



THE HINGE

*A Journal of Christian Thought
for the Moravian Church*

***The Ground of the Unity:
Different perspectives on
The Ground of the Unity***

By Arthur Freeman, Doug Rights, Ed O'Connor,
Hans-Beat Motel, and Ted Wilde

Special Features:
Protocol for Leaving a Congregation, Homily by Alfredo Joiner,
Book Review by David Schattschneider, and book notes
on books by Howard Cox and Daniel Crews

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The Hinge is a forum for theological discussion in the Moravian Church. Views and opinions expressed in articles published in *The Hinge* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or the official positions of the Moravian Church and its agencies. You are welcome to submit letters and articles for consideration for publication.

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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The cover design was provided by Todd Tyson of Kernersville, N.C.

Notes from the Editor

The 2002 Synod of the Southern Province encouraged each congregation to give careful study to our church's doctrinal statement, *The Ground of the Unity*. A study guide was prepared for use in both the Southern and Northern Provinces, and many congregations have had very fruitful discussions of *The Ground* since the synod. The editorial board of *The Hinge* began planning an issue dedicated to *The Ground of the Unity* immediately, but it took an unusually long time to bring this issue to press. We had a long discussion over whether to follow the usual *Hinge* format of a single lead article by a Moravian scholar followed by responses, or to try a different approach. We finally decided to use *The Ground of the Unity* itself as the "lead article" and invited a variety of people in the church to respond to it.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the authors who are sharing their thoughts in this issue of *The Hinge*. Arthur Freeman granted permission to reprint a study piece that he has used in his work at Central Moravian Church. It includes reflection questions to encourage personal theological exploration. Ed O'Connor describes the important role *The Ground* plays in his personal life and in shaping our church's social teachings. Doug Rights speaks to the importance of a doctrinal statement for a pastor. Hans-Beat Motel examines some of the theological principles of the Moravian Church in consideration of a revision of *The Ground*. Ted Wilde looks at one of the controversial issues in the church today from the perspective of *The Ground's* statement on Scripture. Readers are encouraged to respond to these provocative and evocative articles in the next issue of *The Hinge*. Please write to Craig Atwood at zinzendorf2002@yahoo.com.

More than a dozen people were asked to contribute their reflections on *The Ground* and its usefulness in the church. Some declined the offer immediately, but a number of people accepted. Sadly, after many months, some of those who agreed to write were unable to do so. Among them were brothers and sisters who were approached because they discuss Moravian theology on a particular website. Unfortunately they feel it is necessary to use assumed identities in that format, and each found it difficult to discuss publicly in *The Hinge* under their own names. I think that their reluctance is an indication of the anxiety that many Moravians of various theological perspectives are feeling these days. It is much easier to debate anonymously. It is also easier to attack another person's faith and convictions anonymously. I, for one, believe that such anonymous debate is inconsistent with the spirit of our Moravian Covenant. I also think it is vital that we recover our sense of personal integrity and communal trust in the church. Let us seek as well as speak the truth in love. Let us also own what we say and allow others their voices as well. Such honest and public debate is part of the mission of *The Hinge*.

In this issue we also have a sermon, book notes on recent publications by two Moravian scholars, and a protocol for ministers leaving a parish, which was recently approved by the bishops. I hope you find this issue stimulating and enlightening.

— Craig Atwood

Commentary on *The Ground of the Unity*

Arthur Freeman

Editor's Note: This presentation of *The Ground of the Unity* was created to portray the faith tradition of the Moravian Church to members of Central Moravian Church, Bethlehem, Pa. as part of an educational program. It has been adapted for use in *The Hinge* in the hope that it may be helpful in the theological debates which have been occurring within the Moravian Church. Your thoughts and responses are invited. This also appeared in *ITD*.

The Ground of the Unity is a Moravian statement of faith approved at the General (Unity) Synod of 1957. While other statements of faith are often called “creeds” or “confessions,” this one is called a “ground.” Moravians also accept such ancient creeds as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, both of which appear in some of our liturgies. While some statements of faith are understood to express unchangeable and unchallengeable truths, the Moravian approach recognizes that God is central and the source of all, but creeds are secondary attempts to explain. This statement is called *The Ground* because it is a foundation for our faith and companionship with God, a source which nourishes our life. *The Ground* is not the center of our lives nor is it an explanation of everything. Only the triune God is that (#4). And the Word of the Cross, the central theme of Scripture and preaching (#4), defines the way God is: unbelievably choosing to suffer and live the struggles of our existence. The Word of the Cross challenges triumphalist understandings which claim all the answers, and we “ask our Lord for power never to stray from this” Word (#4).

Sound doctrine is the result of a constant search and interpretation of Scripture (#4). But Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system. Scripture knows and expresses the mystery of Christ, which cannot be comprehended fully by any human mind or be expressed completely in any human statement (#4). Thus Moravians at various times have adhered to creeds and confessions of the church in the country where they lived, valuing the treasure in each tradition. Though every creed and confession stands in need of constant testing (#5), in the person of the Triune God, who is the source of all, there is the consistency of grace and love and the promise to Companion us in life.

Creeds and Confessions are statements or descriptions of the faith of religious communities which come from their lived experience, their debate about truth and analysis of Scripture. Some religious communities regard their creeds to be a final and lasting description of Christian faith; others regard statements of faith as attempts to understand and state that which is ultimately beyond systematic description. The latter would see creeds as always open to exploration and restatement: part of a living and dynamic process as we seek to describe the mystery of God. The primary example of this is the 1993-5 discussion of the wording of paragraph 4 of *The Ground* on “God’s Word and Doctrine,” described in detail in *The Moravian Understanding of Scripture* (by the author). Ultimately the international Moravian

Church, the “Unity,” which has responsibility for doctrine, approved this change.

Even though most Christians confess adherence to some creeds, each individual ultimately finds him or herself engaged in a personal process of believing and understanding, and the question then may develop as to how the faith of an individual fits within the context of the tradition of the religious community. It is difficult to find the answers to religion and life without drawing on the wisdom of others who may have reflected on our questions for centuries. In fact, Christianity clearly recognizes the significant role of community and tradition in the believer’s life. And yet, if we exclude the insights of individual journey we may lose significant insights which God would bring to us. Balancing the roles of individual and community is a significant task — for which we need the help and guidance of God. But as Paul points out in I Cor. 12, “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” And the body of the church consists of many members (I Cor. 12:4-6, 14). Paul even points out the limitations of knowledge (I Cor. 13) and the value of love when one explores the claims of knowledge (I Cor. 8:1-3).

The Moravian Church encourages your personal journey and exploration in the context of its tradition and communal witness, keeping in mind that this is in responsibility to Christ our Lord and Companion in life. Know that others before you have sought the Way and Truth of the Christian faith and have explored life, faith, and your concerns. The community of the Church and its wisdom is a wonderful place where you can pursue your personal journey, supported by its love and care. It is also here that you can hear the wisdom of its heritage of life and faith and test your insights.

History of the Ground of the Unity

The Ground of the Unity is one of many Moravian expressions of faith formulated over the 550 year history of the Moravian Church, a history which precedes the Reformation of the 16th century and which extends into our day. Expressions of faith were necessary to define the church’s life and faith, to deal with historical challenges, and to deal with the opposition and questions of other churches.

The Moravian Church began simply in Northern Bohemia as a semi-monastic group which accepted Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to give expression to their faith and life. Gradually it became necessary to develop creedal statements in order to resolve inner and outer conflicts, to respond more to the world in which they lived, and to respond to the developing 16th century Reformation. Such significant statements as the Lutheran Augsburg Confession provided models. Especially important in the thinking of the Moravian Church were the categories of:

- **THE ESSENTIAL:** relationship with the Triune God responded to in Faith, Love and Hope. Sometimes the word essential is in the plural because of the triune character of God and the triune character of the human response. I prefer to use the singular because the triune character of God (Father, Son, Spirit) and the triune character of the human response (Faith, Love and Hope) are all bound up in a singular and unique God–human relationship. They are parts of a whole. During the 18th century Count Zinzendorf defined the Essential as “the heart relationship with the Savior.” By being in relationship with

the Savior one experienced all of God and the heart (not the physical heart but a spiritual inner organ of perception) was understood as our capacity for knowing, perceiving and responding to God.

- MINISTERIALS: all that serve the ESSENTIAL (church, Bible, preaching, etc.)
- INCIDENTALS: the different ways things are done

The ESSENTIAL can never be compromised. On other matters there are often many differences allowable.

This has continued to be defining throughout the history of the Moravian Church.

The Ancient Moravian Church produced several confessions, especially that of 1535 for which Luther wrote a Preface in 1538. The last work on a Moravian confession was done by Bishop Comenius in 1662 as he sought to help the Moravian Church survive into the future following the 30 Years War when the Church lost its right to exist in its homeland.

In the Renewed Moravian Church (so called from 1722 on) persons from each territory carried with them the form of faith of their territory. For Zinzendorf this was Lutheran, and the Augsburg Confession expressed the faith for much of the Moravian Church and was even used in N. America until the 1840s. Zinzendorf's efforts to create an ecumenical church in the mid 18th century in N. America were carried over into Europe, and until the 1790's the members of the Moravian Church were listed according to three "Ways," (three "Ways" of being Christian) the Lutheran, Reformed and Moravian. Because of this, the Reformed Articles of the Synod of Bern were added to the confessions used by the Moravian Church. Please note under Creeds and Confessions in #5 of *The Ground* the many creeds to which the Moravian Church has been related.

Because down through the early 20th century it was difficult for European churches to create new creeds and they had to obey the creed of the Church of their territory, Moravians came to express their faith in doctrinal sections of the minutes of their international synods (previously called "General Synods" but now called "Unity Synods"). But with changing European freedom for religious expression and the need to define faith after the tragedy of the Second World War, a process was set in motion which resulted in the creation of the first Moravian statement of faith since the 17th century.

The Ground of the Unity came into being by an interesting process which I have been able to explore with the help of friends in Europe, England, and the U.S. As expressed by Bishop Steinberg: "Among the many tasks which confronted the General Synod as it came together on August 13, 1957, one of the most important was to find a new form for the 'Principles' of our Church. The strongly-felt need to attempt to give expression to its basic convictions concerning the Unity arose in large measure from the storm, earthquake, and fire through which some of the Provinces of the Unity, particularly Germany, had passed since 1931. The 'still small voice' was speaking to those with ears to hear. Attempts were made to express in words what the Spirit was saying to the Church at the Provincial Synods of Bad Boll in 1949 and 1951. The nearer the Quincentenary and the General Synod grew and the more loudly the Unity of tomorrow knocked at our door, the more urgently we saw the necessity of preparing the ground of the future. During 1955 and 1956 a group of brethren from the Continental Province (Europe) gathered to prepare a draft of a doctrinal

statement. It seemed a hazardous enterprise to put this statement before the General Synod of 1957 and its Committee on Doctrine because the other Provinces of the Unity had not experienced the same shattering and almost overwhelming years of the past two decades in Europe and particularly in Germany. But at General Synod it seemed that a miracle happened. The word of the Spirit spread amongst the members of the Doctrine Committee and they were led to understand what the Continental Province was trying to say of its 'dark night of the soul.' And the same word spread through the General Synod with all its variety of peoples, languages and backgrounds. And so it was that a Statement was adopted which attempts to say in the terms of our own day what the Lord's will is for the Church Universal and for the Unitas Fratrum. Synod gave to this Statement the title of 'The Ground of the Unity.' This name indicates the twofold meaning of the document. First, it points to the one unchanging ground upon which, by God's grace, our Unity has been founded. Second, it points to the living ground in which our Church is rooted and springs continually into fruit. It points to the very foundation and to the fertile groundspring at one and the same time." (H.G. Steinberg, "The Ground of the Unity," *The Moravian Messenger*, Dec. 1957, 3.)

In its very last session, the General Synod resolved that this Statement or Creed should be sent to all the Congregations of the world-wide Unity, to be read and considered in all the varied languages and in one spirit of adoration, or joy and dedication.

The number of creeds to which the Moravian Church has related helps us to understand that the rewording of creeds and redefinition of their statements is a normal process as the church confronts the need for defining faith for the sake of the needs and demands of the present. In the Moravian understanding, the Father, Son, and Spirit, and relationship with them, are the consistent center of our statements of faith. Our creeds serve both the triune God and our relationship with the triune God.

The dynamic nature of creeds is clearly illustrated in the discussion of 1993-5 when the Moravian Church made significant changes in the formulation of *The Ground's* statement on Scripture ("God's Word and Doctrine"), harmonizing it with important elements of Moravian tradition. The history of this can be examined in the unpublished book *The Moravian Understanding of Scripture* by Arthur Freeman. *The Ground* was originally accepted by the Unity Synod held in Bethlehem, PA, USA, Aug. 13- Sept. 10, 1957; was revised by the Unity Synod held on Antigua, West Indies, July 3-15, 1988; and then revised in its presentation of Scripture by the Unity Synod held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Aug. 13-25, 1995.

There is another Moravian document which has some creedal implications. It originated in 1727 during the process of forming the Moravian settlement of Herrnhut as a community of people with diverse backgrounds. Count Zinzendorf gave much attention to the pastoral needs of this community, gave them the rules for living on his property in the *Manorial Injunctions and Prohibitions*, but also worked with the community to develop a *Brotherly Agreement* expressing voluntary commitment to principles for living together based on conviction and not handed down by the authority of the Count. In the 20th century this was given an inclusive name, *Moravian Covenant for Christian Living*, and doctrinal statements were included which were not part of the original *Agreement*.

THE GROUND OF THE UNITY

#1. The Lord Jesus Christ calls His Church into being so that it may serve Him on earth until He comes. The *Unitas Fratrum* is, therefore, aware of its being called in faith to serve mankind by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It recognizes this call to be the source of its being and the inspiration of its service. As is the source, so is the aim and end of its being based upon the will of its Lord.

THE BELIEF OF THE CHURCH

#2. With the whole of Christendom we share faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe and confess that God has revealed Himself once and for all in His Son Jesus Christ; that our Lord has redeemed us with the whole of mankind by His death and His resurrection; and that there is no salvation apart from Him. We believe that He is present with us in the Word and the Sacrament; that He directs and unites us through His Spirit and thus forms us into a Church. We hear Him summoning us to follow Him, and pray Him to use us in His service. He joins us together mutually, so that knowing ourselves to be members of His body we become willing to serve each other.

In the light of divine grace, we recognize ourselves to be a Church of sinners. We require forgiveness daily, and live only through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He redeems us from our isolation and unites us into a living Church of Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL BELIEF

#3. The belief of the Church is effected and preserved through the testimony of Jesus Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

The Lord and his calling to the Church is the source of the Church's being and its inspiration. It does not create itself.

With the whole of Christendom we share faith in the Triune God who has once and for all revealed himself and redeemed humanity in his Son. God summons us and joins us together.

As humans who make mistakes and often fail we are daily enabled to find forgiveness and live by God's grace.

A phrase that has been much debated is "there is no salvation apart from him." Zinzendorf dealt with this by seeing Christ as Creator of the world (see John 1:1-18; note also Col. 1:15-20 and Heb. 1:1-3) and therefore as being in some sense in every religion which recognized a Creator, though it was the Christian responsibility to help other religions to understand their Creator. Especially important is the understanding of God's love, sharing life with us and suffering, something foreign to most understandings of God. Our many contacts with other religions today also call upon us to better understand them and learn how Christian truth relates to their perceptions of life and God.

That each person is a sinner and needs redemption was a perspective of Judaism and has within it the truth that we are all human and imperfect. Yet we must not focus on our sinfulness, but on the grace of God who not

This testimony calls each individual personally, and leads him to the recognition of sin and to the acceptance of the redemption achieved by Christ. In fellowship with Him the love of Christ becomes more and more the power of the new life, power which penetrates and shapes the entire person. As God's Spirit so effects living belief in the hearts of individuals, He grants them the privilege to share in the fruits of Christ's salvation and membership in His Body.

GOD'S WORD AND DOCTRINE

#4. The Triune God as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only source of our life and salvation; and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life.

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the center of Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message. We ask our Lord for power never to stray from this.

The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine. In interpreting Scripture and in the communication of doctrine in the Church, we look to two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and the wisdom of our Moravian forebears in the faith to guide us as we pray for fuller understanding and ever clearer proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed

only forgives us daily but dignifies us as God's children. We must always approach life from the perspective of God's grace and love. Then we are able to deal with our problems. If we approach life with primary focus on the problems, we cannot go beyond them. This is what Zinzendorf indicated.

The belief and life of the Church is effected and preserved by what Christ calls us to and what the Spirit brings about in us of faith and life. Both Christ and the Spirit are active in our lives. Both work in us in personal ways and bring us the power of new life.

Scripture is the sole standard of our doctrine and faith, but Scripture is not an end in itself. The Triune God is the source of our life and salvation. Thus we must always be open to the God whom Scripture describes for us and brings to us.

It has always been important to Moravians to understand the significance of the Cross both because it was so central to their experience of God and because it presented the reality of God over against the presuppositions of signs (power) and wisdom characteristic of Jewish and Gentile understandings. In the theology of the cross there is no denial of other realities such as the resurrection, but there is affirmation of a new way of viewing God who participates in the sufferings of existence to suffer for us and even to die for us. The cross also represents our redemption, God's freeing us from the difficulties and problems of life and the failures of our existence. For Moravians of the 18th century

completely in any human statement. Also it is true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly.

CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

#5. The *Unitas Fratrum* recognizes in the creeds of the Church the thankful acclaim of the Body of Christ. These creeds aid the Church in formulating a Scriptural confession, in marking the boundary of heresies, and in exhorting believers to an obedient and fearless testimony in every age. The *Unitas Fratrum* maintains that all creeds formulated by the Christian Church stand in need of constant testing in the light of the Holy Scriptures. It acknowledges as such true professions of faith the early Christian witness: "Jesus Christ is Lord!" and also especially the ancient Christian creeds and the fundamental creeds of the Reformation.*

**Note: In the various Provinces of the Renewed Unitas Fratrum the following creeds in particular gained special importance, because in them the main doctrines of the Christian faith find clear and simple expression:*

The Apostles' Creed; The Athanasian Creed

The Nicene Creed

The Confession of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren of 1662

The Twenty-One Articles of the unaltered Augsburg Confession

The Shorter Catechism of Martin Luther

The Synod of Berne of 1532

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England

The Theological Declaration of Barmen of 1934

The Heidelberg Catechism

the cross most clearly indicated a God of love and compassion who is at the heart of Scripture's message, over against the understanding that God was a remote God of power and judgment. The meaning of the message of the cross is extensively treated in I Corinthians 1-2.

Although we must always think out as much as we can understand, it is important to always remember that Jesus Christ, though very real, is a mystery which cannot completely be comprehended by the human mind. That is why it is important to live with the person of Jesus Christ, for in his person and companionship we find all we need even though we cannot understand it all. Thus even a child can have religion even though he or she cannot yet understand. Though this mystery of God and Christ is real and cannot be completely comprehended or stated, God's desire to save and help humankind is clear and openly stated in the Bible.

Creeds help us to understand. They are formulated in differing contexts, but each Christian tradition has its unique treasure. The Moravian Church has created creeds, the latest being *The Ground of the Unity*, and has used the creeds of other church traditions, such as the Lutheran Augsburg Confession. Up until modern times it was required that the Moravian Church accept the creeds of the countries in which it worked. Note the list of the creeds we have used. Moravians also accept the Apostles and Nicene creeds, as do most churches. We have also recognized that we continually need to examine the adequacy of our creeds to be sure that we, while recognizing our limits, sufficiently describe the mystery of

THE UNITAS FRATRUM AS A UNITY

#6. We believe in and confess the Unity of the Church given in the one Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. He died that He might unite the scattered children of God. As the living Lord and Shepherd, He is leading His flock toward such unity.

The Unitas Fratrum espoused such unity when it took over the name of the Old Bohemian Brethren's Church, "Unitas Fratrum" (Unity of Brethren). Nor can we ever forget the powerful unifying experience granted by the crucified and risen Lord to our fathers in Herrnhut on the occasion of the Holy Communion of August 13, 1727, in Berthelsdorf.

It is the Lord's will that Christendom should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love. In our own midst we see how such unity has been promised us and laid upon us as a charge. We recognize that through the grace of Christ the different churches have received many gifts. It is our desire that we may learn from each other and rejoice together in the riches of the love of Christ and the manifold wisdom of God.

We confess our share in the guilt which is manifest in the severed and divided state of Christendom. By means of such divisions we ourselves hinder the message and power of the Gospel. We recognize the danger of self-righteousness and judging others without love.

Since we together with all Christendom are pilgrims on the way to meet our coming Lord, we welcome every step that brings us nearer the

God. We are one and confess the unity of the Church given in Christ who died that he might unite us and who continues to lead us towards unity. In fact the ancient name of the Moravian Church was Unitas Fratrum (Unity of the Brethren) and the international Moravian Church today is called "the Unity." Moravians always remember the spiritual experience of unity in the Berthelsdorf Lutheran Church on August 13, 1727, as they struggled for unity in the midst of differences. *For Moravians the greatest heresy is to break relationship, a relationship Christ created and which we do not have the power or right to break.*

We must also recognize our relationship with other Churches. In recent years we have entered into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and are in dialogue with the Episcopal Church and the Reformed tradition. In England we have completed dialogue with the Anglican Church and have long been in relationship with other churches in Europe and in our mission fields. One of the most significant missions of the Moravian Church was the creation of "Diaspora Societies" for the encouragement of new spiritual life in many countries and in many and varied churches, a movement which encouraged people to remain within their own churches.

Jesus leads us to the unity of the church which he has promised.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ constitutes our primary identity. There can be no distinction between those who are one in Christ. We oppose discrimination. In the 18th century communities founded by

goal of unity in Him. He Himself invites us to communion in His supper. Through it He leads the Church toward that union which He has promised. By means of His presence in the Holy Communion He makes our unity in Him evident and certain even today.

THE CHURCH AS A FELLOWSHIP

#7. The Church of Jesus Christ, despite all the distinctions between male and female, Jew and non-Jew, white and colored, poor and rich, is one in its Lord. The Unitas Fratrum recognizes no distinction between those who are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to testify that God in Jesus Christ brings His people out of “every race, kindred and tongue” into one body, pardons sinners beneath the Cross and brings them together. We oppose any discrimination in our midst because of race or standing, and we regard it as a commandment of the Lord to bear public witness to this and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

#8. Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve. From this, His Church receives its mission and its power for its service, to which each of its members is called. We believe that the Lord has called us particularly to mission service among the peoples of the world. In this, and in all other forms of service both at home and abroad, to which the Lord commits us, He expects us to confess Him and witness to His love in unselfish service.

SERVING OUR NEIGHBOR

#9. Our Lord Jesus entered into this world's

the Moravian Church there were extensive experiments in social equality.

As Christ came to serve, we are called to engage in the service to which Christ directs us. Each of us and all of us are called to service and ministry. It is in this service that the life and service of Christ is lived out in this world. We are the vehicles of this service.

Like Jesus, we are in the world to bear the world's misery and overcome it.

To the world we need to bring the love of God and the promotion of peace. In love we commit ourselves to this fallen world while

misery to bear it and to overcome it. We seek to follow Him in serving His brethren. Like the love of Jesus, this service knows no bounds. Therefore we pray the Lord ever anew to point out to us the way to reach our neighbor, opening our heart and hand to him in his need.

SERVING THE WORLD

#10. Jesus Christ maintains in love and faithfulness His commitment to this fallen world. Therefore we must remain concerned for this world. We may not withdraw from it through indifference, pride or fear. Together with the universal Christian Church, the Unitas Fratrum challenges mankind with the message of the love of God, striving to promote the peace of the world and seeking to attain what is best for all men. For the sake of this world, the Unitas Fratrum hopes for and looks to the day when the victory of Christ will be manifest over sin and death and the new world will appear.

CONCLUSION

#11. Jesus Christ is the one Lord and Head of His body, the Church. Because of this, the Church owes no allegiance to any authority whatsoever which opposes His dominion. The Unitas Fratrum treasures in its history the vital experience of the Headship of Christ of September 16 and November 13, 1741.

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes that it is called into being and has been sustained hitherto only by the incomprehensible grace of God. Thanksgiving and praise for this grace remains the keynote of its life and ministry.

In this spirit it awaits the appearing of Jesus Christ, goes forward to meet its Lord with joy, and prays to be found ready when He comes.

we await the coming of the new world and the victory of Christ. In the present time we can be the place of God's presence, where God's kingdom may come, if we open our lives and hearts to these possibilities.

Jesus is the One to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance and we recognize his Headship over us and the Church.

We are sustained by God's grace and live in thanksgiving.

Your Personal Creed

The Moravian Church encourages your personal journey and exploration *in the context of its tradition and statements of faith and the traditions of other Christian Churches*. It asks that you respect the wisdom of the centuries embodied in its creeds, while remaining open to the leading of Christ in your personal life. It respects your insights and stories and affirms the way Christ will companion you in the discovery of what you need to know, perhaps the discovery of some things others may not need to know. God works in a personal way. Please note your thoughts about the items below.

I. God as Father and Creator: What am I discovering about God and God's relationship with the world?

II. God as Son: What does all that Jesus did mean to and for me? What is Jesus leading me to discover as my Companion in life?

III. God as Spirit and other items of Article III of the Creed. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in my life and what does it mean to me that God sends the Spirit into my life?

What does the Church mean to me? What does Scripture mean to me?

Do I have any sense of life in God's spiritual world and the world to come?

Dr. Arthur Freeman was Professor of New Testament at Moravian Theological Seminary where he also taught the theology of Zinzendorf and Spiritual Formation. He is editor of the North American Edition of TMDK/ITD.

Using The Ground of the Unity

Edward J. P. O'Connor

Shortly after moving to Mount Airy, NC, in 1996 from Connecticut, where we belonged to a Congregational Church, we began attending Grace Moravian. Pastor Neil Routh spent an afternoon at our house describing the Moravian faith and left a packet of materials, including *The Ground of the Unity*. I read it and thought: "That's nice. Now I have some idea about the Moravian Church." And then I put the copy back in the envelope.

One of the things that attracted me to join Grace Moravian was the opportunity to participate in *Gemeinschaft*. The next encounter with *The Ground* came at the Group III (third year) level. Discussion of *The Ground* follows a few weeks of reading the historical and theological background of Moravian doctrine in *Confessing Our Unity in Christ* (Daniel Crews). The opening paragraph and first section, The Belief of the Church, are introduced in week 10 without discussion. The remaining sections are incorporated into discussion by way of "reflective questions." For example, under the heading Personal Belief is the statement, "This testimony calls each individual personally, and leads each one to the recognition of sin and the acceptance of the redemption achieved by Christ." The reflective question is, "Why is the recognition of sin in my life as a Christian good news?" This was the first time that I had to interact with the text and come to some decisions about it or draw implications from it.

In 2002, when I was elected to the Southern Province Board of Christian Education, a resolution came to the Board from the Synod calling for a curriculum to teach *The Ground* and *The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living*. A subcommittee was charged with responding to that resolution and decided that, rather than trying to write by committee, we should engage an expert. Brother Craig Atwood consented and produced a study guide with commentary and related questions for discussion on each paragraph. Members of the subcommittee were asked to critique the draft. It was now necessary for me to understand the real essence of *The Ground* and make sure that the commentary was clear and was consistent with the perspective of each paragraph. Fortunately, Brother Atwood had been thorough and insightful, so that task was easy. (Published as *Jesus Still Lead On: An Introduction to Moravian Belief*, Interprovincial Board of Communication, 2004.)

My next engagement with *The Ground* came soon after when I was asked to be the trainer for the *Gemeinschaft* Group III leaders. Now I had to know the material in *The Ground* sufficiently to guide others through enough of it that they would feel comfortable leading the discussion in their own groups in the fall. In addition, I was asked to conduct a devotion on the fact that Group III focuses on Moravian doctrine. I was able to draw on *The Ground* to help define what it means to be a Moravian.

Meanwhile, I had been appointed to chair the Southern Province Commission on Church and Society. We made it a principle from the outset that our work would be theologically grounded. The 1995 Synod had mandated that each church have a Social Concerns Committee. We initiated a survey to determine what these committees were doing. We learned that there were few "social concerns" committees by name,

but a variety of committees that churches identified as somehow related to social ministry (Community Concerns, Outreach, Missions, Evangelism, Social Action, etc.). Secondly, they were carrying out a wide variety of activities. Finally, there were some churches with no committee at all. We concluded that it would be worthwhile for us to write a handbook for social concerns committees. To provide the theological background for such committees, Brother Routh, a member of the Commission, extracted two sections from *The Ground* as pertinent: The Church as a Brotherhood and Serving the World. He supplemented this with relevant statements from *The Moravian Covenant*. He provided commentary for the significant passages in those sections so as to set goals for a committee to achieve. (The handbook will soon be ready for publication.)

The Church as a Brotherhood came up in another context. Having become a member of the Board of Elders at the church where I am a member, I had a gnawing feeling about the fact that women did not usher except on the rare months that have a fifth Sunday. I pointed out that we were in violation of *The Ground* in not giving the women an equal opportunity to serve. The elders concurred, and, rather than the issue being controversial, the head usher said that he would be glad to have a larger pool of ushers and implemented the change immediately.

A resolution from the Unity Synod on Justice for Women was sent to the Commission on Church and Society. The resolution was very broadly worded, and we have spent time attempting to grasp all of the issues involved in that subject. One issue that arose was the role of women in the ministry of the Moravian Church. A review of *The Ground*, as well as *The Moravian Covenant* and the liturgies, revealed that there is nothing that calls for a separate role for women. In fact, there are a number of statements to the contrary. In *The Ground*, under the heading The Belief of the Church, is the following statement: “We hear Him summoning us to follow Him, and pray Him to use us in His service. He joins us together mutually, so that knowing ourselves to be members of His body we become willing to serve each other.” From the section, The Church as a Brotherhood, the following applies: “The Unitas Fratrum recognizes no distinction between those who are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . We oppose any discrimination in our midst because of race or standing, and we regard it as a commandment of the Lord to bear public witness to this and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.” Especially pertinent to this consideration are these paragraphs from the section, Essential Features of the Unity: The Vocation of the Unitas Fratrum and Its Congregations:

- “The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the priesthood of all believers but also has specially appointed ministers who receive commission and authority for their service from the hands of Jesus Christ, whom the Church acknowledges as its Chief Elder. All members may gladly and confidently carry on their work in and for the congregation, and by their devotion and faithfulness all can render service to the whole Church.”

- “At the same time the Unitas Fratrum gratefully acknowledges the gift of the offices of the ministry and confesses that in reality it is its Lord and Head, Jesus Christ, who calls and ordains, whether in the case of the reception as an acolyte, or the ordination to the office of deacon, or the consecration as a

presbyter or bishop.”

- “The same is true for the brethren and sisters who are called or elected to serve in any official capacity.”

With this background in mind, the Commission on Church and Society sent to the Provincial Elders’ Conference several recommendations concerning the role of women ministers in the Southern Province.

Another aspect of justice for women was brought to our attention. Sharee Fowler, head of the Domestic Violence Committee of Family Services in Winston-Salem, contacted the commission in regard to the fact that domestic violence is a hidden element among members of our church families. Ministers need special training to deal with these situations. Under the heading in *The Ground, Serving Our Neighbor*, we find this statement: “Therefore we pray the Lord ever anew to point out to us the way to reach our neighbors, opening our heart and hand to them in their need.” The commission arranged for Sister Fowler to give a presentation on domestic violence for a recent provincial ministerial meeting. Fifty pastors and Christian educators were in attendance. Response to the session was very positive.

The Church as a Brotherhood has become something of a mantra for the commission as it applies to so many aspects of social ministry. It is the basis of the commission’s response to the issue of race in the churches of the Southern Province (see “Race and Faith in the Moravian Church,” and the related responses in *The Hinge*, vol. 10, no. 2, Summer 2003). The commission is developing a racial reconciliation program to bring together members of Moravian churches and members of predominantly minority churches in small groups with a curriculum designed to promote racial reconciliation, understanding, and respect loosely based on the Gemeinschaft model. We expect to have some pilot groups functioning within the next few months.

One of the top priorities for the commission has been the issue of climate change, or human-induced global warming. This led us to extract sections from *The Ground* and the other documents of doctrine to form a statement titled “Caring for Creation.” We referred to the section of *The Ground* called Serving the World, noting particularly Jesus’ commitment for this world, and the fact that we must remain concerned for this world and for what is best for all people. We interpret this as including the caring for resources that are here for all the people of the world and for the preservation of the environment. “Caring for Creation” was included in a packet of educational materials on global warming sent to all churches of the province and was published in the October, 2004, issue of *The Moravian*.

The Unity Synod also sent to the commission a resolution on HIV/AIDS, noting its epidemic dimension in many parts of the world and the fact that it remains insidious in the United States. In *The Ground*, The Church as a Community of Service reminds us that “Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve. From this, His Church receives its mission and its power for its service, to which each of its members is called. We believe that the Lord has called us particularly to mission service among the peoples of the world.” With this in mind, the commission has met with staff of AIDS Care Service in Winston-Salem and has assembled a variety of educational materials on an HIV/AIDS ministry, which

will soon be distributed to the churches of the province.

There seems to be no end to the needs that come before the Commission on Church and Society. Along with the Bible and *The Moravian Daily Texts*, I keep *The Ground of the Unity* at my elbow as a guide to carrying out our responsibilities.

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Something to Stand On

Douglas C. Rights

My first call out of seminary was to serve as the associate pastor of the Kernersville Moravian Church in Kernersville, North Carolina. One afternoon I visited one of our members whose name was Pink Smith. “Miss Pink” was one of our older members who had been a part of the Kernersville Moravian church family for years. During our visit in her living room, I noticed she had a large, thick Bible on her coffee table. The Bible looked worn and used. Seeing an opportunity for our conversation to have more of a spiritual aspect, I said to Miss Pink, “I like your Bible on the table, and it looks like you read it a lot.” Miss Pink looked at me and replied, “Oh I don’t read that one anymore because it’s too large to handle. Now I use it to pull down my shades.” Miss Pink then pointed to one of her windows. At the top of the window was a shade. She had difficulty reaching far enough to pull the window shade down. She solved her problem by taking her large, thick Bible, placing it on the floor, and standing on it to reach the shade. When she told me that, I thought to myself, “Here is someone who literally stands on the Word of God.”

As Christians it is important for us to stand on God’s Word and to let its teachings be the foundation of our lives. Jesus himself said in Matthew 7:24, “Therefore, if anyone hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, he is like a wise man who built his house on rock.” Knowing God’s Word and applying it to our lives keeps us grounded in our faith. As Moravians, *The Ground of the Unity* helps serve that purpose as well.

I am a person who likes to keep things simple. I like things that are clear, concise and to the point. These are some of the things that I appreciate about *The Ground of the Unity*. I love the way Moravians of the past have taken the numerous books, chapters and verses of Scripture and narrowed it down to the clear, concise, and to the point document that we call *The Ground of the Unity* which shows what we believe in the Moravian Church.

I will have to admit that for a number of years when people asked me what the Moravian Church believed, my answer came from John Groenfeld’s book, *Becoming a Member of the Moravian Church*.

The chapter “What We Believe” shares a list of beliefs Groenfeld felt are essential to the Christian faith. This list includes such items as Jesus being the Son of God, humans are sinful, our only forgiveness is through Jesus, the Second Coming of Jesus, and so on.

Several years ago at a Ministers Retreat, I heard Bishop George Higgins talking with other pastors. They were discussing the beliefs of the Moravian Church. I remember Bishop Higgins saying, “Groenfeld’s list of beliefs are not the essentials of the Moravian Church.” Whoa! That got my attention! Did the Bishop mean that the Moravian Church does not believe that Jesus is God’s Son? That we are not forgiven of our sins through Jesus? That Jesus is not going to come again? Fortunately as I continued to listen, that is not what Bishop Higgins meant. The Bishop was talking about what we officially recognize as what the Moravian Church believes. He was referring to decisions passed at our Synods. Bishop Higgins shared how Groenfeld’s lists of beliefs had never been brought before any Synod, while *The Ground of the Unity* had. Bishop Higgins’ point was the Moravian Church’s official, Synod-approved statement of belief is *The Ground of the Unity* and not Groenfeld’s list. From that discussion, I realized I needed to get more familiar with *The Ground of the Unity*.

As a Moravian I am grateful to have *The Ground of the Unity*. I am thankful for the fact that I can point to something that tells me what the Moravian Church believes. As a pastor I am also appreciative of *The Ground of the Unity*. When I teach a New Members Class, I am proud to give class members a copy of *The Ground of the Unity*. I tell the class members if they want to know what the Moravian Church believes, this is it. In my preaching there have been times when I have talked about certain issues and I share portions of *The Ground of the Unity* to show what the Moravian Church says and believes. In discussions when people question Christian beliefs, *The Ground of the Unity* enables me to say to that person, “that may be your opinion, but this is what we believe in the Moravian Church.” When our church has struggled with the threat of changes involving our essential beliefs, it has been helpful to hear a church official say, “Nothing has changed about what the Moravian Church believes because nothing has changed in *The Ground of the Unity*.”

As I read and reflect on *The Ground of the Unity*, I am inspired like those who wrote this document. I read how Jesus is the source of who we are and what we do. I read how our salvation is through Christ, how we need Jesus, and how he is here for us. I read how we are shaped and empowered by Christ’s love, and how we are to share the good news of Jesus with the world. I read about the emphasis the Moravian Church places on unity, fellowship and love.

I believe *The Ground of the Unity* is a tremendous asset of the Moravian Church. There is one thing, however, that I would like to see in it. There is this statement in *The Ground of the Unity*: “The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine.” I agree with this statement because there are things we continue to learn about Scripture and God’s will for us. I also struggle with this statement because it seems anything can be questioned. I feel there are some things that we do not need to question. As Christians, we do not need to question the reality of God. We do not need to question Jesus being God’s Son. We do not need to question that our salvation comes through Jesus. If there

is anything I would like to see in *The Ground of the Unity*, it is a strong statement which says there are some essential beliefs in the Moravian Church that are unquestionable and unchanging.

It is my hope and prayer for the Moravian Church that we will continue to look to God's Word and to *The Ground of the Unity* for our guidance and direction in our individual lives and in the life of our church. Just as Miss Pink physically stood on the Word of God, may we spiritually be grounded and stand tall as we reach for the blessings of life that come from living the truths of God.

The Rev. Douglas C. Rights is pastor of Olivet Moravian Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.

The Ground of the Unity — an Attempt for Our Time

Hans-Beat Motel

Editor's Note: This paper was written by Hans-Beat Motel for the use of a theological discussion in Bad Boll, Germany. Readers are encouraged to write responses.

Preface: *The Ground of the Unity* was written at the Unity Synod 1957, which took place in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This synod was one of the most important events of the worldwide Moravian Church, because it succeeded in building bridges between provinces which were deeply affected and burdened by two disastrous world wars, and it paved the way to our global Moravian fellowship as it stands today. It was most helpful and decisive, that this synod took place in the "New World" — for the first time in the history of our church.

The Ground of Unity was never intended to form a creed or a confession. The idea was to establish some guidelines and a foundation for what the Moravian community believes. It contributed to bring the Moravian Church together, and it has served well as a summary of some basic Moravian doctrinal statements ever since. Because it has never been understood to be a text which is valid for centuries, but rather a document of a certain time, there have been some changes in the text, e.g. by the Unity Synod 1995.

According to my conviction, it is time to look at the ground of the Unity as a whole, and to start an attempt to come to a new text which reflects better the situation of the Moravian Church today and the needs of Christian statements of our time. Also this text, of course, should not last for ever, but must be adapted when the need arises. If this text provokes a discussion which might lead to a draft to be presented at Unity Synod 2009 — the much the better!

1. As the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum), we confess in accordance with the New Testament church “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and we gratefully acknowledge that this witness has born a multitude of fruits both in the Old and the Renewed Unity. God’s love is meant for all people without any restriction. Through the crucified Jesus of Nazareth this love demonstrates that God has taken upon Himself the suffering and the guilt of this world. Through the risen Christ this love demonstrates that God once and for all has overcome the fatal powers of death. Therefore our faith in Jesus Christ means for us to live on an everlasting hope.

2. As the Moravian Church, we are deeply indebted to the rich heritage of our church. In view of the Old Unity we esteem in particular:

- the committed fellowship of those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord;
- the idea of peace and non-violence, based on the teaching and life of Jesus Christ;
- the Bible as standard for our life;
- the education of the youth, leading them to Christ and as such offering them education in the full sense of this word.

As a heritage of the renewed Unity we esteem in particular:

- the rediscovery of the center of the Scripture, the death of Jesus Christ at the cross, by which he has reconciled us with God and became our friend and brother;
- the congregation being a place of joy caused by this Good News, expressed in a rich liturgical life;
- the experience that this Good News is directed to the whole human being;
- the recognition that in the congregation women and men are equal;
- mission as a possibility to proclaim the Good News all over the world to people who live in a deadlock situation or at the brink of society, these people being creatures and images of God as all the others;
- the recognition that the Good News lives and exists in various churches and com-munions in different ways, and that the churches need and supplement each other when they proclaim the Gospel.

3. As the Moravian Church today our task is to let this rich heritage bear fruit again. By fulfilling this task, we are stating that the contents of our heritage are more important than the forms by which it has been conveyed. Therefore we want to examine our traditions, including those which we love particularly, to determine whether they still help us understand the sense of the heritage of the Moravian Church and whether they are able to pass it on in a meaningful way.

4. For the Moravian Church, the crucified Jesus of Nazareth forms the center of the Scripture. This means for our proclamation and for our life as Christians today:

- we take for serious that God loves his whole world so much that He gave His only beloved Son (John 3:16);
- we may live on God's forgiveness, and we are freed from guilt;
- God bears and endures the suffering and the misery of His world;
- the non-violent suffering of Jesus at the cross means a clear sign of tolerance, also with regard to people who think and believe in a way different from ours.

5. Also, the risen Jesus Christ forms in the Moravian Church the center of the proclamation. Throughout the world the Moravian Church witnesses this by using the symbol of the Lamb with the flag of victory (according to Revelation 17:14) and the words: "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him." This means for our teaching and our life as Christians:

- we live on hope, founded on Christ's victory against death and its powers; this hope does not come from ourselves, therefore it is everlasting and is directed to the whole world;
- the risen Lord has conquered the world, but in His victory he has remained defenseless and has renounced any kind of violence or force; following Him, the Moravian Church declines to carry through Christian faith by any kind of pressure or even violence.

6. The Bible of the Old and New Testament leads us to Jesus Christ as our Lord and is the standard of our faith. We read it from the center, the crucified and risen Lord who told his disciples to love God and to honor Him, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, because "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matth. 22:34 ff). This center makes us understand the Bible with its manifold statements, and to value them. Also the *Daily Texts* which help the Word of God speak to us in our daily life must be understood from the center of Scripture. *The Daily Texts* link us with Christians throughout the world.

7. From the heritage of our congregational life we look for and develop new forms of fellowship. In an earlier time this was secured through the choir-system. No one should feel excluded, certainly not members of socially marginalized groups or people in socially difficult situations. The Moravian Church wants to be an open and inviting church for all. With regard to membership in a Moravian congregation, social or cultural differences or sexual orientation are not relevant. It remains the task of our congregations to look out for people who seek ways into the warm shelter of a congregation and to invite them to join the fellowship.

8. The heritage of mission work and its extensive history leads us today to rediscover the instruction given by Zinzendorf to the women and men involved in mission work: "go there, where nobody goes." We want to examine time and again where "nobody goes" in our environment and throughout the world. That means we should look for people who are lost, such as the homeless, asylum seekers, refugees, and those who are HIV infected. In view of new mission outreach in different parts of the world, the program "New World Witness" started in 1988 by the worldwide Moravian Church and supported by all provinces means a great help. When proclaiming the Gospel it is important to us that cultural elements

which are reconcilable with the Good News are being preserved and possibly integrated in church life. At this point we confess that the mission work of our church started in Europe and the North America has not always taken this into account sufficiently, and has deprived people of their identity.

9. As a result of the mission work of nearly three centuries God has presented to the Moravian Church a worldwide fellowship of sisters and brothers which we regard as of high value. As the Moravian Church we want to do everything possible to preserve and to deepen this fellowship. It helps us to promote our understanding of different cultural values. In order to reach this goal, the Moravian Church supports the exchange of personnel within the various regions as well as joint intercultural theological studies; both we want to encourage. We explicitly want to continue our efforts to contribute to justice within and outside the Moravian Church, since only through justice sustainable peace can grow and flourish.

10. The heritage of ecumenical openness and cooperation leads us today to look for and to develop relations with other churches and Christian communities, particularly on the level of local congregations. We are convinced that Jesus himself invites all to Holy Communion; therefore the Moravian Holy Communion services are open to all who seek comfort and encouragement. As the Moravian Church we positively support the ecumenical cooperation both on the national and regional level and we underline our commitment to the World Council of Churches and its mandate.

11. The heritage of our liturgical life remains significant to us because the Moravian Church in the first decades of the Herrnhut congregational life succeeded in developing liturgical forms which conveyed a convincing message. This message is not kept alive today by simply repeating those traditions. If meaningful and necessary, the contents must get new forms. This is true for our forms of worship, our hymns, and also, for example, for the Moravian service of the Holy Supper where fellowship is emphasized so strongly, or for the lovefeast where the idea of sharing is celebrated. When we look for and discover new liturgical forms, the exchange among the different regions of our church is important.

12. The heritage of the Old Unity of peace and non-violence leads us to commit ourselves to peace and justice by prayer, action and public witness. Congregations are places where this can be learned and exercised. We confess that in times of colonialism, the Nazi-regime in Germany and the apartheid policy in South Africa our church and the respective provinces and congregations did not always succeed in clearly witnessing the will of our crucified and risen Lord.

13. The heritage of the educational work leads us to exhaust all possibilities in our congregations and schools to bring Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior of this world and our life to children and young people. As the outstanding mothers and fathers of this heritage have taught us, this happens without any pressure and in a free spirit in order to enable young people entrusted to us to develop their individual gifts and talents. The education aims at a commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation and the sensibility for social behavior.

14. The heritage of charitable work for needy and distressed people leads our church to continue the loving service to people of all ages. At this point, we recognize gratefully the joint task of our worldwide church in Palestine and the rehabilitation center Star Mountain and in East Asia with the boarding school

near Rajpur, India. We regard both places to be signs of peace and reconciliation in their environment. As Moravian church, we want to continue with these commitments.

15. As we believe in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, we live on a twofold hope: in the hope that God through the resurrection of His son has overcome the fatal powers of this world, and in the hope, that our Lord Jesus Christ shall come to us with his kingdom. Everything we say and do as Christians and members of the Moravian Church remains in the light of this hope. Until our Lord comes, we pray to Him that His word becomes real among us: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15).

The Rev. Hans-Beat Motel is former chair of the Unity Board and written for both The Hinge and ITD.

Reflections on *The Ground of the Unity* and Contemporary Controversies

Ted Wilde

Moravians of all viewpoints on “Resolution 6” can be thankful for Lee Sprinkle’s response in the *Summer 2004 Hinge*, which in a way represented Moravians who oppose the resolution. (Resolution 6 of the Northern Province 2002 Synod welcomes and affirms homosexuals in the congregations of the Northern Province.) Brother Sprinkle expressed as a standard that moral decisions should reflect “a position of conscience based in the clear teachings of scripture and 2000 years of Christian history” and “a desire to be faithful to God’s revelation.”

I think both “liberal” and “conservative” Christians can agree on the importance of these standards for dialogue on divisive issues in the Moravian Church. We can enlarge our openness to new insights from God’s revelation and from each other by reflecting on the richness of these strands of revelation. We have the richness of scripture in many forms of poetry, ancient stories of the Hebrew people, historical recounting, parables, and letters. We have the richness of natural history, secular history, and church history. Church history and theology reflect many struggles over doctrine and practice, including in the Moravian Church, which was born of controversy. We believe we can discern God’s self-disclosure in these histories also. The Triune God’s revelation is most of all centered in Jesus and Jesus’ promise of the Spirit’s leading, even to this day.

Then we have also the richness of sisters and brothers in Christ, with our varied scriptural favorites and interpretations and our different experiences. Affirming the value of this Christian fellowship enables us more fully to encompass also the richness of scripture, of history, of Christ, and of the Spirit’s leading. So even as we select which aspects of revelation are important and clear to us on a given concern of faith, let us continue the discussion, following Jesus, with openness to the Spirit and to each other.

Consider Jesus, God's central revelation and our example. Clear in Jesus' life and teaching is that his followers should resist evil and violence, but not with countervailing violence (Matthew 5:38-48 and many other passages). Jesus did not respond in kind to the violence of his arrest and commanded the same response for his disciples, Matthew 26:52. This call to non-violence was followed literally by the early church and by our Moravian ancestors in the faith. For the first 200 years, Christians did not retaliate violently to the violence of the Roman Empire. Our founding Moravians stayed out of the wars of 16th-century Bohemia. In the 18th century, the renewed Moravians in Georgia refused to take up arms against "Indians." Some present-day Christians, for example evangelicals from Mennonite heritage, maintain the certainty of their tradition that both scriptures and history require Christian pacifism. However, our Moravian history is different. Already by 1861, many Moravian men volunteered for the Union and Confederate armies. Our Moravian ancestors must have shot each other. By the 20th century, after Hitler's aggression, discussion of Christian participation in war is less about pacifism in all situations and more about specific wars and purposes.

In this aspect of Christian practice, our understandings differ about how to live out the full richness of revelation in today's world. Let us continue the discussion, following Jesus, with openness to the Spirit and to each other.

Another example: relating to sexuality, Jesus' teaching recorded in the gospels concerns men looking lustfully at women. On marriage and divorce, Jesus clearly states that remarriage after divorce is adultery (Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18; also Matthew 19:9 which differs in offering an exception for marital unfaithfulness. The Apostle Paul adds another exception on his own, not the Lord's authority I Corinthians 7:12-16.) Nineteen hundred years of church history concerning divorce supported a strict prohibition against remarriage within the bounds of the church. Still, this clarity in Scripture and history did not produce equally clear answers for real lives, including those of committed Christians. Should someone who divorced and remarried, possibly before he or she became a Christian, leave the second spouse? Live together in lifelong abstinence? In the North American Moravian Church we ended up with "don't ask/don't tell," in which divorced persons remarried elsewhere and then returned to the church. I expect most Moravians concur with the synod decisions of 40 plus years ago that changed this prohibition in favor of relating to divorced persons pastorally, more attuned to Jesus' call for his disciples to be merciful, even as God is merciful. So what is our response of conscience to scripture, history, and Jesus?

In this aspect of Christian practice, our understandings differ about how to live out the full richness of revelation in today's world. Let us continue the discussion, following Jesus, with openness to the Spirit and to each other. As for Resolution 6 welcoming homosexual persons within our congregations, we have no recorded teaching from Jesus regarding homosexuality. The Gospels do have a main theme on the full inclusion of all kinds of outcasts in God's mercy and Rule/Kingdom. It is hard for me to imagine Jesus voting against Resolution 6. Still, there are other scriptures.

In this aspect of Christian practice, our understandings differ about how to live out the full richness of revelation in today's world. Let us continue the discussion, following Jesus, with openness to the Spirit and to each other.

History encourages us, even as we are weary of all this discussion, because we fear it will lead nowhere. Two hundred years ago a hot topic in the Moravian Church was whether limiting uses of the lot favored by the deceased and still beloved Count von Zinzendorf reflected a lack of faith in the leading of Jesus, our Chief Elder. Somehow, this issue is no longer compelling, and we Moravians use the lot mainly for the selection of Daily Texts (the Nicaragua Province also used the lot to choose the current Superintendent). Fifty years ago, the Moravian Church did not accept women in ordained ministry. With the first calling of ordained women as congregational pastors, some members left. Somehow, we now seem on our way to a vague consensus on ordained women in church leadership.

In any of many possible disagreements, we can decide to break fellowship or we can agree at least on this: In these aspects of Christian practice, our understandings differ about how to live out the full richness of revelation in today's world. Let us continue the discussion, following Jesus, with openness to the Spirit and to each other.

The inadequacy of the "sole standard" formulation in *The Ground of the Unity*. Brother Sprinkle's standard for moral decisions and the examples in this letter all seem to indicate the inadequacy of the often-quoted declaration of the Moravian *Ground of the Unity*: "...and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum..." "Sole standard" is an unhelpful formulation, no matter how much it is explained and latinized. *The Ground* itself does not really present the scriptures as sole standard. In various parts of *The Ground*, the revelation of scripture is enlarged by the Triune God, by "two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and the wisdom of our Moravian forebears in the faith," by prayer, by the Sacraments, and by the Holy Spirit. The "love of Christ" figures prominently in *The Ground* as a resource for faith and practice. Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Ted Wilde is a member of Prince of Peace Moravian Church in Florida and was Director of the Board of World Mission.

Special Feature

PROTOCOL FOR LEAVING AND ARRIVING AT A PARISH

Adopted by the Bishops of the Northern and Southern Provinces

Editor's Note: This statement was reviewed and affirmed at the Eleventh Interprovincial Conference of Bishops of the Northern and Southern Provinces meeting at Home Church, Winston-Salem, N.C., July 18-21, 2002 and was sent as a recommendation to the Provincial Elders' Conferences, North and South. It was given to The Hinge in the hopes that it would stimulate discussion and reflection on an important but often neglected aspect of parish life. At the moment, this statement is advisory, but it reflects the wisdom of the bishops who have dealt with this issue as pastors and as pastors to pastors. Readers, lay and ordained, are encouraged to send their responses to this protocol to The Hinge.

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 describes one of life's challenging rhythms. There is a time to plant and a time to pull up, a time to break down and a time to build up, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together. Such vivid imagery describes the experience of a clergyperson arriving to become pastor of a congregation, and a clergyperson leaving her or his post as pastor.

As challenging as is the arrival with all of its getting acquainted energy, the process of up-rooting from what has become known, familiar and generally comfortable, to be re-rooted in a new community as the new pastoral leader of the congregation, is the process of leaving a parish, experiencing separation in putting behind all that has become a part of the relationship as pastor and people. The recognition and acceptance that "I am no longer the pastor of this church family" or "she/he is no longer our pastor" is at times difficult to achieve. Yet, at stake is the integrity of our relationships with one another and the challenge to be appropriate and responsible in the transition. No matter what the situation, whether it be a pastor who is called to another congregation, resigns or retires and leaves parish ministry, elected to a position of leadership in the denomination, or is removed as pastor, we experience a mixture of emotions, including sadness, disappointment, some resentment and maybe even anger, but also joy, happiness or satisfaction. With the announcement of the pastor's leaving a significant grieving process is set in motion. The challenge is for pastor and people to proceed through this process of separation with a high level of integrity and responsibility, utilizing and following the Provincial Elders' Conference's suggested guidelines and protocol for leave-taking. What follows is directed more toward leaving a congregation, for this is where the boundaries are often confused and lines of integrity are breached, often with confusion, pain, resentment and alienation.

The Difference Between Arriving and Leaving

While this may appear rather elementary, the potential entanglement of emotions when pastors leave and arrive demands that we carefully line out the issues and state expectations.

When a new pastor arrives the dynamic is one of welcome, expectation and anticipation for both the pastor and the congregation. Hopes are usually high and the energy of the church community can be equally high. Congregations and pastors know quite well the rhythm that includes everything from installation Sunday to all the getting acquainted rituals.

Not so when the pastor leaves. Here an entirely different set of emotions is experienced with the congregation and pastor entering new territory, one that at times can become a potential minefield. It is a minefield marked with all kinds of questions: Does the former pastor come back for weddings and funerals? Is it appropriate for the former pastor to come back and visit in the congregation? Is there a problem with continuing regular contact with certain former parishioners? Should a pastor reside in the same community in which she/he lives after leaving a congregation? Should former pastors continue to participate in the life of the congregation they have just left? What about membership in one's former parish when one continues to reside in the community. How should the former pastor handle criticisms of her/his successor, and likewise, how should be new pastor respond to criticisms of her/his predecessor?

This document attempts to answer those questions and offer guidelines for the former pastor, new pastor and the congregation. Compliance can lead to healthier relationships, as well as maintain a strong sense of loving integrity between pastors, the congregations they serve, and their colleagues in ordained ministry.

Leaving One Parish for Another

In addition to information given to local congregations by the Province/District Executive Board informing them of the process that occurs when their pastor announces she/he is leaving, it is important for the Provincial/District President and the outgoing pastor to clearly communicate additional guidelines. In bulletins, the newsletter, and in personal conversations, the clear message to be given is, "When I leave this parish, I will no longer be your pastor!" "For the good of us all, there needs to be a significant time of separation, and I will not be coming back to officiate at weddings, funerals and baptisms." As one pastor brought his pastorate to a close but was continuing to live in the community, he included this in the church newsletter: "It is very important that the final day of ministry here be considered a complete severance from all pastoral duties."

Granted, it is normal and natural to want to keep in touch, and yes, to return to one's former parish carries a kind of excitement. But for at least the first year, the former pastor should not return in any official capacity to allow time for separation to occur.

Are there exceptions? It seems that there are always exceptions to be considered and each should be negotiated between the Provincial/District president, the Joint Board of the congregation and the pastors involved. Regardless, the issues that exist are, "What kind of message is the pastor giving to her/his new parish by continually returning to the former congregation?" "Might it be saying that our new pastor has not fully arrived to become our pastor?" Equally impacting is the message being given

to the former congregation that says, “I’m not going to leave you; I’ll come back and take care of you.” When this occurs, everyone is caught in the middle of the minefield. The question pastors must ask themselves is, “Whose needs are really being met?” “Is this simply satisfying my ego needs?” Pastors do have choices. Right choices serve to maintain a spirit of integrity and responsibility.

Another question that may arise is, “What about keeping in touch with former parishioners through letters, e-mail or by phone, especially when they are raising church concerns with the former pastor?” Other than thank you notes in response to farewell gifts and expressions of kindness, it would be far healthier to stay away from these contacts for the first year to enable everyone concerned to experience the process of disengagement. Again, the boundary line must be maintained that says, “I am no longer your pastor; you really need to talk with your new pastor or a member of the board about those concerns.”

The Former Pastor Continuing to Reside in the Community

This is an area that raises another set of questions, including “Should the pastor reside in the same community where she/he served when their call to that congregation has ended?” “Should the former pastor continue to relate to her/his former church and how?” “Should she/he and the family continue as members?”

Generally speaking, there is no reason why the former pastor can’t continue to live in the same community where they served, as long as certain boundaries are maintained. The former pastor and family should not participate in the life of the congregation for at least the first year, providing time for appropriate separation, allowing for full disconnection, and for the new clergy to settle in and become pastor. Negotiations for future activity or membership in the congregation can take place after the first year, including determination of what role of ministry the former pastor might be able to offer in ways that are mutually beneficial for all concerned.

Other Related Issues

What happens when the new pastor is approached by a parishioner and says, “Pastor, if you really want the real story around here, I’ll be glad to tell you;” or, “You know, there is something you really should know about our former pastor.” These two statements represent equally dangerous minefields and should cause red flags to fly.

Rule # 1: First and foremost, we call one another to a high degree of mutuality and sensitivity toward both the incoming pastor and family, and the pastor and family who leave.

Rule # 2: Be cautious when a parishioner conveys the notion that they have the real scoop. One can listen and say, “Thank you. I’ll take it under advisement along with the opinions of others.”

Rule # 3: Refuse to listen to stories about the former pastor. Remember, there is a new pastor in the parish you have just left behind and how would you want her/him to handle criticisms of your ministry? One might say to the parishioner, “You know, Pastor _____ is my colleague and it isn’t helpful or healthy for us to be discussing criticisms of her/him unless there is something you need to get off your chest.”

Conclusion

What is at stake in this rhythm of pastoral moves is maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the Body of Christ. Pastors and congregations are to model for each other what it means to be Christ's community, exercising sensitivity, a loving and caring spirit, and a reconciling heart. Let this document then serve as the plumb line to guide us through the rhythms of planting and pulling up, breaking down and building, mourning and dancing, in ways that can lead to healthy relationships with one another as pastors and congregations.

Summarizing the Essential Guidelines

A reading of life in the New Testament Church suggest, even demands guidelines that maintain the integrity of the pastoral office and our life together in congregations. Anticipating the pastors leaving and that first year of separation, the following guidelines are offered:

1. The Provincial Elders' Conference/District Board communicates to congregations and pastors "The Protocol for Leaving a Parish."
2. The clear message is given by the pastor, written and orally, "I am no longer your pastor."
3. The pastor shall clearly indicated, "I won't be coming back to officiate in any way."
4. If there are exceptions, they must be initiated by the current pastor and negotiated between the Provincial/District president, joint boards and both pastors.
5. The pastor and spouse will not keep regular contact with former parishioners.
6. The new pastor will develop skills to appropriately and healthily deal with parishioners as they speak of the former pastor.

Submitted by the Rt. Rev. Paul A. Graf.

Book Notes

Craig D. Atwood. **Jesus Still Lead On: An Introduction to Moravian Belief – Studies of the Moravian Covenant for Christian Living and The Ground of the Unity.** (Bethlehem PA: Moravian Church – Interprovincial Board of Communication, 2004).

Reviewed by David A. Schattschneider

It was a simple request that led me to the discovery of this valuable resource. “Some of our newer members are wondering what really are the Moravian ‘essentials,’” said the leader of an adult Sunday School class in a nearby congregation. “Do you think you could spend four Sunday mornings discussing what Moravians believe?”

Craig Atwood’s study guide is very useful in answering a question like that. The guide provides an abundance of good material and the user is encouraged to adapt the contents to whatever schedule and format is planned. Atwood begins with an introduction laying out the basics of how to lead a discussion group (which experienced leaders will skip but novices will find helpful). The gem buried in this section is a two-page statement (pp. 13-14), “Introduction to the Study of Moravian Doctrine.” This is an excellent summary of the Moravian ‘approach’ to the study of doctrine and how such an enterprise can be “a great privilege and should be a joyful and energizing experience.” (p. 13). It is a fine statement about an oft-neglected topic.

The guide is divided into two parts — one for each document. The format is also the same for each: historical introduction describing the development of the document and then sessions devoted to paragraphs of the document, each

containing a brief commentary and questions for discussion. Part I contains 22 sessions on the *Covenant* and Part II has 24 sessions on *The Ground*.

The historical introductions are very useful in understanding the development of the modern Moravian Church and how these documents grew out of specific circumstances. These pages bring together in one place a lot of information which is otherwise scattered around in many sources. The discussion of the 1957 Unity Synod is especially good.

The commentaries present a nice flow back and forth between the distinctive Moravian insights being discussed and their connection to the larger ecumenical Christian scene.

With the questions, Atwood attempts to draw out the implications of the documents for the life of the contemporary Church and for individual believers.

The format works best with the *Covenant*. In the 2001 edition, the *Covenant* is divided into 35 numbered paragraphs under 6 major headings. Atwood has chosen to devote a single session to some single paragraphs and at other times to combine several numbered paragraphs into a single session. The arrangement of the material in this manner makes sense and having the 2001 edition at hand enables ones to easily understand

how the guide is addressing the document.

The Ground, in its 1995 edition, has 11 major headings, but each contains several unnumbered paragraphs, so the format is a little more problematic. Atwood has spread all this material over 24 sessions. The entire text of *The Ground* is covered but occasionally long paragraphs are split between several sessions. The reasons for this arrangement become clear to the reader and make sense theologically. But, it is necessary to use this section of the guide with the 1995 edition

nearby so as to be able to understand how the text is being divided.

There is a growing interest in these two foundational documents among North American Moravians. This particular study guide was developed for a yearlong study at Home Moravian Church, Winston-Salem NC. Atwood is to be commended for making this excellent resource available to the wider Church.

David Schattschneider is Professor Emeritus of Church History at Moravian Theological Seminary.

C. Daniel Crews, **This We Most Certainly Believe** (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Archives Publication, 2005).

Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood

There has long been a need for a succinct and accessible introduction to Moravian faith and doctrine for lay persons. Br. Crews' book meets that need nicely. Though short and mercifully free of theological jargon, Crews covers many of the key aspects of Moravian doctrine. Though the book has been endorsed by each of the bishops of the Southern Province, it is not clear whether it is intended as an official statement of the church or the personal statement of the author.

Those who are familiar with *The Ground of the Unity* and The Easter Morning Litany will certainly recognize this book as a clear statement of traditional Moravian beliefs. Br. Crews' presents Moravian belief as Christocentric rather than dogmatic; devotional rather than prophetic. For Crews, doctrine is a teaching tool rather than an arena for theological dispute.

Br. Crews directs the readers' attention to the nature and work of Christ in redemption and discipleship, but he does not enter into the controversies over salvation that are vexing many American churches today. Nor does he attempt to resolve the other hot-button issues of human sexuality and personal morality. Rather, he calls readers to explore the fundamental affirmations of Christian faith: the Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement, and the church. In doing so, Crews reminds Christians that controversies should be discussed in the context of faith rather than politics.

This booklet would be a good starting place for an adult class on Moravian belief, and it is a welcome addition to the other resources provided by the Moravian Church, such as the Gemeinschaft III program.

Howard Cox, **The Pentateuch: History or Story?** (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America, 2005).

Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood

For many years Howard Cox was Professor of Old Testament Theology at Moravian Theological Seminary. Many Moravian pastors prepare their sermons and classes with Br. Cox's voice in their minds. Few have forgotten the insights they gained from reading the Old Testament with intellectual integrity and knowledge of its historical setting. Most remember Br. Cox's deceptively simple question: "Where do your Bible come from?"

The Pentateuch answers that question and provides a glimpse at the manuscript traditions that conflict with the "received text." Br. Cox also examines the history of Israel as presented in the Old Testament in light of contradictory evidence from archeology. His conclusion is that the Pentateuch is "story," rather than "history,"

but he does not explore fully the meaning of this distinction. In some European languages, there is one word for both history and story. It is good to recall that historical science was invented in the 18th century. Attention to the significance of history/story for one's life and faith would also have been helpful.

Br. Cox introduces lay readers to the complexities of modern biblical criticism without overwhelming them in details and debates. But the presentation is often too brief to be illuminating for those unfamiliar with the topic. For students of Br. Cox, this book may induce nostalgia for his lectures. It is unfortunate that the written word lacks the immediacy and energy of the spoken word.

Special Feature: Homily by Alfredo Joiner

JESUS' ESSENTIAL TASKS (Ex 19:2-8; Mt 9:35-38)

INTRODUCTION: Good to say that my first thought in describing this reflection was: “Jesus’ Priorities.” Nonetheless, I decided on “Jesus’ Essential Tasks,” to make it sounds more to the heart of Moravians, since we share a rich historical heritage based on the following philosophical statement or motto: “In essentials, UNITY, in none essentials, LIBERTY, and in all things, LOVE. This is gladly memorized by a lot of Moravians. However, the problem is that when we ask a Moravian what are the essential things in which we should be united? There isn’t an agreement. Actually, we are in search of what Moravians should consider as “the Essentials.” This will be discussed in the Unity Synod to be held in 2009. (See The Moravian Magazine of March, 2005, p.8.)

If there is one thing I would like you to take with you from this message is your sincere response to the following question: What is your priority or the thing you consider to be essential in your Christian life? This morning as we take time to pull back and think about who we are and what we stand for, I would like to draw our attention to God’s inspiring words and concentrate on the summary, which Matthew made of Jesus’ ministry. I hope that we deepen our commitment and move to a new direction in our Christian practice as we look at what Jesus did, what we are doing and what we need to do in obedience to his call.

I. THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR JESUS: From the beginning Moravians placed faith in Jesus Christ at the center of what it means to be Christian. By the help of God, such a conviction continues to be true for us. Therefore, it is important to find out what Jesus considered to be the most essential things for him.

A. Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching (Mt. 9:35a)

1. You can always tell what is important to a person by what that person gives priority to in life: Job, country, institution, family wealth, fame, recreation, and so on. Matthew reveals that Jesus’ greatest priority was people. Therefore, his first essential task was to teach them all, for he did not hesitate to associate with people who were classified as sinners and outcast.
2. Jesus was not only considered as a teacher by his 12 disciples, but also by the official teachers of his time. In the context of when Jesus was eating at Matthews’ home, “When the Pharisees saw this; they asked his disciples, ‘why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” Mt 9:11. In John’s Gospel also registers that the Pharisee Nicodemus who went to Jesus by night said: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” Jn 3:1-2.
3. Jesus was not a static teacher, who was only in one specific place teaching a small group of people, rather, he went through all the towns and villages of Palestine. The Gospel writers refer to at least thirty-five personal contacts Jesus had with persons face to face. He took

time to talk with people along the roadside, by a well, in the synagogues, and in friends' homes. It was important, for him to pass on the new teaching he had in order to transform the world of his time. Likewise, if we are to contribute in the change of our socio-political, religious and economical situation, we are to practice and teach God's principles where ever we are and where ever we go.

B. Preaching the good news of the kingdom (v. 35b).

1. Secondly, Jesus considered that proclamation of the good news of the kingdom was also essential. His preaching was about the good news because it was about the saving acts of God through him, which is sum up in Lk 4:18-19, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." There is a lot that can be said about this text, but for this morning I just want to state that this marks the core of Christianity and shows that our challenge is not an easy task as a lot of people think.
2. In Matthew chapter 13 we have 5 parables about the kingdom of God, which help us to understand that the kingdom preached by Jesus is the one in which the greatest command is love. Therefore, God's kingdom is in contrast to the kingdom of this world that functions by violence, intimidation, selfishness and demonic power. In which of these two kingdoms are you and I involved in at this time?
3. What good news do you have to tell your family, classmate, neighbors, and friends or to the unknown person you meet on the way? As the Hymn writer has written: "I love to tell the story of Jesus and his love..." If we are not sharing this marvelous gospel story of redemption and of God's unfolding love to all people as yet, today is a good day to start telling it to those who may have all the material things they need, but are lacking some deeper needs; Such as the meaning of their existence, direction for their life, forgiveness, hope, and love. Sometimes they are lonely, frustrated, depressed, and confused, and they long for wholeness and faith. Yes! You and I have a word of hope they need to hear, which we should gently, joyfully, and naturally share. We must not fail!

C. Healing every disease and sickness (v. 35c).

1. This statement refers to the power of Jesus to heal, which introduces Jesus' third essential task. In Greek, the same word, *swzw*, can mean, "Save" and "heal." Jesus healings can mean saving someone from a physical, emotional or spiritual affliction. Matthew includes more miracle stories than any other Gospel – There are 20 specific miracle stories in such a Gospel. In Matthew chapter 9 alone we read that Jesus healed a paralytic man (vv 1-8), a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years (vv. 20-22), raised a dead girl (vv 18-19, 23-25), recovered the sights of two blind men (vv. 27-31), and healed a man who

was demon-possessed and could not talk (vv. 32-33).

2. As Jesus the master teacher, preacher and healer of all times asked the two blind men: “Do you believe that I am able to do this? v. 28b. I ask you today: Do you believe that Jesus healed all those people? I do hope that your answers are positive as it was for the blind men, that by believing they received what they asked from Jesus. However, I would not be surprised if some of your answers were negative, for at Jesus’ time the Pharisees said “It is by the prince of demons that he drives our demons” v.34.
3. The crucial point is that our doubts and negative answers will not stop God from working out miracles through his followers of today. The church worships because it believes that its words about God are meaningful and should be shared within a community. As James Cone had said in his book *God of the Oppressed*, “the people believed that Jesus could conquer sorrow and wipe away the tears of pain and suffering...” The heart of every Christian needs to beat with a sense of urgency to share the love of God with others. Convinced that God is more than able to do more than what we can ever think about.
4. According to Matthew 9:36 Jesus is considered as the true shepherd, who has compassion on the harassed and helpless flock of his time. He understood that it was his vocation to be sent to them (Mt 10:5; 15:24). Therefore, he fulfilled his preaching, teaching and healing ministry with authority that was given by his father. Baron Friedrich von Hugel, a German philosopher, once wrote, “caring is everything; nothing matters but caring.” If caring is absent from our lives, we will never reach out to other people. Brothers and sisters, friends, who do you care for today?

II. JESUS INVITED HIS DISCIPLES TO FOLLOW THE SAME ESSENTIAL TASKS

(Mt 9:37-38)

- A. Matthew 9:35 emphasizes the continuity between the mission of Jesus and the mission of the disciples’ v.37. This reveals that teaching, preaching, and healing are the reasons for the existence of Christians in the world.
- B. Jesus instructed his Disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest (God) to send out laborers into the harvest (Matt 9:38). The response to such a prayer is the chosen, authorized and committed disciples as participants in God’s plan of salvation that were sent by God through Christ (Mt. 10:1-8). The early Christians were on fire for their Lord. In obedience, they wanted to share the good news of Christ with everyone they met. In Acts 5:42 points out, “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” This far, Jesus and his disciples’ practical examples show that a pastor should be a theologian, preacher, teacher and healer. Moreover, all Christians should be totally committed in extending God’s kingdom. We should ask our Lord for power and courage to never stray from this primary task of witnessing for him.
- C. ILLUSTRATION: Once a pig and a hen left the farm and went into town. Walking down

the street, they saw the sign: Ham and Eggs. The pig said to the hen: “Look there; for you that is just a contribution; but for me that is a total commitment.

What the world needs – whether it is church, business or education – is total commitment. The church needs members but over all it needs committed workers that are willing to be active in God’s harvest field, were the multitude are still been harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd as in the time of Moses (Num 27:17). And in the context of the prophet Ezekiel, “as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock” Ezekiel 34:8. This refers to the uncommitted church leaders and members of today, who are potential disciples but need to wake up and follow obediently in practical acts of teaching and preaching that will produce healing to the sick and needy ones.

- D. Jesus, the good shepherd has come extending his arms into the world to show us that God loves all people. This is our message: Come home. Receive God’s grace. Find a new beginning. God loves you. Come home. We must remember that God never said to any one, “Thou shall not witness.” This calls for all of us as a part of his body the Church to take a stand of conscience, and embrace his invitation and confront the challenges that face us in the world today. After, more than 115 years of worshiping in this temple, it is time to move in new directions and mission for this Moravian community to increase in numbers and in quality. Christianity is more than coming regularly to church; it is about commitment to Christ and his kingdom. Therefore, a good place to begin to be his faithful witness is among our family. Here is were we are to put our energy, time and heart, not just to keep the faith but to pass it on from generation to generation, as it is oriented in Deut 11:19. ILLUSTRATION: Once a Bishop wrote a circular letter to his pastors and asked if they would meet him for a “quiet day.” One of the pastor replied: “What my church needs is not a quiet day but an earthquake!”

This Church like so many of our Churches today may also need a spiritual earthquake or a new Pentecost. In order for that to happen here, each one of you should ask; What are some of the things which you can help to make this Vanderbilt community a more healthy place where outsiders would like to come and be a part of our celebrations? God continues calling each one of you by name and invites you to a faithful discipleship; perhaps in Sunday School, youth fellowship, choir, visitations, inviting others and extending to them a cordial welcome, or by voluntary work for Vacation Bible Studies...There will always be a place and activities for us to embody the spirit of Christ in the World. What is needed is that we be sincere and consistent with the promise we once made to our creator, on that unforgettable day when we rendered our life, wealth, motives, love, heart and our whole self and consecrated it to his faithful service. Acknowledging that the least we do in Jesus’ name will be precious in his sight. When we really care, we will find something to do and share. Many of God’s creatures are out there, longing to know that they are loved and can begin again.

CONCLUSION: Based on this reflection so far, we see that there isn't any doubt, that preaching, teaching, and healing were the three most essential activities in Jesus' life. Jesus did it all based on his deep concern and love for all people. The pages of the New Testament are filled with individuals who shared the good news about Christ. And as Moravians, we are always amazed and proud of how the first Moravian missionaries were profoundly engaged in taking God's good news through all the different towns and villages. They were conscious that it was not enough to admire Jesus as a great teacher, preacher and healer or as some great religious figure from the past, but to follow his unique example. Now it is your turn and mine to be witnesses. We are challenged to pass on the light about God's grace. Let us carry the light courageously and enthusiastically, lifting the torches of the marvelous Gospel high and carrying the faith, love and hope in Christ our Chief Elder always forward. Amen.

The Rev. Alfredo Joiner has served as a Moravian missionary in Costa Rica and was founder of the Moravian Theological Seminary of Nicaragua. He is currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Theological Studies program at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem.

FALL EVENTS FOCUSING ON MORAVIAN TOPICS

Online: MORAVIAN HERITAGE - 5 sessions with Bishop Arthur Freeman
Tuesdays, Sept. 27, October 4, 11, 18, 25 • 7-9 pm

Winston-Salem: WRITING A BOOK OF WORSHIP COMPANION
Moses Lectures in Moravian Studies - presented by Rev. Dr. Albert Frank
Archie K. Davis Center • Monday, October 10 • 9-1:30 pm

COMENIUS AND THE REFORM OF CHRISTIANITY
Moravian History Videoconference - presented by Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood
Sunday, October 16 • 3-5 pm (ET), 4-6 pm (CT)

Sturgeon Bay, WI: Location TBA

Winston-Salem: Salem College, Fine Arts Center, Videoconference Classroom
Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Seminary, Distance Learning Classroom

Online: EVANGELISM - 3 sessions with Bishop Arthur Freeman
Tuesdays, November 1, 8, 15 • 7-9 pm

Dover, OH: WRITING A BOOK OF WORSHIP COMPANION
Moses Lectures in Moravian Studies - presented by Rev. Dr. Albert Frank
First Moravian Church Dover • Sunday, November 6 • 2-6 pm

To register or for more information on these events
contact the Office of Continuing Education at Moravian Seminary at 800-843-6541.
See the Seminary's website for program description www.moravianseminary.edu.

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