



THE HINGE

*A Journal of Christian Thought
for the Moravian Church*

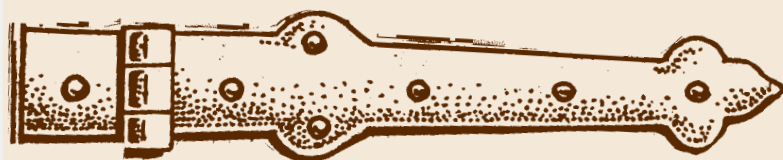
Moravians and Scripture

Janel R. Rice, Tracy Pryor,
Amy Godhes-Luhman, Mary Lynette Delbridge,
Keith Stanley

Also Poetry, Commentary and Book Note

Summer 2006

Volume 13, Number 3



The Hinge

Volume 13, Number 2: Spring 2006

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.

The Hinge is published with the assistance of the Center for Moravian Studies, 1200 Main St. Bethlehem, PA 18018, and all rights are reserved. *The Hinge* is available online at www.moravianseminary.edu/center/hinge.

Articles in *The Hinge* may not be republished or reposted on the Internet without the express permission of the author and the editor of *The Hinge*. Articles may be duplicated according to “Fair Use” rules, which allow for discussion in church classes and similar forums.

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

Notes from the Editor

“Is it your sincere purpose to live according to the precepts of God’s Word, and to teach nothing but the truths and doctrines contained therein, as received and taught in the Moravian Church?” Moravian clergy will recognize this as one of the vows taken in ordination. It is one indication that the Bible is at the center of Moravian worship, work, and doctrine. Moravians have contributed greatly to the translation of Scripture into the many languages of the world. We preach only from the canon of sacred Scripture, and we ponder the ancient text when confronting modern social problems. At times, we even fight over Scripture.

But what does it mean “as received and taught in the Moravian Church?” Is there a Moravian approach to Scripture that is distinct from other ways of interpreting the text? How have Moravians read the Word in the past? How do we read and interpret today? Can we identify principles of Biblical interpretation that are authentically Moravian?

These are the questions addressed in this issue of *The Hinge*. We have a different format than normal. Rather than having a lead article followed by responses, we have five scholarly articles addressing different aspects of a common theme: Scripture.

Janel Rice, who recently graduated from Harvard Divinity School, examines the approach to Scripture in the Unity of the Brethren. She draws attention to the fact that the Unity had a canon within the canon in that the synoptic gospels were held in higher esteem than the Hebrew Scriptures. The Bible was ministerial for the Brethren rather than essential.

Tracy Pryor, who wrote a study guide for Arthur Freeman’s book on the theology of Zinzendorf (*An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart*), explores Zinzendorf’s Christocentric and subjective hermeneutic. Zinzendorf was a pioneer of the modern approach to interpretation elaborated by Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard. His work should be taken seriously by Moravians and non-Moravians alike.

Amy Gohdes-Luhman, a professor of Old Testament and Moravian pastor, shows how she draws meaning through a careful reading of the Hebrew texts. In her article we see the creative conversation of text, theology, and pastoral care.

In her reflections, Lynette Delbridge brings together her identity as a New Testament scholar and Moravian pastor. She shows that Moravians do bring things to the text that other people may not, such as a commitment to community. She also shows how the epistles of early Christianity can be a resource for dealing with conflict in the Moravian Church today.

Keith Stanley is best known to Moravians in North Carolina through the Gemeinschaft program, but he is also a professor of classics. Keith gives a helpful analysis of Moravian hermeneutics and identifies principles that run throughout Moravian history.

We also have a commentary on the Iraq War and a poem on the church.

The Biblical View of the Ancient Unitas Fratrum

Janel R. Rice

Although over-shadowed by the Lutheran Reformation, the Czech Reformation of John Hus and its spiritual descendants, the Unitas Fratrum, have important insights for our modern church. The Unitas Fratrum taught its followers to; 1) practice or act out of the Biblical witness for the greater work of God, and 2) interpret the Scripture as a community of the faithful, with each believer being given the authority to read the Bible and receive the Holy Spirit for him or herself. What can the wisdom of our spiritual ancestors teach our Moravian Church about Biblical interpretation and application today?

The Bible and the Unitas Fratrum: An Overview

The Unitas Fratrum's theology has always taken the Bible as its first and basic source for knowledge of God and God's saving actions (Rican and Molnár 401). The Unitas Fratrum, coming out of the Hussite Reformation, gave greater authority to different parts of the Bible than the Lutheran Reformation did. "Where the [Lutheran] reformation concentrated its theology on the Pauline message of justification, the Czech [Hussite] Reformation focused on the evangelical commandment of Jesus" (Lochman 7).

The Unitas Fratrum saw the Gospel tradition, and particularly the Sermon on the Mount, as the foundation for their faith. Constantly appealing to the earthly example of Jesus, they used their Biblical foundation to look outward to the world, often with a prophetic vision for Christ's kingdom on earth and a "readiness to accept a revelation of the Holy Spirit directly" (Rican and Molnár 391). Through this understanding of Scripture, the Unitas Fratrum grew to be concerned with the Bible's ethical and social impact, especially in the eradication of the class and economic distinctions between the believers.

Out of their interest in allowing all people, regardless of class, to receive the Gospel message, the Unitas Fratrum saw a great importance in education and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The Czech people had a long history of reading the Bible in the vernacular. Since the days of the Eastern missionaries Cyrill and Methodius (850 C.E.), the Bible had been translated into the Czech or "Bohemia" language. John Hus also promoted the vernacular reading of the Bible while preaching in the Bethlehem Chapel, and he began to codify the modern Czech language out of his Czech Bible.

Although the earlier leaders of the Unitas Fratrum such as Peter Chelcicky and Gregory

The Rev. Janel Rice is associate pastor of Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

the Patriarch saw the New Testament as the only source for their doctrine, later generations of the Brethren grew to appreciate and use the Old Testament as well (Segert 28). The translation of the Bible into the vernacular reached its pinnacle in the Unitas Fratrum's history with the publication of both the Old and New Testaments in Kralitz Bible in 1593.

The Unitas Fratrum believed that Scripture was not only to be read by the laity in their own tongue, it should also be interpreted by their own hearts and minds. There was no authoritative interpretation of Scripture; interpretation was a communal act and spoke a message to both the individual and the community (Rican and Molnár 401). Furthermore, this corporate act of interpretation encouraged the witness of Scripture in everyday Christian life and discipline, not to develop a personal creed, but to carry out God's activity "as Servants of the Word" (400). "At each word of the Bible, the Czech Protestants used to ask what they were to do, and only in the second place what they were to think" (Otter 81). Through Biblical study, they taught to live in service of the Word, with ethical and social obligations.

The Biblical Viewpoints of Hus and leaders of the Unitas Fratrum

As mentioned earlier, John Hus was a priest with strong ideas about the power of the vernacular Scripture. He preached from the Czech Bible in the Bethlehem Chapel and encouraged his followers to search for the truth, not in the words of the Pope or the clergy, but in the Bible and the law of Christ (Hutton 22). For Hus, the Bible was the foundation of the church and theology, and it is the "only infallible

norm," upon which all Church teachings must agree (de Schweinitz 46-47). Hus' view of the Bible was later echoed by the Hussite League. In 1419, they wrote the "Four Articles of Prague," a declaration of their religious beliefs as Hussite followers. One article stated that the living Word, in dialogue between the preacher and the congregation, is the real expression of faith. The "prophetic and apostolic message of the Word of God," they concluded, must be preached freely and in the vernacular (Lochman 2).

Peter Chelcicky was a student (and sometimes critic) of Hus and the spiritual father of the Unitas Fratrum. "Accept the simple words of Scripture," Chelcicky preached, "and believe above all in the example of Christ," as is shown through the literal truth of the Bible (Sawyer 18). Like many in the Unitas Fratrum, he saw the necessity of living a life out of this Biblical truth and example of Christ (Rican 21). Chelcicky never acknowledged any human authorities in his faith and interpretation of the Bible. This attitude may have influenced the Unitas Fratrum to shy away from human-composed creeds or doctrines, and initially to reject theological education and training to interpret the Bible. Seeing other (non-Biblical) writings as the "screens which keep him away from the Bible," Chelcicky was uncompromising in his Biblical literalism and dedication (Odlozilik 255).

In 1457, a group of Hussites, led by Gregory (Rehor) and influenced by Chelcicky, distinguished themselves the "Brethren of the Law of Christ." This law of Christ, the Brethren affirmed in a resolution of 1464, was shown through the Bible. Later statements of the Unitas Fratrum would continue to affirm Hus' view

on the centrality of the Bible, which they saw as the source and rule for their community. It is interesting to note how the *Unitas Fratrum's* apologies would center on the affirmation of the Bible, not a leader's opinion, written theological statement, or doctrine. Many of the resolutions and apologies that came out of the Lutheran Reformation affirm the theological or Biblical interpretations of their particular leader, but the *Unitas Fratrum*, with their emphasis on the Bible and not theological doctrine, rarely affirmed one leader's view as orthodox. For example, in the Synod of 1495 the *Unitas Fratrum* declared that they were no longer bound to the writings of Gregory or Peter and instead affirmed the Bible as their only standard of faith and practice.

Throughout their history, the *Unitas Fratrum* continued to uphold the Bible as their only standard (or rule) of faith and life. However, the leaders never mistook the words of Scripture for what the Bible revealed, that is the Trinitarian God. The Bible was not God nor was God found only in the reading of the text. Hus contended that the inspired Scripture revealed faith and an understanding of the unseen (Schwarze 91), and the Bible pointed us toward the essentials of faith, our Triune God. This understanding of the Bible was further developed by the Brethren's Luke of Prague in his system of essentials and ministratives of faith.

Luke defined essentials as divine and human. The "divine" essentials are the grace of God, the saving work of Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The "human" essentials of faith, love, and hope are the necessary human responses to live in a relationship with God. Ministratives are those means which help humans to reach the

essentials. The Bible is the primary and most necessary ministrative for faith is the "divinely appointed means decreed by God for persons to come to salvation" (Crews 19). In their 1503 Apology the *Unitas Fratrum* wrote that the "Word of God" is the ministrative by which God is made known (de Schweinitz 201). The *Unitas Fratrum* noted that the ministratives, such as the Bible, should never be exalted or placed above the essentials (Crews 19). The words of Scripture are still "directly dependent on the essential Word of God, which is Jesus Christ" (Rican and Molnár 409).

Since the time of the "Four Articles of Prague," the followers of Hus understood the necessity for the Bible to be preached freely in their faith. An individual reading of the Bible, even in the vernacular, was not enough for this ministrative to lead us to the essentials of our faith. The Scripture was to be preached, since it is in the hearing of the holy reading that "we may instruct people in the essence of faith and penance" (Crews 21). The written Bible is only an echo or description of the true nature of Christ, and it is through a public reading, interpretation, and application in the community that Luke believed one can truly hear the essentials of his or her faith (Crews 21). The followers of the *Unitas Fratrum* also believed that it was the responsibility of the entire community to hear Christ present in the Biblical proclamation and to live a disciplined Christian life out of this proclamation, rather than out of a particular interpretation of Scripture. "Holy Scripture, apart from any disputed interpretation, should be [our] only standard of faith and practice" (Hutton 60).

I believe that the ability to distinguish the ministrative use of Scripture from the essential living God allowed the Unitas Fratrum to begin an early form of Biblical and historical criticism. Believing that the Biblical word was not the immediate Word of God (which is Jesus Christ), Luke was able to see the written text of the Bible in a particular social and historical location. Luke “always paid attention to the time, the place, the persons and the motives of the Biblical narratives and history,” (Crews 22) demonstrating an early tendency toward criticism in the forms, types, and social histories of the Biblical text.

The Brethren’s John Blahoslav, in the later part of the 16th century, would also demonstrate a tendency of Biblical criticism in his writing on the Book of Revelation. In his 1566 commentary on Revelation 13, Blahoslav rejected the common Catholic interpretation of 666 as referring to Luther. Instead he wrote that the interpretation of this mysterious text needed a “good knowledge of Roman and Church history, careful study of the book of Revelation and of the biblical books related to it, and especially a comprehension of the specific sense of these matters” (Rican 218). Blahoslav’s call for a historical inquiry into the time and place of the Book of Revelation shows the Unitas Fratrum’s early movement toward a historical critical reading of the Bible. However, in no way should we assume that the Unitas Fratrum saw the Bible only as historical and its interpretation as an academic endeavor. While holding strong to the inspired word of Scripture as a revelation of God’s activities, the Unitas Fratrum never placed the Bible above God and in this understanding they were able to understand

it both as a historically bound and inspired text to teach humans of salvation.

Although Blahoslav encouraged higher education for the interpretation of Scripture, this attitude was not always shared by other members of the Unitas Fratrum. Throughout its history, the Brethren displayed differences in opinion on the role of higher education for the priests or anyone who wished to interpret the Bible. John Blahoslav represented a new movement in the Unitas Fratrum toward an appreciation of higher education, knowledge of ancient languages, and the beginning of the historical critical method. “Only a thorough education” Blahoslav said, “for the leaders [and] for the simple Brethren, can ensure a peaceful development of the Unitas. Of course all great knowledge is to no avail if it is not guided by true piety” (Strupl 10).

More than 50 years after Blahoslav’s time, John Amos Comenius combined great knowledge with true piety as he advanced the Unitas Fratrum in the areas of Biblical understanding, education reform, and spiritual development. Comenius advocated for higher education while also understanding the Bible as a divine ministrative which could bring people to God by teaching of Jesus and the practices of the Christian life (Comenius 64).

Comenius centered his faith on the teachings of the Bible and refused to speak definitively in areas where the Scripture was silent. “Let us remember,” Comenius wrote, “mystery was ordained not that the hearts of believers be thereby alienated, but rather tied and bound together into one” (Spinka 60). The ability to humbly accept the mystery of the Bible while

seeking reconciliation around its teachings became a practice of both the ancient and modern *Unitas Fratrum*. Since a community was united both in Biblical understanding and Biblical mystery, the community should also participate in Biblical interpretation. Following Hus' thought, he concluded that differences arose when the Church or its leaders sought to place themselves and their own opinions above the Bible (Spinka 35).

Since its founding, the *Unitas Fratrum* experienced degrees of persecution and peace. When they were denied public worship and attacked because they lacked a strong doctrinal theology, they often clung to their Scripture and its message. As the *Unitas Fratrum* fled from the persecution of the Thirty Years War, they climbed through the White Mountains singing this hymn: "Nothing have we taken with us/ Everything is lost/ We have our Bible of Kralitz,/ Our Labyrinth of the World" (Sawyer 37).

This hymn, sung by exiles who had lost their material possessions, financial security, and freedom in the Thirty Years War, demonstrates the great value of the Bible in their lives. Indeed, their Scriptures were the only thing that the world could not take. Here we see the value beyond the written word in the Bible, for even if the exiles had their written Bibles taken from them, the persecutors could not take their essential and Biblical truth; their faith in Christ. The Bible was more than the written word. For these descendants of the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Bible was a ministrative leading them to their faith essentials of a merciful, loving and saving Triune God.

How does the *Unitas Fratrum's* Biblical interpretation and application speak to us today?

The *Unitas Fratrum*, unlike some other Protestant movements, understood the Bible as a ministrative; a divine mean to connect a community with God. Out of this understanding of the Bible, the *Unitas Fratrum* encouraged its followers to move from an individual reading or hearing of Scripture to a Biblical practice of Christian discipline in their communities. The *Unitas Fratrum* realized that "every word of the Holy Scripture must be understood in its relation to the concrete and actual situation in which the congregation and its members are living" (Molnár 11). Each individual in the church was given the opportunity to interpret Scripture which would point the believer outward to a Christian life.

As members of the modern *Unitas Fratrum*, do we still see Scripture as a ministrative to lead us to the essentials of our faith; our Triune God and a relationship with God lived out in the human community with faith, love and hope? Do we see the Bible as a divine means to push us outward to the essentials of our faith and its practical application in our Christian lives? Can we create a theology that does not rest in dogmatic, inflexible frameworks of Biblical interpretation, but allows each believer to ask practical questions of our Scriptures in light of the social, ethical and political circumstances of our contemporary world? I believe we, as modern members of the *Unitas Fratrum*, must explore and rediscover our unique, historical view of Scripture as a ministrative for our church today.

J. L. Hromadka, a modern Czech theologian, writes that when the Bible is seen as a ministrative it has the unique ability to help people “penetrate through the freedom of their faith to the deepest roots of contemporary events and to cope with them in pertinent responsibility” (Molnár 13-14). We, who claim allegiance to the Biblical word as members of the *Unitas Fratrum*, must in turn practice the Biblical message through responsible and responsive lives in our contemporary communities and our world.

This paper asks you to reconsider and rediscover the heritage of the *Unitas Fratrum*, especially around their unique and important views on the Bible. Instead of tritely dismissing a “Moravian method of Biblical interpretation,” or half-heartedly attaching ourselves to the popular Biblical interpretative methodology of our day, what can our church learn from its distinct Biblical interpretation and application? Like Blahoslav and Comenius, can we approach the Bible and theology with both piety and theological education?

The *Unitas Fratrum* has always lent one ear to the contemporary theology while also reminding ourselves of our own religious beliefs. “Contemporary” theology, whether it is in the form of the Lutheran reformation ideas of the 16th century or the emerging church movements of the 21st century, should never be dismissed by our Church. However, like our spiritual ancestors, we ought to examine new theologies in light of our standard and rule, the Bible, and ask if they lead us to our faith essentials; the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. We cannot

shun higher theological education in Biblical interpretation, but we must also remember that we need true piety as well. As we look outward to the ethical and social applications of the Biblical word, we also must not forget that we work out of an essential, spiritual relationship with God.

While the social involvement by Christians is an urgent matter today in view of the global distress of humankind, it is persuasive and effective only when it is not the overreaction of unreflective activism overcompensating for the lack of spiritual discipline and concentration, but rather issues from thoughtful and dynamic faith. (Lochman 10)

Biblical interpretation of both the head and the heart, I believe, will lead us to both a thoughtful and dynamic faith.

Finally, we must always approach our faith remembering that no matter how we interpret the Bible, ultimately the Word of God is a living Word, powerful and active beyond the will or arrogance of the human spirit. We would all be wise to humbly learn from Amedeo Molnár’s reflections whenever we interpret the Bible:

There has been a reformation before Luther and Calvin, and the reformation has continued to do its works after they were gone, for the Word of the Lord, the law and witness of the Gospel cannot be imprisoned in ready-made forms, burning through the shells in which we enclose it. (Comenius 8)

Bibliography

- Comenius, J. A. *A Perfect Reformation*. Selections and introduction by Amedeo Molnár. Prague: Ecumenical Constitute of the Comenius Faculty, 1957.
- Crews, C. Daniel. "Luke of Prague: Theologian of the Unity." Moses Lecture in Moravian Studies. Moravian Theological Seminary. 1997.
- De Schweinitz, Edmund. *History of the Church Known as the Unitas Fratrum or the Unity of the Brethren*. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication Office, 1885.
- Hutton, J.E. *A History of the Moravian Church*. London: Moravian Publication Office, 1909.
- Knox, R.A. *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Lochman, Jan Milic. "Spiritual and Ecumenical Significance of Czech Reformation." *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal*. 9.1 (1990).
- Molnár, Amedeo. *Czechoslovak Protestantism Today*. Foreword by J. L. Hromadka. Prague: Central Church Publishing House, 1954.
- Odložilik, Olakar. "Two Reformation Leaders of the Unitas Fratrum." *Church History*. 9.3 (1940).
- Otter, Jiri. *Witness of the Czech Protestantism*. Kalich-Praha, 1970.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Reformation of the Bible: The Bible of the Reformation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Rican, Rudolf and Amedeo Molnár. *The History of the Unity of the Brethren*. Tr. C. Daniel Crews. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1992.
- Sawyer, Edwin. *These Fifteen: Pioneers of the Moravian Church*. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1963.
- Schwarze, W.N. *John Hus*. New York: Fleming Revell Company, 1915.
- Segert, Stanislav. "Unitas Fratrum and the Old Testament." *Communio Viatorum*. 33.1-2 (1990).
- Spinka, Matthew. *John Amos Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1943.
- Strupl, Milo. "Jan Blahoslav, 'Father and Charioteer of the Lord's People in the Unitas Fratrum,'" *Czechoslovakia Past and Present*. Ed. Miloslav Recheigl. The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1968.

Zinzendorf's View of Scripture

Tracy Pryor

In the contemporary Moravian Church we seek faithful approaches to interpretation that help us not just to speak about the “good news” but also, by grace, to become the good news. Amidst a culture that promotes polarization and dichotomy we desperately need a starting place for theological discussion that will encourage unity (if not unanimity), and so, quite naturally, we are led to explore and reflect upon the historical expressions of hermeneutical practice within our denominational tradition.

It is by way of this search for understanding that we arrive at one of the Renewed Moravian Church's most controversial leaders, whose influence in the area of theology and religious practice was profound and extended beyond the Moravian Church. Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf sought to bring new vitality to the Christian faith in the period of stagnation in the German church following the Protestant Reformation.

As a student of both Scripture and the theology of Zinzendorf, I offer these reflections in hope of spurring further discussion and struggle for truth, both in our witness and presentation of the gospel. What follows is a brief look at Zinzendorf's hermeneutic so that we

may use his practical approach to interpretation as a springboard for Christ-centered mission. In other words, for the sake of Zinzendorf and his dedication to our Savior, may this intellectual activity lead us to the Savior and call us out in mission.

Cultural Context

It is generally understood that all persons are influenced by the culture that surrounds them. Zinzendorf was born into a time when many great minds of Europe were looking to nature and human reason for the answers to humanity's great spiritual questions. In response to the Reformation and the Thirty-years War, Europe was evolving into a different world. The printing press had done its part to transform the political and spiritual world-view and the roads of commerce and travel were bursting with new ideas and challenges. Out of this era of social turmoil came the philosophical developments known as the Enlightenment, modern scientific method, historical criticism, and the French and American Revolutions. On the opposite end of the spectrum, German Pietists were looking inward to the heart where a personal experience of the Savior was the foundation for all religious pursuits.

The Rev. Tracy Pryor is pastor of the Shepherd of the Prairie Moravian Church in Fargo, North Dakota.

One might expect that Zinzendorf himself would be caught up in this struggle between head and heart. As a child Zinzendorf expressed concern over his own feelings of doubt, yet he held to a commitment to serve Christ that was unusual for someone of his age and position in society. While still a student at Halle, Zinzendorf began to develop a vision of a mission for Christ; however, social and family responsibilities kept him from pursuing this call to ministry until adulthood.

In his studies at Wittenberg, Zinzendorf was re-introduced to what he understood as the “true” teaching of Luther on “justification by grace.”¹ Zinzendorf was influenced by Luther in much of his theology and practice, but he disagreed with the Lutheran scholarship of his day that sought Christ through an intellectual and rational process. For Zinzendorf, the only way to Christ was through a personal relationship initiated by the Savior Himself. It was never his intention to create yet another systematic doctrine since he believed it impossible to know and express God in a systematic way. “Any attempt to systemize understanding of God will always have gaps because of human limitations. One needs to accept that the only Christian system is Christ, the historical expression of the Person of God.”²

Hermeneutical Development

According to Arthur Freeman, “Zinzendorf was impressed by the Enlightenment’s historical sensitivity. However, as in so many cases, he used its arguments for his own purposes. For him revelation was always *ökonomisch*, bound to the particular history in which it is given. That is the way God works, for God works in a way relevant

for each time...Each person in each period has the faith which is right for them.”³

Based on this premise, true religion is not fixed. It is individualized according to the relationship the Savior has with each person extending through all time and cultures. “Evidently Zinzendorf saw a parallel between what happens in the Christian life and what happened in the origin of Scripture, namely, that both reflect the glory of Christ.”⁴

However, to say that Christ, the historical expression of the Person of God, can be the only Christian “system” does by its nature imply a “system,” a way of interpreting all of Scripture though the lens of the Incarnation. This “system” is a hermeneutic of relationship that starts not with the written word, but with the Living Word and a relationship of the Divine with humanity. With this lens for understanding, it becomes inevitable that our relationship with Christ impacts our relationship to those around us, and Holy Scripture becomes a means by which the Savior draws us closer to His heart and at the same time closer to one another. Again, quoting Freeman, “His theology seems to have progressed experientially. In the Catechism for the Heathen he advised those to whom the Gospel was preached to start with the Savior and then allow the Savior to teach them about the Father and the Spirit, a process which reflected his own experience.”⁵

Zinzendorf’s hermeneutic developed through his own personal experience with Christ. His reliance on personal experience for interpretation rather than doctrine was rooted in the earnest belief that the Savior would lead

one to the knowledge of what was necessary for understanding. “That to which the Savior did not lead, was not necessary [essential] for salvation. Theological reflection was acceptable but would remain unsure matters until their truth was revealed in human experience.”⁶

The “historical problem,” the difference and variety within Scripture, was not viewed by Zinzendorf as a problem to be solved. He believed the diversity of Scripture was related “to the divine accommodation of truth to each historical period and the limitations and characteristics of each writer.”⁷ Unlike some of his contemporaries, these differences led Zinzendorf to assert that interpretation and study would be difficult without guidance and at the same time he acknowledged that it was not difficult for the one in whom the Holy Spirit resides. From a sermon on this subject he states,

One of the most important observations that must be made in the current times, however, is that the Holy Scriptures need no explanation. Rather they are as clear as they should be to each person who comes to them with a simple heart and who has a right to understand them. Therefore nothing is less necessary than the explanation of the Holy Scriptures. However, it is healing, blessed and good if a person correctly explains the truth as it is, dissects it, and interprets it for the hearts of people. In this way many kinds of people and minds who cannot grasp a particular part of a talk can get something which satisfies their hearts from another part. So the application of the Holy Scriptures, or as the apostle [Paul] calls it, “the sharing of

the word of truth,” is a beautiful, profitable manner, sharing what is already there.⁸

Perhaps these two seemingly contradictory thoughts offer a glimpse at understanding Zinzendorf’s ongoing efforts in regards to teaching and discipleship. One manifestation of this effort would be the development of the Daily Texts, a daily devotional tool providing a guide and model for scriptural reflection within the community. Another would be the establishment of “choirs,” small groups of people grouped by gender, similar life circumstance and/or experience wherein a leader or elder would guide spiritual formation.

A comparable explanation of the role of the Spirit in guiding our understanding is found in 1 Corinthians 2.13-14 where Paul writes, “We speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” One familiar with Moravian missions in Zinzendorf’s era may recognize in their “gentle” approach to evangelism the underlying assumption that it is not the work of the evangelist that convinces or convicts, but only the presence of Christ and wisdom of the Spirit that instructs and guides one outside the faith towards conversion.

Zinzendorf believed that God would open up the meaning of Scripture for the person and the Church, in such a way that could not occur through historical or scholarly analysis. This unfolding could only occur as the individual

and/or community sought to “live” prayerfully with the Scripture(s).

In his later years Zinzendorf worked on a harmony of the gospels that, despite various modifications in congregational practice, the Unity continues to treasure and utilize as a vital part of Holy Week observance. His work was titled the “Story of the Days of the Son of Man upon the Earth,” although contemporary readers may find it titled, *Readings for Holy Week* or *Passion Week Manual*.⁹ In this “harmonized” account of the last days of Jesus life Zinzendorf sought to bring together the variety of voices and witnesses one finds in a parallel reading of the gospels. The readings, divided into sections for each day of Holy Week with verses of hymns added for community response, not only offered a way for believers to “walk” through this crucial period in the experience of Christ, they also demonstrate the power of shared Scriptural testimony and hermeneutic to shape the community to be and become a living expression of the Body of Christ.

In these tangible, practical ways Zinzendorf acknowledged the challenge of the diversity in Scripture without undermining Scripture’s divine nature. “Scripture was this way because God worked this way, and it was divine because the divine truth always lay behind the historical accommodation...The goal of interpretation was the going behind historically conditioned concepts of the writers to an encounter with the religious reality behind revelation: to an encounter with the Savior, who is the Revealer, and to know him and his Atonement in one’s heart.”¹⁰ For Zinzendorf and the renewed Moravian congregation, Scripture’s primary purpose was

for devotion. They came to it individually and as a community with the expectation of meeting within it the mystery of Christ.¹¹

For the purpose of mission and education, Zinzendorf divided the Scripture into three different classifications: basic truths about salvation upon which he understood Scripture to be clear, matters of knowledge that require an experiential and historical understanding of Scripture, and mysteries which remain uncertain even for those with the tools for interpretation.¹²

One example of how a mystery remains a mystery in the worshipping community is in the understanding of Christ’s presence in the sacrament of communion. Instead of seeking to define the nature of Christ’s presence, the modern Moravian Church states that persons may bring differing understandings of Christ’s presence to the Table and still partake of communion together.

Zinzendorf also divided the witness of Scripture into Economies, which represent a historical period in which God relates to humanity in a particular way. This idea expresses his underlying hermeneutic of the relationship of Christ and the Cross. The periods were the Economy of the Invisible God (which included the Economy of the Patriarchs and the Economy of the Law); the Economy of the New Covenant when knowledge of God comes in the form of his suffering Son; and the final Economy when God shall be known even as He is.

In describing the Economies, Freeman notes, “It should also be mentioned that in regards to the Economy of the New Covenant

the presence of the Spirit and the new birth of man are characteristics — and important ones; for these make possible the knowledge of Christ as a living reality in the heart.”¹³ Zinzendorf said very little about the final economy since he believed that eschatology was one of the mysteries that will remain uncertain until that time as God chooses to reveal it completely within human experience.

The Ancient Unity, before the second Reformation’s uplifting of the Pauline materials, developed a hermeneutic from an emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount. Central to their faith and practice was the Savior as encountered through the synoptic tradition. The emphasis on Christ’s teaching as witnessed in the synoptic tradition led to an ethical hermeneutic and a practical expression of faith lived out in daily life.¹⁴ Zinzendorf, influenced by his own time and experience, focused heavily upon the Gospel of John and Hebrews because of the understanding that they were written as a culmination of all the other gospels. One recognizes in Zinzendorf’s hermeneutic the influence of the fourth gospel in regards to the inseparable interrelationship between Divine and human, a relationship most fully expressed in the Incarnation. From the beginning John’s gospel is relational, inviting the believer to “come and see, come and spend some time with me.” Based on the success of Moravian missions among outcast groups of people, it would seem that the relational approach to God’s nature provided a tangible connection for individuals living in a wide variety of cultures.

In contrast to the synoptic gospels, John’s more developed Christology understands all revelation of God as originating with Christ.

Likewise, Zinzendorf experienced the Son, and in particular the wounds of Christ,¹⁵ as the channel to a deeper understanding of the Trinity rather than the other way around. God does not lead one to Christ; rather, God comes to be known only through Christ. The focus on Christ was not a dispute about the role and relationship with the Father or the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, it was an effort to determine what was essential and unique to the Christian witness in order that their missionary efforts meet with greater effect.

In light of Zinzendorf’s concern for evangelism, it is possible that his emphasis on Christ stemmed from a particular relevance for the time in which he lived. “Part of the reason for this [emphasis] is to be seen in the challenge which Rationalism presented to him... A second reason is the problem of Deism, which of course is closely related to that of Rationalism. The Deists seem to have been a deep concern of Zinzendorf, and he believed that this approach met with success amongst them.”¹⁶ Christ is central for Zinzendorf not just because Christ is the core of all Scripture, but also, because “He is the Revealer, the Mediator between God and man not only in the New Testament, but in the Old.”¹⁷

Zinzendorf’s theodicy, rather than developing from the Sermon on the Mount, comes from the understanding that God joins in the sharing of suffering. A theology of the cross and the suffering Christ is Zinzendorf’s answer to questions about God’s presence in the world in the face of human suffering. The wounds of Christ, as witnessed by Thomas in John 20, are evidence of the historical reality and a consequence of the Incarnation. “When remarking that Christ

must never be seen except in the light of the cross, he [Zinzendorf] reminds his listeners that the crucified Christ is also the risen and exalted Christ.”¹⁸ Added to Zinzendorf’s hermeneutical principle of understanding all Scripture in light of Christ was an interpretation of Scripture in light of the cross wherein the whole of scripture is understood as the story of God’s suffering and grace.¹⁹

Zinzendorf encouraged individuals to come to the Holy Scriptures in faith believing that Christ would reveal understanding and truth for each person as needed. This belief was lived out in community, each person being encouraged to learn to read in order that he or she would be able to personally read and reflect upon the scriptures as guided by their Savior/Husband and the Holy Spirit or Mother of the Church. God is understood as active, but cannot be seen or touched. Jesus is the tangible, interactive representative of God, and the Holy Spirit is our Mother.

Relational Nature of the Trinity and our Community

“The doctrine of the Trinity means that relationship is in the very nature of God. When we come to God we join God’s inner family, Father, Son and Spirit (which 18th c. Moravians liked to call “Mother” because it [the Spirit] cared for us as Mother).”²⁰ Freeman goes on to offer two examples of this reflection of the relational nature of God. The first is from John 20, in the story of the Beloved Disciple and Mary gathered around the cross of Christ. The second comes from Luke 1 in the story of the baby John the Baptist in his mother’s womb leaping for joy when Jesus in his

mother’s womb came into the room. The first story promotes the equality of men and women before God. This understanding was reflected in the Moravian Church of the 18th c. as women were ordained and assumed leadership roles in the religious life of the community. The second story expresses the equality of all before God even though not all have the ability to understand. A child in the womb cannot comprehend but God (Christ) relates to a child just as a parent might also relate to one in the womb.

In the Moravian community all were believed to have the capacity for faith from the un-born to the infirm, the mentally challenged to the academic. It was not that Zinzendorf believed rational thought and theological reflection unimportant; he simply did not believe them to be the essence of religion. Relationship is at the center of God’s nature, and in this way the Trinity becomes a model for human relationships and the transformation of society is based on this relationship.²¹

Gary Kinkel helps us to understand that the development of Zinzendorf’s hermeneutical principles were shaped by the life of the community, and in turn, community life was shaped by Zinzendorf’s theological interpretation and development. “Zinzendorf’s thought about the Holy Spirit emerged from the convergence of his practice of Christian community and his theological sources, in turn, the theology of Zinzendorf developed, informed and shaped his practice of community. Thus, these claims about the Holy Spirit were crucial to his hermeneutical thought, to his thought about the Christian life and to his thought about the Christian community.”²²

Zinzendorf believed it beneficial, even essential, to share Christian discipleship with companions of faith and circumstance. In new areas of mission he expressed the need for a congregation to be established right away in order that potential converts begin to see and experience Christian community. The decision to believe in Christ is a decision to enter into relationship, to become a member of a community that is bound to God just as they are to one another, a community whose relationship to one another is an extension, a reflection of the Divine nature.

Looking to the Future

We are living in a time of great transition and upheaval, not unlike the era of Zinzendorf. In view of the complexities of contemporary culture what does it mean for us to seriously consider the relational expression of our faith as found in Zinzendorf's hermeneutic? We can begin by defining the nature of our community or lack thereof, and then seek answers to questions that arise regarding how decisions are made and who holds the power for decision making within the community.

The Church under the influence of Zinzendorf understood community as a reflection of the divine glory. This not only implies a sacredness of all life but a trust and respect that seems to be lost in a culture where someone must be either right or wrong, where respect for diversity within the Scripture, interpretation and religious practice is viewed with suspicion. Zinzendorf's hermeneutic seems to suggest that the nature of our community will influence our theology — conversely our theology will influence our

practice of community or lack thereof.

What do we gain from Zinzendorf's understanding of the nature of God and the church that sheds light on our own search for truth and understanding? How can we approach the future in a way that is in keeping with our theological heritage and at the same time responsive to God's revelation in our own time?

Zinzendorf would teach us that as the Church works out its theology, God recognizes the limitations of human understanding and offers a specific revelation appropriate for that era; therefore, theological development is not fixed. It is not God that changes, rather it is our understanding and revelation that changes based on what God desires to reveal to us in each age.

Zinzendorf would also have us come to the Scripture in mutual trust, acknowledging that Christ is somehow speaking to each person, even though what the Spirit teaches you is sometimes different from what the Spirit teaches me. This is what makes it possible for us to encourage one another as brothers and sisters to remain in prayer and study the texts together until the Spirit speaks in a way that provides unmistakable clarity or convicts us of its ongoing mystery. At the same time, we should never shift our focus from the work of the Great Commission. As God continues to work within the hearts of the Body, speaking to the community through Christ and the Holy Spirit, changes are made and the church transforms.

I have heard it said that one of the greatest heresies in the Moravian tradition is to split the church because a division of Christ's body represents human rather than Godly action.

While division of the Church may bear witness to our limitations and sin we have seen how God can bring new life out of division. If this statement remains true for the Church today, then perhaps Zinzendorf's hermeneutic of relationship and a renewed understanding of Christ's sacred wounds and blessed suffering can provide a way for the church to move from brokenness to healing and from division to reconciliation.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Arthur J. Freeman, *Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Board of Communications Moravian Church in America: Bethlehem, PA, 1998), 34-35.
- 2 Ibid, 6.
- 3 Ibid, 49.
- 4 Ibid, 131.
- 5 Ibid, 35.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Arthur J. Freeman, "The Hermeneutic of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf" (Th.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1962), 98
- 8 Nicholas von Zinzendorf, *A Collection of Sermons from Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Journey*, trans. Julie Weber and ed. Craig Atwood (Bethlehem, PA: Interprovincial Board of Communication, 2001), 49-50.
- 9 Freeman, "Understanding of Scripture in the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum), 1996," (unpublished manuscript), 11.
- 10 Freeman, "Hermeneutics," 98-100.
- 11 Freeman, "Understanding of Scripture," 11.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Quoted by Freeman, "Hermeneutics," 133.
- 14 Craig Atwood, "Faith, Love and Hope: The Moravian Theological Heritage," *Hinge* 11, no.3 (Autumn 2004), 15.
- 15 For further discussion of wounds theology, see Craig Atwood, "Blood, Sex and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem," (Ph.D. diss. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995); and Riddick Weber, "Blood and Righteousness, Blood and Wounds," *Hinge* 8, no.3 (summer 2001).
- 16 Freeman, "Hermeneutics," 81.
- 17 Ibid, 87.
- 18 Quoted by Freeman, "Hermeneutics," 90.
- 19 Ibid, 100.
- 20 Freeman, "Moravians and Luther in North America," (unpublished paper presented at Augsburg Lutheran Church: Winston-Salem, NC, January 30, 2000), 5.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Gary S. Kinkel, *Our Dear Mother the Spirit* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), 9.

God Revealed: Sacred Conversations

Amy Gohdes-Luhman

Growing up in the Moravian Church, I remember my second grade Sunday School, Ms. Schumann, giving me my first Bible. Inside it she had inscribed the words from 2 Peter 3:18. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. I thought I was too young to own something so valuable. And indeed I was. Absent-mindedly I laid some modeling clay on top of it and it made a mark on the cover that remains to this day. I felt so bad. To the best of my knowledge, outside of the modeling clay, I have never made a single mark in this first Bible. I have treated it as an object of holiness. The second and third Bibles have worn their mark of holiness a bit differently. There is hardly a page that does not have something written on it. I still think of the Bible as something holy, and I mark it as if my life depends on it.

I have been asked to write about Old Testament exegesis or interpretation. But before doing so, I think it might be helpful to say something about how I understand that Bible to be holy. Do I believe that the Bible was put together by scribes in a trance taking dictation from God? No. That is not how the Bible came

together. But is this Bible the revelation of God? Yes it is.

We tend to think that human words are not good enough to be from God. The Bible loses value if we say that humans wrote it. It does not have authority unless God wrote it. But if you think about it, how do we know God best? In human form. In the form of Jesus Christ. We know God incarnationally, as the divine become human, the Word made flesh. And so is this not how it is with the Bible? Isn't it right to think of the Bible as the word made "fully human?"

The revelation of the Bible is a sacred conversation: humans describing in a fully human way, with all our particularities, what has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, by the Divine. The apostle Paul is knocked off his horse by a bright blinding light, and he hears the voice of Jesus. This is his experience of the Holy, and he writes it down in his letters to the churches. By the authority of this experience, people listen to him and churches are created and sustained.

But not everyone listens to just Paul, we have the gospel of John, three letters of John, the book of Revelation — produced by a different

The Rev. Dr. Amy Gohdes-Luhman has a PhD in Old Testament from Garret Evangelical Seminary and is pastor of Main Street Moravian Church in Northfield, Minnesota. She also teaches at St. Olaf College in Northfield.

set of Christians who found their authority, not in Paul's teachings, but in the writings and understandings of John. We have the testimonies of both. And because our Bible includes both we wrestle with both.

The Bible does not have to meet my standards of truth; I have to meet its standards of truth by way of the stories put together by humans in search of God's face. Like Moses, I beg to see God. God granted Moses' plea to see him, but only with a glimpse at his back as he passed by. And God grants my plea with the Bible showing me a glimpse of God from behind me, what has already happened. I get a glimpse of God by way of the Scripture, the collected stories of those people of God who like me wanted so desperately to see and know the Lord.

It is with this ardent longing that I turn to the Scriptures and apply various methods of interpretations to reach a level of understanding of the Word made flesh. Knowing that all interpretations are partial (we see only dimly) and realizing that there is always a real potential for seeing only what I want to see and hear in the text, I try to guard against reading meaning into a text by employing a blend of historical critical methods and rhetorical critical methods.¹

The historical critical methods force me to admit that the text was written long ago in a culture far removed from my own. Using these methods I attempt to determine when a passage was written, by what kind of speaker and what sort of audience. What were the cultural norms of the day and what is the underlying thought process that would call forth such a text and cause an ancient community to hold it sacred?

Rhetorical critical methods allow me to deal with the words on the page in a thoughtful and careful manner. Using these methods I seek to discover why a certain word was used instead of another, what is the rhetorical power of the text, was it persuasive for the ancient audience and if so, how?

As a pastor, it is from this point that I would then write my sermon. After identifying the rhetorical pull and direction of the ancient text, I try to recreate that same pull and direction in my message, thus allowing the Word of God to come alive in the present worshipping community.

After applying these methods of interpretation I collect my findings in a form that suits the audience and rhetorical situation for which I am speaking. A sermon for a worshipping community, a question and answer session for a Bible-study, an essay for a publication, a lecture (or lecture series) for a teaching setting, a program for a youth gathering, a story or object lesson for a children's sermon and so on.

Below is an essay which follows material I prepared for the Groenfeldt Lectures given at Sturgeon Bay in 2005 entitled, "God of the Old Testament: Searching for An Ancient Witness to the Moravian Way". In almost every rhetorical situation mentioned above, teaching and learning are central. For me the use of story is critical in that process. And so you will see that story-telling is more often than not woven into my elucidation of a text or biblical concept.

In the Groenfeldt Lectures I sought various Hebrew concepts that I could pair with identified virtues in the modern Moravian church. The following is the pairing of creation (Hebrew

concept) with sacrifice and surrender (Moravian virtue).

Sacrifice and Surrender: Br'

Sacrifice/surrender and creation. How is God's act of creating a surrender or a sacrifice on his part? The Psalmist says:

When I look at your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet. (Psalm 8:3-6)

My middle child is an artist, a creator. She is also a middle child and is protective of her stuff. She has terror on every side — a younger and an older sibling who might take from her that which she has created. A most prized possession this summer was a large dishwasher box that she had made into a small house. God protect the neighbor or sibling who thought wrongly and went into the house without the permission from the creator.

I take it as surrender on God's part, a sacrifice of power, that we are allowed in this house. This house we call the created world. I can imagine there may have been a bit of a pause between Genesis 1:25 and 1:26.

God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind...and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good... [PAUSE] ... Then

God said, "Let us make human kind in our image...

And some days I think God wonders if he should not have rested right then and there. He certainly has that thought right before the big flood. But God keeps creating, AND CREATES US. *Bara'*: the term is used 48 times in the biblical text. 11 times in Genesis, 21 times in Isaiah. And of the 11 times in Genesis the concentration is in Genesis 1 five times and three of those times that it is used appear in a single verse: Genesis 1:27.

So God *created* humankind in his image, in the image of God he *created* them, male and female he *created* them. Create Create Create. Of all the times this verb, *bara'* is used it is always only a divine act. Only God creates, human make things, fashion things, build things, shape things, God does all that too, but only God creates.

And so why did God create us? "To glorify him and enjoy him forever." (Moravian catechism — of all 72 questions I memorized this is the one I still remember).

And it is true and correct as our response. But why and how are we the pinnacle, as Von Rad says: "the high point and the goal" toward which God's creating work has pointed?² And how is this a sacrifice or an act of surrender on God's part?

I think the answer lies in two words that appear in this section and again in Genesis 5:1-3 and Genesis 9:6. Image and likeness or *selem* and *demuth*.

Genesis 1:26: Then God said, let us make humankind in our image (*selem*), according to our likeness (*demuth*)...and

Genesis 5:1-3: When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of god (*demuth*). Male and female he created (*bara*’) them and he blessed them and named them humankind, when they were created (*bara*’). When Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of a son in his likeness (*demuth*), according to his image (*selem*).

Genesis 9:6 for in his own image (*selem*) God made humankind.

One notices something in these passages. This image/likeness concept is non-negotiable. We can not get rid of it. We are created with it, which is God’s act. We cannot un-create or be rid of the image in which we are created. The second and third use of this triad (create, likeness and image) is related after the first sin; the first named sin being that of Cain’s murder of Abel. Even after we murder each other out of jealousy and self-concern we are still affirmed as being created in the image and likeness of God. Even after every inclination of our heart turns toward evil, even after the great flood, we are still affirmed as that creation which is created in the image of God.

So what does that mean? What does it mean to be created in God’s image? And how is that a surrender or a sacrifice on the part of God?

The two words *selem* and *demuth* are not synonymous though they are closely related. *Selem* probably did mean a physical likeness. It is a term used for idols or hand-made gods, things that are produced to look like something else. There is no doubt that the writers of the OT thought God looked like a man: the face of God (Psl 42:2, Gen 33:10), the hand of God (Gen

9:2), the feet of God (Exodus 24:10)...and so in some sense the ancient writer did mean we look like God. But the second term is less concrete and more abstract: *demuth* is used in reference to similarities other than visual ones.

What are those similarities that are not visual? I believe they are similarities in function tied to the command that follows our creation:

God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air...

Have dominion over... as God has dominion over all of creation, so do we. What? Von Rad says: “Just as powerful earthly kings to indicate their dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of the empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem... He is really only God’s representative...”³

I have a small problem with Von Rad’s analysis. We are not made of stone, metal or wood. So we can not be placed or erected...our act of representation is laden with danger — the danger of messing it up!

I also have a problem with Von Rad saying we are ONLY God’s representative...Only! One would think that is quite a job description. We have been commanded to act as God’s representative and we have been given the constitution and ability to do so. We have been created for this. Do not misunderstand me: We are not little gods nor are we dolls with rings in the back of our necks that make us move and speak.

We are given a power and a function to act as God's representatives on earth. And it is in this pinnacle act of God's creation, that I think God surrendered something. He surrendered a certain amount of control.

One may not be as comfortable with this idea. God is Omni: omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, all knowing, all powerful...all controlling? I am not so sure. God surrendered something in our createdness as God's representatives on this earth. Our God sacrificed in the act of *bara'*, in creating a creature that was like him with a will and volition of its own, God surrendered power to his creature, the power of dominion over the earth.

The Psalmist feels the weight of this sacrifice...*What are mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God...and given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet...(Psalm 8:4)*

I would like to think I am not responsible for this world — I know I am not in control of it. I would like to think that I am indeed not my brother's keeper or a tiller of this earth. But I am. We are. There is no way around it. We are *selem* and *demuth*, the image and likeness of God. And that has never been rescinded or broken, Genesis makes it very clear that this element of our created state follows us whether we murder or fill the world with wickedness. We still have the function of God's representative on this earth.

It may be easier to think that God is fully in charge and all the mess we make will be cleaned up in the end by a great housekeeping God. I would like to think I am not responsible for

this world. But God did surrender and sacrifice that which he made that which he could see was good, to us...to us.

Unlike Josie's cardboard play house, we are allowed in and not only that we have been asked to keep it good. God surrenders like that.

God surrenders in *bara'*.

(Endnotes)

1 For two texts that I use as foundational for gaining historical critical insights, see Norma K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) and John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, *Israelite and Judaeon History* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1977). In addition to these, I use the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* and numerous articles that can be found in the ATLA religious data base. For a rhetorical perspective I utilize various articles and books that focus on particular passages or books of the Bible.

2 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (The Old Testament Library Series; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 57.

3 Ibid, 60.

Reading the New Testament

Mary Lynnette Delbridge

Let me begin by thanking *The Hinge* for asking me to consider the ways, as a Moravian, I read and interpret the New Testament (NT) texts. I confess that I gazed with nostalgia at my shelf of New Testament interpretation books, as I first considered this assignment. These books outline the various methods of interpretation I learned during my years as a seminary and doctoral student and which I taught as a seminary professor. Obviously, they inform my approach to the NT. I seek to read the texts in their historical, cultural, and social context. I look for the literary and rhetorical structure of the texts. I listen to the texts understanding that they were written and canonized largely by those in the Early Christian world who had social power and authority. I try to read between the lines, seeking to hear as well the voices of those who lacked power and authority. Often, I find that reading non-canonical Early Christian writings and the broader world of Greco-Roman literature helps me to hear and understand the social dynamics I find in the NT texts. Finally, I realize that as I read and interpret the NT, I also need to be honest about my own presuppositions, preoccupations, and prejudices.

So far, nothing I have said sounds particularly “Moravian.” Many other readers of the NT say the same sort of things, regardless of their denominational identity. The question then remains: How do my sensibilities or experiences as a Moravian inform the way I read and interpret the NT? This question brings to mind a conversation I had long ago during my first year of doctoral study. The church history professor had graciously agreed to read with me the Apostolic Fathers, a collection of Early Christian texts reflecting life in the church in late first to mid-second century CE. We were reading together the letters of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch who was traveling to Rome where he was to be executed. As he journeyed through Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), he visited and then wrote letters of thanks and instruction to several of the churches in the towns and cities he had passed through. Apparently, the leaders of these churches had rolled out the red carpet and provided warm and loving hospitality for him as he stopped along the way. After all, he was a Bishop of the church and he faced martyrdom. He was also a Christian leader in a world that was still largely pagan. It was a joy for the Christians

The Rev. Dr. Lynette Delbridge has a PhD in New Testament from Union Theological Seminary and is co-pastor of Castleton Hill Moravian Church in Staten Island, New York.

of Asia Minor to be with another Christian, to honor his faithfulness, and to feel connected through him with the churches he had come from and those he would be visiting.

I commented to Professor Norris that their behavior reminded me of the way Moravians open their homes and churches to welcome Moravians traveling from other parts of the world. He raised his eyebrows. Was I naïvely idealistic? Was I seeing my denomination through rose-colored glasses? I assured him that Moravians would be pleased to welcome each other just as the Christians of Asia Minor had been pleased to welcome Ignatius. After all, compared to the large sea of people in other religious traditions and in other Christian denominations, we Moravians are also a fairly small band of believers. Like the Christians who were a tiny minority in the Greco-Roman world and who welcomed Ignatius, it does give us joy when we have the opportunity to be together, to share news with each other about our churches, and to pray and care for each other.

I'm not sure whether I convinced Professor Norris. Our conversation did, however, alert me to the fact that I do read from a Moravian perspective. I am curious about and sensitive to the community dynamics I see reflected in the NT and in other Early Christian texts. I want to understand how Christians experienced the Risen Christ and the work of the Spirit in the context of their community life together. How did they define their sense of identity? How did they hammer out their relationships with outsiders? How did they fight and reconcile with each other? And how did they support and care for each other? In the larger academic world, I

suppose I would be identified as a scholar who favors sociological or social-scientific methods of interpretation. In my heart, I know that I am reading as a Moravian.

I am grateful that the years I spent in the classroom and library were fruitful, rich years. The knowledge and skills I gained did teach me how to listen carefully to the voices of Early Christians in the NT and in other Early Christian texts. As each year passed, I felt I knew and understood my Christian forebears better. Gradually, instead of being an object of my study and historical investigation, they became people with whom I could have a relationship. Like good mentors, they started teaching me about life in the Church. Now that I serve as a co-pastor of a local congregation, I am particularly grateful for my relationship with them. When I let them, they stand beside me. They encourage me, correct me, shake their heads with me, and remind me to stay focused on the things that are really important. I am grateful for the conversations they are willing to have with me.

For the purposes of this reflection for *The Hinge*, I would like to explore some of the conversations my Christian forebears have had with me about “difference.” Inevitably, in our local congregations and in our denomination, we have to deal with differences in the ways we encounter the Risen Christ, worship, and seek to live and do mission in the world. Sometimes we can celebrate and rejoice in our differences. Sometimes they make us uncomfortable and threaten our ability to stay together. Should we avoid those differences and try to make everyone feel, believe, and speak of Jesus in the same

ways or should we accept our differences? If we do accept them, how do we deal with them in productive rather than destructive ways? To explore these questions further, I would like to consider the conversations I hear my Early Christian ancestors having with each other and with me about Christology, the interpretation of the Jesus' traditions, and ways we live out our lives out in the larger cultures that surround us.

My Early Christian mentors remind me that from the earliest days, Christians have always had a variety of viewpoints about the identity of Jesus. Here are just a few examples. Some Early Christians tell me that Jesus was a fiery-eyed, apocalyptic prophet preaching the doom of a coming, cataclysmic judgment (Mark 13). Others bear witness to Jesus' power as a healer who gave sight to the blind (Mark 10:46-52) and restored the lepers and those with mental illness to their communities (Mark 1:40-45; 5:1-20). Some see Jesus as an insistent advocate for social justice who pointed out abuses of power by the wealthy (Matt. 20:1-15; 25:14-30) and who also called his followers to alleviate the sufferings of those around him (Luke 4:18-19; 14:13, 21). Some say Jesus was a suffering servant messiah who insisted that he must suffer and die (Mark 8:31-36) and who called his followers to be servants as well (Matt. 23:11; Mark 9:35b; Mark 10:42-45; John 12:25; John 13:14). Some see Jesus as a high and exalted Lord who disarmed the "principalities and powers" and who is now seated on the right hand of God (Col. 2:14, 3:1). Many more examples of other Christologies abound in the NT texts.

As my Early Christian forebears speak from the texts and bear witness to their own deeply held and differing beliefs about Jesus, they teach me that God's revelation to us through Christ cannot be confined to one way of understanding. Nor, they say, should we be so threatened by differences in our Christologies that we try to make one Christology normative and exclude other Christologies. They remind me that different understandings of Jesus do not have to be mutually exclusive. Instead, they can live together in creative tension within our communities just as they do within the NT texts. We should consider ourselves blessed then, as Moravians, when our various viewpoints about the identity and work of Jesus are all present in our communities and when they are in conversation and exchange with one another. Our different understandings of Jesus and the different ways we respond to him enable us to speak to the world in a variety of ways about God's love and redemption through Christ.

If we can deal with differences in our Christologies, can we deal with differences in the way we understand and apply the teachings and actions of Jesus? Again, my Early Christian mentors would say yes. They remind me that the Jesus' traditions take on a life of their own as Christians in various times, places, and situations seek to interpret and understand them. An excellent example of this phenomenon is Jesus' saying about being "for or against." Remember the story about the man casting out demons in Jesus' name even though he was not part of Jesus' inner circle of disciples? John was offended and reported to Jesus that he and the disciples had

told the man to stop. But Jesus told his disciples to let the man continue his work of healing and restoration. He said, “For he that is not against us is for us (Mark 9:40, Luke 9:50).” Here Jesus’ response is one that supports inclusion. Even though the man casting out demons is not part of their own particular inner circle, his ministry to the world in Jesus’ name is valid.

Early Christians in a different context, however, could remember this saying in an entirely different way. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, Jesus defended himself. “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?” In this antagonistic atmosphere, he goes on to say, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23).” Here the lines are drawn. Either you are part of the group or you are completely outside and against it.

These different interpretations of Jesus’ “for and against” saying in the gospels show me that Early Christians were willing to reflect upon the sayings and teaching of Jesus in light of their own situations. Because their situations were different, they found different meanings in Jesus’ teachings. Other examples of Early Christians giving different interpretations to Jesus’ teachings and actions abound in the gospel literature. As my Christians forebears share with me their own interpretations, they help me realize I cannot vacuum pack Jesus’ sayings and actions in their original historical context or in my own context for that matter. By their own example in the

NT texts, they encourage me to participate in the creative process of hearing, reinterpreting, and handing down the traditions of Jesus. They give me permission let these traditions live on in other times and contexts. They also help me expect and accept that since our situations do differ, our interpretations of the Jesus’ traditions may differ as well.

A third conversation I have with my Early Christian mentors is one about the stance we take toward the larger cultures in which we live. As Christians who believe God’s Spirit is already working in us and that God is raising us to a new life, how do we continue to live and work in the world? How do we live out our lives as people who are radically changed, redeemed, and committed to the Kingdom or Realm of God rather than to the temporal rulers and social structures of our day? Inevitably, as they dealt with these questions, my early Christian forebears made different choices; sometimes, they found themselves in conflict with each other.

Let’s focus on a practical example. Early Christians found themselves wondering how following and being transformed by Christ would affect their families, the use of their household resources, their status as masters or slaves, the gender roles they played, and the decisions they made about marriage and celibacy. For the sake of this discussion, we will focus on one particular issue. Should Christians marry or remain celibate? We find that Paul, writing in the 50’s CE, dealt with this issue as did the author of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), who wrote in Paul’s name sometime between 100 and 125 CE.

First, in 1 Cor. 7, Paul gives us a glimpse of the Christians in Corinth asking many questions related to this issue. Should Christian couples continue to have sexual relationships with each other (7:1-7) or divorce (7:10-11)? Should Christians who were married to non-believers divorce their spouses (7:12-16)? Should Christians who are currently unmarried follow social expectations and marry or should they remain single (7:8-9; 7:25-27; 36-40)? Apparently, some in the Corinthian community strongly felt that their new life in Christ called them to embrace celibacy and Paul is probably quoting one of their slogans when he says, “It is better for a man not to touch a woman” (7:1).

Paul engages the issue by giving practical reasons for preferring celibacy. Why would Christians want to deal with the responsibilities of family during the “impending crisis” of the end time (7:25-29)? And certainly Christians without family responsibilities would be able to give “unhindered devotion to the Lord (7:32-35). And yet, even as Paul offers this practical advice supporting celibacy, he acknowledges that Christians have different gifts (7:7) and that both lifestyles, celibacy and marriage, are legitimate (7:28; 7:38; 7:39-40).

For all Christians, regardless of their life situations and their choice to be celibate or not, Paul offers theological considerations to keep in mind. He says the external conditions of a Christian’s life such as being circumcised, uncircumcised, slave or free are secondary. By implication, being celibate or not is also secondary. The important thing is to “remain with God” (7:17-24). Finally, Paul leaves the decision up to individual Christians and suggests

that whatever their marital status, they should live life with a sense of detachment from the “world” which is passing away. They should stay focused on God (7:29-31).

The Pastoral Epistles offer us a second example of a NT writer dealing with celibacy and marriage. The author of these letters mentions opponents who forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods (1 Tim 4:3). He believes that they are “making their way into households and captivating silly women” (2 Tim 3:6) and that they are “upsetting whole families” (Titus 1:11). He also refers to a group of widows which the church supported and which included both older widows and younger celibate women (1 Tim 5:3-16).

For the author of the Pastoral Epistles, the debate over celibacy and marriage is a quite heated one and he gives it great importance in his writings. He makes being married and raising respectful children a requirement for those who wish to be church leaders (1 Tim 3:2-12; 1 Tim 5:9-10; Titus 1:5-6). He insists that the church should only support widows who have been married and who have brought up children (1 Tim 5:9-10). He instructs younger celibate women to leave the widow’s group and to marry and bear children instead (1 Tim 5:14; See also Titus 2:3-5). He also makes bearing and raising faithful children a requirement for salvation for women when he says that a woman “will be saved through childbearing, provided they [the children] continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Tim 3:15).

We have to wonder about the motivating factors behind these instructions. In addition

to wanting the Christian “faith” to be preserved and handed down in an orderly fashion from one generation to the next, the writer of the Pastoral Epistles wants his communities to enjoy social stability. To that end, he is preoccupied about the opinions outsiders have of the Christian community. His instructions for choosing leaders (1 Tim 3:7; 3:13); instructions which would have eliminated celibate younger women from the widows’ group (1 Tim 5:14); instructions to slaves (1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:10), and general instructions to younger women and men (Titus 2:5; 2:8) all suggest that Christians should behave in ways that would earn the Christian community the respect and regard of outsiders.

The Early Christian debates about marriage and celibacy which we find in 1 Cor. 7 and in the Pastoral Epistles are interesting, not because they are necessarily a front-burner issue for us today. In our churches we accept, both as members and as leaders, people who are married and single and people with and without children. These debates, however, are interesting because they raise larger questions for us. How do our Christian values and sense of mission affect the ways we live in the world? To what degree are we willing to be “different” from and even in conflict with the larger cultures in which we live? How important is it for us to be well-thought of by outsiders so that we can make a living, quietly go about our business, and avoid hostility and negative attention from outsiders? And how do we deal with each other when we come down on opposing sides of such issues?

When I reflect on the issues that have the most potential to divide us as Moravians, they are often not about our shared belief in the

redemptive work of Christ or our call to bear witness to him in the world. They are about the ways we choose to live in and make sense of the world around us. For instance, how do we deal with right to life issues like capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia? How do we respond to our governments when they wage war? Do we refuse to be employed by or benefit from companies that exploit their workers or companies that make and sell products that harm the public health? What kinds of attitudes do we have toward those who are immigrants and towards those who come from different religious traditions? Should we welcome and provide civil rights for all persons regardless of their sexual orientation? And how much should we refuse to participate in activities or support corporations that do damage to the environment? The decisions we make about any of these issues could well put us at odds with one another and at odds with the world around us. They are choices that can radically and very practically alter the way we live in the world.

When I realize that I am caught up in a debate over one of these social issues, I find it helpful to observe and learn from the ways Paul and the writer of the Pastoral Epistles dealt with the issue of celibacy and marriage. They offer us two quite different approaches. On the one hand, we find in the Pastoral Epistles a conflict that is so heated no room is left for real dialogue between those who disagree. Instead of engaging his opponents on the theological issues at stake, the writer of the Pastoral Epistles calls them names (For example, 1 Tim 1:8-11; 2 Tim 3:1-5). He insists that his way is the only way for Christians to be faithful and claims that those who practice

celibacy are non-Christians. They “renounce the faith” (1 Tim 4:1). He suggests requirements for leaders which, if followed, would have shut out anyone who could not or would not conform to his ideals. Finally, he seeks to limit God’s free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ by saying that women save themselves, not through faith, but through childbearing (1 Tim 2:15).

On the other hand, we find Paul dealing with his church conflict in a way that enables Christians who have different sensibilities about the issue to remain in community with each other. He does not mention the reactions and opinions of outsiders as a reason for Christians to choose celibacy or marriage. He does not resort to name calling nor does he seek to exclude anyone from the church or from leadership in the church. He discusses the practical and theological issues at stake and then makes it clear that both celibacy and marriage are legitimate options. Finally, he encourages Christians to make their own well-informed theological decision about the way they choose to live.

As a Moravian, I am grateful that I can listen in on and learn from the conversations Paul and the writer of the Pastoral Epistles had with their respective communities. Observing their approach to this particular conflict helps me to become more self-conscious of the ways my Christians communities and I deal with conflict. Carefully listening to and evaluating the words and behavior of these two Early Christian authors is like holding a mirror up to examine myself, my church, and my denomination. After listening carefully to the author of the Pastoral Epistles, I wonder. Do we ever call our

opponents names and try to make the rules so only the people in our “camp” can lead and have influence in the church? How much do we broker God’s salvation in ways that support our own agendas and power? How much do we care about what other people think?

I admit that I find Paul’s style of conflict management much more redemptive and “Moravian.” He does not make a person’s marital or reproductive status into an “essential” but focuses instead on a person’s relationship with God and attitude toward the world. He gives Christians the liberty to decide how they will use their different gifts and life circumstances. And in 1 Cor. 13, we do hear him extolling the virtues of love. Listening to Paul encourages me to ask whether we give people good practical advice along with solid theological reflection. Are we gracious enough not to control people’s decisions but to allow them to make their own choices? Can we live with the tension of “both/and” in our communities?

I have talked in this reflection about the conversations I hear my Early Christian forebears having with one another and with me. When I listen to them, I learn a great deal about accepting differences and dealing with conflict. Does this way of reading the NT texts, however, truly help me to experience the Risen Christ and move ahead in faithful discipleship? Is it a legitimate as a “Moravian” way to read the NT? For me, the answer is yes. Listening to the different ways my Early Christian forebears experienced and understood the Risen Christ helps me speak more effectively to a world with many different needs. Listening to voices of my

Christian ancestors empowers me to interpret the Jesus' traditions in light of my own context and experiences, even if the meaning I find is different from the meanings others find.

Conversations with my forebears in the faith also protect me from becoming overly disillusioned when tensions arise in the church. Understanding the human dynamics of living in community helps me to be sanguine when our differences lead to conflict. Finally, while personal revelation and mystical experience are important ways to encounter God, I do take incarnational theology seriously. I know the Risen Christ in large part through the proclamation and struggles of my sisters and brothers past and present, in the words of appreciation and encouragement they speak to me, through the arms with which they lovingly embrace me, through the hands that join mine in service, and through the voices that raise with mine in worship. And so, as a Moravian, I read seeking to understand the communities of faith that have gone before me in the distant past as well as my own. As I read, sometimes, I am blessed with glimpses of the Risen Christ.

Moravians and Scripture

Keith Stanley

Most Moravians are well aware of the contributions of the Unity to the European heritage of religious music and to the world mission field. Some may be aware of its influence upon the education of children, warmly recognized by Jean Piaget, the father of modern child psychology. Others may be aware of its understanding, unique in the eighteenth century and controversial even now, of sexuality and the need for respectful, straightforward sex education. But relatively few are aware of the Moravian tradition, from earliest times, in the understanding of Scripture. At a moment when churches and nations — ours in particular — are tearing themselves apart over the meaning of words and the obligations and commitments they entail, it may be that members of this church in particular have much to gain and much to offer by exploring their own 500-year history as readers of the Bible.

I was going to write ‘readers of God’s word’, but I’m given pause by a startling remark made by Ludwig Zinzendorf at a church Synod in 1740: “One could not speak of ‘the Divine Book’, but rather of ‘the Divine Truth in the Book’.” In what follows I’ll try to suggest the background of this apparent distinction between

words that are thought to communicate truth in an unmediated and inarguably definitive way, and words telling the story of an experience of truth through various filters that need to be recognized.

The distinction was not Zinzendorf’s invention. Among Moravians three names (to reduce *my* story to manageable scope) are important in outlining a context, two before him, one later: these are Luke of Prague, Jan Amos Comenius, and then Friedrich Schleiermacher.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Luke of Prague, using the vocabulary of mediaeval scholasticism, had formulated a division of the Christian heritage into essentials, ministerials, and accidentals. ‘Essentials’ were understood as the grace of God the Father, the merit of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit — and on humanity’s part, faith, love, and hope. ‘Ministerials’ comprised Scripture, preaching, and the sacraments (including all seven of mediaeval tradition). And ‘accidentals’ (or ‘indifferents’) were the particular means of implementing the ministerials in a given time, place, and manner. It is important to note that in the order of priority here, the action of God and the response of an individual soul are given precedence without

Dr. Keith Stanley is a Episcopalian with a lively interest in the Moravians. Until recently he was Professor of Classics at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

sweeping away all the impedimenta of Christian history, merely setting them to one side in an order of relevance.

As for Scripture, which for so many centuries had been a battleground of argument and competitive interpretation, there could be no question of elevating it to the apex of the faith-pyramid. Similarly for all the rest, which should be viewed as ancillary, but not determinative, to the primary emphasis and the main perspective—or perhaps rather as conducing to the essentials without becoming ends in themselves, as they had for centuries. Luke (no less than Hus) was responding to a movement for renewal within the western church that had already produced some of its most memorable witnesses to individual experience of God, ranging from the anonymous writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* to Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*.

Comenius is elaborately concerned with Scripture as such but is emphatic in urging that it cannot be regarded as a literal standard for belief or behavior. He had been well forewarned by the explosive debates of the earlier 16th century, which had driven enlightened, scholarly investigation of biblical texts virtually underground in the face of bitter and often deadly theological controversy linked to powerful economic and political agenda (as we see in our own time). Neither Luther nor Calvin had any illusions about the uniform inspiration of Holy Scripture, but their successors were caught up in a war of survival that Comenius was helpless to moderate. He is explicit in opposing “those who turn their attention solely to Scripture, ignoring senses and reason (due to the nobleness of their conceptions), hover above the real world or

blindly believe things they do not understand, or stick literally at each letter, or take whatever absurdities and superstitions as articles of faith.... Similarly, as nothing is in reason that was not first in the senses, so nothing is in the faith that was not at first in reason.” Again, “The more closely Divine Revelation can be conformed to the testimony of intelligence and experience, the greater strength it gains.” As to ministerials in general, there should be toleration of differences, “allowing the whole Garden of the Church to blossom with voluntary piety.” In short, the essential inner life is more important than theological orthodoxy or biblical literalism, which may indeed be harmful to it.

Zinzendorf, though in a number of respects a child of his Age, continues firmly in the tradition set by Luke and Comenius; the link with the latter is given symbolic expression in his consecration as a Moravian Bishop by Comenius' grandson. Like his predecessor, he rejects *a priori* concepts of Scripture while retaining a profound commitment to the figure of Christ as Savior. The result is a spiritual relationship that does not dispense with Scripture but uses it devotionally, without requiring a narrow, mechanical concept of verbal inspiration to sustain faith, and is therefore open to historical and critical approaches to the text.

Although any leading of the Spirit should be in harmony with Scripture, “the consideration of Scripture must never be made by us equal to the fellowship which we should and can have with our God and Savior in person.” This relationship is not only distinct from experiencing the Bible but may also differ from individual to individual: “each one builds his own system, each one must

be able to speak for himself.” In the tripartite scheme, the relationship is essential; Scripture is ministerial in various ways for different persons; and there is much in it, taken as a whole, that one must recognize as falling on the side of accidentals, being historically conditioned and limited by the horizons of the individual writer.

The language and ideas in Scripture were for Zinzendorf conditioned by time and context, just as the formation of the canon of Scripture was a historical process subject to accident and human circumstance. The texts we have include obvious mistakes, inconsistencies, misconceptions, and (in the case of the letters attributed to Paul, for example) much of unequal quality. Indeed, Zinzendorf goes so far as to reject the claim that Scripture represents a body of Revelation sufficiently consistent and unified to provide the basis for a closed theological system — a limitation that, in his view, lends a paradoxical credibility to its core of essential truth. His distinction between the Divine Book and Divine Truth in the Book, cited as we began, should be clearer now, as well as the reasons for it. Here we have an emphatic break with the Reformed tradition that Scripture should be read and explained solely within the context of Scripture (as in the familiar Lutheran tag *solâ scripturâ*, ‘by Scripture alone’) and a no less telling rejection of the Roman Catholic argument that Scripture and Tradition (as recognized by the Church) have co-equal authority.

In another area Zinzendorf points the way towards the future: he is sensitive to language and to stylistic differences between various writers. In his day, the Greek of the New Testament seemed so remote from the language of the

Classical period that it was thought to represent the unique, idiosyncratic voice of unmediated inspiration: “Holy Ghost Greek.” It was not until the later nineteenth century that papyrological evidence revealed that this Greek was in fact the international Mediterranean language — or *koinê* — of communication in law, business, and private affairs, subject for better or worse to the educational experience of the writer. On just this basis Zinzendorf found evidence for the individual personality and background of the writers of the New Testament that affected what they had to say and how they said it: a hermeneutical principle that is still important, indeed essential, today.

Zinzendorf’s achievement in reinvigorating the Moravian identity cannot be denied. But as a legacy of the “Sifting Time” in Bethlehem and elsewhere, the complications of which are still being unraveled, his intellectual and spiritual heritage suffered some eclipse in Moravian thinking. “Even so,” remarks A. C. Outler in a valuable essay on Pietism and the Enlightenment as alternatives to Tradition, “[Zinzendorf’s] influence was widespread and lasting — not least of all through the transformation of his thought that was achieved by Friedrich Schleiermacher.” Regarded as the founder of modern Biblical hermeneutics, Schleiermacher was educated in Moravian schools at Gnadensfrei, Niesky, and Barby, a sequence that in the latter phase seems to have left him with some frustration, along with a more lasting gift: respect for that essential relationship to God we have seen in the thinking of Luke, Comenius, and Zinzendorf.

Years later, when his intellectual questioning had led him beyond their personal frontiers, he

returned for visit to Gnadenfrei, where as a child he received his first introduction to Moravian teaching. There, in a letter of 1802, he wrote with affectionate irony, “There is no other place which could call forth such lively reminiscences of the entire onward movement of my mind, from its first awakening to a higher life, up to the point which I have at present attained. Here it was that, for the first time, I awoke to the consciousness of the relations of man to a higher world.... Here it was that that mystic tendency developed itself, which has been of so much importance to me, and has supported and carried me through all the storms of scepticism. Then it was only germinating, now it has attained its full development, and I may say that, after all that I have passed through, I have become a Herrnhuter again, only of a higher order” (tr. Frederica Rowan, 1860).

In this spirit of devotion to essentials and freedom to reconsider all the rest, Schleiermacher was largely responsible for laying the foundation of twentieth-century theories of language and how it functions, and for outlining the questions inherent in approaching and understanding any text: issues at the heart of each successive movement in critical theory and practice, Biblical and literary. It is rewarding to note that, in this spirit also, the 1909 Herrnhut General Synod chose not to oppose scientific methods of Biblical scholarship: a remarkable stance in a rising tide of Fundamentalism that has shown no sign of receding.

Wisely, in this context, a revision of the *Ground of the Unity* offered by the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America and adopted by the Unity Synod of 1995, defines

Biblical interpretation as an ongoing process:

“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 completely in any human statement....”

The past, as most of us know from personal experience, has a good deal to do with the future, and we can conclude with a brief glance at both sides of the coin. The earliest Christians fell into two main groups: pagans with some classical education, and Jews with a mixed experience of their own traditions of religious training and exposure to the Greek schools in which Paul, for example, would have read his Homer. In both groups the prevailing approach to a text involved deriving its ethical significance through figurative, or symbolic, interpretation — a practice indispensable to every Sunday preacher. Literal meaning was not at issue: Old Testament material was used to support an argument, not to recover the historical record or moral imperative in the sources. Christian tradition developed a variety of methods for this purpose: allegorical (concerned with ethics), typological (the Old Testament fulfilled in the New), and anagogic

(prophetic, concerned with the future of the soul). Results differ, extending from the early Epistle of Barnabas, who interprets the Mosaic prohibition of certain foods as forbidding certain forms of sexual activity, to the very much later John Calvin, who interprets Jesus' circumcision, the Jews' passage across the Red Sea, and the pillar of cloud over the tabernacle in Numbers (9.18), all three, as figures anticipating infant baptism. Among Jews the divisions and the rules for procedure within them became far more complex and explicit.

Early on in the midst of all this, perhaps the most profound and moving portrayal of the difficulty of defining literal meaning in Scripture appears in the last three books of Augustine's *Confessions*, offering an extended meditation on the first verse of Genesis 1. While theology went on its own way in terms inherited from the traditions of Greek and Roman philosophy, it would be nearly a millennium before Augustine's quandary was revisited. The twelfth century saw a movement towards a fresh view of language and logic in establishing the primacy of the literal, historical sense in Biblical texts as a control over excessive figurative interpretations.

In the thirteenth century, Anthony of Padua was insistent upon a careful grounding in the linguistic context of Scripture; Hugh of St Cher anticipated the modern interest in isolating a core of inspired truth from elements that simply reflected the education, experience, and culture of the individual writer. In the fourteenth century Nicholas of Lyra was the first to produce a complete scriptural concordance, aided by a thorough knowledge of Hebrew: a work that greatly influenced Luther. We have

noted, however, that the sixteenth-century preoccupation with theological debate caused a turn away from philology to the rhetoric of persuasion. This distraction from the problematic implications of a literal reading (involving inconsistencies, contradictions, and the like) was not mended until the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as in the work of Zinzendorf and Schleiermacher.

The status of Scripture has become an even more complex issue than in the lifetime of Schleiermacher, thanks to a constant, extraordinary growth of textual and archaeological material, along with new methods of assimilating evidence old and new. In the present state of controversy, however, several elementary observations are worth keeping in mind as we approach the gift of reading Scripture:

1. First, much OT material was subjected to a constant process of rethinking, reinterpretation, and adjustment to changing conditions and aims over time, whether one thinks of the variety of creation-stories — ranging from the juxtaposition of the Priestly and the Yahwist and Elohist accounts in Genesis to the quite different cosmological traditions represented in Psalms and Second Isaiah, or of evidence of reshaping in the prophetic books.

2. In the NT we find that the witness of faith in community lies prior to what we have come to consider the determinative Scriptural record. Thus our earliest textual evidence for NT belief is found not in Paul's formulations but in the hymns he quotes. The Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom tradition evident in intertestamental writings — marginal to the interests of much in the OT

but offering a religious universalism compatible with Christian experience — provided forms of thought and expression that were adapted to the hymns. These in turn supplied Paul and others with a voice and vocabulary for their own encounter with the Holy Spirit. Enough to give pause in attempting a ready answer to Tyndale’s question whether “the church or congregation be before the gospel, or the gospel before the church.”

3. The NT offers clear evidence of (a) adjustment of tradition to the immediate purpose of a given author and the substitution of one tradition for another, both habitual with Luke; (b) adjustment of tradition to suit local conditions (consider the differing treatment of divorce in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and Paul (at 1 Cor 7.15)); (c) outright rejection of tradition, as when the exclusion of eunuchs in Deut 21.1 is pointedly abandoned by Christ Himself at Mt 19.12, perhaps on the model of Isaiah 56.3-7 (cf. Acts 8.14-25); (d) revision of a line of thinking within the writings of a given author, as at 1 Cor 11.11f, where Paul adjusts his own construct of the *ekklesia* as a hierarchy analogous to the Body of Christ in order to justify equality of the sexes.

4. Finally, there are elements that reflect points of view characteristic of the first century intellectual climate — philosophical, moral, and scientific — that cannot reasonably be accepted without careful study in light of present knowledge and understanding. Thus Paul’s concept of the soul, a somewhat inconsistent formulation heavily indebted to elements derived from Stoicism, can only be regarded as an ad hoc attempt to communicate an intuition, not a

coherent (much less inspired) dogma. In effect, there are passages where there is little gain in preserving the ancient thought form; elsewhere, we may need to differentiate between a kernel of truth and the terms in which it is expressed.

There is nothing here that is alien to the tradition of Luke, Comenius, Zinzendorf, and Schleiermacher: they, and the bishops who have succeeded them voting in Synod, seem to point the way to a future in which the more questions we ask of ministerials and incidentals, the richer we are likely to become in matters essential, as each new awareness nourishes the next with an unexpected grace among seekers in community.

The Church

I weep for us!

As the Body of Christ we can be so judgmental,

So lacking in understanding of those who differ from us!

As Christians we can be so unforgiving,

So closed to new thoughts,

That we are deaf to God's revelations.

I weep for us!

As followers of the Christ we can be so forgetful of his ways,

So concerned with respectability and acceptability!

As moral leaders we can be so timid,

So afraid of conflict,

That we render ourselves useless.

I weep for us!

When will we learn that there is no growth without differences?

That there is no love without pain?

I weep for us!

by Helen Everhart

Letter to the Editor:

While no longer affiliated with the Moravian Church (I still have a place in my heart for Her) I look forward to reading *The Hinge*. It is about time that the issue of worship was addressed. As an aside, I found myself agreeing with the writer and the responders (not that agreeing is a necessity). What particularly resonated for me were the pet peeves and prejudices that Matt and Bob Nickel listed. One of my fondest memories of serving on the Northern Province PEC was my visit with Burke to the Wisconsin Churches. We were treated to an impromptu concert by Bob and had some time to discuss his philosophy of worship. Two additional points that need to be made (in my mind at least) is a point that John Jackman raises in his anecdote about his friend from Germany, the criticality of not taking the Liturgy, or for that matter any part of worship, for granted or by rote but reading with expression and sincerity. The most important point in my mind is one that has never been discussed in my experience and that is the authenticity of worship. I don't care about style or format what I care about is whether the worship leader is sincere and has an honest faith that can be communicated to the congregation.

— George Friedman, Staten Island, New York

COMMENTARY

The War in Iraq

Bill Gramley

My dear friends, it is May 11, 2006 as I prepare my words to you. This morning USA Today revealed the fact that one of our nation's security agencies has been monitoring phone calls and e-mails from millions of Americans. In particular this agency did not tell us what they were doing. But the fact that they have been doing this secretly is only one more item on a long list of very questionable activities that President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and others in the Administration have been carrying out. Usually these things are kept secret from us, from "we, the people," that is, from the citizens of this democratic and open society with our various Bills of Rights and judicial system and a Congress elected by the people.

I am writing to you basically because I have yet to hear any minister speak about or discuss the war in Iraq. And that war, of course, has implications for many aspects of our daily lives. In fact, the only thing I've heard besides prayers of intercession in the three plus years that we have been waging war in Iraq was a reference to some American contractors who were killed brutally and dragged through the streets of a city in Iraq. The minister who mentioned this did not mention specifically this incident but raised the question about "who will bury the dead?" This might have happened during Holy Week. I'm not sure. But that's been about all I've heard.

I don't get around to many churches to get a sense of whether I am right or wrong about this silence, but thus far I really haven't heard anything at the churches I do attend.

And I worship pretty regularly. In short, I don't know of any Christian congregations that have suggested that maybe this matter of war and violence, of secrecy, of deception about how and why we got into this war, about the way some of our soldiers and C.I.A. agents have treated prisoners, or about any number of other questionable actions related to terrorism and anti-terrorism is relevant to our faith. I admit that I may have missed some sermons or discussion groups that dealt with these things, but I think what I haven't heard from the few churches I know about is typical of the majority of churches of all faiths.

And since I have not gotten any guidance in these matters, I get what information I get from Eugene Robinson, Paul Krugman, and the numerous other columnists in my local newspaper and from *The New Yorker* which I read and which I confess does take what can be called a "liberal" point of view. Maybe you do the same thing — sort of keep up with the issues from liberal, moderate, or conservative sources. So I'm prejudiced or biased or whatever, but I read other columnists who are conservative, too. And yet that is not the issue I'm getting at. I am

saying that I don't read any clergy writings on the subject or hear any comments from them. There seem to be no biblical references to these topics, no connection of theology, Christology, or personal faith in Jesus Christ with what is going on in the social and political realm.

The first question, then, is this: Should the Church, the Christian community, the earthly Body of Christ — or whatever name you want to give us — address this matter of the war in Iraq and its many tentacles? I think we should, but I also think we are silent because President Bush told us after the tragedy of 9/11/2001 — almost five years ago — that we ought not to panic but go about our lives as we normally do. So we have gone about our lives as we normally do except for one thing. We have allowed this Administration, often with the approval of Congress, to go about this war and justify it and all its costs and losses of lives and deceptions and hidden prisons and various surveillances and refusals to admit mistakes because we are fighting terrorism. As long as we are fighting terrorism we the people are willing to put up with a few inconveniences at the airport or in the subway and give our approval to the massive amounts of money we are spending both on the actual war in Iraq and in building up a huge Department of Homeland Security and its multitude of components.

So we have trapped ourselves. We have bought into the President's point of view — even though he switched from going into Iraq to get rid of Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction and his deck of fifty-two cohorts to the purpose of creating democracy there. Naturally, when he throws that word “democracy” at us,

we are likewise swayed into believing that this is a good thing to offer other countries. Fight terrorism. Create democracy. It doesn't matter how we go about that so long as we go about it. But he never mentions why we aren't doing similar things in parts of Africa and Asia where other dictators and totalitarian governments exist. These days only thirty-six percent of the American people believe our President is doing a good job in spite of his rhetoric and questionable candor.

Still, the silence from the Church abounds. And all I am trying to say to you at this late date is that we ought to raise a few important questions. Here are some:

Does the Church find something redemptive in being silent in the face of deception, secrecy, retaliation (e.g. the Valerie Plame case), abuse of prisoners and lack of legal counsel for some, and the bombing of civilians?

Does the Church have a responsibility to be prophetic and question the pursuit and promotion of war and violence or is that irrelevant to the teachings of our Lord and Savior?

Should the Church say something about the stewardship of our resources, of how we use the contents of the earth? Is there such a thing as asking people who have made mistakes to apologize and repent and work to correct those mistakes?

What does the word “salvation” really mean? Is it only for our souls or does it include the “cosmos,” the word for “world” that John used in John 3:16? What is the Gospel about anyway, the Gospel and all those teachings Jesus gave us

about loving, forgiving, healing, redeeming, and having compassion? Does justice have a part in our faith?

What does it mean for more terrorists to have come into being as a result of our policies? And what does it mean when people blow themselves

up like kamikaze pilots in order to kill others for the sake of their convictions in comparison to what we in the church are willing to give up for the pursuit of our convictions — which are what?

Editor's note: Subscribers to the Hinge are encouraged to send in their own commentary, sermons, and other items for publication.

Book Note

Erika Geiger, *Erdmuth Dorothea Countess von Zinzendorf: Noble Servant*, tr. Julie Tomerlin Weber (Winston-Salem, NC: Blair Publisher, 2006).

Erdmuth Dorothea von Zinzendorf was one of the most significant women in the history of the Moravian Church. In fact, she was one of the most interesting and active women of the 18th century in Europe and her story should be known outside the Moravian Church. Thanks to Blair Publisher, now it can be. Julie Tomerlin Weber's translation of Erika Geiger's biography of the countess is a lively read designed for non-specialists that will be enjoyed by Moravians and non-Moravians alike. In it we learn that Erdmuth was an active co-laborer with her more famous husband, and she deserves credit for being one of the architects of the famous Moravian communal system, developed at Herrnhut, that was brought

to Pennsylvania and North Carolina. She was also one of the business managers of the far-flung Moravian mission endeavor. Though she was a mother who gave birth to twelve children, she risked her life traveling through the Baltic in a vain attempt to win the release of Moravians imprisoned in Russia. By her work and personal example, she also helped break down the barriers of race and class that continue to bedevil the world. We see her on the cover in the simple garb of a Moravian woman illuminated by an inner happiness. Her biography offers a shining example of a life of active faith and sincere devotion to Christ.

Announcements

Upcoming Issues of the Hinge:

14.1 The Moses Lectures for 2006 by Alice Caldwell

14.2 Caring for the Sheep or Following the Lamb? by Elizabeth Miller

If you would like to write a response for Rev. Miller's article, contact the editor at atwoodcd@wfu.edu.

Upcoming Events:

Public Theology Program - Winston-Salem, North Carolina

September 23 Steelman Lectures at Wake Forest Divinity School

Featuring John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki

September 24 Thompson Lectures at Home Moravian Church

Featuring John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki

October 23-24 Brian McLaran lecture and workshop in Winston-Salem

November 21 Interfaith Community Thanksgiving Worship

These events are part of the Public Theology Program of Wake Forest Divinity School and Home Moravian Church. This is a three year pilot program funded by the Comenius Patrons. Craig Atwood, editor of *The Hinge* has been appointed the Comenius Scholar. In addition to directing the Public Theology Program, Dr. Atwood will teach historical theology and Moravian studies courses at Wake Forest and continue his work as theologian in residence at Home Moravian Church. For more information on the Comenius Scholar position, contact Kathy Barnes at Home Moravian Church 336-722-6171 or visit www.wfu.edu.

Groenfeld Lectures - Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin

The Sturgeon Bay congregation has started a lecture series focusing on Moravian theology and spirituality. Dr. Amy Gohdes-Luhman gave the inaugural Groenfeld Lecture last year. Her lectures are available on DVD. Craig Atwood will be the lecturer in November 2006. His topic will be Moravian Core Values through the centuries. For more information contact Rev. Dr. Matthew Knapp at Sturgeon Bay Moravian Church 920-743-6218.

Moses Lectures in Moravian Studies of Moravian Theological Seminary

“Moravian Music on a Mission” presented by Alice Caldwell

October 9 Archie K. Davis Center, Winston-Salem

November 5 Los Angeles, California

For more information or to register contact the Office of Continuing Ed at Moravian Theological Seminary 800-843-6541 or visit: www.moravianseminary.edu.

The cost for subscribing to *The Hinge* is \$30.

Send checks payable to:

The Hinge
Craig Atwood, editor
2444 Ardmore Manor Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27103

The Hinge is provided free of charge to Moravian clergy thanks to the generosity of the Center for Moravian Studies.

Contact Jane Burcaw (jburcaw@moravian.edu) at Moravian Theological Seminary to change your subscription information or to request additional copies of *The Hinge*. The single issue rate is \$4.00 with a discount for ten or more copies.

Editorial Board:

*Sherry Mason Brown, Christy Clore, Otto Dreydoppel
Margaret Leinbach, Graham Rights*

Editor:

*Craig D. Atwood, Comenius Scholar
Wake Forest University and Home Moravian Church*

Send letters to the editor, articles, book reviews, and other contributions to the editor at: atwoodcd@wfu.edu.