

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.

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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.