

# Responses

## Matt Knapp

I am not a theologian or an expert on church history. So somewhere along the journey I figured out that when an idea or a thought, can successfully provoke both ends of the theological spectrum at the same time, I will sit up and take notice. This very subjective and unscientific process has helped me also figure out what might be an authentic, “Moravian” thought or idea. My hat is off to what Craig has laid out for us here. It has the aroma of being the real deal. Craig is one of a growing number of scholars in our church who are starting to articulate “Moravian” viewpoints rather than the same tired liberal axe grinding or the conservative wagon circling.

I absolutely agree with his basic thesis. Our conflicts and or spiritual malaise (depending on which province you reside in) are, in my opinion, rooted in a lack of understanding of who we need to be for God in this world. Many of the problems we are facing are coming out of a collective uncertainty.

I have to admit I have a low level of tolerance for denominational navel gazing, I’m greatly fatigued by the collective whining going on about our “identity” and our “conflicts.” We are behaving like a 70’s encounter group screaming at our pillows rather than being the dynamic Body of Christ, joyfully serving a risen Lord.

Yet one of the things I have learned from 20 years of parish life is that folks need to have deep roots in order to weather the storms. Christ is the rock on which we stand. It is always and it

is only about Jesus. But our theological heritage is vital because that is how we hold on to Him. Our doctrines are among those roots that bind us to Him along with the roots of worship, personal piety, and mission/action.

People need roots. Though I agree with the stated concern about “Traditionalism,” in my ministry context we find people crashing through our doors hungering for a spiritual tradition. They want a sense of rootedness that goes beyond the typical American Protestant experience available on the corner at your typical McCommunity Church. Tradition is only of value when it is alive, dynamic and being constantly interpreted into the context of ministry. I find that people crave what we have to offer in our theology, our liturgical worship and our history.

Our Moravian theology is a gift for ministry today so I’ll toss out my perspective on how to improve Moravian Theology and make it dynamic for today’s church. It is very simple: Get it out of the Ivory Tower.

Precisely because, as Craig writes, orthopraxy is an inherent part of our doctrine, the decline in our theology has followed the decline in our practice of living it. I believe that one of the places where we have dangerously assimilated American religious values is by selling our souls to the liberal tendency that a select few who are in “the know” know what is best for the rest of us. The decline of our church curiously coincides with practice of theology becoming the domain of only the scholar. We have sold the laity short in this regard.

It is no wonder that the great age of theological ferment in our church happened in partnership with our greatest age of mission, outreach and effective ministry in the world. Our identity is found and defined by action. I see this truth constantly in my current ministry setting. The “Moravian Way” thrives at the intersection of action and reflection. I see it in our youth when we provide opportunities for them to do as Jesus would have them do. This orthopraxy produces a hunger in them to then know what Jesus would have them know. And when that happens you had better have some answers with some meat on them.

We are a simple and humble people. Moravians need to “do” theology. When we don’t, well frankly, we start to rot, smell bad and serve no heavenly or earthly good purpose. What an incredible waste of God’s time, grace and love, showered upon us to be fussing with one another about the things we are fussing over, when the world so desperately needs Jesus.

We need scholars engaged in what is happening in the ebb and flow of life in mission. We need a greater dialogue between our “Wise” ones and those lay leaders and clergy who are out putting our Moravian theology into practice in new and ever changing ways. As a pastor I need help constantly in finding new ways to interpret our theology in a relevant manner. That means we need scholars who understand what is actually going on in places where our church is thriving. Our theological heritage needs to serve the church, not be a dusty idol, or the domain of a select few.

And why doesn’t somebody translate all of this great Moravian material I’m always hearing

about into English! Sorry but that’s a pet peeve of mine.

I hope what Craig has offered here will be received as a great place to start some exciting dialogue. I know I’m going to corner him in a smoky Wisconsin Pub, in the great tradition of C.S. Lewis, and work over Justification by faith. This is great stuff. And I am thrilled to be a part of a church that allows me to be pushed in my theological thinking while forever worshipping and serving the Risen Christ.

*The Rev. Matt Knapp is pastor of Sturgeon Bay Moravian Church in Wisconsin.*

---

## **Hans-Beat Motel**

1. I fully agree with the author: at this time, the Moravian Church finds itself in a deep identity crisis, it “has lost its memory” and shows great difficulties when it comes to describing what it is. The fact that this is shared with most of the “main-stream” Protestant churches (doesn’t this term also reveal a problem?) is of no comfort at all, but it rather underlines our difficulty. It is of great importance to note, however, that this identity crisis is only true for certain regions of our Moravian Church. I can speak for the European region, where I sense a lot of similarity to the congregations and the churches in North America. But our fellow Moravians in Tanzania, where about half of all Moravian Christians world-wide live and where the church is still growing, shake their heads in disbelief when we complain about our unclear situation in the North. I will come to that point later.

2. To my opinion, the author is right when he