

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).

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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.

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