and I expect someone else to come and put their life on the line to protect me because I refuse to stand up to evil, I am the greatest of hypocrites.

Peace comes at a great price, as Jesus, the author and grantor of ultimate peace, has shown by paying the ultimate price to gain it. We Moravians may not like to admit it, but there really are bad people in the world intent on oppressing. It is the greatest form of injustice to have the means to foster peace and not use it. This is my opinion, but it is an opinion that I am confident is held by a significant part of our Unity. Brother Motel's particular social and political consciousness, I am equally confident, is representative of another significant perspective in our

Unity. We are not of one mind on this external issue. Do we really want to get bogged down legislating external, extremely non-essential and divisive matters, like the war in Iraq, that are out of the direct control of the church? The Unity should not seek legislation on such matters. It is another thing, entirely, to ask the Unity to speak on internal Moravian policy matters, such as the ordination and marriage of homosexuals. I am greatly concerned with Brother Motel's desire to produce one-sided Unity legislation.

In a similar way I am greatly concerned about Brother Motel's blanket endorsement of the Swiss approach toward other religions. I resist and strongly disagree with inter-faith worship. Understanding and tolerance of other religions is one thing, a vital thing, and I commend the Swiss sisters and brothers for their passion, but I draw the line at blended worship. As much as we want to be nice, the fact is that Jesus, Himself, taught that Christianity is exclusive. Yes, let's find ways to reach out to people of other religious backgrounds, but without tossing out our own theology. The current trend is to seek the lowest common denominator instead of seeking the highest. It is a slippery slope that leads to questioning the supremacy of Christ.

Moving on to matters of injustice, I would agree with Brother Motel that there is great disparity in wealth in this world, but we must proceed very carefully. Why? Because I see the effects, in Labrador, of money being dumped on a formerly self-sufficient people. Injustice? To me injustice is organizations like Green Peace shutting down the Inuit way of life and major source of income, the sealing industry, in order to protect a few seals, which are now so overpopulated that they are dying from disease. To me, injustice is allowing international fisheries to deplete the entire Labrador cod industry. To me, it is injustice to allow sport fishermen to close the Labrador salmon fishery. Now, the government pays the people not to work. This is injustice to me, under the guise of good intentions.

We must learn from the travesty inflicted on the people of Labrador. Labrador's three economic pillars have been kicked out from these proud people and then we wag our heads decrying the high suicide rate and substance abuse issues. We have stripped away their dignity and made them like infants dependent on the breast milk of government money. We can cause and inflict injustice with our good intentions. Yes, we need to address financial injustices in our various provinces, helping them to be the church where they are, but with great care.

Concerning missions. I agree with Brother Motel that we need only to look around us to see the needs. Yes we also need to ensure that our various provinces have the resources to do their work and we still need to look for new international opportunities. The fact is, however, that all of our provinces could benefit from outside assistance. Short-term missions could take form of prayer teams, administrators, musicians and a host of other ways. Sending teams out from the Western Europe and the States is only one approach, but why not start thinking in terms of places like Bethlehem, London, Herrnhut and Winston-Salem being mission fields? Why not bring in international teams of Spanish-speaking Moravians to do outreach right under own noses? Why aren't we doing more to support our black sisters and brothers in their massive work in our various cities? Why not bring in people from our various provinces to hold revival services, youth ministries and a host of other functions? I think this is what Brother Motel means by "Mission Rather than Preservation." Embracing our heritage of missions, and by walking in the Spirit, growth, not stagnation or a preservation mentality, will be the result.

Throughout his lectures, I believe that Brother Motel is calling for something that we northern Moravians had, but chose to discard. We've left our purpose-driven, evangelical roots, leading to stagnation and self-preservation. Growing churches aren't questioning the supremacy of Christ. Growing churches don't worry about preservation, because their focus is not on themselves. I suggest an immediate moratorium on divisive legislation at our various synods. Synodal time should be spent in worship, asking forgiveness for opportunities lost and for seeking direction from Jesus to recapture our mission focus. I pray that our various provincial boards will have the courage to lovingly encourage our pastors and leaders who advocate theological positions that are clearly outside of the doctrinal foundations of the Unity to look for employment elsewhere and quit muddling up the church.

This goes for those on both extremes. We have a clear common task if we would stop derailing ourselves. We need to act on many practical matters, but we really can't legislate most of the things Brother Motel calls for. These will just happen when we are walking in sincerity with Jesus. Yes, the heritage of our church is rich, but I assert that it is most alive in a context where the church remains evangelical, mission-minded, clinging to the Scriptures and our foundational teachings.

I want to thank Brother Motel for his stimulating and passionate lectures and pray that he accept my response in the spirit that it is intended. I guess a passionate lecture evokes a passionate response.

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