

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.

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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

describes the situation of the Moravian Church as being “in the midst of the worst crisis to threaten the Moravian Church since World War II.” Let us remember that not so long ago, this was quite different. In 1957 the Unity Synod at Bethlehem, Pa. (the first to be held outside of Herrnhut in our whole history!) succeeded in overcoming the wounds of two World Wars when Moravians fought suffered on both sides, and when it paved the way to turn the “mission fields” into independent provinces. That was a signal of hope for a bright future. Much of that hope and enthusiastic commitment, however, vanished in the course of the past decades, at least in the Northern hemisphere of our worldwide community.

3. Yes, for quite a time we have been in “a process of assimilation,” also in this respect being part of the mainstream churches. Our heritage and our history teach us a very different lesson. Herrnhut came into existence against the then rather bloodless and inflexible Lutheran Church, and it developed its own profile which attracted seeking and disappointed Christians from various denominations. And it is true, and I tried to emphasize that in the 2003 Moses Lectures, we have neglected our rich heritage, using it mainly as a nostalgia instead of a critical instrument which could help us to define who we are today and how we in this time with its challenges could find our theological position.

4. I am very grateful to Craig Atwood when he expresses his strong conviction that we as Moravian Church must put much more emphasis on our own theological work! This has been neglected during the last decades, or rather during the last

centuries, when we as Moravians limited ourselves by repeating what we have experienced and what we have learned from the past. For quite a time, especially during the strong mission efforts, this may have been sufficient, but for too long we have not even noticed that without continuous theological work the church loses “the engine,” as Craig puts it. I am convinced, that part of our inability to deal with the so-called charismatic movement and the fact that such a low-scale subject as homosexuality is able to bring division into our Moravian world have to do with the fact that theologially we have become speechless. The theology which is being practiced at our seminaries as well as in our congregations and within the clergy is not creative enough. But being creative is an essential element of all theological work! Doctrine is not a matter of a gray looking past, but doctrine helps to define where we stand as Christians today. Doctrine must be something flexible, doctrine consists of statements, which must be reworded and replaced if necessary. For this reason I claim for a redefinition of the “Ground of Unity.” The “Ground” is not a creed, but a doctrinal description where we stand as Moravian Church in our time.

5. In the Moses Lectures 2003 I stated that I do not give too much value to the “Moravian motto: in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love” — as long it is not defined, what the essentials and non essentials are. Too often, this motto has been only repeated, being a “cliche” without thinking of what it really could mean in view of the contents. One of the most important and valuable parts of Craig’s lectures is his attempt to define the essentials and non-essentials. This also could become one of our main

theological tasks as Moravians: that we regularly look at this motto, and that when doing this we include our worldwide church community! I am sure that making good use of this motto divisions and misunderstandings could have been avoided within our church, or, also important, we could have clearly discerned why and on what grounds people have left the church in recent times!

6. Theological work is vital for our church; I fully agree with the author. Let us be honest: this has been a weak point since a long time (since Zinzendorf?). But who does that work, who could become a forerunner in this respect? Certainly, the Moravian theological seminaries are called here, and without any doubt, they already have contributed to that purpose. Certainly, the Theological Seminary at Bethlehem must be mentioned here in the first place. But what has been achieved it is not sufficient. This has to do with the core responsibility of the Moravian seminaries: to prepare and to train people for the ministry. That leaves very little time and space for theological research, or even for a kind of a “dream factory.” Theology today, certainly in the Moravian Church, must mean a cross-cultural dialogue!

I am still dreaming of cross-cultural ministers’ conferences, and of an intensive dialogue among our provinces, of a Moravian network of Christians interested in the future tasks and possibilities of our church. *The Hinge* and the *ITD*-periodical are very important instruments in this context, helping to start such a dialogue including members of other provinces. Everything must be done to engage the “Southern” provinces in this process. The 2004 Moses Lectures, e.g., should

be distributed in the African provinces, and the text should be discussed in classes at the Moravian Theological College at Mbeya/Tanzania, and the Theological Seminary at Heideveld, South Africa, as well as in Bethlehem and other theological training institutes of our worldwide community. Unfortunately, the Theological Committee of the worldwide unity has, as I see it, so far not been able to fulfill the task to offer a real theological Unity platform, or at least the study work of this group has not shown a significant impact. Perhaps this has to do with my final remark.

7. The best theology is only meaningful when there are instruments to communicate it, not only among church officials, but also to the grass-root level of our church. A revision of the “Ground” could be done at the congregational level, as well as the definition what “essentials” and “ministerials” mean for us today. Results of such dialogues could be brought to synods and/or to minister’s conferences, and they could be shared with other provinces as well. Why not have the dream of a vivid, encouraging worldwide dialogue? Perhaps the bishops or another group could be asked by the Unity to launch the grass-root level discussions and such a dialogue — a motion could be sent to the Unity Board, which has its next meeting in March of 2005! Such a process could help us as Moravians to (re)discover who we are, where we come from and where we want to go, as Christians living with a rich heritage in a global context.

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