



THE HINGE

*A Journal of Christian Thought
for the Moravian Church*

**A Church Ahead of its Time:
The 18th Century Moravian Community
on Gender, Worship and Ecumenism**

By Douglas Schantz

Responses by *Donna Hurt, Joe Moore, Will Sibert,
Keith Stirewalt, and Glen Stoudt*

Book Reviews: *Rebecca's Revival* by Jon Sensbach;
The Exotic Plant by Geoffrey and Margaret Stead

Homilies by *Bronwyn Shiffer* and *Frank Hiddemann*

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One of the early offices of the Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pa. was that of the Hinge: “*The office of the Hinge requires that the brother who holds it look after everything and bring troublesome factors within the congregation into mutual accord without their first having to be taken up publicly in the congregation council.*” September 1742, *The Bethlehem Diary*, vol. 1, tr. by Kenneth Hamilton, p. 80. *The Hinge* journal is intended also to be a mainspring in the life of the contemporary Moravian Church, causing us to move, think, and grow. Above all, it is to open doors in our church.

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Notes from the Editor

There has been a lot of discussion in the Moravian Church in America over the past decade regarding our identity, character, doctrine, and future. Sometimes it is helpful to have an outside perspective on our community of faith. What is it that others value about the Moravian heritage? Are there aspects of our church's witness that speak to the world outside our sanctuaries, which can inspire expressions of faith, love, and hope today?

It is honor to be able to present to the Moravian Church the work of Douglas Shantz of the University of Calgary. Dr. Shantz discovered the Moravians through his research into Dutch and German Pietism. I am grateful that he was willing to share his research and thoughts with the Moravian Church through *The Hinge*, and I hope readers find his article informative and stimulating. It is interesting that some of the things that he identifies as being significant for all faith communities today, previous generations of Moravians tried to deny about our heritage.

Our respondents represent many different areas of the North American Moravian Church's life. We have a DCE, seminary professor, pastor, seminary student, and missionary. They also represent voices from the Southern and Northern Provinces. Each responded to Shantz's article from their own settings and concerns, but a common theme in the responses is how do we translate historical study into contemporary church programs and concrete decisions.

As an historian outside our community of faith, Dr. Shantz cannot answer that question for us. What he can do is present a portrait of the radical Zinzendorfian church that challenged assumptions about gender, economics, confessionalism, reason, and race in the 18th century, and which offers a vision for today. Many of you know "Schattschneider's law" that if something happens in the major denominations, it will happen in the Moravian Church five to seven years later. Shantz, in contrast, argues that the Moravians were 200 years ahead of the curve on many issues and led the way for others to follow. Several things that churches today take for granted were pioneered by the Moravians, but in Shantz's view Moravian history also provides guidance for confronting issues that churches are only now wrestling with. The challenge for readers of *The Hinge* is what this remarkable history means as we work with the Holy Spirit to form the Moravian Church of the coming century. Will we draw upon the resources of our past to create new patterns for effective ecumenism, meaningful worship, and gender equity? Or will we deny who we once were in order to preserve who we are now?

Also in this issue are reviews of recent books on Moravian history that should be read widely in the Moravian Church. One is a new history of the British Province that is illuminating for American Moravians. The other is a ground-breaking study of the origins of the "Black Church" in the Moravian mission to St. Thomas, with a focus on Rebecca Freundlich, one of the great Moravian missionaries. As added treats, there is a short homily by a young Moravian woman who shares her struggles with faith, doubt, and identity, and a sermon from Germany that looks at wrath and grace.

A Church Ahead of its Time: The 18th Century Moravian Community on Gender, Worship and Ecumenism¹

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Introduction

The 18th century Moravians or “Herrnhuters” have been described as “the most significant religious community that the age of Pietism produced.”² The present study has a dual purpose: to discover the nature of 18th century Moravian communal life, and to consider the surprising insights for contemporary Christianity that we can derive from such historical study. These early Moravians were innovators in their practice of Christian community. They were a church ahead of their time and provide a model for Christian community in the 21st century.

The subject of Christian community is an important one, fraught with issues and emotions, successes and failures. In his recent study, *Religion and Community*, theologian Keith Ward observed that Christianity “is essentially a communal faith.” The Christian church views itself as “a community which mediates the power of the divine love, the Spirit, to the world.” As the body of Christ, the church is called to disclose to the world “the compassionate love and liberating activity of God.”³ But as a fragile, human institution, the church’s success in achieving this mission is often mixed. According to Ward, the church “needs to learn from its own history and from the history of other religious traditions the sorts of limits on power and authority that

are needed to counterbalance the repressive tendencies which seem inherent in all human institutions.”⁴

The kind of church that is needed in the 21st century is one marked by “a new ecumenical or global paradigm, for which the old divisions of Christendom are largely relegated to history. ... Within such a paradigm, the church would be more self-critical, recognizing the historical conditionality of its formulations and the symbolic nature of many of its basic images. It would be more openly plural, accepting a diversity of religious insights, and seeking positive interaction between them. ... It would be committed to social structures making for liberation and fulfillment for all humans. ... It would consist of those who have been grasped by a vision of the ultimate goodness of a suffering and universally loving God, of the ultimate hope for the whole world of sharing in the life of God. ... They will accept that their primary vocation is to witness to the universal love of God in a world of many disputes and many destructive hatreds.”⁵ Ward observes wistfully that until now this vision has been shared “by relatively small groups of odd, imperfect people.”⁶

I will argue that the 18th century Moravians were one of these small groups that shared the vision that Ward speaks of, making them truly

a church ahead of their time. *In a day of bitter religious wars, disputes and hatreds, the Moravian community exhibited to the world a non-dogmatic liturgical Christianity marked by ecumenical openness, affirmation of women in leadership, a piety shaped by exile and focused on the sufferings of Christ, and a global vision of God's love for a world of diverse cultures and beliefs.*

I have both personal and historical reasons for focusing on the Moravians. On the personal side, during my research sabbatical in Germany in fall 2002 I took the opportunity to spend a few days in Herrnhut and Berthelsdorf. I stayed at the Moravian guesthouse in Herrnhut, visited various historical sites, including Zinzendorf's estate, and worked in the Moravian archive. I met scholars of Moravian studies from Germany, Poland, Finland and Canada. This experience was a rich one, both personally and academically, and sparked my own latent research interests in this field.

On the historical side, it makes good sense to look to the 18th century to learn something about Christianity and community. Gordon Rupp observed that the Reformation affirmed two great dimensions of church life: Word and Sacrament. In the period 1560-1660 a third dimension was stressed, "the discipline of Christ," which can be seen variously in Calvinist Geneva, English Puritanism and elsewhere. The next period, he suggested, saw the addition of a "fourth dimension": the church as koinonia or fellowship, the Christian cell meeting for prayer and mutual guidance and edification.⁷ Rupp pointed to the examples of German Pietism, Moravianism and English Methodism as movements that discovered afresh the dimension of Christian community. In this presentation we will examine

just one of these groups and their contribution to our understanding of Christian community.

The 18th Century Moravians

Moravians are known outside their church for several reasons. Many have heard of their round the clock prayer vigil, which lasted for over a hundred years. Others are acquainted with the Moravian devotional book, the *Losungen* or Daily Texts, which are advertised as "one of the most widely read Christian devotional books," and appear in some fifty languages worldwide. The Moravians are also be known for their leading and distinguished service in worldwide missions. Mission scholar Stephen Neill reflected on this: "Under the leadership of Zinzendorf this small Church was seized with a missionary passion which has never left it. The Moravians have tended to go to the most remote, unfavourable, and neglected parts of the surface of the earth. Many of the missionaries have been quite simple people, peasants and artisans; their aim has been to live the Gospel, and so to commend it to those who have never heard it."⁸ Still others have heard of the role that the Moravians played in John Wesley's conversion and in sparking the evangelical revival in England.⁹

The founder of the Moravian Church, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), is recognized as "one of the most colourful and intriguing figures of eighteenth century Pietism."¹⁰ Hans Schneider observed: "Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf...is without doubt one of the most original figures in all of church history, and also one of the most controversial. Already in his own lifetime, opinions on him were divided: his followers called him tenderly 'dear

Papa' (*Papachen*), submitted to his authority, ... and saw in him a 'true prince of God,' but his opponents untiringly cautioned others against this 'false apostle,' denounced him as a heretic unparalleled in the history of the church, or poured their scorn upon this 'most laughable spiritual Don Quixote.'"11 Certainly his social behaviour and creative energy were unusual for his time. "His background in the upper nobility on the one hand and his complete identification with the artisan/craftsman class and uneducated on the other, in a way that superseded all social boundaries, was unusual for his day. ... The extent of his writings [over 67 volumes] points to his unusual energy."12

Since Zinzendorf's biography is well-known to most readers of *The Hinge*, I will highlight those areas related directly to the themes of this paper. Zinzendorf was still young when his father died; when his mother remarried he was sent to live with his maternal grandmother, Henriette Katharina von Gersdorf (1648-1726). Henriette was admired by theologians of the day for her abilities in Biblical languages and was widely praised for her religious poetry and verse. She corresponded with the philosopher Leibniz, prominent Lutheran theologians, and with Pietist leaders such as Spener and August Hermann Francke. She used her wealth to support struggling Pietist leaders such as Johann Wilhelm Petersen, and studied even radical religious thinkers such as Jakob Böhme and Jane Leade. These thinkers advocated the creation of a loving community of true believers who set aside their denominational differences.¹³ Zinzendorf said of Henriette: "I received my principles from her. If it weren't for her, the movement would never have

come about. She saw no great difference among Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed religion; whomever she met who had a heart for faith was her neighbour."¹⁴ Henriette's ecumenical interests helped to inspire the Moravian vision.

In 1719-1720 Zinzendorf embarked upon an educational trip known as a *Bildungsreise*, visiting leading church figures in Holland and Paris. His dealings with Reformed and Catholic Christians in these places confirmed his views about a cross-confessional religion of the heart. In his description of his experiences in Holland and Paris he sounds like a modern university student:

I came to know all kinds of religious groups, and found that they had more to say for themselves than I had heard. ... I became so familiar with the Catholics that I gained a better idea of the honest souls that there are among them. From this time on, I determined to discover the best in all religions and...to attain a better and more benign understanding of their teachings and what might be removed as a hindrance to godliness. For I knew that the Lord must have his own among all kinds of people. I returned from my travels with the conviction not to allow myself to engage in any [religious] favouritism, for I saw that [even the Pietists] in Halle and Wittenberg were also human and fallible. This notion helped in promoting the kingdom of God on my estate, but it alienated the Halle Pietists from me somewhat.¹⁵

After returning from his travels, Zinzendorf sent Cardinal Noailles a book of Pietist devotion

(Arndt's *Wahres Christenthum*). The two men continued to exchange letters right up to the cardinal's death.¹⁶ In fall 1721 Zinzendorf began his service in Dresden as legal counselor in the court of the Elector of Saxony. On Sundays Zinzendorf welcomed into his home a Philadelphian gathering of Pietists, Separatists and devotees of Jakob Böhme, to whom he offered edifying discourses.¹⁷

Herrnhut

In 1722 Zinzendorf purchased his grandmother's estate in Berthelsdorf in Upper Lusatia, hoping to establish Halle-style institutions there. That summer he began welcoming to his estate religious refugees who suffered persecution by the Catholic Habsburg Emperor Charles VI (d. 1740). The emperor sought to enforce the decree of 1648 in the *Peace of Westphalia* that only three official faiths should be tolerated in the German Empire: Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic.¹⁸ The refugees included Moravians, Schwenkfelders and other Protestant groups. The Moravians consisted of German-speaking Christians from villages in Moravia led by the carpenter and Pietistic Catholic convert Christian David (1691-1751). W.R. Ward observed that, "This handful of refugees brought by David to Berthelsdorf in 1722 were to leave an indelible mark on the history of Protestantism."¹⁹ In five years (1727) there were 300 settlers on Zinzendorf's estate, about half of these Moravians.²⁰ The other groups came from various parts of Germany and included Pietists, Separatists, Lutherans and Calvinists (Reformed).²¹ The vast majority of these settlers were craftsmen, artisans and handworkers.

In 1724 they began calling the settlement, *Herrnhut*, "God's protection," or "the Lord's watch." Zinzendorf later described the situation in Herrnhut: "I found three kinds of subjects on my estates: the Lutherans, the Schwenck-felders, and the Moravian Brethren...The Moravian Brethren, founded some sixty years before the Protestant Reformation and accustomed to certain Church regulations, impressed three things upon my mind: their doctrine, the condition of their souls, and their regulations. In doctrine they were all Reformed. But in 1725 after heartfelt discussion, they welcomed all the Evangelical Lutheran teaching that I presented to them."²² In 1732, under pressure from the Emperor, the Saxon government forbade acceptance of any more Moravian emigrants. Princes and parish clergy alike felt that public order and the parish system were threatened by the flood of "footloose immigrants from Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary."²³

Inevitably, tensions and divisions arose among the diverse Herrnhut settlers, but Zinzendorf helped them create a new type of community. "Through his intensive efforts with individual members, through the imaginativeness of his ideas, and not least through the charisma of his personality, in a short time he was able to bring about peace among the settlers, indeed, to make them a close community...a cross-confessional brotherhood."²⁴ On May 12, 1727 Zinzendorf delivered a constitution to the community, consisting of his "Things Required and Forbidden" (*Herrschaftlichen Geboten und Verboten*), and forty-two articles comprising "Statutes of the Community of Brethren." Herrnhut was to be a community free of outside

princely interference, and ruled by elders. Their life together should be according to the pattern of the first Christians, and express Christian freedom before God. Zinzendorf created a series of offices for the laity: Elder, Teacher, Encourager, Nurse to the sick. The Herrnhuters must commit themselves to live “in constant love toward all the brethren and children of God in all Religions.”²⁵ These statues were signed by almost all those in the Herrnhut community.

The community continued to worship on Sundays at the Lutheran Church in Berthelsdorf, participating in the sacraments of the Lord’s supper and baptism. However, they also held their own meetings in Herrnhut. They were a gathered group of disciplined Christians within the larger Lutheran church. Luther had envisioned such groups, and Spener described them as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.²⁶ The whole community was organized into small groups called “bands” or “choirs,” separated by gender. Choirs held their own daily devotions, liturgical celebrations, and musical events; on Sundays they sat in church divided according to choirs.²⁷ The purpose of the choirs was to “encourage the intellectual and religious development of each member of the community, as well as strengthening the unity of the community.” The assumption was that “people in similar life situations [were best suited to] encourage each other in spiritual growth.”²⁸

What especially knit the colony of refugees into a vital Christian community was a revival that broke out at a celebration of the Lord’s Supper by Pastor Rothe on August 13, 1727. This day has been celebrated ever since as the movement’s spiritual birthday.²⁹ Just prior to this event there had been all night prayer meetings led

by children. These began with Susanne Kühnel, who had been present at her mother’s deathbed and was deeply moved by the joy and surrender that she saw in her mother. “For three days and nights Susanne’s distress and prayers lay upon the whole community. Then at one in the morning she awakened her father with the words, ‘Father, I am now a child of God, now I know how it was and will still be with my mother.’”³⁰ Three of her friends experienced the same struggle and conversion that same night. Zinzendorf met personally with the girls and prayed with them. At their first communion the whole community was present with much weeping and singing. The revival soon spread to the boys and adults as well.³¹

Zinzendorf’s Theology

The Moravian movement was shaped by Zinzendorf’s piety and vision. Dietrich Meyer has nicely captured the twofold genius of Zinzendorf’s enduring vision: a childlike Christocentric piety focused on the wounds of Jesus, and a diverse community that provided a model to the world of Christian cooperation and ecumenism.³² Zinzendorf taught that child-like faith and trust should characterize Christian faith: “I believe and teach: philosophy has nothing to do with theology...Let people clarify their minds with philosophy as long as they like, but tell them that as soon as they wish to become theologians they must become *children and fools*.”³³ The chief feature of this childlike faith was its focus upon the suffering and death of Christ [see *Hinge* 8.3]. Zinzendorf made the blood and wounds of Christ the primary object of devotion for his followers.³⁴ This “distinctive foundation of Zinzendorf’s theology” became the object of severe criticism from those outside the

community.³⁵ Zinzendorf complained in 1747 that the main accusation against the Moravian Church was, “that we know nothing else than the blood and wounds [of Christ].”³⁶ His response to the accusation is worth noting:

[T]hey consider this a miserable theology, that one knows nothing except this. [Yet], there was an old Latin proverb, *Si Christum discis, satis est, si caetera nescis*. If you know the Saviour, then it is enough, even if you know nothing else...But [our critics say] that this cannot be taken seriously. It is only a manner of speaking. We are good Lutherans and everyone else is a heretic. That is what they would say, but that is mistaken. For [our critics] show their mistake in that they have learned and taught everything else [but Christ], and have forgotten him...You theologians, don't you know that from of old that has been the sum of true doctrine? Have you not understood what is written in the old books of belief? Or maybe you have not believed it and not realized that it was written in earnest?...Even if others do not wish to accept this, if they reject it, mock it, and despise it, if they proclaim it as the mark of a false church: [we say:] “Preserve it among us, dear Lamb, as our peculiar blessing, for the sake of your five holy wounds.”³⁷

In later times, this “blood and wounds theology” would become a source of some embarrassment to the Moravians causing them to soften some of Zinzendorf's language.

Zinzendorf's piety of childlike simplicity should be understood as his response to the rising Enlightenment rationalism of the day and to the experience of exile. This “theology of the heart”

was a “creative, anti-rationalist approach to Christianity.”³⁸ The first threat of exile came in December 1732. On that occasion Zinzendorf penned the following hymn:

Our wandering at this time
has many rugged ways,
And some little side trails built
through courageous faith.
Yes, at times our Lord, the Lord
whose name is love, awakens
The enfeebled traveler's desire
by [providing] a good way.

We see then this manifold working
of God's wonderful ways,
Which in the weak [is] powerfully strong,
The goal [subjected to] so much derision,
Established in the world as the
goal of the Almighty,
in the earth to his praise.
From few our Hero establishes
many hundreds.

So come you much-loved
Prince of the weak and the small,
After whom our souls do thirst,
you their only good.
Multiply your power of grace
even here within our fold,
Ease for our knighthood the burdens we must
bear.

We offer you once more,
with mouth and hand,
our body, soul and spirit,
We promise our unquestioning
faith for every bond.
But keep your oath and
do not forget your work,
And cause your true Christian faith
to triumph even in defeat.³⁹

In 1741 the Moravians purchased 500 acres on the Lehigh River in Pennsylvania where they built the town of Bethlehem as the center for the Moravian mission in America. Bethlehem was originally conceived as a communal enterprise. Everyone gave their labor and its fruits to the community, and the community gave them food, shelter, and clothes in return.⁴⁰ In Bethlehem before 1762, we see the Moravian communal ideal in its most developed form.⁴¹

The Moravians and Recent Scholarship

Moravian scholarship has been a lively research field in recent years. Craig Atwood is one of several young Moravian scholars who are contributing to a growing historical reassessment of the Moravian heritage. Despite the wealth of research on Zinzendorf and European beginnings, Atwood observes that there has been a real neglect of Moravian history in America. Only recently has Bethlehem begun to receive the attention it deserves from scholars who work in colonial history and American religious history.⁴² Atwood has called for scholars to widen their purview in selecting their source materials.⁴³ He notes that scholars of American religion have tended to rely on theological sources, sermons and systematic theology, even when discussing popular religion; yet it was liturgical practice that was formative for the Moravian communities. “Bethlehem combined a Lutheran sense of liturgy and devotion with radical Pietist spirituality and communal living.”⁴⁴

Another young Moravian scholar is Peter Vogt in Germany who has highlighted the implications of Zinzendorf’s lack of theological training. “Zinzendorf was not a trained theologian and never wrote a systematic exposition of

his ideas. Instead, he expressed his views in hymns, sermons, letters, occasional pamphlets and administrative instructions.”⁴⁵ As a result, “Zinzendorf’s thought has been susceptible to widely diverging interpretations.” Also, his “Idiosyncrasies [in terminology and vocabulary], together with numerous inconsistencies and contradictions, often obscure the underlying structure of Zinzendorf’s thought.” Clearly, Zinzendorf’s “greatest achievement” was his organization of the Moravian community “as a living embodiment of his theological ideas.”⁴⁶ Vogt’s research has also examined such themes as Zinzendorf and ecumenism, Zinzendorf and the Philadelphian movement, and marriage among the Moravians.

Dietrich Meyer’s recent book on Zinzendorf and the Moravians skillfully traces the impact of social, economic and political forces and events upon the life of the Herrnhuters. He suggests that “the history of the Herrnhuters reads like a dialectic between financial crisis and spiritual renewal.”⁴⁷ Another theme that Meyer emphasizes is the readiness of the Herrnhuters to change with the times. Matters of organization and even faith emphases changed significantly under the impact of Zinzendorf’s death, under the influence of Enlightenment and Awakening, and especially as the center of gravity shifted decisively to provinces outside of Germany. Meyer sees the Herrnhuters as a movement ahead of their time, and deserving of credit for inspiring 20th century ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.

Meyer highlights two issues of scholarly debate regarding Zinzendorf’s personality and ideas. Meyer notes that contemporaries recognized “the contradictions” of his life, and

the originality and colourfulness of his “almost modern” religiosity. Fascinating as Zinzendorf’s complex character may be, Meyer opposes efforts to psychoanalyse the Count because of the difficulty of understanding his Baroque style and context.⁴⁸

The second issue has to do with the main influences on Zinzendorf’s view of Christian community. Pietist historian Johannes Wallmann pointed to the influence of Spener and his idea of forming a small church of the committed from within the larger church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*). This is evident in the way the Herrnhut community continued to associate with the Lutheran parish church while meeting separately during the week. Hans Schneider, on the other hand, highlighted the influence on Zinzendorf of Jane Leade’s Philadelphian conventicles and their notion of an invisible church of the reborn superceding all denominational differences. This is evident in Zinzendorf’s home gathering while in Dresden. Meyer suggests that a mixing of the two ideas became necessary as the Herrnhut community spread and became a worldwide fellowship.⁴⁹

In his 1992 study of international revival in the 18th century Protestant world W.R. Ward devoted two chapters to Zinzendorf and the Moravians.⁵⁰ According to Ward, the “central biographical problem” of Zinzendorf’s life was “his universal ability to make a splendid first impression, and his universal inability to cooperate for long with men of independent mind.” Ward illustrated this by reference to the “in-fighting” between Halle and Herrnhut. This conflict “formed the context of Zinzendorf’s greatest failure (in America) and his greatest success (in the Baltic).”⁵¹ One should also

remember the tensions that developed between Zinzendorf and Wesley.

The Christianity of the Herrnhuters has been summed up nicely in their conviction that “There is no Christianity without community.”⁵² In Vogt’s judgment, “Zinzendorf’s greatest achievement was the organization of the Moravian community as a living embodiment of his theological ideas.”⁵³

In a time of bitter religious wars, disputes and hatreds, Moravian Christianity exhibited to the world a nondogmatic liturgical Christianity marked by ecumenical openness, affirmation of women in leadership, a piety shaped by exile and focussed on the sufferings of Christ, and a global vision of God’s love for a world of diverse cultures and beliefs. We will now examine each of these features in turn.

Moravians, Liturgy and Worship

Zinzendorf was convinced that the common worship experiences of the community had a greater impact than the experiences of the individual. This applied especially to the community’s liturgical worship gatherings.⁵⁴ “I am persuaded that the feeling [sensitivity] that the community experiences altogether in attending the service of the Sacrament at one and the same moment and place...is more noticeable and produced in a higher degree than in any private conversation ...For there is a certain dignity in the Body broken together, when he is present in all the members and joints and none is missing.”⁵⁵ Zinzendorf viewed all of life as liturgical. The ordinary tasks of the day should be done in a spirit of worship to God and service to the community. All callings and skills were considered equal before God.⁵⁶

“Liturgy was the primary way in which the doctrine of the *Brüdergemeine* was communicated because for Zinzendorf and his followers the truths of the Christian religion are best articulated in poetry and song, not in systematic theology or polemics.”⁵⁷ In 1748 a believer in Bethlehem expressed the matter this way: “Whoever wants to get acquainted with us and to learn our first principles and progress of grace can acquire that knowledge better from our hymns, our *litany of the wounds*, and the homilies upon the same, than if we respond to such writing against us.”⁵⁸

Not surprisingly for a religious movement that arose during the Baroque period, music played a prominent role in Moravian gatherings.⁵⁹ The Moravians believed, “Well-performed music served to edify the hearer and was a foretaste of the heavenly music of the angels who surrounded the throne of Christ.” “In the fellowships of the brethren there developed a distinctive musical life.”⁶⁰ The Moravian church’s creed and faith are to be found in its music.⁶¹ “From the beginning, the Moravians were a singing community.”⁶² By 1725 the Herrnhuters had their own hymnbook compiled by Zinzendorf.

Many times the gatherings would consist entirely of hours of singing. Often they would sing thematically, the leader guiding them from verse to verse of various hymns, jumping from melody to melody, following a theme. Zinzendorf called this the “song sermon” [*Liederpredigt*]. Sometimes during these *Singstunden*, or song services, Zinzendorf would improvise. Taking an idea from his sermon or a previous verse of a hymn, he would compose and dictate a hymn on the spot while standing before the congregation

during a service, leading the congregation stanza by stanza.⁶³ “During our public prayer services... if I cannot find something [appropriate] in the hymnbook, then I simply dictate a new hymn of which I previously knew nothing and which [often] is forgotten again once its purpose has been fulfilled. We prefer to worship in such a way that makes sense to our people and their changing circumstances, so that they meet God face to face.”⁶⁴ Zinzendorf’s emphasis upon singing from the heart was an encouragement to members as well not only to rely upon traditional hymns, but to compose their own. For Zinzendorf, these song services were more important than any sermon or doctrine class. Singing shared with God’s Word a certain power of divine inspiration, and was able to awaken and illumine the singing community.⁶⁵

There was instrumental music in Herrnhut as well. A brass choir performed regularly accompanied by organ, under the direction of the gifted Lutheran musician, Tobias Friedrich. “But only after 1739 [in Herrnhag] began the cantata performances with the various elements of Choir, Recitative, Aria, and Chorale along with playing on stringed and wood-wind instruments.”⁶⁶ At special events, cantatas were performed in which soloists, choirs and whole communities took turns, accompanied by instruments. Especially significant was the cantata performed at the laying of the cornerstone for the Choir house for single men in 1739. The music was composed by Philipp Heinrich Molther, and the words by Zinzendorf. At the dedication of the Bethlehem brotherhouse on July 7, 1742 in the Pennsylvania wilderness, the members performed a cantata.

Mention should be made of Zinzendorf's contributions as a gifted liturgist. He created a vast variety of new liturgical forms: for Sunday preaching services, Prayer services, Reading services, Bible study services for the Choirs, Song services, the Lord's Supper services, and Easter morning celebration. Zinzendorf looked to the early church as the basis for services devoted to the Love Feast, Footwashing, and the Kiss of Peace. Soon the various liturgical forms were gathered together in a book called, *Liturgiebüchlein*, or *The Small Liturgy Book*, so that each member could have it in their hand. It went through many editions as Zinzendorf continued to make changes and add new forms.⁶⁷ Zinzendorf especially began to demonstrate his liturgical abilities after the move to Herrnhag.⁶⁸ Here he had the opportunity to plan community life from scratch. Between 1739 and 1744 Zinzendorf created liturgical forms for the most important Christian events. For the first time he broke free of the order of the Mass, the basis of the Lutheran liturgy, and drew on other liturgical traditions such as the Ambrosian *Te Deum* of the Litany.⁶⁹

A prominent example of Zinzendorf's liturgical work is the *Liturgy for Easter Morning*, based on Luther's Smaller Catechism. The *Liturgy for Easter Morning* is recognized as concisely summarizing Moravian beliefs.⁷⁰ The liturgy begins with the *Lord's Prayer*, and moves to the second article of the Nicene Creed:

I believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God through whom all things were made. I believe that he became flesh and dwelt among us and took on the image of a man through the overshadowing of the holy spirit, borne by the virgin Mary...And

being found in appearance as a man was tempted in every way as we are, but without sins....He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, in the spirit preached to the spirits in prison...On the third day he rose again from the dead, entered heaven and sits at the Father's right hand; he will come again just as he went.⁷¹

After responses inviting Christ to come, there follows the third article of the Creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and whom our Lord Jesus sent after his resurrection to abide with us forever...To him be glory in the church which is in Christ, the holy catholic Christian Church, in the communion of saints from all time, forever and ever. Amen

I believe that I am able to believe and come to Jesus Christ, my Lord, not of my own reason or strength but that the Holy Spirit calls me through the Gospel.⁷²

Zinzendorf took great interest in matters of architecture and building as well. In a typical Moravian church hall there was no pulpit; the preacher/ worship leader would give his sermon while sitting down. Beside the speaker sat the other leaders of the community. Men and women sat separately.

Maternal Imagery for the Holy Spirit and Women's Roles

Zinzendorf conceived of the Godhead as a heavenly family, including Father (God), Mother (Holy Spirit), and Son (Christ), to whom the Daughter-in-law (the Church) is married.⁷³ For Zinzendorf the Holy Spirit was Mother in three senses. *First*, the Spirit was the true mother of

Jesus, “preparing him in the womb and giving him into the arms of his mother,” Mary. *Second*, the Spirit is the mother of all living things in the ongoing act of creation. *Third*, the Holy Spirit is the mother of the Church and all those who are reborn. The Spirit is the “active agent in conversion.”⁷⁴ “Zinzendorf’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as mother of the Church was expressed liturgically in the *Brüdergemeine* through hymns and litanies devoted to the Spirit.”⁷⁵ When critics asked why the mother office of the Holy Spirit had not been noticed by Christians until the time of Zinzendorf and the *Brüdergemeine* if it was so clear in the Bible, Zinzendorf responded simply: the Spirit “waited for the right time to clarify this biblical truth.” “It happened with this as with a hundred other truths” that lay hidden within God’s revelation until the proper time.⁷⁶

Atwood has argued that, “The use of maternal imagery for the Holy Spirit was not a tangential or [short-lived] aspect of Zinzendorf’s theology, but thrived for more than thirty years and was, in Zinzendorf’s words, ‘an extremely important and essential point...and all our *Gemeine* and praxis hangs on this point.’”⁷⁷ However, the Mother metaphor virtually disappeared in the *Brüdergemeine* after 1774, at least in public. There was concern that this expression would bring reproach to the *Brüdergemeine* from other churches. Following Zinzendorf’s death, “as leadership grew more cautious and concerned about public opinion, the mother metaphor was one aspect of the Zinzendorf tradition that was rather quickly repressed.”⁷⁸

This Mother office of the Holy Spirit helps to explain the enhanced status that women enjoyed

in Herrnhut and Bethlehem. The power and status of women in the *Brüdergemeine* was greatly enhanced compared to contemporary society at the time. “In their inclusion of women in the work of the church, the Herrnhuters were far ahead of their time.”⁷⁹ Also among Moravians in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, scholars find that “male and female roles were much more symmetrical than in any other colonial society, including the Quakers.”⁸⁰

This was evident in 18th century Moravian communities in several ways. Women were sometimes chosen to exercise independently the pastoral care of sympathizers meeting in outlying communities, often preaching to these groups. In Herrnhut itself, women took part in the confirmation of young girls, and sometimes preached at these services. Women held higher leadership roles at every level of the Moravian community: at the Conference level, at the community council level, and at the Synod level. Women were appointed to undertake the pastoral care of other women, including counseling and instruction. In the women’s Choirs, women oversaw devotions, worship, love feasts, and counseling, “as would a Pastor his church.”⁸¹

Anna Nitschmann, one of the most important female leaders of the international Moravian community, was referred to commonly as *Mutter*. She was elected eldress in 1730 at age 15 and remained leader of single women in the *Brüdergemeine* until her marriage to Zinzendorf in 1756. Women administered the houses in which single and widowed women resided in their Choirs, managing their various craft industries.⁸² Almost all positions in Herrnhut were filled in a twofold manner, with one man and one

woman in each, with women playing key roles in the leadership and administration of Moravian communities.⁸³

During the early communal period in the Moravian community in Bethlehem, Pa., the ideals for men and women were “virtually identical.”⁸⁴ Both men and women were to develop a humble relationship with Christ; both were to spend their lives serving the Community with their gifts and talents; after marriage, men and women served together as husband and wife teams, doing similar work in service to the community. Zinzendorf called Moravians “fighters” (*Streiter*) for God; and marriage was “marriage militant” (*Streiterehe*).⁸⁵

Raising children was a communal enterprise, and no more the mother’s duty than the father’s.⁸⁶ Even nursing mothers could pursue “the same outwardly directed lives focused on the needs of the Gemeinde that they had led before their children were born.” Anton Böhler and his mother are an example of this. “Little Anton Böhler traveled with his mother at least 1,000 miles before he was born while she went about her duties as a missionary... Before Anton was a year old, he had made five trips back and forth between Bethlehem and Philadelphia...such trips required two days each way. As infants grew, unrelated adults...took an active part in their upbringing. Anton’s biography names 10 adults besides his parents who played with him, sang to him, gave him medicine for an eye infection, reprimanded him, wrote songs for him on his 1st birthday, and prayed for him both before and during his final illness.”⁸⁷ The early Moravians freed parents from responsibility for their children so they could work in the Gemeinde. At age 4 or 5

children joined Boys’ and Girls’ Choirs.

Nevertheless, there was not complete equality of the sexes among the Moravians. Women were not allowed to assume the chief leadership position in the community. Likewise, the main teaching office was closed to women in the larger community, although in smaller communities and on the mission field women assumed the preaching role.⁸⁸ In Bethlehem the principles for married people reflected the sexual hierarchy “typical of colonial society in general”: “The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ of the *Gemeine*...The wife is entrusted to his care in spiritual and physical matters. He must treat her with understanding.”⁸⁹ While we should recognize the remarkable opportunities that existed for Moravian women, full equality awaited a later time. Throughout Moravian history women’s roles have varied widely in degree of egalitarianism and opportunity compared to those for men.

Ecumenism

The third aspect of Moravian community that impresses us as being ahead of its time is its ecumenism. Zinzendorf intended the community in Herrnhut to be “an ecumenical risk and model.”⁹⁰ It was an ecumenical experiment in Christian unity, whose greatest affirmation and fulfillment would only come about two hundred years later with the rise of the Ecumenical Movement.

Even as a young man, Zinzendorf was influenced (probably by his grandmother) by the Philadelphian ideal of brotherly love that superseded all denominational differences.⁹¹ Zinzendorf made several efforts to bring unity

to divided Christians: he tried to restore peace to two warring faculties of theology, the orthodox faculty in Wittenberg, and the Pietist faculty in Halle; and he tried to bring about unity among the various German denominations in Pennsylvania. After these failures, he determined no longer to seek an organizational union of Christian denominations and confessions; rather, he encouraged Christians in the various churches to work together in living out their common faith in community.⁹²

Zinzendorf placed his emphasis upon the invisible church founded in Christ, the “community of God in the Spirit” (“*Gemeine Gottes im Geist*”). The various “Religions” or denominations were simply necessary expressions throughout history which represent the invisible community from various angles and in various degrees: “The beauty of the invisible church becomes apparent in the variety of the denominations; the invisible church, like a crystal ball, refracts its beauty in the variety of Christian confessions...That Zinzendorf could be so positive in his judgment of the various churches and traditions and not withdraw to an antagonistic mentality...as some radical Pietists did, constitutes much of his importance for us today.”⁹³

Like Wesley and the early Methodists, Zinzendorf never intended to found a new church. Zinzendorf was not inclined to separate from the Lutheran church; he always considered himself a member of the Lutheran confession. The Herrnhut community worshipped at the Lutheran parish church in Berthelsdorf on Sundays, took communion there and had their children baptized there. Herein lies Zinzendorf’s

uniqueness compared to many separatist reformers of his day who were disdainful of the failings of the state churches. In this he differed from such restitutionist groups as the Quakers, the Baptists, and the Mennonites.

So, what role did the community in Herrnhut (*Brüdergemeine*) play in his ecumenical ideal? It was not just another church or denomination, but a kind of “experimental station” where the various Christian groups could come together and discover their commonalities. The Moravians sought to serve the denominations by leading them to the central issue: loyalty to Christ. Rather than seeking to convert or proselytize Christians to join an organization, they encouraged individual believers to experience a living contact with Christ.

Herrnhut is founded by God the Holy Spirit in order to bring souls to the Saviour. There we deal directly with people’s hearts and do not concern ourselves with any one Religion (denomination); each one remains in his own tradition. But because in some places the tyranny of the clergy is so great, and toleration [of some Pietist groups] has been withdrawn in some places...therefore places of refuge are necessary where people can live in peace.⁹⁴

Zinzendorf’s ecumenical vision was also a global vision. This point cannot be addressed to the degree it deserves. Suffice it to observe that Zinzendorf’s global vision was also ahead of his time. He has rightly been described as “a pioneer of world mission.”⁹⁵ “As early as 1732 two members went to St. Thomas on the Virgin Islands; missions were also established in Greenland, North America

(1734), South America (1735), South Africa (1736), Labrador (1752), Australia (1850), and Tibet (1856)...The proportion of missionaries to home communicants has been estimated as 1:60 compared with 1:5000 in the rest of Protestantism.”⁹⁶ This global outlook, including all cultures and races in the family of God, eventually gave rise to a Moravian community with independent provinces in Africa and the Americas.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study I indicated that my purpose was to spell out how the 18th century Moravian community was ahead of its time and how it might serve as a model for Christian community today. The most impressive feature of early Moravian spirituality was the way in which the Moravian community embodied Zinzendorf’s ideas on Christian worship, gender equality and ecumenism. I agree with Peter Vogt: “While some of Zinzendorf’s ideas now appear obscure and obsolete, others, such as the image of the Holy Spirit as ‘mother,’ his appreciation of the historic character of Holy Scripture, have been re-discovered for contemporary theology.”⁹⁷ I think we should add to that list the Count’s views on equality of gender and class, and his belief that the children of God are one in Christ across all ethnic and denominational boundaries.

Endnotes

¹ This article originated as the Swanson Lecture on Christian Spirituality, 3 March 2003 at Good Shepherd Community Church (Moravian), Calgary.

² Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

1990), 109.

³ Keith Ward, *Religion and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 356.

⁴ Ward, 4-5.

⁵ Ward, 361.

⁶ Ward, 361.

⁷ See Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1989), 168.

⁸ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 237.

⁹ JGG Norman, “Moravians,” in J.D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 676.

¹⁰ Peter Vogt, “Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf,” (Lecture delivered Feb. 16, 2003), 1.

¹¹ Hans Schneider, “Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf als Gestalt der Kirchen-geschichte,” in Dietrich Meyer and Paul Peucker, ed., *Graf Ohne Grenzen: Leben und Werk von Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf* (Herrnhut: Unitätsarchiv in Herrnhut, 2000), 10. See also Wallmann, 110.

¹² Dietrich Meyer, “Zinzendorf und Herrnhut,” *Der Pietismus im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 8.

¹³ Wallmann, 110.

¹⁴ Wallmann, 110.

¹⁵ Zinzendorf, “Kurze Generalidee meiner Absichten und Handlungen,” in D. Meyer, ed. *Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf: Er der Meister, Wir die Brüder* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2000), 17.

¹⁶ Wallmann, 111.

¹⁷ Wallmann, 112.

¹⁸ “The Religious boundaries created by the Peace of Westphalia lasted essentially until the population upheavals unleashed by the Second World War.” See Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 70.

¹⁹ W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 124.

²⁰ W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 125; Wallmann, 113. Thanks to the preaching of a Pietist friend of Zinzendorf, the Lutheran preacher in nearby Berthelsdorf Johann Andreas Rothe (1688-1758), Zinzendorf’s estate became a gathering place for Pietist preachers. By 1734 the total number on the estate grew to 600.

²¹ Wallmann, 113.

²² Zinzendorf, “Kurze Generalidee meiner Absichten und Handlungen,” pp. 22f.

²³ W.R. Ward, 125.

²⁴ Wallmann, 113.

²⁵ Wallmann, 114.

²⁶ In his 1526 Preface to the German Mass, Luther wrote: “The third kind of Service which a truly Evangelical Church Order should have would be...for those who mean to be real Christians and profess the Gospel with hand and mouth. They would record their names on a list and meet by themselves in some house in order to pray, read, baptize, receive the Sacrament and do other Christian works.” See Luther, “The German Mass and Order of Service, 1526,” in Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 125.

²⁷ Wallmann, 115.

²⁸ Beverly Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 10.

²⁹ *Graf ohne Grenzen*, 189.

³⁰ W.R. Ward, 127.

³¹ W.R. Ward, 127. “...through Susanne Kühnel an extraordinary movement arose in their assembly which became daily more true and serious. In particular there was to be heard on the night of 29 August from ten at night till one in the morning a heart-rending praying and singing by the girls of Berthelsdorf and Herrnhut upon the Hutberg. At the same time the boys were at prayer in other places. So powerful a spirit prevailed among the children as is beyond words to express.”

³² Dietrich Meyer, *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, 1700-2000* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 15.

³³ W.R. Ward, pp. 117, 123

³⁴ Dietrich Meyer, ed., *Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf; Er der Meister, wir die Brüder* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2000), 230.

³⁵ There were three great periods of literary controversy against German Pietists: in the 1680s and 1690s opposition was aimed largely at Spener; in the first decade of the 18th century opposition was focussed on Francke and Halle; in the 1740s opposition was directed against Zinzendorf. See W.R. Ward, 201.

³⁶ Zinzendorf, “Das Leiden Christi als das brüderische Leitmotiv” (1747), in Dietrich Meyer, ed., *Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von*

Zinzendorf; *Er der Meister, wir die Brüder* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2000), 231.

³⁷ Zinzendorf, “Das Leiden Christi als das brüderische Leitmotiv” (1747), pp. 231, 234.

³⁸ Craig D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (State University, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 6.

³⁹ D. Meyer, *Er der Meister, Wir die Brüder*, pp. 337f.

⁴⁰ Smaby, xv.

⁴¹ Smaby, xv.

⁴² Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 5.

⁴³ Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 7

⁴⁴ Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 3.

⁴⁵ Peter Vogt, “Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf” (Lecture delivered on Feb. 16, 2003), 4.

⁴⁶ Vogt, “Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf,” p. 15.

⁴⁷ Dietrich Meyer, *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, 1700-2000* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 158.

⁴⁸ Dietrich Meyer, “Zinzendorf und Herrnhut,” *Der Pietismus im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 8.

⁴⁹ Meyer, “Zinzendorf und Herrnhut,” p. 92 n.110.

⁵⁰ W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), chapters 4 and 5.

⁵¹ W.R. Ward, pp. 141f.

⁵² *Graf ohne Grenzen*, 189.

⁵³ Peter Vogt, “Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf,” (A Public lecture on 16 Feb. 2003), 15.

⁵⁴ Hans-Christoph Hahn and Hellmut Reichel, *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder: Quellen zur Geschichte der Brüder-Unität von 1722 bis 1760* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1977), 216.

⁵⁵ Hahn and Reichel, 218.

⁵⁶ Hahn and Reichel, 210.

⁵⁷ Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 141.

⁵⁸ Quoted by Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” *Church History* 68 (1999): 886-909, 899.

⁵⁹ Dietrich Meyer notes that, “Only in recent times have scholars begun to assess the large music collection in the Unity Archive and to make it available for performance.” Meyer, 52.

⁶⁰ *Graf ohne Grenzen*, 193.

⁶¹ *Graf ohne Grenzen*, 189.

⁶² Hahn and Reichel, 220.

⁶³ Hahn and Reichel, 220.

⁶⁴ Hahn and Reichel, 222.

⁶⁵ Hahn & Reichel, 220.

⁶⁶ D. Meyer, 52.

⁶⁷ Wallmann, 115, and Hahn and Reichel, 216.

⁶⁸ Forced to leave Herrnhut in 1736, Zinzendorf found welcome in the Wetterau region of Germany, settling in Herrnhag.

⁶⁹ D. Meyer, 51. See Atwood, “Theology in Song,” in *The Distinctiveness of Moravian Culture* (Nazareth, Pa.: Moravian Historical Society, 2002) for translations of these litanies.

- ⁷⁰ C. Daniel Crews, *Zinzendorf: The Theology of Song* (Winston-Salem: Moravian Archives, 1999), 3.
- ⁷¹ Zinzendorf, "Liturgie am Ostermorgen," Meyer, *Er der Meister, Wir die Brüder* (2000), 344.
- ⁷² Zinzendorf, "Liturgie am Ostermorgen," p. 345.
- ⁷³ Hahn and Reichel, 297.
- ⁷⁴ Atwood, "The Mother of God's People," *Church History* (Dec. 1999), pp. 886-909. See Gary Kinkel, *Our Dear Mother the Spirit* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990) for a discussion of this aspect of Zinzendorf in its Lutheran context.
- ⁷⁵ Atwood, "The Mother of God's People," 899.
- ⁷⁶ Atwood, "The Mother of God's People," 892.
- ⁷⁷ Atwood, "The Mother of God's People," 887.
- ⁷⁸ Atwood, "The Mother of God's People," 909.
- ⁷⁹ Martin Jung, *Frauen des Pietismus: Zehn Porträts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 51. "In der Einbeziehung der Frauen in die kirchliche Arbeit waren die Herrnhuter ihrer Zeit weit voraus."
- ⁸⁰ Smaby, 13
- ⁸¹ Martin Jung, 52.
- ⁸² Zinzendorf divided the community into Choirs, each Choir having their own pastors and leaders, their own worship meetings and sometimes their own residences. *Graf ohne Grenzen*, pp. 191f.
- ⁸³ Jung, 51.
- ⁸⁴ Beverly Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 170.
- ⁸⁵ Smaby, 159, 170.
- ⁸⁶ Smaby, 170.
- ⁸⁷ Smaby, 146 f.
- ⁸⁸ Hahn and Reichel, 292 f.
- ⁸⁹ Smaby, 168.
- ⁹⁰ D. Meyer, 159. "Für Zinzendorf war die Gemeinde in Herrnhut ein ökumenisches Wagnis und Modell. Die spätere Entwicklung hat gezeigt, in welchem erstaunlichem Maße dieser Impuls auf die Kirchen gewirkt hat."
- ⁹¹ W.R. Ward, 121.
- ⁹² Hahn and Reichel, 373.
- ⁹³ Hahn and Reichel, 373.
- ⁹⁴ Hahn and Reichel, 376. As Peter Vogt notes: "Zinzendorf insisted that the [Moravians] form an interconfessional brotherhood rather than a church. Its specific purpose was precisely to gather believers from various confessional backgrounds without abrogating their confessional identity." See Peter Vogt, "Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf," 11.
- ⁹⁵ Schneider, 13.
- ⁹⁶ JGG Norman, "Moravians," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*.
- ⁹⁷ Vogt, 1, 4, 15.

Responses

Joseph L. Moore

I was thrilled to read Professor Shantz's article on the role of the 18th century Moravian community as an inspiration for modern day understanding of gender, worship and ecumenism in the church. It is my belief that too often in the Moravian Church we use our rich history as a merely a quaint glimpse of a charming past. Our history can be much more. It can be used to give us insight into our current challenges and guidance into an uncertain future.

Professor Shantz uses as the foundation for his article a study by Keith Ward, *Religion and Community*. As part of his study, Ward calls for the church of the 21st century to be marked by "a new ecumenical or global paradigm, for which the old divisions of Christendom are largely relegated to history...within such a paradigm, the church would be more self-critical, recognizing the historical conditionality of its formulations and the symbolic nature of many of its basic images. It would be more openly plural, accepting a diversity of religious insights, and seeking positive interaction between them...it would be committed to social structures making for liberation and fulfillment for all humans...it would consist of those who have been grasped by a vision of the ultimate goodness of a suffering and universally loving God, of the ultimate hope for the whole world of sharing in the life of God...they will accept that their primary vocation is to witness to the universal love of God in a world of many disputes and many destructive hatreds."

Shantz argues that the Moravian church of the 18th century, specifically the Herrnhut community, was a precursor of Ward's vision. By fulfilling the vision of the 21st century church in the 18th century, Shantz believes that the Moravian Church was "truly a church ahead of their time."

Professor Shantz does a good job of examining the aspects of how the Moravian Church developed in the 18th century. By combining the unique biography of Zinzendorf (and his peculiar philosophy and theology) with the arrival of persecuted Christians from Moravia on Zinzendorf's estate, Shantz shows how the community of Herrnhut was formed into an 18th century model of the church we need to strive towards in the 21st century. His focus is on three areas that are often the source of conflict and struggle in the modern church: worship, gender, and ecumenism.

"Zinzendorf was convinced that the common worship experiences of the community had a greater impact than the experiences of the individual." This conviction gave rise to the liturgical nature of Moravian worship. Worship in the 18th century Moravian Church was centered on the singing of hymns and corporate prayers. The theology of the Moravian Church was not systematically spelled out in written form. It was expressed through the words and music of the hymns of the united community. The belief of the church was expressed by the joining of hearts and voices rather than by arguing until intellectual

consensus and academic agreement are reached. The focus was on the communal experience of worship rather than the individual experience.

I found Shantz's point on this matter to be especially relevant to the challenges facing the Moravian Church as we confront the 21st century. There is a real danger in ceding to the desire to elevate the worship experience of the individual over that of the community. This change in the focus of worship is evidenced by a shift from "we" language to "I" language. This implies a separation and removal of the individual from the community. When this separation occurs, the experience of worship becomes an exercise in trying to meet one's own spiritual needs rather than a chance for the gathered believers to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. In worship that is focused on the experiences of the individual instead of the community, the individual's need to receive from God takes precedence over the community's need to give back to God out of gratitude for what we have already been received. The church can not effectively do the work that it is called by Christ to do when our focus is on ourselves rather than on others.

Shantz's second area of focus is on the role of gender in the Herrnhut community. He argues that the "power and status of women in the *Brudergemeine* was greatly enhanced compared to contemporary society at the time." Much of this enhanced power and status was grounded in Zinzendorf's theological understanding of the Godhead as a heavenly family with the Father (God), the Mother (Holy Spirit) and the Son (Christ). This belief led to men and women both holding equal roles in the Herrnhut community. One man and one woman filled each leadership

position in the church and community. Even though Zinzendorf's theology of the Trinity as a family has disappeared from the Moravian church, some of its effect on our understanding of gender as relates to church leadership is beginning to re-emerge. The view of men and women as having equal responsibility in church leadership is necessary in the 21st century.

As a pastor serving in team ministry with my wife, I can certainly see the advantages of this approach. Men and women bring different sensitivities and understandings to all areas of church life: worship, theology, pastoral care, fellowship, and education. It is most valuable to provide leadership and understanding in such a way that we can meet people where they are and not force them into being where we are. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by providing both male and female leadership. This was shown in the 18th century Moravian church and is slowly returning to the 21st century church.

This brings us to Shantz's third point: ecumenism. The Moravian community in Herrnhut was not seen as a church or denomination as much as it was a place where "various Christian groups could come together and discover their commonalities." When many of our Christian denominations are focused on what divides and separates us, it is refreshing to recall that our Moravian ancestors were focused on things that unite. This allowed their focus to be on loyalty to Christ, rather than on loyalty to church or denomination. In our modern world, this distinction is difficult to maintain. We are so caught up in our society's need and desire for competition that we lose sight of our main purpose and calling: to serve our Lord and Savior,

Jesus Christ. The 18th century Moravians were concerned with leading people to Christ, not with leading people to the Moravian church. Belief in Christ was placed far above any adherence to any customs or practices of the church or community. And this allowed for the customs and practices that arose during this time to have a much greater depth of meaning because they were grounded in their common beliefs.

I see Professor Shantz's article as a challenge and a call to the modern day Moravian church. It is a challenge to re-examine our past and to use the lessons taught by our ancestors to move our church into the 21st century. If the Moravian

church can reclaim its past, we can once again become pioneers of a new vision of the church that is largely based upon the ideas and beliefs of our predecessors. We can re-establish a sense of communal worship focused upon the needs of the community to give rather than on the need of the individual to receive. We can continue to stress the importance of gender equality in the leadership of the Christian church. And we reach out to others by focusing more upon what we have in common, our unity in Christ as Lord and Savior, than on the non-essentials that divide us. Professor Shantz's use of our history calls us to use our past to propel us into the future.

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Donna Hurt

When Dr. Shantz had the opportunity recently to immerse himself in our church's story, he obviously developed a deep admiration for the customs and ethos of the Moravian community in the 18th century. I can truly understand his excitement, for I experienced a similar sensation, only mine was on the re-entry level, and the century was the 20th.

Chapter one of my life belonged to the Moravian Church where I was involved in nearly every 'church thing' a child or youth could do. But as a young adult, chapter two thrust me beyond Moravian territory, meaning I had to join another denomination. At the time, it didn't seem to matter as I grew in faith and served that church in numerous ways for 25 years. (Well, I

must admit it *did* matter during the Christmas Eve services, when I stood there holding a stumpy white candle encircled by a piece of cardboard that felt a million miles removed from sweet-smelling beeswax and red crepe paper.)

Then, God's tug on my heart toward fulltime ministry sent me back to school where I earned a master's degree in Christian Education. Finally, with no idea that any such thing would happen, chapter three brought me back home with my first call as a DCE. Once again I thrive spiritually within the *Unitas Fratrum*.

In reading Douglas Shantz's commentary, it's clear that he found excitement as he discovered Moravians of long ago, rather similar to how I've experienced repeated blessings through re-discovery of my roots over the last few years.

Only now do I realize that my earlier religious formation had tucked away special treasures within my heart. For example, soon after reclaiming my Moravian citizenship, the first time we sang ‘Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice,’ I was dumbstruck to discover that EVERY WORD was already ingrained in my memory! Add to that the fact that I never had to look in the book to sing ‘Morning Star’ and ‘Hosanna.’ Another example is that a plethora of emotions resurfaced when I returned to our denomination and once again was able to experience Jesus’ last days through Holy Week readings, crowned by the victorious celebration on Easter morning (not to mention the thrill of the band playing outside my window at 4:00 a.m.).

As an educator, I’m often called upon to teach about our church, especially our history and culture, and particularly to those who know very little about our denomination. These opportunities are some of my favorites! And based on his statement that “Moravians were a church ahead of their time and provide a model for Christian community today,” I think that Dr. Shantz feels as energized as I do when he has the opportunity to tell our story to new listeners (especially the foundational Herrnhut and Zinzendorf part).

“Moravians are known outside their church for several reasons,” explains Shantz. The first three he mentions are round-the-clock prayer vigil (or Unity Prayer Watch), Daily Texts, and worldwide missions. All of these are vivid examples of our church’s intercultural nature, with the added plus of our unity across those cultures. By the way, I want our author to know that Moravians are up and running again on the

round-the-clock prayers, as testified by one who took a turn just after midnight on her birthday this year!

Allow me to share a personal example of unity across the cultures. A German couple moved to Mt. Airy and started attending Grace Church. They had their German copy of the Daily Texts, but wanted an English copy, which I got for them. When we compared the books published in two different countries and saw that the scripture passages matched, I was filled with awe. Of course I knew that was supposed to be the case, but actually seeing it was a huge reminder that the Unitas Fratrum is truly connected across the continents, from one province to another.

A second personal example: Our first missionaries went to the Virgin Islands in 1732, and I was there involved in mission work on behalf of our church the summer of 1962. During that time, I lived for several weeks with a Moravian family on St. John. I have never forgotten the loving care shown to me by that family, parents and two children, who were so different from me in color and culture and had very little in the way of worldly goods. You can imagine how elated I was when, several years ago at the Moravian Women’s Conference with people from nearly every province represented, I happened to meet someone from St. John who knew my special family. Once again I was overcome with a sense of our connectedness. I have worshipped in many of our sanctuaries in the Eastern West Indies, numerous German Moravian Saals (including Herrnhut) and several in the Czech Republic, a few of our historical churches in Pennsylvania, and even a rather primitive worship room in Ahuas, Honduras. In every location I felt a deep

sense of belonging as soon as I saw our Moravian seal, no matter the language inscribed upon it.

Brother Shantz highlights one of Zinzendorf's trademarks when he reminds us that "liturgy was the primary way in which the doctrine of the church was communicated." For the Count, "the truths of the Christian religion were best articulated in poetry and song, not in systematic theology." His influence continues still in that regard. Open our current *Book of Worship* and you'll find three dozen liturgies to help us focus on a particular time of the church year or on a specific theme. For nearly three centuries, our denomination has expressed what it believes communally through liturgies and hymn texts; in fact, I'd say those are our Moravian creeds.

Being a music lover myself, I would have been right there with Zinzendorf for the *Singstunden* of the early days. Actually, I did get to step back in time of sorts, when I worshipped in the Königsfeld Church a few years ago on my trip to Moravian sites in Germany. Every week without interruption for nearly two hundred years that congregation has gathered on Saturday night for a *Singstunde*, which Zinzendorf called a 'song sermon'. The bulletin that I still have shows that we sang part of a hymn, heard some Scripture, then sang selections from eleven other hymns, whichever verses spoke to the message or theme of the service. I now realize that our communion services and lovefeasts were birthed

directly from this format. So were our liturgies in a broader sense.

Zinzendorf encouraged Moravians to scatter across the lands sharing the gospel and their heart religion. That message eventually made it to North America, specifically North Carolina, so that today I am blessed to be one of the beneficiaries. For me, there is abundant joy in being a Moravian Christian. It's about the unique and meaningful way we celebrate communion, and it's about our lovefeasts. It's about the openness of our church bands: intergenerational, male and female, varying levels of ability, all invited to make music. It's about what our graveyards symbolize and how everyone seems to know our blessing. It's about the fact that gender does not matter on the congregational level or when we call forth pastors, bishops, and provincial leaders. It's about our heritage, our love for mission and belief in community. It's about our hymns, our memoirs, and our liturgies, especially the one that says "The Lord is risen indeed!"

I know that the professor already has a church connection, but since Dr. Shantz had such a *personally rich experience* immersed in 'Moravianism' back in 2002, I would almost feel remiss if I didn't follow up on that by inviting him to join in worship with one of our congregations in his area. You never know, one visit might lead to another, especially when there's already a special appreciation for this small band of Christians. As for me, I hope I'm home to stay.

Donna Hurt is DCE of the Mt. Airy Moravian Church and a lay member of the Provincial Elders Conference of the Southern Province.

Glen Stoult

It seems a worthy endeavor to contemplate our long and rich Moravian history, in the hope of discovering anew a few notes of spiritual identity which still resonate in the church today. And it feels especially gratifying when those threads from the past are not only visible in the current fabric of our church but also available to be woven into the future of Christian community. Any historical grounding of contemporary issues evokes a sense of stability and authenticity in our current and future search for meaningful ministry, and justifiably so. In this spirit, Shantz's article attempts to do just that, by exploring three distinct arenas of Zinzendorfian fascination and applying them to present day concerns; to some degree, he succeeds.

Not being a historian, I am conscious of the potential pitfalls in reading something into our history that might be hinted at, but not necessarily present. There is always the temptation to make too much of what we discover, and overstate its relative significance. Throughout the article I found myself wondering how the historians among us would react to some of Schantz's assumptions. For example, in his introduction, Shantz suggests that "these early Moravians were *innovators* (emphasis mine) in their practice of Christianity. They were a church ahead of their time." Most of us would agree that, historically speaking, there is truth in this idea. Certainly the innovations of our forebears *in their day* are noteworthy. The efforts of Hus, Comenius, Luke of Prague, and Zinzendorf, to name only a few, set in motion and helped shape the ever-evolving movement that has become the Moravian Church. Nevertheless, when Shantz continues by

suggesting that 18th century Moravians, "provide a model for Christian community in the 21st century," he may be overstating any reasonable application of our history to the present day. This is especially evident in considering some of Zinzendorf's more fanciful theological and ecclesiastical ideas referred to in his essay.

In his defense, Shantz writes provocatively of Moravian history in order to address some significant global concerns of the present and future age. He gathers those issues under the banner of "Gender, Worship and Ecumenism," but he also hints at others, including "non-dogmatic liturgical Christianity ... in a day of bitter religious ... disputes," and a new sense of "piety shaped by exile and focused on ... Christ." I recognize his desire to challenge this present generation of Moravians so we might reconsider our heritage and apply it anew as our legacy to the current development of Christian community. For this encouragement we can all be grateful, regardless of any individual disagreements we may have with Shantz's point of view. Perhaps we can listen to Shantz as Zinzendorf listened to other religious leaders, with an open mind and heart, in order "to attain a better and more benign understanding of their teachings and what might be removed as a hindrance to godliness."

Still, there are some peculiarities in Shantz's interpretation of Moravian history which cause me to question his grasp of our faith tradition as a whole. The most obvious is his reference to Zinzendorf as "the founder of the Moravian Church," and I wonder how much Shantz is aware of the 300 year history of the Ancient Unity. He does refer later to the Moravian refugees "led by the carpenter and Pietistic

Catholic convert Christian David,” who were welcomed by Zinzendorf at Berthelsdorf in 1722. In addition, he acknowledges that Moravians were just one group among other Protestant refugees who, under Zinzendorf’s guidance established the settlement of Herrnhut (an important distinction occasionally downplayed in some popular histories), and that they were “founded some sixty years before the Protestant Reformation.” Yet, I get the impression that Shantz considers this ancient history, to which these references point, as inconsequential. As significant as Zinzendorf’s influence may have been on Moravian history, it is not the starting point, perhaps not even concerning the matters which Shantz addresses.

Regarding the effect of Zinzendorf’s sometimes eccentric theology on the 18th century Moravian community, it was helpful to see described these two enduring ideals: “a child-like Christocentric piety focused on the wounds of Jesus, and a diverse community that provided a model to the world of Christian cooperation and ecumenism.” Many of us are aware of the ongoing discussions concerning Zinzendorf’s “‘blood and wounds’ theology of the heart,” and of the recent reconsiderations encouraged by Moravian theologian and historian, Craig Atwood. At the risk of oversimplifying, Shantz attempts to focus Zinzendorf’s primary contribution as the emphasis on an enduring, intimate, personal relationship with Christ that is known more through “liturgical practice” (public worship) than through doctrinal teachings.

Of equal importance, though, according to Shantz, is Zinzendorf’s “greatest achievement:” “his organization of the Moravian community

‘as a living embodiment of his theological ideas.” Shantz contends that “Zinzendorf was convinced that the common worship experiences of the community had a greater impact than the experiences of the individual,” and that this shaped the community, its worship, and its theology. Certainly in an environment, like the one we currently live in, which accentuates personal faith, personal salvation, and personal relationship with Christ as personal savior, our Moravian appreciation of the centrality of communal liturgical experience is engaging. As personal as the relationship with Christ may be, in the Moravian context it is not private.

When Shantz finally addresses his thesis, well over half way through the article, I found his consideration of Moravian liturgy and worship less than compelling. The central place of music and hymns in the worship life of the community was articulated clearly enough, including the acknowledgment that “the Moravian church’s creed and faith are to be found in its music.” But he did not adequately develop the stated idea of a “nondogmatic liturgical Christianity” as a means of helping shape a 21st century model for Christian community. Aside from suggesting the empowering effect of the “song sermon ... (as possessing) a certain power of divine inspiration ... to awaken and illumine the singing community,” he gives no obvious application to the current scene. I was grateful to be reminded of Zinzendorf’s innovative and spontaneous approach to composing new songs and not just relying upon traditional hymns, as well as his preference “to worship in such a way that makes sense to our people and their changing circumstances, so that they meet God

face to face.” These were the closest Shantz came to contemporizing Zinzendorf’s theology of worship, and as laudable as they may be, several other Christian traditions have long since assumed leadership roles in the contemporary worship scene.

With regard to gender roles, and in particular, affirming women in leadership, we have embraced (in many provinces of the Moravian Church) the spirit of our 18th century ancestors, by continuing to work toward a more equitable appreciation of the roles of women and men within Christian community. That the status of women in Herrnhut was above the cultural norm for their day should encourage us to continue striving for this justice issue in our day. Concerning Zinzendorf’s maternal imagery of the Holy Spirit, I was disappointed that Shantz did not use his succinct description of Zinzendorf’s theology to challenge our 21st century Moravian Church in its predominantly masculine references to the divine, especially given his observation that “this Mother office of the Holy Spirit helps to explain the enhanced status that women enjoyed in Herrnhut and Bethlehem.” Because of this legacy, Moravians today are uniquely positioned to help lead the Christian church in this matter. Still, for many this may be too inflammatory a subject to undertake, but it certainly will be an issue which succeeding generations of Moravians must address.

Finally, in Shantz’s discussion of ecumenism, Zinzendorf’s attitude of being “so positive

in his judgment of the various churches and traditions and not withdraw(ing) to an antagonistic mentality” is noteworthy. This kind of open-mindedness and open-heartedness to other doctrinal understandings, both within and without the Moravian Church, could enable us to serve as the vanguard for other confessional churches in theological tolerance and inclusion. Our faith communities could serve as “experimental station(s)” where the various Christian groups could come together and discover their commonalities,” or as “places of refuge” where “rather than seeking to convert or proselytize Christians, (we) encouraged individual believers to experience a living contact with Christ.”

All in all, when I close my eyes and imagine the Moravian Church of the 21st century, I see communities exhibiting to the world a “generous orthodoxy”¹ marked by openness and compassion; I see congregations where Christ’s love is at the heart, and where diverse ways of loving Christ are affirmed; I see places of spiritual refuge from the dogma wars of this generation, where women and men can find comfort and strength in simply worshipping God; and if that makes me a “most laughable spiritual Don Quixote,” then I suppose I’m in good company.

Endnotes

¹ Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004).

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Keith Stirewalt

A couple of months ago, I overheard a woman describing a man that she was looking for to a person on the other end of the phone. The attributes she was describing did not seem to add up to any person that I knew. Suddenly, I realized that she was describing me! I stood up quickly to spare us both further embarrassment. Her description was not uncomplimentary or inaccurate. The attributes that she used in her description, however, were not attributes that I recognized or appreciated as being accurate ways to describe me.

I had a similar reaction to the article by Douglas H. Shantz. The attributes of gender equality, ecumenism, and worship provided a striking description of the early Moravian Church. The question is, “Do these attributes sound familiar (and complimentary) to the modern North American Moravian Church?” What attributes would a non-familiar observer use to describe us now? Shantz sees the Moravian Church as the early embodiment of Keith Ward’s ideal Christian community of faith, and he describes the attributes by which Moravians historically are identified. I especially was taken by W. R. Ward’s statement that Zinzendorf’s central problem was “his universal ability to make a splendid first impression, and his universal inability to cooperate for long with men of independent mind.”

I wonder about our current ability to make a ‘splendid first impression.’ I spend most of my days surrounded by non-Moravians who are temporary or permanent transplants to Winston-Salem. I make the point to ask many of these non-Moravians what they know about us. The

overwhelming response is a description of trips to Old Salem and experiencing a Lovefeast at Christmas time. Curiously, few seem to know of our Easter sunrise services and fewer still are acquainted with our theology.

Several of these people have asked me whether we allow women to be part of the ordained ministry. Shantz’ comment is interesting: “While we should recognize the remarkable opportunities that existed for Moravian women, full equality awaited a later time.” Speaking specifically of the Southern Province, the movement of women into the ordained ministry does not betray a sense of gender equality in ordained church leadership roles. Women play an active part in much of our church leadership; however, the percentage of female pastors in the Southern Province does not reflect the gender distribution of many seminaries and divinity schools. While the current inequitable gender distribution may only be a direct function of seminary ratios and gender roles of the past, we do need to examine ourselves critically to insure that females have an equal opportunity for ordained church leadership.

Disappointingly, people often describe to me their negative experiences of visits to a variety of local Moravian churches. The common theme is the conveyance of a closed society. “No one said hello to us.” “We could not find anyone to tell us where the nursery was.” “We were told that, if we joined, we would probably not be able to _____ (help with Lovefeast, usher, serve on a church committee, etc.) for many years...maybe not ever, because these jobs are handed down.” “The people there just were not friendly.” “I’ve not been to church in decades. When I raised questions in Sunday School class, people got angry with me.

How am I supposed to learn about Christianity if I can't ask questions?"

Does this describe the type of church that you would want to visit again? Does your church environment invite someone to explore Christian community? Jesus told us that it is not the healthy, but the sick who need a physician. Asking explorers to visit only after they have accepted our theology and attitudes excludes those in need. Do we see ourselves as healthy? If we automatically exclude others because they don't think like or look like us, we are not doing our job as Christians to spread the Gospel. I'm not implying that our theology should shift purposely to make others comfortable. Some who visit will not embrace our theology or our ways. We should, however, provide inviting space to those wanting to visit or join us.

As you leave your neighborhood next Sunday, look at all the cars that won't be driven to church. As you enter your church next Sunday, put yourself in the place of an intimidated visitor. Pretend that you don't know any of the people around you. Pretend that you are not related to half of the congregation! How would you describe the Moravian Church? What would be your first impression? Would you want to come back next week and explore Christian faith in community? Or, would you choose to stay home and clean out

the gutters? When I provide these anecdotes to church members of the respective churches, the usual response is, "But this is a really friendly church! We all love each other and we love visitors!" Maybe so, but in this case our works must demonstrate our faith.

How do we represent the Moravian Church when we are at work, home, the grocery store? I had one woman come to me (unsolicited) to tell me of her experience with 'the Moravians.' A woman in a large vehicle with a Moravian Church lamb magnet cut this lady off in traffic. When the lady honked her horn in response, the 'Moravian' woman made an obscene gesture and yelled an obscenity. The 'Moravian' woman then pulled into an ABC store parking lot! The purchase price of a Moravian car magnet bears the added responsibility of church representation. Likewise, the claims of being a Christian and a Moravian bear the responsibility of carrying that claim into the ethical decisions of our work and personal lives.

To the un-churched or to those of other denominations, the first impression that we provide may be our only chance to show who we are in our hearts. Provide that splendid impression to those who visit our churches or who work beside us. Our future...their future... depends on it.

Keith Stirewalt is a student at Wake Forest Divinity School in Winston-Salem, NC.

Will Sibert

“Zinzendorf’s greatest achievement was the organization of the Moravian community as a living embodiment of his theological ideas.” Douglas Shantz thinks enough of Peter Vogt’s observation above that he quotes it twice. I appreciated Shantz’s well constructed, in-depth validation of Vogt’s point as he fleshes out Zinzendorf’s theology and its influence on the 18th century Moravian community. Shantz points to ecumenism, the role of women, and dynamic worship as emergent features of this early Moravian community, making his credible case for the Moravian community being “a church ahead of its time.”

Given Shantz’s choice of title, I would like to suggest that Vogt’s quote might as easily stated that the Moravian community was “a living embodiment of (Zinzendorf’s) ecclesiological ideas.” When Shantz notes Keith Ward’s vision for the 21st century Church as important for framing future reflection on “being church,” he believes that this community in fundamental ways reflects Ward’s vision. Ward argues this future church should represent “a new ... global paradigm... more self-critical, recognizing the historical conditionality of its formulations and the symbolic nature of many of its basic images.” Ward goes on to say that the church would consist of those “grasped by a vision” and strive to “witness to the universal love of God in a world of many disputes and many destructive hatreds.” In juxtaposing Ward’s two quotes, I also hear Shantz asking a challenging question to the contemporary North American Moravian Church: Are we willing to be sufficiently tough in our self criticism to examine whether

our historical formulations of “being church” (ecclesiology) now help or hurt our ability to embody the vision Ward lays before us as we move into the 21st century?

Early in the 20th century Martin Kähler wrote, “Mission is the mother of theology.” I read Kähler’s statement as a succinct summary of the dynamics at play in the early apostolic church. It’s struggling to work out its theological understanding of Jesus in the complex 1st century cultural milieu was driven by its mission mandate. The early Christian community being committed to God’s mission also, in a very real sense, was a community constantly reflecting and adjusting its own internal self understanding of the person Jesus and how to communicate and witness to this understanding effectively. Therefore, the community within itself was in a process of ongoing conversion or “evangelization.” Equally important, “being church” at a fundamental level becomes a missiological enterprise. Thus, the concept of “evangelization” forms the core of an ecclesiology that some now call “missional” — that the apostolic way of “being church” (ecclesiology) was focused on building up the body precisely to equip it for carrying out its mission (i.e. Ephesians 4:11-16). Any severing of inner communal “evangelization” from its outward missional/proclamation witness serves to undercut a proper understanding that Christian community has a very intentional purpose, not existing for its own sake.

Understanding “evangelization” in this way helps to bolster Shantz’s stress on the “communal faith” that shaped Herrnhut’s heart — “there is no Christianity without community.” Many of Herrnhut’s activities and structures were very

much centered on strengthening witness — *and more importantly, did so to the extent that the ratio of “missionaries to home communicants has been estimated at 1:60 compared with 1:5000 in the rest of Protestantism.”* In other words, the Moravian community with its unique combination of values created such synergy that the community literally exploded in sending its people out into the world as witnesses. However, I don’t mean to suggest that Herrnhut developed a “missional” ecclesiology self consciously. Rather, perhaps Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut leadership intuitively shaped a missional way of “being church” with their conscious reference to apostolic values. What were some of Herrnhut’s apostolic, thus “missional” values one is able to lift out of Shantz’s article?

Zinzendorf wrote that three things attracted him to the Moravian Brethren: “their doctrine, the condition of their souls, and *their regulations* (italics mine).” These regulations helped inform Zinzendorf as he wrote Herrnhut’s constitution and “almost all members” signed the 42 “Statutes of the Community of the Brethren.” This intentional ordering of their community guided members to understand the *high expectations* required to participate in Herrnhut’s communal life and the community’s witness. Shantz notes, “Their life together should be according to the pattern of the first Christians, and express Christian freedom before God.” Such expectations were not seen as strict adherence to certain doctrinal formulations, but rather focused on encouraging a deeper spirituality and strengthening their capacity to obey God’s call on their lives. Creating choirs to “encourage the intellectual and religious development of each member of

the community as well as strengthening the unity of the community” demonstrates the Moravian community’s “evangelization” character. The Herrnhut community embraced these high expectations willingly and was subsequently blessed in its mission vision and vitality.

Zinzendorf’s concept of the Moravian community as a “church within a church” helps to explain the concept that a missional church *measures growth by its capacity to release people, not retain them.* In other words, the goal is to be building God’s Kingdom *by building up His Church.* Shantz develops Zinzendorf’s ecumenical vision well. I find it interesting that within some circles of the American church, ecumenism is seen negatively as an unnecessary imposition of institutional structure upon the organic nature of the church. In my travels worldwide, the church in the global South more intuitively understands that by working together despite theological differences it witnesses to the power of the Gospel, especially where the church is persecuted. Therefore, regional councils of churches are quite common. Zinzendorf, despite frustrations championing his ecumenical vision, still held to his positive “judgment of the various churches and traditions and not withdraw to an antagonistic mentality ... (this attitude) constitutes much of his importance for us today.” Thus, missional churches focus on God’s mission even as they continue to wrestle with evangelization both within and without their institutional structures.

The incredible creative energy that Zinzendorf as well as the whole Herrnhut community brought to worship endorses the idea that missional churches see *worship both being highly participatory and flexible* — which certainly

describes Zinzendorf's constant liturgical experimentation. One of the enduring traditions regarding Zinzendorf was his composing hymns on the fly where the congregation sang verses he had just composed minutes before as he wrote new ones. Take a moment to read Hymn 401 (Blue Hymnal) "Heart with Loving Heart United." I believe we see Zinzendorf laying out a "missional" ecclesiology: we stand ready to die for each other; we are waiting to be commanded to go out into the world as a witness, and we must work hard as a community to incarnate the "the promise of a new humanity." Missional ecclesiology consciously sets the bar high.

I have noted three characteristics of a missional ecclesiology that I find in reflecting on Shantz's discussion of the early Moravian community's unique way of being church: high expectations for membership; a capacity to measure growth by releasing people, not retaining them; and creative worship that invites the whole congregation to participate and focus on God alone — worship that stays fresh and alive.

So, back to my initial question — Are we willing to be sufficiently tough in our self criticism to examine whether our historical formulations of "being church" (ecclesiology) now help or hurt our ability to embody the vision Ward lays before us as we move into the 21st century?" Perhaps we already manifest a missional way of "being church," perhaps we don't. I think this is an important question to decide. We need

some very painful reflection on the way we think of "being church," including a willingness to recognize that what needs to change is our focus on our "traditions." We can continue "being church" based on the "historic conditionality of our formulations," but at what price? Obviously, such formulations today more directly reflect our attempts at engaging our culture of the past century or so, rather than what we see in the Moravian community of Herrnhut.

Where Herrnhut consciously sought to be apostolic in nature, can we say the same? I fear the language of "community" we now typically employ is severed from the early Moravian community's underlying powerful missional values. The early Moravian's communal nature with its high expectations no longer has sufficient traction today given the individualistic ethos of our contemporary culture. The context has changed. I believe we no longer have the luxury of believing that somehow today we possess or will somehow intuitively form a missional ecclesiology reflecting the values of the early Moravian community. We certainly might experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, though we'll miss Zinzendorf's creative genius and energy. Hopefully, in reflecting on Shantz's fine article I succeeded in bringing out some of these missional values. And, by doing so, I have supported his contention that the early Moravians were once a "church ahead of its time" — can we say the same thing today?

Will Sibert is Director of the Board of World Mission for the Northern and Southern Provinces.

The Author Responds

First, I want to express gratitude to the respondents for their careful reading of my article, "A Church Ahead of its Time." I assure them that I have taken their comments seriously and have profited by our discussion from afar. I have always understood my calling as a church historian to include engagement with issues facing the church of our own day. C.S. Lewis, Jaroslav Pelikan and Keith Ward suggest that one way to look more critically at our present situation is to rediscover the vantage point of the distant past. Not that past Christians were always better, just that they often understood and practiced their faith in surprisingly different and often challenging ways.

Clearly Joseph Moore, Donna Hurt and I are on the same page in appreciating the way Moravian history calls the Church of today to consider issues of worship, gender and ecumenism. I was interested that Joseph's own experience of team ministry has shown him how women and men can complement each other in leadership, and has led him to rejoice that women leaders are "slowly returning to the 21st century church." I thought the comments of Keith Stirewalt and Will Sibert offered fascinating reflections on what the historical model might look like in the practice of community and mission today.

Glen Stoudt offers some well-placed challenges to my preoccupation with the 18th century Moravians. First, he asks how historians would react to my assumptions. Much of my interpretation of 18th century Moravians is not

original. A glance at the footnotes will indicate how much I follow previous scholars such as Dietrich Meyer, Hans Schneider, Peter Vogt and Craig Atwood. More significantly, Stoudt challenges me to consider the Moravian story that goes back to the 15th century; and to do more to address 21st century issues, such as gendered language for God. I readily admit that I have little expertise to offer in terms of the Hussites or modern Moravians. In this study I have pretty much kept to my comfort zone, hoping the story might inspire others to make the applications. I might also add that when I first wrote this lecture and gave this presentation, Moravians constituted only a minority in the audience that I had in mind. My purpose was to challenge Anglicans, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Baptists and Lutherans to discover some inspiration from a tradition of which many had previously never even heard.

Let me finally offer a word of thanks to Craig Atwood for giving this lecture a larger public. I would welcome further discussion of these important issues.

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Presenter: **The Rev. Dr. Albert Frank**

April 28, Moravian Theological Seminary

Lay Seminary

Topic: The Life and Thought of John Amos Comenius

Presenter: **Craig D. Atwood**

July 8-10, Laurel Ridge, NC

Special Feature

Homily preached Oct. 24, 2004 by Bronwyn Shiffer

Sirach 35:12-18: “Give to the Most High as he has given to you, and as generously as you can afford. For the Lord is the one who repays, and he will repay you sevenfold. Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him there is no partiality. He will not show partiality to the poor; but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged. He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan, or the widow when she pours out her complaint.”

Sermon:

For a variety of reasons, I am in a place of questioning right now, examining my faith, and none of the readings really grabbed me like they usually do. The passage from Sirach was one that I mulled over for awhile and did a little bit of research on though. I was interested in finding out more about Jewish sacrifices: what were the Israelites giving? Where did the sacrifices go?

Evidently sacrifices pre-date the Torah, and all instructions from the Torah around sacrifice are limiting; the Torah puts boundaries around sacrifice rather than instituting it. The limits may be “designed to wean a primitive people away from the debased rites of their idolatrous neighbors.” The primary purpose of an offering was to become closer to God. Offerings included a concept of giving something that belonged to the one making the offering; for example you wouldn’t offer a wild animal but one from your

herd, and if you were making a food offering it would be something that you had made an effort to prepare, like flour or meal. Offerings could also include an element of substitution, that what was being done to the sacrifice should have been done to the one making the offering.

Today, prayer has taken the place of offerings in Jewish life. The temple in Jerusalem was the only appropriate place to make a sacrifice, so after it was destroyed the Jews made no more sacrifices.

If the object of making an offering is to become closer to God, how exactly does that happen? We can see from Sirach a few examples of what will not bring us closer to God: 34:20-22 “To offer a sacrifice from the possessions of the poor is like killing a son before his father’s eyes. Bread is life to the destitute, and it is murder to deprive them of it. To rob your neighbor of his livelihood is to kill him, and the man who cheats a worker of his wages sheds blood.”

So cheating the poor will not bring us closer to God. (On a side note, is it ever ok to cheat the rich, myself included in the rich? I don’t remember reading that we should not cheat the rich.)

Sirach talks about some intangible offerings as well; 35:1-3 “Keeping the law is worth many offerings; to heed the commandments is to sacrifice a thank-offering. A kindness repaid is an offering of flour, and to give alms is a praise offering. The way to please the Lord is to renounce evil; and to

renounce wrongdoing is to make atonement.”

So keeping the law and the commandments, repaying kindnesses, and giving alms will act as an offering and thus bring us closer to God. If we bring in the Luke passage and see prayer as offering, we see that humility, not pride, will bring us closer to God.

I took a class on Biblical justice, and the instructor (Kim Lamberty) used a baseline question of “Is it building up the kingdom?” In addition to the ways that Sirach tells us to give offerings, I found it helpful to ask the question, “Does this bring me closer to God?”

What really was most helpful to me though, in preparing this homily, was to write both a creed and a statement of actions. Someone (probably Duane) said a few weeks ago that there is not really any doctrine in the Jewish tradition, only actions. What follows is, at the moment, what I believe and what I do.

Creed:

I believe that people are good and respond best to kindness.

I believe that God created us.

I believe that every day we can choose to help people or hurt people.

I believe in Easter — I believe that there is possibility for resurrection in life.

I believe in goodness, in the earth.

I believe in the many forms of building community and in nurturing our creative selves.

I believe in beauty and its importance for our well-being.

I believe in saying thank you.

I believe in smiling and saying hello.

I believe that there is enough food for everyone.

I believe in singing and the Eucharist.

I believe in mystery.

I believe in silence.

Statement of Actions:

I follow my heart.

I listen to myself.

I smile.

I try to remember to respond with kindness.

I give some of my money away.

I get angry when things are not right.

I spend time in yoga and silence every night.

I build and keep relationships with other people.

I cry.

I seek out community.

I sing.

I read novels.

I work for justice in small ways.

I reflect.

I appreciate and seek out beauty.

I listen to the rain.

I look for God.

Bronwyn Shiffer is a young Moravian from Wisconsin and a graduate of Salem College in Winston-Salem. She is currently occupied in organic farming in New Zealand. She gave this sermon in a non-Moravian church before leaving for New Zealand.

Book Reviews

Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 247 pages plus notes.

Jon Sensbach has written one of the most extraordinary books on the Moravians ever published, and everyone interested in Moravian missions or race relations should read it. *Rebecca's Revival* rescues from historical obscurity a remarkable woman who “crossed, and sometimes threatened, boundaries between slavery and freedom, whiteness and blackness, male and female activity” (p. 233). Originally named Shelly, Rebecca was a mulatto woman born on Antigua who was sold as a slave on the Danish colony of St. Thomas in the 1720s. She eventually gained her freedom, perhaps because of her embrace of Christianity. Throughout her life people remarked on her intellectual and spiritual gifts as well as her fortitude, courage, and prudence. In the 1740s she was one of the most celebrated Moravian figures, but her grave on the Gold Coast of Africa is lost today.

After finding joy and peace through the ministrations of the Moravian missionary Friedrich Martin, Rebecca used her gifts and virtues as an evangelist for the Moravian Church. Sensbach shows that it was her abilities as a preacher, counselor, and organizer, in the face of violent opposition, that made the Moravian mission on St. Thomas and the neighboring islands a prodigious success. Her marriage to the white missionary Matthäus Freundlich contributed to the couple's four-month imprisonment on St. Thomas, a hardship that Rebecca endured as a martyr. Her courage and resistance to injustice inspired other slaves suffering for their faith. In the 1740s Rebecca journeyed from the Caribbean to Germany, and after the death of Freundlich, she became one of the first missionaries of African lineage to preach the gospel in Africa. Sensbach refers to this connection between Europe, Africa, and the New World as a “spiritual triangle trade,” of which Rebecca was the pioneer.

Sensbach's book is more than an account of an important figure forgotten by history; it is a compelling study of the creation of African American Christianity under the conditions of dehumanizing slavery. Sensbach argues convincingly that the Moravian work on St. Thomas was in fact the genesis of the Black Church, and that Rebecca was the key figure in this history. This is a bold claim that will no doubt produce heated as well as helpful scholarly debate. If nothing else, Sensbach's work demonstrates that American history needs to be understood in a transatlantic and multi-lingual context. Sensbach generally avoids the temptation of reading modern motives and motifs into his historical sources, preferring instead to let Rebecca and others speak for themselves. He does, however, give a good analysis of the political agenda behind some of the Moravian sources and ways in which the white Moravians may have shaped the slaves' self-expression.

Sensbach impresses on the reader the brutal realities of slavery, which also highlights the courage (or fanaticism) of the Moravian missionaries and their African converts who faced torture and murder at the hands of white planters. It is heart-breaking to read the accounts like that of the planter who would set the Bible on fire and beat the flames out on the faces of his Christian slaves to the delight of his children. Sensbach recognizes that conversion to Christianity was not simply a ploy by slaves to gain better living conditions, but it was part of a dangerous struggle for personal dignity in the face of cruelty. Slaves who accepted the simple message of the Moravian missionaries that the Son of God had been a slave who gave his life in love for them found new resources for endurance. No “white devil” could rob Christian slaves of their worth or their humanity if their souls belonged to the Savior. Some slaves found they could use their new knowledge of the white planters’ own Scriptures to shame their abusers with the commandments of Jesus himself. Eventually Danish and English evangelicals used the example of the Moravians and those same teachings of Jesus in their successful political struggle to end the slave trade.

The complexities and contradictions of the slave system are clearly evident throughout his discussion, especially when addressing the establishment of Posaunenberg, the Moravian plantation on St. Thomas. What are we today to make of the decision of Matthäus Freundlich, husband of a manumitted slave, to buy a plantation to serve as a mission center? What do we make of the fact that it was Rebecca herself who suggested the purchase or the fact that hundreds of converted slaves cheered at the news that the missionaries were to become slave-holders? As horrifying as that sounds to us today, it is important to note that the planters saw this move as a serious threat to the slave system itself. They sent gangs of men to beat worshipers and threaten the missionaries.

The plantation may have been the best decision for the Moravians and their new black brothers and sisters at the time, but this also marked the first time that the Moravians themselves became public defenders of the institution. Sensbach calls this the “devil’s bargain,” and it bore bitter fruit later. One feature missing from his account of Posaunenberg, though, is comparison between the condition of the slaves on the Moravian plantation and the other plantations in the Caribbean. Did the Moravian *Baas* and the *Bombas* treat their slaves the way other whites did? Was there an effort to introduce some type of Christian ethic into a diabolical economy or did the Moravians succumb to the vices common to slave holders?

One strength of Sensbach’s book is his awareness of the distinctive nature of the Moravian Church in the 18th century as the only institution where Rebecca’s odyssey was possible. Sensbach also demonstrates that both the successful mission methods and the accommodations to the implacable reality of slavery made by Zinzendorf set the pattern for later Methodist and Baptist missions to enslaved Africans. The promise of the work of Rebecca and Matthäus Freundlich and Friedrich Martin could not be fully realized as long as European and American governments encouraged and endorsed brutality against the African workers. But the missionaries did inspire hope for a better day and provided some space for the

slaves to create spheres of dignity. And, as the historian points out, the bell that once called slaves to bend their backs in relentless labor to provide sugar for European tables today calls men, women, and children to kneel in prayer and song. The Moravian brothers and sisters in the Caribbean today are the spiritual children of Rebecca.

— Craig D. Atwood

Geoffrey and Margaret Stead, *The Exotic Plant: A History of the Moravian Church in Great Britain 1742-2000* (Peterborough, England: Epworth Press, 2004), 383 pages plus notes, bibliography and index. 25£

Geoffrey and Margaret Stead took on the ambitious project of writing a comprehensive and professional history of the Moravian Church in England down to the present. As the Steads point out in the opening chapter of their book, the history of the Moravians in England has not been well served by historians over the past century. Earlier histories were more interested in the Moravian Church as a whole than in the history of the British Moravians themselves. In many cases, those earlier histories were too apologetic in their approach, which meant that the actual history was somewhat distorted. The Steads, in contrast, are non-Moravians who have written a sympathetic yet rigorous account of the long history of the British Province. Their research confirms rather than contradicts the recent studies of J.C.S. Mason *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England*, which was reviewed last year in *The Hinge* by David Schattschneider, and Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England 1728-1760*, but *The Exotic Plant* has a broader historical lens.

The central thesis of this book is that the Moravian Church was indeed a foreign implant in England that has only partially been anglicized through the years. Initially the church was primarily a religious fellowship for German Pietists living in England that also provided a safe haven for Moravians en route to or from the New World. Except for a few evangelists, like John Cennick, who loom large in the lore of the British Province, Moravians had difficulty adapting to the social and religious culture of England and attracting members. Even though the church did indeed adapt gradually to the British setting, its close ties with Germany always marked it as distinct and even “exotic.”

The Steads show that British Moravians gradually moved away from the German Moravian pattern and became a dissenter denomination in England with free-standing congregations served by an ordained pastor. But this in turn made it increasingly difficult for the church to survive and thrive in the 20th century. The authors note that the contemporary British Province is being forced by circumstances to adopt informal structures and creative forms of ministry that are quite similar to the original Zinzendorffian plan. The irony of this history is not always recognized.

An irony that the authors identify is that it was not until 1908 that the church officially adopted the name “Moravian Church” rather than the original “Church of United Brethren of the Augsburg Confession.” This was just six years before the outbreak of World War I when the name “Moravian” became suspect because of its association with the Hapsburg Empire (p. 127). The Steads shed light on the complex issue of using the name Moravian in several places in the book, and I hope that they will publish an article devoted to this topic in the future.

This is a well-researched and critical history rather than a triumphal one, and it can be a bit depressing to read the litany of woes after the “Golden Age” of Zinzendorf: too many small congregations, dire financial circumstances, stagnating or declining membership, petty squabbles, and repetitious calls for renewal. The province never had more than 4000 members, and the Steads show that a lack of finances and human resources had a continuous crippling effect on the province from 1753 to the present. There were always too many congregations with too few members to support full-time pastors, and there was always a tendency on the part of those pastors to blame their congregations for lack of energy and initiative.

Despite the fact that the world mission of the Moravians was the one thing that did attract admiration from the British public prior to World War II, relatively few Moravians from the British Isles actually became foreign missionaries. Likewise, for several decades Moravian schools achieved a measure of respect in England, but even the famed boarding schools were often under-funded and under-attended. The writers are to be commended for addressing such issues objectively. They do not flinch, for instance, from the fact that many British Moravians shared their countrymen’s hatred of Germans during the two world wars and that it took courageous leadership to reconcile British and German Moravians after each encounter.

The book is helpfully designed to allow readers to focus on topics of particular interest, such as Moravian education and hymnody. Some of these sections are of high quality and can stand on their own right as pieces of historical research and writing. Particularly noteworthy is the section on “Moravianism,” which charts continuity and change in Moravian beliefs and practices, particularly in their worship. Also noteworthy is the discussion on the Moravians’ small but important contribution to British ecumenism through the years.

Perhaps the most helpful aspect of the book is that it provides the details of the process by which the Moravians in England slowly turned away from many features of the Zinzendorf era while striving to maintain some of the mission of that period in a new era. Readers may be surprised to learn, for instance, that in the 1750s ordained women helped distribute the Communion elements to women (p. 201) but that women would not be ordained again until the 1970s. Or that in the 1850s it was declared that if the Brethren in 1741 thought the idea of Christ as Chief Elder meant that Christ held ecclesiastical office, then they were “mistaken” (p. 87).

In many ways, this book provides a model for the writing of the histories of each province in the Moravian Unity. It is comprehensive but does not get bogged down in the details of each congregation’s

history. It places the history of the British Moravians in their changing historical circumstances in a way that illuminates changes in the Province. Statistical information is well-researched and presented in a way that illustrates rather than bores the reader. Most important, it offers a helpful insight into the character and ministry of the church today. Many sections would have benefited by more comparative analysis with developments in the wider Moravian world, particularly the American provinces; however, such comparative study can be left to other scholars who will no doubt value the solid research and lucid writing of the Steads.

— *Craig D. Atwood*

Call for Book Reviews: If you've read a recent book that you think would be of interest of benefit to others in the Moravian Church, submit a review for *the Hinge!*

Special Feature:

Sermon by Frank Hiddemann

In Neudietendorf Moravian Church, Germany

Translated by Linda Easter

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Dear brothers and sisters,

Children of wrath and a ruler of air, of death, of desire, of flesh appear in our Scripture text. And then also God's grace.

The dark, stormy sky opens and releases a pyramid of light. I blink my eyes.

Even the sentences we have heard seem to have been brought into disarray by the mythological storm.

Once well ordered, they have been tossed about by a wind blowing through them.

Did the Ruler of the kingdom in the air blow so mightily?

Or did the author of these lines, hair blowing in the wind, formulate his sentences in the face of this wind?

A small cosmology — brought to paper by summer storms or autumn weather that struck earlier.

“Children of wrath.”

I get stuck at this phrase. I asked a 12-year old boy what “children of wrath” means. Boys of this age are natural experts in this subject. The war between Good and Evil rages in their games, their books, their movies. What are “children of wrath”?

My son answered after careful thought: they are “dark warriors of a subterranean Ruler” I repeat the words: “...dark warriors of a subterranean ruler.” And it must have sounded so perplexing that my son added:

“Like the Orcs.”

Now, I know: Orcs. They are figures in the fantasy epic of J.R. Tolkien, a Catholic. In the past few years, the movie version has made the book more popular than ever. There are elves and dwarves, hobbits and humans, wizards and Orcs in Lord of the Rings. The Orcs are the evil soldiers of the Lord of Darkness. They resemble trolls or animals and are predatory and violent.

“All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.” (v. 3, NRSV)

That fits. “We were Orcs,” I figured out.

“Are Orcs human?” countered my son.

Difficult question.

In Lord of the Rings, they are counterparts to the elves. Orcs are the evil ones who can choose no good.

The others are the good ones who can choose no evil. And yet, I dig in my memory, the Orcs once were human. But they remained with their evil choices.

“The Orcs chose Evil,” I say.

“And could they have chosen Good?” asks my son.

“Yes, they could have,” I answered, “but it becomes harder all the time. Once you have chosen Evil it becomes easier to choose Evil again.”

The boy looks at me skeptically.

“Imagine,” I attempt to explain, “that you have plowed a piece of your neighbor’s land and claim it as yours. Then you have to lie to defend yourself, and it becomes harder all the time to tell the truth. It is easier to take another piece of the land. It is easier to claim it all belongs to you anyhow than to unravel everything and tell the truth. You get into a sort of downward spiral with the first evil deed. It becomes more difficult each time to turn back completely. Things go downhill more steeply all the time.

I am a bit unsure about my explanation, using this farm example that really is not part of the boy’s frame of reference. But he accepts the words and trots off to another object of interest. Perhaps he needs to think about it to find a new objection. Perhaps the issue is clear to him for now.

I return to my text. It is difficult to return to Good once one has chosen Evil.

It’s amazing how the conversation about the “children of wrath” brings us to the problem of good and evil and whether and how one can choose either.

And just as in Lord of the Rings, a dark angel also appears in our text. One who sees to it that we cannot revise our evil choices.

And then the light angel, Jesus Christ.

He is not just the opponent of the dark angel.

He is not there to motivate us to make good decisions. He does not have the same function as the dark angel. He is not the light version of the dark one.

He lived a life on earth.

He had the choice between Good and Evil.

He fought against the downward spiral.

As a human, he tried to live amidst the difficulties of life.

His life was a view of God.

It ended at the cross and in death.

But God resurrected him.

He lives.

And we no longer live in the downward spiral of evil deeds. His life is credited to us. And that it is not logical.

Why should his life improve ours, make us righteous, spare us the choosing of sides?

The dark angel tries to lead us astray.

The light angel lived under the conditions of our humanity.

It is grace, our text makes sure to emphasize. And this grace is like a new creation.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (v. 8-10)

What does this grace feel like?

The first answer comes clearly and easily. We no longer have to try constantly to behave correctly, to choose Good and not Evil. There is good and evil in our lives also, but our life is not dependent on these decisions —Whether we succeed or fail,

Whether the decisions can be added up to a positive total. That no longer needs to be our striving. We are credited with the grace that Christ Jesus earned.

This grace is an event. Like the act of creation. Just as God separated the heavens from the earth. Just as he called the light into being.

That is how he calls us into a life that no longer is under the stress of having to be right.

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to our way of life.”

As we are told in this passage of the letter to the Ephesians, God has created us anew in Christ. And yet God created us to do good works. Yes, he created them in advance. It is not irrelevant how we live. We have the freedom to choose.

And yet something is expected of us. If our life is a success — that no longer depends on our good works. But if we are to be new creations in Christ, does not that depend on our good works for which we have been newly created? Our text speaks so strongly of this grace that is not of our own earning.

What does this grace feel like?

The second part is more difficult to express than the first. Our life no longer depends on whether we do everything right. And yet we must do good works to be in Christ.

Quickly the cycle begins again.

We no longer try in panic to do good to save our lives; rather we try to do good to remain in Christ. that brings us again and again to a new awareness. If we take the message of this Sunday seriously, Christians have another chance to begin anew.

They don't have to go back to the very beginning; they just have to go back to Christ — where that which angers us about ourselves suddenly becomes very small. His life was right, his life was approved by God.

And that is where we can begin anew. As new creations, as the beneficiaries of his gain.

The evil angel has no more power because we no longer fall into nothingness, but rather into the hands of God who creates us anew just as he promised us. We are the firstborn of the new creation every time we surrender ourselves and have to start anew.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Frank Hiddemann is director of the arts, culture, and theology program of the Evangelische Akademie Thuringia. Linda Easter is a member of the Good Shepherd Moravian Church in Kernersville.

Letters to the Editor

I have been catching up on some reading in these early days of the new year. Specifically, I had not yet read the Fall issue of the *The Hinge*, and I read with much interest your lead article. I agree with so very much of what you had written. I was not able to attend the Moses Lectures this past year, but was delighted to be able to read that content. We do have much to embrace from our unique history and faith tradition, especially as given through the lives and ministries of leaders such as Comenius, Zinzendorf and Luke. These “saints” may well be able to help lead us through the malaise of doctrinal disputes that remain before us. Thank you for your excellent work. As Matt said, we do need scholars who will help us to stay engaged, and, as you wrote, scholars who will seriously study and write what will be a guiding benefit to all. It was not your article and responses, though, which caused me to write. It was more driven from the letters to the editor received after the summer publication. I went back to review the summer 2004 issue and read what I had earlier missed, that you had found it difficult to secure responses from those opposed to Resolution 6 because, as some told you privately, it might affect their careers. I do not know who you spoke to, and, to be honest, I have probably spoken to some of the same folk who have chosen not to go on record aside from their private vote, but please know that there are some of us who would have been honored to add to the mix of response. Several of us participated in committee at the 2002 Provincial Synod (N) and also spoke at plenary sessions as the resolves were discussed. I deeply appreciated what Glenn Hertzog wrote, but must agree with the response of Lee Sprinkle who expressed very well that some of the strongest concerns expressed during the discussion of Resolution 6 were based on the content of Resolutions 7-9 to follow. That was the essence of my argument against the word “celebrate” as Resolution 6 was discussed. Anyway, there are folk out there who are willing to be heard with the secure knowledge that, although we may not be agreed with, it will not affect our future job security!! Blessings to you in the new year and thanks for the ministry of *The Hinge*.

Gary Marsh, Bethlehem, PA

Editor's note: Thank you to all who gave verbal expressions of gratitude for Hinge 11.2 and to those who are using Hinge 11.3 (Moses Lectures) in church classes. You may also access the Moses Lectures online at www.moravians.org.

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