

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.