



The Hinge

International Theological Dialog for the Moravian Church

Religion and Violence

Andrew Lumpkin

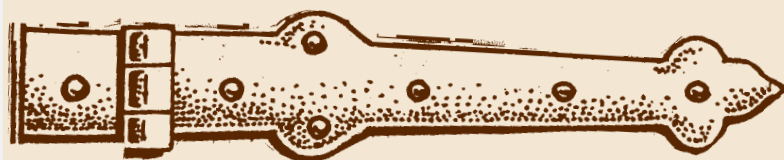
*Responses by Gill Frank, Bill Gramley,
Margaret Leinbach, and Rick Stamm*

Additional articles from *ITD* by

Martin Clemens, Angetile Musomba,
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One of the early offices of the Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pa. was that of the Hinge: “*The office of the Hinge requires that the brother who holds it look after everything and bring troublesome factors within the congregation into mutual accord without their first having to be taken up publicly in the congregation council.*”

— September 1742, *The Bethlehem Diary*, vol. 1, tr. by Kenneth Hamilton, p. 80.

The Hinge journal is intended also to be a mainspring in the life of the contemporary Moravian Church, causing us to move, think, and grow. Above all, it is to open doors in our church.

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Notes from the Editor

In this issue we take a look at one of the most important but overlooked aspects of religious life: the relationship of religion and violence. Most people in the world today have been affected at some level by violence connected to religious beliefs. Americans are most aware these days of Muslim Jihadists, but every inhabited continent experiences some type of religious violence. Christian history is filled with atrocities committed in the name of Jesus, and the potential for such violence remains high. Religion scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers have explored the connection between religion and violence, but there is no simple answer to the question of why religions, including those that teach love and respect for human dignity, can sometimes inspire individuals and groups to do acts of unspeakable horror.

Andrew Lumpkin, the author of our lead article, examined much of the contemporary research on religious violence in his Senior Project at the Divinity School of Wake Forest University. He graciously agreed to summarize his findings for readers of *The Hinge*. He offers several criteria that are indicators of a religious organization's tendency toward violence. This can serve as a mirror by which to examine our own preaching and teaching. Are we Moravians promoting peace in the world or could our words and attitudes potentially lead to violence?

Also in this issue we have several articles from around the Unity that appeared in our sister journal, *ITD: International Theological Dialog*, which is published in Germany. Most of the articles were translated from the German by Sister Linda Easter, who works at Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem. Linda grew up bilingual in the United States and wants to use her language skills for the good of the Moravian Church. We are grateful to her for her hard work.

The articles are written by some of the most significant leaders in the world-wide Moravian Church, and in different ways they address the twin themes of history and mission. What is there in our 550-year history that can be meaningful to the church today as it engages in a variety of missions globally? Some of the articles discuss forthrightly the question of whether one can even speak of a "Unity" amid the diversity of Moravian theology and practice around the world. Other articles raise equally provocative questions about the meaning of missions in today's world.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of *The Hinge* and that it will provoke your own thinking. Feel free to send letters for publication to atwoodcd@wfu.edu.

Religion and Violence

Andrew Lumpkin

Each year Americans observe September 11th to memorialize over 3,000 victims who lost their lives in dramatic acts of religious violence. One can easily dismiss 9/11 as the deranged lunacy of a few sociopaths, but, truthfully, religion has always had a fascinating and flirtatious relationship with violence. Needless to say, Islam is not the only religion with a violent past. All the other global religions have shed their share of blood.

Recent examples of religious violence abound: David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, the Aum Shrinko cult's poisonous gassing of a Tokyo subway, and the assassination of peace-seeking Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by an angry Jewish fundamentalist, to name just a few. This article will examine this relationship, specifically those factors that increase the likelihood that a religion will employ violence. Let us, however, first turn to two historical—even foundational—examples of religious violence.

Religious violence birthed our Christian faith. Throughout the Gospels, the embittered Jewish elite conspired to destroy Jesus and his emerging movement. With inside help, the chief priests, elders, and scribes captured Jesus and charged him with blasphemy and treason. Their plan succeeded (however short-lived) and Jesus was tried and crucified. Regardless of the

theological import of Christ's death, Jesus was a victim of religious violence plain and simple.

The beginning of Moravian history also reflects religious violence. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Jan Hus called for reform in the Catholic Church, railing against its rigidity on indulgences and other practices. Searching for loyalty among its clergy and theologians, the Catholic Church sought to squelch Hus' dissent, eventually excommunicating him. Hus, however, would not remain silent and continued his rebuke of the Church. In 1414, he was invited to defend his beliefs in front of the Council of Constance. There he was arrested, tried for heresy, and burned at the stake the following year.

With these historical and contemporary examples and daily news reports in mind, investigations into the relationship between religion and violence are vital. Over the last decade scholars have begun to examine this intricate relationship, but the tragic events of September 11, 2001, brought this scholarship to the forefront of religious studies. This new and emerging discipline explores a range of questions. For example, and most simply, is religion inherently violent? If not, what turns religious adherents violent? Do our sacred texts cause or reinforce a violent worldview? Now more than ever, these questions, and many more, need to be answered, for in an era of

increased globalization, an understanding of how religion can become violent is integral for a future of peace in our world.

Although there are various approaches to studying the relationship of religion and violence—each with positive contributions—this study will investigate factors that increase the likelihood that a religion will become violent. The factored approach is best exemplified in Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).¹ By surveying recent scholarship on this subject, this article will propose six factors that contribute to religious violence and will expose their form and function. Importantly, the presence of one or more of these characteristics *does not necessarily* produce a violent religion, but the presence of these factors *does drastically increase* the likelihood that a religion will employ violent means. A religion employing all of the six following factors can be peaceful, while, theoretically, a religion employing only one of the factors could become violent.

Let me first define the term ‘violence’ for better reader understanding. In general, scholars have had difficulty defining this term. Should the word be used to connote physical harm, or something larger, wider, and deeper? Use of a wider definition tends to dominate religious studies, and one definition in particular has been cited repeatedly.²

In *Religion and Violence*, Robert McAfee Brown maintains:

The basic overall definition of violence

[is the] *violation of personhood*. While such a denial or violation can involve the physical destruction of personhood in ways that are obvious, personhood can also be violated in ways that are not obvious at all, except by the victim. There can be “violation of personhood” quite apart from the doing of physical harm.³

Because this definition encompasses physical, psychological, emotional, linguistic, and systemic notions of violence, it possesses a great utility for this work.

Factors Increasing the Likelihood a Religion Will Become Violent

An examination into the relationship of religion and violence should appropriate many or all of the approaches footnoted earlier. Due to the scope of the paper, however, I will only use one approach in this paper. Surveying the various approaches to religious violence by theorists of religion allows one to extract several common denominators. Indebted to Kimball and Juergensmeyer, I will utilize the factored approach to religion and violence, re-shaping their factors from themes and common denominators within all of the approaches. These factors will also be re-shaped to include scholarship from biblical studies and sociology of religion.

Outside Agitation

Violence does not happen in a vacuum. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic for a violent religion is the threat—whether real or perceived—that outside agents or forces are oppressing or marginalizing a religious community. Whether it is through political,

religious, and/or economic imperialism, one group feels pushed to the margins of the larger society. Said differently, forces outside the boundaries of the religious community endanger the values and livelihood of that community.

When a religious group is subject to outside agitation, the experience has psychological ramifications. Outside agitation can lead to feelings of alienation and humiliation within the context of the larger society.⁴ When the values of a religious community are under attack, the group, sometimes violently, asserts its cultural validity. It is human nature to assert dignity and personhood in the face of oppression. Similarly, violence resulting from external pressure expresses the desire for cultural legitimacy and social empowerment.⁵ The purpose of this violence then is for the larger society to recognize the value of the oppressed religious community and for the latter itself to feel worthy within the larger society.

Dualistic Thought

Dualism posits two distinct states of reality, where each state is irreducible to the other. Certain dualisms pervade our Western conscience. There is a material realm, distinct and separate from an immaterial realm. There is the body, and there is the spirit. Light and darkness, right and wrong, purity and impurity, sacred and profane, and good and evil also connote opposing metaphysical realities.

When a religion employs dualisms, there are no shades of gray. By viewing the world in two distinct realities, people, entities, and substances are inevitably divided by an either/or criterion.

Transcendence above these categories is highly improbable, often impossible. While this neat packaging requires little cognitive effort, its implications are profound, and the logic quickly becomes dangerous. Without appreciation for the complexities and ambiguities of life—without a holistic understanding of reality—people and things are consigned to exclusive categories.

The exclusivity of these groups can turn violent when one is viewed as better than the other: male is better than female; straight is better than gay; the West is better than the East. By placing people and groups into diametrically opposed categories, one creates a hierarchy of values, where one category is striven for, and the other is repressed or oppressed. When groups of people are assigned to dualistic categories, the violation of personhood is nearly inevitable.

Apocalypticism

Closely related to dualistic thinking is apocalypticism. While dualistic thought divides reality into good and evil, apocalyptic thought envisions the cosmic struggle between good and evil, decided by an ultimate battle. This cosmic struggle ushers in a new end-time reality. As John Hall summarizes, apocalyptic orientation “posits a final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil—a conflict that leads to the destruction of the existing temporal order and the arrival of a new ‘timeless’ era of ‘heaven on earth.’”⁶

Mark Juergensmeyer explains the logic of violent apocalypticism. The cosmic struggle is played out in history and realizable in human terms. Believers have to identify personally

and internally with the cosmic struggle. Accordingly, the cosmic struggle continues in the present and currently happens on the social plane. The struggle is at a point of crisis, and there is uncertainty in its outcome; if one knew the outcome, response would be unnecessary.⁷ On this point, Charles Selengut would rightly dissent with Juergensmeyer, because some groups, certain that good will ultimately prevail, try to usher in the apocalypse.⁸ Finally, according to Juergensmeyer, acts of violence have a cosmic meaning. The response of the people can sway the tide of the cosmic struggle and ultimately establish a new and good world order.⁹

Demonization of the Other

I know who I am, and I know that you are not me; you are Other. As such, Othering is necessary for self-definition. Naturally, Othering happens on individual, communal, and national levels. Othering becomes violent, however, when the dignity and respect for the Other is trampled. Religious language that dehumanizes and demonizes the Other may lead to or support the use of violence.

A violent religion demonizes its opponents to create a different class of humanity, one more easily attackable. Alastair Hunter provides an excellent definition of demonization: “a process of alienation of the other which permits us to treat them with a kind of inhumanity which would be shocking were it to be found *within* our respective groups.”¹⁰ The projection of inhumanity creates a double standard, one in which the ingroup can treat (and vilify) the

outgroup in a manner too deplorable for usage on other members of the ingroup.

Demonizing the Other is inextricably linked to dualistic and apocalyptic thought. As Saldarini states, “Demonization of the other quickly divides a society into the righteous and the wicked, the true citizens and the traitors, the godly and the satanic... From this violence flows.”¹¹ Demonization of the Other then requires language that divides the world into two cosmically opposed groups; the ingroup is Good and the outgroup embodies Evil. Because of dualistic and apocalyptic influences, this language also is without nuance, polarizing, absolutizing, and without shades of gray: “‘They,’ the establishment, are the sources of all evil, in vivid contrast to ‘us,’ the freedom fighters, consumed by righteous rage.”¹² Accordingly, this language does not encourage love, acceptance, or toleration, as it is impossible to respect and associate with agents of evil.¹³

Certainty of Interpretation

Truth claims are central to the tenets of any faith, without which, religion becomes a cacophony of disparate ideas. While truth claims focus the direction of a person’s faith, even truth claims are open to interpretation. Without the dialogue over the meaning of truth, religion can become dangerous. As Charles Kimball perceptively states:

While truth claims are the essential ingredients of religion, they are also the points at which divergent interpretations arise. When particular understandings become rigidly fixed and uncritically appropriated as absolute

truths, well-meaning people can and often do paint themselves into a corner from which they must assume a defensive or even offensive posture.¹⁴ Absolute truth claims, or certainty of interpretation, quickly divides the world into right and wrong, truth and evil.

When the certainty of interpretation of sacred texts is absolute, those who disagree are incorrect, a short step away from being evil. John Collins, while examining the violence of the Christian Bible states, “The Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation.”¹⁵ This degree of certitude stems from a belief in the divine revelation of sacred texts. If a sacred text is transmitted by God, the text has absolute authority, and this authority and certainty of interpretation draws a line in the sand:

... historically people have appealed to the Bible precisely because of its presumed divine authority, which gives an aura of certitude to any position it can be shown to support ... And here, I would suggest, is the most basic connection between the Bible and violence, more basic than any command or teaching it contains.¹⁶

Oliver McTernan would add, “Exclusive claims on truth have given rise either to high boundaries that have marginalized outsiders or to aggressive attempts to impose those beliefs on unwilling neighbors.”¹⁷ Needless to say, this is a potentially dangerous position to be in.

Hierocratic Domination

Religious movements have generally been started by the actions and guidance of a charismatic leader. When a leader demands steadfast loyalty or blind obedience, however, the propensity towards violence is greater. This final factor then is created by two component parts: charismatic leadership and steadfast loyalty. I combine them here utilizing Hall’s label of “hierocratic domination,” or the dominating rule by the clergy or priesthood.¹⁸

According to Thomas Robbins, movements that employ highly apocalyptic and dualistic worldviews are often characterized by “markedly *charismatic* styles of leadership.”¹⁹ Coupled with this violent worldview, Robbins argues that a charismatic leadership style usually is devoid of checks and balances. As such, the leader has an unhealthy amount of authority over the religious community:

Charismatic leadership has been said to be intrinsically *precarious* by virtue of the absence of both institutionalized restraints on the willfulness of the leader and institutionalized supports to sustain and stabilize the leader’s authority. ... [T]he charismatic leader may be both empowered and pushed into deviant behavior.²⁰

Because of the skewed authority or monopolistic control of the religious leader, Hall argues that hierocratic domination exerts “a kind of ‘psychic coercion’” over his/her religious community.²¹

The other part of hierocratic domination is the steadfast loyalty given to the charismatic

leader by the religious community. Kimball opines that an authentic religion encourages religious adherents to struggle and wrestle with the mystery of experience and life. However, a religion becomes potentially dangerous, “when individual believers abdicate personal responsibility and yield to the authority of a charismatic leader...”²² In this unhealthy system, the religious leader is venerated, elevated to a higher human status. A result of this veneration is the unrestricted power and control granted to the leader. The uncritical acceptance of the actions and ideas of the religious leader also points towards hierocratic domination.²³

Conclusion

Everyday we turn on the news and hear stories of Muslim suicide bombers, and we remember, for example, newscasts of abortion clinic bombings by Christian extremists during the late 1990s. In grade school we learned the lessons of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. Truth be told, religion can be hurtful, if not outright dangerous. We know that religion tries to offer hands in the form of friendship and love, but, often times, it offers hands in the form of fists.

If a religion is violent, one or more of the following factors are present. First, pressure—real or perceived—from outside the religious community increases the likelihood that a religion will respond violently. The use of dualistic and apocalyptic thinking also heightens the tendency towards violence. Violence may result when a religion both demonizes its opponents and is absolutely

certain of their interpretation of scripture and tradition. Finally, the presence of a charismatic authority that demands steadfast loyalty should warn religious adherents of the propensity towards violence.

In Matthew 10:34, Jesus states that he “did not come for peace, but a sword.” How do we learn not to take this passage literally? Here, I have offered six factors that increase the likelihood that a religion will employ violent means. (I must emphatically reiterate that the presence of one or more of these factors does not necessarily mean a religion is violent.) When we recognize the presence of one or more of these factors within our community, we must reflect and be critical of the potential consequences. Are we violating anyone’s personhood? Are the implications of our beliefs violent?

Let us learn not to cast stones.

Endnotes

¹ See also Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003). Due to the scope of this discussion, I will only use the factored approach here. Other scholars do approach the question of the relationship between religion and violence differently. Rene Girard understands this relationship in terms of sacrifice, mimetic desire, and scapegoating. See Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). For a social identity approach, see Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: The

- University of Chicago Press, 1997). For a scarce resource approach, see Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005). Finally, for a typological approach, see Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003). Importantly, an examination into the relationship of religion and violence should appropriate many or all of the approaches defined here.
- ² C.A.J. Coady catalogues the ambiguous usages of the term ‘violence’ in scholarship and offers three prominent usages of the term. See C. A. J. Coady, “The Idea of Violence,” in *Violence and Its Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Manfred Steger and Nancy Lind (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 24.
- ³ Robert M. Brown, *Religion and Violence*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 7, emphasis in the original. Philip Tite and his mentor, Michel Desjardins, both employ this definition in their work. See Philip L. Tite, *Conceiving Peace and Violence: A New Testament Legacy* (Dallas: The University Press of America, Inc., 2004), 38; Michel Desjardins, *Peace, Violence and the New Testament* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 3.
- ⁴ Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).
- ⁵ Thomas Robbins, “Religious Movements and Violence; A Friendly Critique of the Interpretive Approach” *Nova Religio* 1, no. 1 (1997): 25. See also Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 190-218.
- ⁶ John R. Hall, “Religion and Violence: Social Process in Comparative Studies,” in *A Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 372.
- ⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Logic of Religious Violence,” in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 185-190.
- ⁸ Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 98-111.
- ⁹ Juergensmeyer, “The Logic of Religious Violence,” 185-190.
- ¹⁰ Alastair G. Hunger, “(De)Nominating Amalek: Racist Stereotyping in the Bible and the Justification for Discrimination” in *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence*, ed. By Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Yvonne Sherwood (London, England: T&T Clark International, 2003), 93. Emphasis in original.
- ¹¹ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Demonization and polemics,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34, no. 3 (1997), p. 335-340.
- ¹² Jerrold M. Post, “Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 25.
- ¹³ Wayne A. Meeks, “Apocalyptic Discourse and Strategies of Goodness,” *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 3 (2000): 465-467.
- ¹⁴ Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 46.
- ¹⁵ John J. Collins, *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 32-33.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 32.
- ¹⁷ Oliver McTernan, *Violence In God’s Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 133.

¹⁸ Hall, "Religion and Violence," 368.

¹⁹ Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence," 14.

²⁰ Ibid, 24.

²¹ Hall, "Religion and Violence," 368.

²² Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 72.

²³ Ibid, 82-85.

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Responses

Bill Gramley

Lumpkin's article in this issue clearly describes six basic reasons why religious groups or churches have gotten involved in supporting war and violence. But there is one aspect of this that needs to be highlighted. It is the fact that the church, as such, does not engage in war. It simply supports and justifies the wars and violence that nation states perpetuate. This means that many followers of the Christian faith give greater loyalty to "the nation" or what we call patriotism than they do to the nonviolent example and teachings of Jesus Christ.

One of the earliest creeds of the Church was the statement that "Jesus is Lord." Many Christians really believed that and sacrificed their lives during periods of persecution rather than deny the lordship of Jesus Christ. Some believers refused to bear arms. They simply did not buy into the practices and ambitions of the society or empire in which they lived.

And there were various times in the history of the Moravian Church when members refused

to bear arms. For some years in the colonial era of America the Moravians established villages of peace in Ohio for the Native Americans in an effort to get these people to forsake fighting. The Moravians at that time believed that the teachings of Jesus took precedent over the policies of the warring powers. In short, there was something about faith in Jesus that implied a different lifestyle and attitude.

This was also true much earlier in Moravian history when the Brethren of the Ancient Unity actually lived by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. While they were somewhat separated from the state, they did live by an alternative form of daily life in contrast to the usual violence and power plays of the state.

Certainly in the 20th and 21st centuries most churches, including the Moravian Church, have given unthinking consent to the belligerent foreign policies of our national government. The exceptions have been the Quakers, Church of the Brethren, and Mennonites. Those policies are mostly in favor of using threat, subversion,

upholding dictatorships, and military force to carry out the wishes of the leaders of the state and thereby the wishes of the people. The catch phrase of “national security” is used over and over again to justify everything from wiretapping to the torture of prisoners to the actual overthrow of other governments or their leaders. And often anyone who dares to question these practices is denounced as unpatriotic. This can be translated to mean that national security or the nation itself is our main god.

To change this or overthrow this god would be as difficult as it would be to suggest that professional football teams start playing touch football rather than tackle. And so we are deeply imbedded in the belief that physical power or the “big stick” is the way to conduct our lives. And that is a very, very long way from the teachings of Jesus Christ who actually said we are to love our enemies, be peacemakers, and forgive those who trespass against us!

If you think I am overstating all of this, let me remind you that in 1968 at the Provincial Synod of the Southern Province a resolution prepared by Ted Bowman and me to allow the creation of a Moravian Peace Fellowship was defeated by a vote of 144 to 8. That’s how strongly members felt about even allowing anyone to pursue the path of peace or refuse to bear arms.

Since March of 2003 or soon thereafter as news reporters became embedded with American troops and others in Iraq we have had almost daily by-lines from Baghdad. The war in Iraq has clearly dominated the news for the past five years. And what has the Moravian

Church had to say or do about this war? The PECs have participated in some ecumenical statements to the President expressing concern about the war, but little else has been offered to church members or by church members to say that just maybe this war is not in accord with the teachings of our faith.

A few ministers and a few congregations (Central in Bethlehem, Home in Winston-Salem and perhaps others) have broached the subject of war, peace, violence, and the stewardship of the nation’s budget. But there have been no clear resolutions opposing our national policy or discussion resources made available that I am aware of. The reason we remain silent is because we don’t want to seem unpatriotic. We cannot seem to stop worshipping this idol which truly is our addiction. I can’t find any differences between what the state says and what the church says. We are so intertwined. Oh, yes, we do espouse Jesus as Lord, but in reality we love what the nation does more.

Nowhere among the many words that we can use to describe life in Christ or the purpose of the Church can we find a call to hatred and war and bloodshed or the torture of people. Moreover, the Church is not called to establish political or material power, to build itself or its members or leaders into advocates of tyranny or oppression or enslavement. If anything, the Church should be prophetic and call into question such inhumane practices.

Finally, I noted an article in the *Winston-Salem Journal* on May 29, 2008, reporting that one hundred countries have agreed to

stop making and using cluster-bombs (which spray devastating bomblets over large areas and can blow up later when people pick them up). Guess what? The United States, Russia, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan did not participate in shaping this ban and haven't agreed to it. I quote a paragraph in the report: "In Washington, a spokesman for the State Department, Tom Casey, said that such weapons are an important part of the American arsenal." I wonder what a spokesman for Jesus would say?

The Rev. William Gramley is a retired Moravian minister living in Winston-Salem, NC.

Gil Frank

Generally speaking, humankind has a tendency toward violence when things do not go the way that individuals, groups and nations desire. We most often consider violence only to have occurred when physical force and action is used against another, whether it be a person, a group, a nation, or some other earthly entity. However, violence is rightly defined as abusing and doing harm to someone through thoughts, looks, and words, as well as actions. Most of us do not stop to consider that any harmful way in which we interact with one another is a form of violence. For any interaction between two or more people, an unkind thought or word, gossip, a reacting frown, a threat, domination, aggressive behavior, or undue physical force are examples of violence that disturb what could and should be a peaceful and meaningful

relationship. In most situations, we do not have to look beyond ourselves for daily examples of this expanded view of violence.

In his relationship with the established religion of the day, Jesus expressed dissatisfaction with the current practices that existed in the Jewish faith; and he did this with words and actions that disturbed the leadership and status quo. Jesus' intent was to return the Jewish people toward acknowledging and worshipping God without the extreme legalism and pomp promoted and practiced by the existing leadership.

With words and actions that disturbed the leadership and status quo of his day, John Hus also expressed dissatisfaction with the current practices and excesses that existed in the Roman Catholic Church. His intent was to return the leadership within the church to a more simple style of living that modeled the life of the Apostles, centered on the law of Christ as found in the gospels, and emphasized helping people at all levels of society.

Both Jesus and John Hus worked for improvements by staying within the existing religious establishments using reasonably peaceful and meaningful approaches. Both were willing to come to the table and discuss their feelings and to reach agreements on changes that would result in more appropriate religious practices. I can think of no examples from their ministries in which they called for violent, physical action against another person or group or for the specific establishment of a new religion. It was the leadership of the Jewish faith and the Roman Catholic Church who

was unwilling to change and who wished to continue the status quo. It was only after their deaths by violent methods that new religious movements were begun by those following their teachings; and, over time, both the Christian faith and the Czech Reformation used physical violence to promote and sustain their beliefs and existence.

I hope we can learn from Jesus and John Hus and apply the lessons learned when our own Moravian congregations and provinces need to improve our faith and service so that we effectively focus on God and Christ, our ministries, our missions, and our love for one another. We have a rich heritage of faith, love and hope that has acted in peaceful ways and has promoted justice and service to all peoples.

I also hope we can learn from the six factors cited in *The Hinge's* lead article—factors that can potentially increase violent thoughts, words, looks and actions in our Moravian community. I think these factors point to six simple ways in which we can remove the potential for violence as we work together in our congregations and provinces:

We can reduce agitation within our community by acknowledging, listening and responding in creative ways to new thinking and action that may be needed to improve our relationships and practices.

We can eliminate irreparable damage to our community by not cleaving to an immovable position on any religious, cultural, social or organizational issue, although widely divergent opinions may exist.

We can overcome evil with good actions by demonstrating through our faith and our love toward others that we follow Christ and that peaceful existence and good order result through the ways in which we live and behave.

We can provide dignity and respect for all members of our community by not letting our personal biases make others feel that they are different and thus alienating and separating them from truly belonging.

We can dialogue over matters of faith and belief by recognizing that the truth claims of the Christian faith are essential to our existence but need to be interpreted and understood in ways that transcend unhealthy absolutes.

We can participate in leading and supporting our community so that all members are represented in deciding on directions and actions.

Applying these six simple and positive responses to situations in our community allow us to live by example in demonstrating our non-violent approaches to the Christian faith in our congregations and provinces. Applying these responses requires that we recognize the value and need for dialogue and understanding. Applying these responses requires that regardless of our thinking and opinions or our positions as leaders or members, we come to the discussion table and remain until there is agreement or consensus on how we will behave as a community of Christ.

Gil Frank is a retired engineer and a member of Home Moravian Church in Winston-Salem, NC.

Margaret Leinbach

I appreciate Brother Lumpkin's tackling how religions contribute to the violence so prevalent in today's world. I whole heartedly agree that "an understanding of how religion can become violent is integral for a future of peace in our world." His identification of six factors that can increase the likelihood that persons of faith will act violently towards perceived threats can help every person examine those parts of ourselves where (in the words of Mother Teresa) "a Hitler resides in me."

I also appreciate his recognition that "violence of personhood" encompasses more than physical harm to include "psychological, emotional, linguistic, and systemic" actions and inactions that diminish the life and well-being of God's children. While today it is easy to point fingers at our Muslim brothers for denying women basic human rights, Christian history is not guilt free. Today it's hard to grasp when anesthesia first became widely available, that significant numbers of clergy and doctors argued against giving women painkillers during childbirth because of God's words to Eve "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16a).

Brother Lumpkin's hope that we "learn not to cast stones" but rather practice discernment in how our religious beliefs affect others in harmful ways is a hope I believe most Moravians share and strive to practice in our own faith walks. Yet I have my doubts that we will make significant headway in reducing violence done

in the name of religious beliefs until these questions of Brother Lumpkin are addressed:

Is religion inherently violent? If not, what turns religious adherents violent? Do our sacred texts cause and reinforce a violent worldview?

To these questions, the answer seems to be an obvious and resounding YES! The sacred texts of polytheistic religions abound in stories of one god using violence to conquer another god and violently punishing wayward human beings. The scripture of the two largest world religions, Islam and Christianity, abound in stories and instructions from God to use violence for divinely sanctioned punishment for unbelievers and for God's greater purposes. Indeed religious authorities used these texts to justify both Jesus and Jan Hus' executions for heretical beliefs and agitation.

The biblical text's witness to God using or sanctioning violence as a legitimate form of punishment, leads many Christians to understand Jesus' crucifixion as satisfying God's "justice" for torture and extreme pain as payment for our sins, i.e. Jesus willingly bore the punishment we deserved for our sins and took our place on the cross. Whether one agrees with a substitution theory for the atonement or not, at a very minimum Jesus' violent death shows even when the elements of violence and punishment are not prescribed or initiated by God, they can be accepted by God for a saving purpose. What then are the criteria for religious people to determine whether violence is ever acceptable?

Brother Lumpkin's six factors seem to be present in the mass murders of innocents in the

name of ethnic cleansing we have seen in our lifetimes in Germany, the former Yugoslavia Republic, Zimbabwe and Darfur. Perhaps these six factors are more humanly universal and serve masters beyond religion like ethnic and national beliefs.

Until we can adequately address the primary cause for religious violence—sacred texts testifying to God specifically using and sanctioning human violence for redemptive purposes and to punish unfaithfulness—I fear religious people will remain violent.

The Rev. Margaret Leinbach serves as an Intentional Interim Pastor in the Southern Province.

Rick Stamm

This article would make a great five or six piece blog in order to generate replies and discussion. While the intent is admirable I find a number of points I would either disagree with or, at least, want to discuss further with the author. For example, I find it unfortunate that the examples used to support the thesis are a mix of political and religious. The attack of September 11, for one, has been identified by a variety of analysts as more political than religious even though the people carrying out the action probably had strong religious convictions. The same claim could be made for the murder of Rabin and possibly that of Jesus. So, I wonder if it is the religion itself that is prone to violence or just members of the religion who use violence as their way of getting what they want.

As for the factors being described, most have merit to some degree with the exception of Outside Agitation. Mohammad was peaceful until he had power; Christianity was peaceful until Constantine embraced it and gave it power. On the other hand, Anabaptists in early history retreated as they were threatened, and today Christians in Pakistan and Palestine retreat rather than respond with violence. The other factors mentioned are probably worthy of study and would have had a stronger position in this article if they had been referenced against the examples used in the opening so the reader could see how they produce violent action.

The footnote directing the reader to other theories of violence in religion was excellent and I hope there will be many articles in the future opening discussion on these as well. As the author states, “religion has always had a fascinating and flirtatious relationship with violence.” As people following the Prince of Peace it is incumbent upon us to pay attention and respond.

Rick Stamm is a member of the Lititz Moravian Church in Lititz, PA and is the founder of Moravian Peacemakers.

The Author's Final Word

I would first like to thank Craig Atwood and the editorial board of *The Hinge* for the opportunity to publish this article. After completing my Masters of Divinity degree, Craig asked me to turn part of my senior project into an article for this publication. As a young master's graduate, adding a publication to my resume is a great honor. I was and am excited about this opportunity. Thank you again, Craig, my teacher, mentor and friend.

While the goal was rather lofty, the required size and length of this paper was hinderingly short. Translating two years of thorough and detailed research into a brief article required difficult editorial decisions. As such, there simply was not the room to follow historical and/or contemporary examples of religious violence through each factor, nor was there length to go into more depth on each factor.

The purpose of this article was to provide an introductory piece with the intention to direct readers toward further research. This article was meant to be a starting point for dialogue, discussion and reflection on the subject. I apologize to those readers who desired a more detailed and intellectual article, but space and purpose simply did not allow it.

I would like to make one cautionary statement. One reader described my historical examples of religions violence as unfortunate because they contained a mixture of religious and political motivations. The distinction between religion and politics is relatively new,

especially in Western, and therefore American, contexts. Most of the world does not employ this distinction, and it would be incorrect to project this distinction into many examples of religious violence. This is also true when we study historical examples of religious violence. We must be mindful of this fact.

This same reader proposed a useful and helpful question: “[is it] religion itself that is prone to violence or just members of the religion who use violence ... [?]” How a scholar answers this question influences how they approach the issue in general. For example, Rene Girard inherently believes religion itself is violent, as does Hector Avalos. On the other hand, Charles Kimball assumes that religion is inherently pure, but religious adherents bring violent tendencies to the table. This debate is unlikely to be resolved in the near future, as I am not sure how you can empirically prove one answer over and against the other. It is important, however, for readers to understand the underlying presuppositions of the scholar.

Rev. Gramley discussed the role of nation-states in promoting wars and conflicts. His point assumes national actors in international conflict (i.e., U.S., Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.). The rise of non-traditional groups of violent actors (terrorists) in recent decades has bucked this trend. He makes the point, however, that the church (with the exception of certain denominations) has seemingly abdicated its prophetic role in the lead up to war. The Early

Church Fathers wanted the Church to be “in the world, but not of it,” yet, the Church has not taken a leading role in stalling or slowing the call to arms. While every human has multiple loyalties, we must not let our nationalism trump our faith.

Finally, I would like to applaud Mr. Frank. After reflecting on this article, he applied the principles and created a list of six behavioral changes that religious groups should apply to

decrease the chances of violence. These are good starting points for all readers, as this list should not be viewed as comprehensive (i.e., respect the ambiguity and complexity of life and not view the world in simplistic, dualistic terms). I encourage readers and religious adherents to reflect, create, and employ your own list in order to decrease the likelihood that your religious groups will utilize violent means.

Reflections on the 550th Anniversary of the Moravian Church

Articles from *ITD*, 2007

Translations from the German by Linda Easter

From Hus to Now: Thoughts on this Year's Anniversaries in the Unity from a Layperson's Perspective

Martin Clemens, Herrnhut

In previous editions of *ITD* I have already expressed myself from a brotherly perspective regarding political and social collaboration as well as lay ministry and office in the Moravian Church. The two anniversary celebrations in the worldwide Moravian Church prompt me to consider the reason and motivation for the aforementioned collaboration in the Church.

Formation of the Moravian Church 550 Years Ago

Already as a schoolboy in Herrnhut I took part in leading tours of the village and God's Acre for groups of visitors, first as the assistant with large bus tours, then on occasion on my own. Therefore it was necessary to study the origins and roots of our church's history, with questions about why we did not join with the Lutherans, why the Moravian Church became a separate denomination under the wings of the Lutheran Count von Zinzendorf, or what is unique about the mission work of the Church?

As an 18 year-old in Bethlehem, PA, USA, in 1957 I experienced with great awareness the 500th anniversary of the Moravian Church

and the first Unity Synod since World War II where, among other things, the Unity Prayer Watch among all 19 provinces was initiated as a continual global event. The following facts in the history of the old *Unitas Fratrum* were particularly important and striking to me:

The martyrdom of Jon Hus in Constance in 1415 for his reformation teachings:

- God's word in sermons and proclamations in the respective language of the country;
- Communion *sub utraque*—in both forms for all believers;
- Abandoning wealth and pomposity of the Church combined with simple, scripture-based priesthood.

The followers of Hus as Taborites (militant Hussites) and Utraquists (centrists) from which the first brothers and sisters who wanted to work in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount gathered under Brother Gregor in 1457 in the Bohemian village of Kunwald.

The Thirty Year War begins with the Defenestration of Prague in 1618, followed

in 1620 by the Battle on White Mountain where the Hussites were crushed, and which ended in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, a disappointment for the Unity.

The Counter-reformation which followed with the emigration of the Bohemian religious refugees under their bishop Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and their dispersion to all parts of Europe. Comenius foresaw the demise of his church in his “Legacy of the Dying Mother, the *Unitas Fratrum*” (1650).

Had I grown up in any other town this Moravian history would likely not have interested me so. In 1960 I was able to visit the old Brothers House in Kunwald with our Czech brother Adolf Vacovski, the preacher of our congregation Usti nad Orlici, who sadly died much too young. During a very intimate communal prayer I myself became aware of being a part of the history of the old Unity. I felt where and how deeply the roots of our belief go. At the same time I asked myself if I would be ready to give up my home on behalf of my faith or to spend two decades in prison for it as Brother Bischof Augusta or other brothers did—not really!

More current to a member of the Herrnhut congregation is the story of the renewed Unity after the establishment of the settlement on June 17, 1722, the workings of Count Zinzendorf and his wife Erdmuth Dorothea, the spiritual events at communion on August 13, 1727, in neighboring Berthelsdorf, and the sending of the first missionaries on August 21, 1732. A testimony to our history which cannot

be overlooked continues to be our meaningful God’s Acre in Herrnhut.

Thoughts on the Beginning of the Herrnhut Mission 275 Years Ago

Thoughts of mission have always been a part of our family. Both sets of my grandparents were missionaries. Our father was born in Gosen, South Africa, in 1899 and our mother in Poo, West Tibet, in 1910. Our great-grandfather, Hermann Clemens, died of malaria in the mission field of Surinam in 1872. Also our grandparents Reinhold and Elisabeth (born Adam) Schnabel, had to bury four children at the mission posts of Kyelang and Poo. One daughter died on the trip home in 1907 and had to be buried in the Red Sea.

I have personal memories of all four grandparents, but especially Grandmother Schnabel who lived in our house in her last years and died on March 5, 1953, just a few days before my confirmation. She could tell very impressive stories about the many dangerous trips between mission posts which often took weeks over 4000 meter high passes and traversed fear-provoking hanging bridges. Nights spent in snow and ice with only a tent and always with small children in tow. She told about fears and protections. Their furniture consisted of the travel cases with which they arrived in north India. In the winter there was no connection to the outside world for six months. After that they were thrilled with bags full of mail!

For us children this was all terribly interesting and exciting just as were the

narrations by Grandmother Clemens who was born in South Africa in 1871 herself and died in Herrnhut in 1965. She told us about treks on oxen wagons and tried to teach us the language of the native South Africans! Only a few single words of that have stayed with me to this day.

When one looks back today on the beginnings of the missions one can just marvel at the faith with which the missionaries went, barely knowing anything about the land to which they were going, very little language training, no immunizations, and no material security...no comparison to the requirements for a secure life we have today!

Had we not been so isolated in the DDR I could have imagined making a mission trip to the Third World, not as a theologian but as a teacher. This original occupational wish of mine was, however, refused as a result of the well-know restrictions of the DDR. In spite of this, in April 1982 I received an unexpected allowance from the state authorities for a trip to England for the 250th anniversary of the Unity. As chairperson of our district synod I had been suggested for this trip by the Unity Board. In additions to visits in seven congregations of our British Province I was able to attend and take part in the May 1982 Anniversary service in Coventry Cathedral.

In school under DDR conditions I had learned no English, but did have to use English mining texts in two semesters of college. I depended on the fact that the representatives from Bad Boll would have command of the English language. Once arriving in England I

soon learned that I was the only representative from our entire province at the Anniversary celebration! I had to build texts for my words of greeting from an English phrasebook the night before my visits to the congregations. I practiced my sermon for the celebratory worship service in Coventry with Bishop Geoffrey E. Birtill with whom I stayed in London and with Sister M. Geddis in Fairfield until I knew it by heart. The remaining conversations went fairly well since I received many invitations and could thus always repeat the same things at each visit! I was even able to visit a coal mine with Brother Malcolm Hily (Secretary of the Moravian Church Foundation, Unity Office) from Fulneck where the comprehension was even better.

I gave reports of this extremely impressive visit with slide shows in various DDR congregations as well as for brigades of my union, for such a trip to the West was very rare indeed. It was not long, however, before I was prohibited from giving these reports by the Ministry for Security!

Since I abided completely by the rules during this trip to the West, e.g. no side trips to relatives or importing of printed materials, etc., the DDR authorities allowed me several additional trips in the following years, even for private purposes. With the political turn of events in 1989-90 such limitations have been eliminated for the citizens of the previous DDR.

And Today? How Does it Continue?

So much for my very personal connections

to the two anniversary celebrations in the Unity this year. Do not we in this province get anxious when we think on the future of our congregations? The demographic changes are continuous. This is clearly seen by the fact that in 2008 for the first time in the recent history of the congregations in Herrnhut and Niesky there will be no confirmations. The decline in membership has been a concern for many churches in Europe for some time now. In some locations this has been a specific result of the departure of brothers and sisters with a more charismatic inclination. In connection with this we are also affected and concerned about the divisive activity in our neighboring Czech province. In the Caribbean and to some extent also in the American provinces there are currently disputes resulting from charismatic and pentecostally-oriented brothers and sisters. In our Herrnhut congregation we have had an additional point of conflict through the settling of “Youth with a Mission,” also known as “Strategic Frontiers,” in the nearby moated castle of Ruppertsdorf since they knowingly use the good name of Herrnhut, a blessed source of mission work, for their advertising purposes.

However when we look back at the 550 year history of the Moravian Church we have no reason to feel pessimism or resignation regarding the current situation. The already mentioned Defenestration of Prague, the results of the Peace of Westphalia, the beginnings of Herrnhut until the aforesaid 13th of August, and the outcomes of World War II that caused the loss of our Silesian congregations and severe damages in Herrnhut and Niesky were

all events far more serious and perilous to our existence. To see the warning and chastising hand of God in these events should be a goal of our commemorative celebrations. And may we always be able to recognize the God’s healing and helping through just such testing.

Do not new changes and activities often come from difficulties? That is how it happened in our Herrnhut congregation in 2006 when 24 youths declared themselves to reaffirm their membership after intensive discussions among our elders. The request for a profile of our congregations rose out of the conflict with the “Christian Center” association and the settlement of the “Youth with a Mission” in Herrnhut. The questions of rebaptism and the emphasis on spiritual gifts in the charismatic groups encouraged me already years ago to seek God’s Word and will more fervently. For the past 15 years daily Bible readings have helped me in this regard.

I also see the conversation group “God and World” founded in Herrnhut three years ago in which 12-20 participants deal with ongoing religious, economic and political topics as sustainable. There are atheists from nearby towns who participate regularly also. The following topics have been discussed often: The European situation. How does the Moravian Church deal with unemployment? Is democracy in danger in Putin’s Russia? Christian-Islamic dialogue, one evening with representatives of “Youth with a Mission” and on another with a Muslim woman from Dresden. The minimum wage. And how dangerous is Scientology?

Surely there are new activities like this in other congregations as well.

Regarding missions I strongly support the activities of the various synods to become active in our country as well as in others in ways that do not exclude, that establish us as a small but globally effective church promoting a more just north-south balance, and to practice whatever is in our power to do.

Mission activities in our province include not only the new work in the “Stopping Place” in Cottbus, but also the spiritual uprisings in Estonia and Latvia, and the sponsorship of independent schools in Gnadau and Herrnhut. The established schools in the Netherlands, Konigsfeld, and Tossens count to this as well as our kindergartens and other pastoral facilities.

I see no solution to the conflict in the Czech province in the near future. I have a hard time with it personally and am surely not alone in this. The next Unity Synod will need to address this; it may be helpful to take a look at our ancestors in the old Unity.

Finally I am looking forward to and am anxious to experience the seven congregational seminars planned as anniversary events this year, three of which will be held in May and four in the fall of the year. After these seminars perhaps there will be a new perspective on one or the other of these issues.

Martin Clemens was born in Herrnhut in 1939. He studied mining 1958-1963 at the Mining Academy at Freiberg, and served as assemblyman on the last People’s Chamber of the DDR and in the Saxon Parliament.

The Jubilee: 550 Years Of The Moravian Church And 275 Years Of Moravian Mission

The Rev. Angetile Yesaya Musomba, Tanzania

(Edited for style only by Jason Matlack)

This article is meant to articulate a Tanzanian perspective of the Church. This is not a formal statement, but is a personal view written from experience as a Church leader for about thirty years.

Today’s Moravian Church does not clearly show her stand on certain issues surrounding it. Its members pose many questions, and sometimes there is a great endeavor to find

answers, but there is no clear path to them. I would like to write about some of those very confusing issues.

For many years our church has remained locked in a room; it does not want to know what people are thinking about her stand on issues. There have been many conflicts in the world, but her members could hardly hear for what Moravians stood. Since Moravians are not

especially outspoken, many times the Moravian Church has closely identified herself with the ecumenical groups or communities. It seems the theology of the Church fellowship, regardless of the denominations, has stunted Moravian Church growth in many areas and in numbers. Moravians went out into the world many years ago, but we have remained few in many countries except in Africa. Moravians have, for many years, continued to serve those who were connected to a particular place or within Moravian history. The Moravian Church has always been able to look after its own sheep or to follow its sheep wherever they had strayed; she has not cared much to reach out these years.

Yet looking through the eyes of history, the Moravian Church has always traveled to places where it had been called to bring the Good News. But after reaching those destinations, the Moravian Church was very careful not to extend or expand its work where other churches were at work, even if the work of other churches was not promising. It seems that the hidden seed period and Count Zinzendorf's decision to allow Moravians to settle at Herrnhut has, for most of its history, shaped the Moravian Church to not reach past its own members into the surrounding culture. This same philosophy has kept the Moravian Church in Tanzania from growing.

This is not to say that the Moravian Church did not have good intentions to serve the poor. It has remained in very poor communities which have not been able to gather funds to sustain its own work, let alone to begin new works in the world. For many years the churches in poor

communities had to look for money from other wealthier churches. Since there was such limited numerical growth in the Moravian Church, the provinces claimed to not have enough money to aid the projects of poorer congregations. This has become a hindrance to the fulfillment of their Great Commission given by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The "go forth" spirit, which was to extend to other lands and reach people where they were, died out. This is why the growth of the Moravian Church has remained very slow. The justification behind this slow growth was that it is "better to have few as a living church and be an example, than to have many members who are not living as good committed Christians." The spirit of "going forth" has been revived in some parts, especially in Africa and specifically in Tanzania. The rapid growth and expansion of Moravians in Tanzania has predominately occurred in the past thirty years due to certain leadership changes.

In 1970s, when Moravian missionaries crossed the provincial borders to work throughout Tanzania, our partner provinces asked, "Are there no Lutherans in such areas, or Anglicans?" In 1978, when the Southern Province decided to start the work in eastern Tanzania, our partner provinces found that work difficult to accept. A special conference was called in London in 1980 to discuss the issue, and the Southern Province decided to continue its work without the support of our partner provinces. To date Eastern Tanzania has become a Mission Area of Eastern Province and of Zanzibar. The area is even financially well

established. In 2005, it contributed 60% of the local income towards the general budget of the whole province.

The Moravian Church has also grown in other areas, and overall membership has increased. We have covered almost the whole of Tanzania. The Moravian Church in Tanzania has expanded to Zambia, Congo, and Malawi, and soon it will expand to Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya.

When you compare the Moravian Church in Tanzania with other provinces, especially in regard to practices and customs, it is very different. If you moved to Tanzania you could clearly note the differences, especially on days of special remembrance, the so called “Moravian Memorial Days.” When I study the history of our provinces, so many missionaries from other churches came to us, and they had no knowledge of these days. Because of this Tanzanians do not observe days like June 17th, when the buildings of Herrnhut were began by immigrants from Moravia in 1722; or July 6th, when John Hus was martyred at Constance in 1415; or August 13th, the manifestation of the Spirit in 1727; or August 21st, when Moravian mission began in 1732. In this way the Moravian Church in Tanzania is different from other provinces. But on the other hand, the Moravian Church in other parts of the world kept many different traditions while foregoing the “going forth” spirit and reaching out. The Moravian Church has remained for many years within her own denominational walls.

World changing events have not been able

to penetrate into the Moravian Church. We have been swallowed up by Moravian practices and customs. Certain times, practices, and customs have become essential to our faith, such as Advent Star, the Easter Morning Liturgy, the Love Feast, and “Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him.” All of the above mentioned have not been integral to the Moravian Church in Tanzania except the motto “Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him.” Our Tanzanian Provinces have lost what others call the Moravian Church. Tanzanians know of many Moravian practices and customs from their sister provinces. Yet sometimes we have to ask ourselves, what is the Moravian Church? Our first ministers were trained in seminaries which taught very little about the practices of the Moravian Church.

Our Church faces many difficulties in relating to what others call revival of the Church with the gifts from the Lord. The conflict in the Czech Republic, Honduras, and other parts of the world are not necessarily ecclesiastical splits. The Church has claimed for many years that it is a revived one, but I am not sure how this reality is lived out in practice. The wind is blowing very seriously with revival, shall our Church be able to stand in that wind? In Tanzania there are many revival or Charismatic groups within Moravian Church life. It is not clear how the church of the future will embrace and include all groupings. The historical claims that the Moravian Church is a renewed one seems to have been swallowed by practices and customs and the spiritual side has been left on the wayside.

I remember an instance at the All Tanzania Partners Consultations held in Zeist in 2002 when one of our ministers was asked to pray during the session. That Tanzanian minister prayed as a revival person would. Some partners wondered, “Is she mentally disturbed?” Such comments show the difference between the Moravian Church and the revival groups.

The Moravian Church in Tanzania has sometimes simply been the wagging tail of a dog. This can be seen in two examples from Unity Synods. At the Unity Synod of 1981 held in Herrnhut, a resolution was passed to prevent an increase in the numbers of the Unity Synod from Tanzania due to a fear that the number of Unity Provinces would increase. This action has greatly affected how the Tanzania Provinces look at issues concerning the International Moravian Church. During the 1995 Unity Synod held in Tanzania, a very important document called “Ground of the Unity” was put forth with very little input from the Tanzanian Provinces except to adopt the resolution. In that same Synod, due to a fear of the expansion of the provinces in Tanzania, a new document was passed called “The Steps of the Growth of the Moravian Church.”

The document “Ground of the Unity” is not known in Tanzania since it did not speak to the minds of the Tanzanian members. What is it that unites us as members of the Moravian Church world wide? This is a question to be worked on in future. How could the Moravians from other parts of the world participate in issues of the Unity? If the church is to remain as one, then it

needs to listen to those members who account for more than a half the total membership of the worldwide Moravian Church.

In recent years another dividing issue has just come out. The issue of homosexuality is going to divide the church into three parts: those who accept the practical life of homosexuals, those who look and watch what is going on, and those who openly reject it. At present, our Tanzanian provinces do not hear a ring of acceptance in our ears. We believe that it is impossible to agree with homosexual lifestyles and accept them in Church leadership as it is done in some churches of the Western world. We see homosexuals as sinners who affect the community at large. They are part of our society, but the Holy Bible clearly states that it is a sin. If such people do live in our society and participate in the church, then it is a secretly lived life, for we cannot accept their lifestyles as normal life in our church.

We feel that by the time Tanzanian leadership is accepted in the International Moravian Conferences or Synods, they would not be accepted to lead the majority. Even if we are cornered into taking the financial support of provinces which accept homosexuals, we will let the funds go; we shall remain with Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We are willing to fellowship with the roots in Europe, but we can not choose to associate with provinces who accept homosexuals. We have biblical reasons for not accepting homosexuals.

We know that we are all sinners, ourselves included. And we know that we were all

created by God and that Jesus Christ came to save all mankind from all sins, including homosexuality. Yet we simply do not accept their way of life. According to African religious, cultural, and moral values, we can not accept homosexuality as part of the normal living standard. Thus all of these objections cement our refusal of homosexuality; we have no basis to accept homosexuals.

One Tanzania pastor had a study tour in Canada in 1993. In the course of his travels one day, someone who he did not know was taking him from place to place. He started to speak against homosexuals while traveling with this person, and just listened to his talk. When they arrived at their destination, the lady left him there saying, "I am a sinner. I cannot drive you any more. Please look for those who are like you." It was costly for him, but in Tanzania we feel it was a worth cost.

The Moravian Church in Tanzania is not ready to change its mind, even if the Unity Synod commissioned a committee to study the issue of homosexuality. To us it is a waste of God's money to discuss the matter. This issue will be a dividing factor in future for the Moravian Church.

Mission work has been spoken so much in our Church. There were times when our Church was called a pioneer in mission work, and we were pleased to hear it. In 2001 we held our 2nd International Moravian Church Mission Conference in Herrnhut. We had many good resolutions. But I see that papers are remaining on Church shelves. The main challenge for

mission work is the availability of funds. It seems that there are very few people who are willing to give money for evangelism. The Tanzania Provinces have written project proposals for mission outreach, but they seem to fall on deaf ears. Today it is our challenge to speak as a church obedient to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, even though the Church has nothing to financially give to send people to where they are called. Our Church has to look for different ways to fulfill our evangelistic work. The Moravian Church in Tanzania is growing, but we would have grown faster if funds were available to enable the evangelists and preachers to reach out to new places.

The Provinces which are better off financially should look afresh to the question how they should help financially, so that our Great Commission is fulfilled. The Church seems to be very busy with social work, and that is also very important, but should we not emphasize that work over the evangelistic work.

There is another challenge facing the church. This challenge is marriage. In past years, people looked to Christian couples as examples of better marriages. Today the family unit is shaking. The world is moving fast, marriages cause people to slow down, and so the number of divorces are increasing. We have many single mothers and poor parents who are not able to sustain their families in our society. The church has to address this very serious situation.

It is becoming evident that it will not be long until the charismatic and revival members will take the Church in their hands. If that

happens there are going to be many activities in our church which are not necessarily connected to the Moravian Church as we know it today. But the church is challenged to include all groups. In 1960s, when the East African Revival swept through our Church, leaders like the late Bishop Teofilo Kisanji helped the church stay inclusive. This is our challenge, not only in Tanzania as mentioned before, but also in

Europe, America, and Asia. We need each other for the extension of God's Kingdom on earth.

Angetile Musomba was Unity Board President from 2001 to 2004 and has served as Chairman of Provincial Board of the Moravian Church in Tanzania, Southern Province and General Secretary Christian Council of Tanzania.

Some Thoughts on the Subject of Missions

Christoph Reichel, Bad Boll/Stetten

In the following discussion I would like to combine some fruits of my reading with other thoughts which have continued to occupy me in recent years. Perhaps this will make clear how fascinating I find the various aspects of the subject of missions and how important I see these for the vitality of our church and all others. They are tiles of a mosaic and pieces of thought which, in my opinion, are worth further exploration.

Rediscovery of an ambivalent concept

For some years now we have been experiencing renewed attention to the subject of missions in European churches. This certainly is in part a result of the growing secularization of our societies which forces the Church to consider its image. The Ecumenical Council of the Netherlands just released a paper in which churches are called to finally take the fundamental changes in Dutch society seriously and to "throw the net to the other

side". The image refers to John 21:5 where Jesus urges the disciples who have caught nothing all night long to throw their nets to the other side of the boat.

On the other hand one notices that in the churches themselves—except for those regular "specialists" in mission—that basically the term "mission" is gladly avoided. Mission projects must deal with the fact that church mission work in the narrow sense is rarely supported by congregational giving. Instead aid for natural disasters, the fight against poverty, or educational projects have stronger appeal.

Mission is a burdened concept. This is due in part to a continued blanket image of its colonial-based history and partly to a certain perplexity in considering what mission could mean today. It is precisely in circles that consider themselves enlightened-liberal that one shirks at the thought of convincing others "of one's own belief," even if one is readily willing in a secular

context, for example politically or economically, not to withhold one's beliefs. Christian faith, however, is a more intimate matter about which it is difficult to communicate. At best we notice with interest the missionary-evangelistic efforts of the churches in the South.

It's not much different for us in the Unity with our 275-year tradition of missions. Here too congregations have tried to avoid the ambivalent term by substituting "Africa Days," a "Day of the World," or something similar for the traditional mission celebration specifically to more readily reach people outside of the shrinking inner circle—a quasi mission effort. The danger in this is that the term "mission" gradually is left to those who shape it in a one-sided fundamental manner and it thereby becomes ever more foreign to us.

I believe we should work on the subject of mission instead of abandoning it or leaving it to others. This year's anniversary is a good occasion for this.

Dealing with the history of missions

The memory of the beginnings of the Herrnhut missions is quite vivid to many in our church which sometimes makes it more difficult to realize how distant the mothers and fathers of mission are from us. People such as Christian David and Leonard Dober were attached to their time just as we are to ours, and the trench that after more than 200 years of enlightenment has been positioned between them and us is difficult to bridge. Still we claim history as a part of ourselves; it constitutes our identity as a Church.

History is always a concept into which we place a part of ourselves. We hold history as true as we need it to be. Thus the history of mission was often written by missionaries with the goal of building up the home congregation and providing proof of God's work among the heathens. Photos were also used to portray the "desired perception." This is seen in a collection at the exhibition of mission photos, "The Distant Neighbor, Pictures of Mission; Mission of Pictures, Ludwigsburg 1996," and various publications of the former archivist of the Basle Mission, Paul Jenkins.

How clearly the individual perspective forms the perception of history became clear to me in 1987 in the South African Moravian Church when I experienced the celebration of Georg Schmidt's 1737 arrival at the Cape. The unbroken positive view of the mission history there was rather strange to me. The thankfulness for the missionary "without whom we would not know Christ" brought to my rather critical perception that which I had expected to see as a result of mission work in the former mission station, Mamre. For example, the conflict between the villagers and missionaries over property rights dating back to the 1900s was still vivid in the memory of some people; even so, the old inhabitants of Mamre told how the missionaries still punished them as adults.

Years later I experienced a discussion between German visitors and native members of the Moravian Church at Genadendal. The visitors had expressed their disappointment about the style of the worship service, which

in their opinion could just as well have taken place in a German congregation. One did not notice that one was in Africa: the same stiffness of the service, hymns translated from the German. To this, one of the South Africans asked back sharply how the German had the right to believe that this was not *their own* South African tradition. The South African brothers and sisters would not allow that the Germans had again stripped them of their own culture in this way.

Our “western guilt complex”¹ sometimes obstructs our view of how arrogant it is to believe that the active mission moment springs only from the missionaries; the “missionees” adopted that which they needed. They were never solely the objects but also subjects of their own history.² Even today the spread of neo-pentecostal and charismatic movements in Africa is often attributed solely to the influence of well-financed US charismatic groups, which inarguably is formidable. But here as well it is the local cultural conditions as well as the intra-African societal attempts to modernize in light of globalization which set the stage for the acceptance of charismatic spirituality. One of the first signs of this insight lies in Zinzendorf’s conviction that no mission can succeed unless the Holy Spirit has laid the groundwork or prepared for the acceptance of the Gospel. Thus the Holy Spirit makes the “missionees” a subject of their history.

Specifically because the history of missions influences us deeply in our relationships in the worldwide Unity, specifically because it

is a concept that we all interpret differently according to our own context, we need a conversation about our common history. In 2000 the Protestant Mission Board in Southwest Germany (with Mission 21 in Basel) held a workshop, planned and conducted with our South African brothers and sisters, about the history of the South African Moravian Church. Unfortunately it was never continued in South Africa even though the South Africans who had helped us strongly advocated for this. It dealt with much more than just history: it dealt with the deepest dimensions of the perception we have of ourselves and one another. Only by having conversation with one another can we bring these perceptions into our conversations with one another.

A plea for a broad, but concrete, understanding of Mission

Currently it seems that scholarship about mission no longer wants to adhere to the concept formed at the world mission conference in Willingen in 1952: any mission in “*missio Dei*” is a justified Godly mission.³ That God sent His Son into the world is the basis of our missions (John 17, 18: 20, 21). *Missio Dei* has a “kenotic structure” (Phil. 2).⁴ Just as God steps out of Himself, forms a covenant with mankind, binds Himself to them, and changes as a direct result of this bond, so following Christ by sending of missionaries is a “stepping-out-of-oneself.” Mission means finding Christ outside one’s own camp (Heb. 13:13) and standing with Him at the edges of society so that the healing power of Christ can also work

through us, his followers. The devotion of God to mankind remains a secret (*Mysterium*) which we carry forth as a secret.⁵ In this respect it does not remain secret.

Our exegetical, critical perception does not readily allow us to fix the trinitarian rationale of missions through Jesus' taking the form of a man to any single Scripture such as the mission command (Matt. 28). Mission can only mirror the movement of God in the world and His loving devotion to mankind and all creation. The fact that the concept of mission became ever broader after Willingen, that mission became known as the "shaloming of all of life" (J. C. Hoekendijk),⁶ turned things around to criticize the plan that, if everything is mission then nothing is mission any longer. How restricted or broad should we understand mission to be today?

I myself believe that our understanding of mission must be all-encompassing: mission is "church in action," church that steps beyond its borders, which presents itself to strangers in a secular world, to different cultures and different religions. The Moravian missions did not go along with the restriction of mission to the "conversion of heathens," but rather considers conversion a result of the shared, all-encompassing love of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the number of those baptized never was an indicator of the success of a mission. Mission was and is successful where it is possible to share one's life with others—strangers⁷—in the same way that God connects to mankind,

living and suffering with marginalized persons and creation. We do not need to fear that if everything is mission, nothing will be mission any longer. It is exactly this integral, comprehensive concept of mission that is seen in the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels.

What will always separate us is "the name that allows us to believe,"⁸ in which we share our life with others. "Christian identity means to be in that place that Jesus decides for us. If we live in that place we get to some extent to the point where we carry His name and find ourselves in the same relationships in which He stands to God and the world."⁹

An example of authentic living at the "place of Jesus" for me was the story of Missionary Rauch who, exhausted from his journey, lay down to sleep in the tent of the Indian chief, putting himself in the hand of this stranger, and thereby caused interest in whatever could possibly cause this unlimited trust.¹⁰ This step, to give oneself into the hand of another, the living and suffering with another can only occur in concrete and authentic ways. In my work on the international council of the Protestant Mission Board in Southwest Germany (EMS) during the development of a mission statement I saw that if one wishes to conceive the entire concept of mission in the worldwide ecumenical social network more concretely one must very quickly speak up for justice, peace, and the preservation of creation.

The World Mission Conference in Salvador de Bahia in 1996 in its voluntary commitment called particularly on churches in cultures

where religion is a private matter to apply the truth of the Gospels to all aspects of public life and society. “The conciliarist process... is not only socially ethical, but a missionary program.”¹¹ Elsewhere Klaus Schaefer identified reconciliation as a central theme of missions today.¹² Where churches stand with and for one another for peace, where they do not allow themselves to be pulled into warlike conflicts and forces, but resist “in the name of Him who allows us to believe,” there they are close to the mission of Jesus.

Enculturation and cultural differences

When, as described above in the history of missions, one cannot distinguish between the subjects and objects but must speak of subjects who tell their own story, when one sees mission as “stepping over the borders,”¹³ then one is close to speaking of mission as a *communicative process*.

Christians come into conversation with others, with that which is different and foreign, through mission—and that which is foreign begins at one’s own door, that is to say, among us. To be able to enter into such a conversation one must learn above all to listen and understand. In conversations that step over borders there is no one who was “he” or “she.”

In our mission history we did not always succeed in listening, and still today we are not always successful. H. C. Bredekamp describes the meeting between Africo, the first baptized member of the Khoikhoi, and Georg Schmidt, at which Schmidt was apparently so enthusiastic about *his own* understanding of faith that he

could not absorb that which Africo wanted to share with him about *his* faith.¹⁴

For other missionaries it occurred that in listening and understanding they became estranged from their own heritage and the church that sent them. One example from the Unity is Samuel Kleinschmidt in Greenland who conducted mission completely “from a Greenland perspective”¹⁵ and eventually went his own way in Greenland. There are similar examples in many mission groups. These were often missionaries who made a significant effort regarding the language and culture of the group to whom they were originally sent. But according to their authorities they went too far, even were suspected of dissolving the core of their message into a form of syncretism.

To this date there still exists a tension between understanding, enculturation of the Gospel, and the danger of syncretism. The adoption of the foreign, which especially finds its expression in the adoption of the foreign language, can not mean jumping over differences, but merely “the process of a reciprocal integration and partial assimilation that remains detached—a form of familiarization from a distance.”¹⁶

This applies to our missions today as well. It remains important that the Gospel can only be believed and communicated when it is incarnated and enculturated. The “canon in a canon,” the core of the message, remains abstract and empty when one tries to distill it out of a narrated, story context. Enculturation of the Gospel can not merely be the application of the contents of a single seed.

Today it is never merely just local or regional cultures that we encounter. The concept newly introduced into ecumenical discussions—“globalization”—tries to deal with this by seeking to bring two conflicting tendencies into one concept: the need for local self-ascertainment and rootedness and the global context in which local cultures continually find themselves. In Ghana I experienced the change processes which occur as a result of the tension between local and global influences most clearly, e.g., the changes in the traditional leadership structure (chieftaincy) or the rapid changes occurring as a result of worldwide networking in cyberspace. Enculturation must therefore always anticipate the brokenness of local cultures. It becomes correspondingly more difficult to appreciate the foreignness of others and to be able to understand them in their foreignness.

T. Sundermeier repeatedly considered the concept of understanding strangers and the process of translating.¹⁷ It seems important to me that one first defines one’s own identity through the appreciation of the difference of strangers. Since Christian identity is narrative, i.e., always communicated through the culturally expressed stories and telling of the Gospel, one can perhaps most closely compare the placing of the Gospel into a foreign culture with the translation of a poem: the translator can translate a foreign poem only if he does not translate it word for word but rather creates a new, personal poem (or story). A translation is successful when through discontinuity it allows recognition of continuity.¹⁸

What does this mean for our self-concept in the Moravian Church and the worldwide Unity? I believe that we must understand and recognize the foreignness of various cultures within the Unity. The foreignness refers to the differences in our beliefs. It seems to me, for example, hardly possible to come to a common statement on topics such as homosexuality (which is hardly just an ethical topic, but also one which affects the basis of our faith just as the understanding of the Bible does). Even today’s understanding of atonement and sacrifices, something critically discussed in our province, is very diverse within the worldwide Unity.

The unity of the Unity should not prevent us from trying to address our conflicts from our own contexts. Our mission as a “crossing of borders” must deal with both: that which is foreign in our own culture into which we must continuously place the Gospel anew as well as that which is foreign in other cultures within the worldwide Unity. We need one another in the Unity to find the critical distance for our own understanding of the Gospel again. Enculturation can never be understood as a merging into another (local) culture; rather it always also includes the critique of cultures because we as a Church can only understand one another ecumenically—globally connected and networked—and can only take on our own particular cultural surroundings. We cannot solve this tension between mission in one’s own cultural context and the cultural diversity in the worldwide Unity for the benefit of clarity if it masks the important features of our identity.

One example of a mission project in Germany is the “Haltestelle” (Stopping Place) in Cottbus. Through this example we can appreciate how difficult communicating the Gospel and enculturation in a secular environment are. It is easy to criticize the search for suitable communication and enculturation as making the message shallower. We cannot act as if “moving into a secular environment” does not provoke a theological fermentation in our midst. Yet we continue to have difficulty “tossing the net out to the other side” because we still have the opinion that things could continue as they always have. However only wrestling with language skills keeps us vital. We need mission. It is the means to our own transformation.

Mission in the context of religious pluralism

In recent times the topic of mission as it relates to the Christian understanding of other religions has preoccupied me. There are varying opinions about this in our province. In the Netherlands, Surinamese groups of Indian and Javanese descent understand their mission work to be among Hindus and Muslims. At the same time we are supporting an initiative in Switzerland that is planning a “House of Religions” which seeks to promote dialog between different religions. How do mission and dialog relate to one another? For P. Schmidt-Leukel there is no possible reconciliation between mission and dialog because mission “ideally seeks to Christianize the world and thereby overcome all other religions.”¹⁹ Instead he advocates for a pluralistic theology of religions

which overcomes all Christian exclusivity and also avoids inclusive approaches to absorb other religions.

Pluralistic approaches have attracted much criticism in the past. I would like to take these approaches seriously because they are in my opinion much more widely held among Christians than we in the churches believe. This is a case where a “creeping change outside of the official theological discourse”²⁰ has taken place which, if taken on, can enrich the view of our mission especially that in our western cultural areas.

What was stated earlier regarding the understanding of the foreignness of other cultures can refer to other religions as well since they are a part of foreign cultures. The discussion about the relationship between mission and dialog with other religions is of course too broad a topic to be considered here. But we should have this discussion. And I would like to make a few comments about it here.

First, I would like to consider again the previously cited story of Missionary Rauch as told by the Indian Chief Tschoop. Tschoop tells us that the convincing part of Rauch’s proclamation was not the new God which previous missionaries had actually already brought, because his people already knew God. It was not any dogmatic truth and no *proclamation* of truth which worked on Tschoop but rather the personal faith of this man who in following his Lord Jesus Christ put himself in the hands of the Indian and lay down

to sleep in his hut. This story makes two things clear: the meeting of religions always takes place in the meeting of real people who adhere to different religions (and cultures), and only those who are prepared to expose themselves to the other (in the border crossing, kenotic movement of *Mission Dei*, see above) can reach others. After all the real meeting of the minds truly happens not where a claim of truth occurs but where one's own truth is lived.

Second, I would like to refer to a term that I encountered in a preparatory document for the Ninth Convention of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006²¹: *hospitality*. Hospitality is used here as a fundamental biblical principle (philoxenia: love of strangers, others). It is the hospitality of our merciful Lord that becomes visible in Jesus' devotion to the excluded. "The Bible sees hospitality primarily as a radical openness to others which is based upon the recognition of the dignity of all people."²²

Jesus does not only supply; he depends on the hospitality of people who take him up. Where He is taken in as a guest, there He can become visible as a host as shown in the story of Emmaus (Luke 24).²³ This hospitality is not noncommittal; it leads to an encounter that changes both sides. The basic question of a claim of truth here is no different than with a pluralistic approach. But it must be said that we must admit in humility that we can not comprehend the secret of salvation. Only through the hospitality of God are we granted a share of His salvation.

The story of Tschoop shows that meeting

persons of other religions occurs not there where we define the conditions of our hospitality, but where we, as followers of Christ and trusting the hospitality of God, accept the hospitality of others. Exactly there is where "God becomes our guest" (Acts 21:3).²⁴

Thirdly I would like to remember the time of Apartheid in South Africa where I experienced how persons of different religions came together in a common cause against the injustice that occurred there and in service for people in need and poverty. Cooperation became more difficult after the end of Apartheid, not just between religions but also among ecumenical churches, because every religious group and church felt they had to return to their own identity. I think we still misunderstand what our mission is in the face of threats to the earth and mankind. It is precisely in the common missionary commitments for peace, justice, and the preservation of creation that opportunities for cooperation exist and where we could see that we are making progress jointly. The consideration of our mission (in a broader sense) makes possible this common path with other religions.²⁵

Part of the special theological profile of the Unity is that in following Christ it combines ecumenical breadth with a lived spirituality. One expression of this ecumenical breadth was Zinzendorf's imprint on tropical teachings in which he found a way to allow the various denominations within the Unity to come into their own.²⁶ We apply it to church and religious pluralism as well. Even today's wide spectrum of

varying beliefs which come and stand together testifies to this. But can the pluralism within a society such as ours to be distinguished from pluralism between religions?²⁷ “The life reference of today’s believer is much more important as a standard in the credibility of a religion” than any belief system.²⁸ Can not the concentration on Praxis Pietatis—life with Jesus where He is, which is clear and credible and yet contains all sorts of metaphysical possibilities—create a means of dealing with other religions in a hospitable and respectful manner?

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- 1 Lamin Sanneh, *Christian Mission and Western Guilt Complexes* (1991), 146.
- 2 The simplified schematization of the terms victims (missionees) and perpetrator (missionaries) is also criticized by Andrea Shultze, “New, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Writing the History of Mission,” in *Manual of Ecumenical Mission Theology*, ed. C. Dahling-Sander (Gütersloh, 2003), 105.
- 3 *Missio Dei Today—To the Actualization of a Key Theological Mission Concept* (Hamburg, 2003).
- 4 T. Sundermeier, *Mission—Gift of Freedom* (Frankfurt, 2005), 99.
- 5 Sundermeier, 33.
- 6 Sundermeier, 44.
- 7 Sundermeier formed the term “konvivenz” for this. Ders, *Understanding the Stranger: a Practical Hermeneutic* (Göttingen 1996).
- 8 According to John Newton’s song: “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds” in the Dutch collection by W. Baranrd. Here the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name mission occurs is emphasized as a distinguishing criterion of Christian mission.
- 9 According to the Anglican bishop Rowan Williams in his speech to the convention of the World Council of Churches in Porto Allegre, February 2006, titled “Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Concept”, found at <http://www.oikoumene.org/>.
- 10 Karl Müller, *200 Years of Moravian Mission, vol. 1, The First Century of Mission* (Herrenhut 1931), 209.
- 11 K. Schäfer, *The Gospel and Our Culture, in Impetus for Mission* (Frankfurt, 2003), 252.
- 12 In a speech to the EMS Mission Council, published in Schäfer, 66-86. Schäfer here borrows from works by Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* (1996) and Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996).
- 13 Sundkler 1965: Mission for the Church means “constantly crossing its own frontiers”.
- 14 H.C. Bredekamp, *Die verhouding tussen Africo Christian en Georg Schmidt, 1737-1743* (Kapstadt o.J. 5).
- 15 H. Beck, “The peregrinatio hominum in mission Dei,” in *Unitas Fratrum* 9 (1989), 65.
- 16 A. Wierlacher, *Cultural Topic-Foreignness* (Munich, 1993); Sundermeier, 84.
- 17 Sundermeier, *Mission—Gift of freedom*, 77-104.
- 18 T. Sundermeier, 88.

- 19 P. Schmidt-Leukel, 41. A similar critical view is expressed by K. P. Jörns, with the distinction between invisible religions, i.e. the universal history of the perception of God, and the visible ones as religious institutions of emerging religions. Jörns, 70 and 154.
- 20 K. P. Jörns, 46.
- 21 Religious plurality and Christian self-image. This gives a type of interim result from an ongoing ecumenical discussion process and thus is not an official document of the WCC; instead, discussion topics and comments from the churches are solicited. The document can be found at <http://www.oikoumene.org/>.
- 22 Ibid, p.8.
- 23 Refer also to *Over een andere boeg*, op. cit., p.24, where a biblical miniature on the concept of hospitality is given. The concept here becomes a central one for missionary presence.
- 24 Ibid, p.12.
- 25 T. Sundermeier uses the Greek term of “Hodogese” from the story of Phillip in Acts 8 to represent a different type of understanding for which the eunuch bids: not explanation (exegesis) but rather accompaniment on the path. Perhaps it is in the appreciation of other religions while on a path of common commitment in the face of worldwide threats it becomes possible to appreciate the stranger.
- 26 Refer to H.C. Hahn/H. Reichel: *Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut Brethren*, Hamburg, 1977, p.412.
- 27 Specifically because “secular” society is not completely atheistic and because Christians in today’s churches no longer conform without question there are fluent transitions which must be “kept open through communication”. “This however requires the departure from the unrealistic idea that one can live in a communicative yet closed system.” (K. P. Jörns, op. cit., p.79).
- 28 K. P. Jörns loc. cit., p.71

Nicaragua—A Community of Faith

Hans-Beat Motel, Königsfeld

At the end of January 2007, 307 delegates met in Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) for the Synod of the Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua; it was the fourteenth since becoming an independent province. The official announcement of the conference contained the following words: “The Moravian Church of Nicaragua is a community of faith in Jesus Christ—consisting of various peoples and cultures, Protestant, by

nature oriented to the Gospel, and ecumenically disposed. It promotes and participates in the complete evangelism of Nicaragua and thereby in union with the rest of the Moravian Church declares to the world the Good News of the kingdom of God on which are grounded love for one another, equality of the sexes, and the rights of all people as well as its dedication to social and economic development, medical care, education, and the protection of the environment.”

This anniversary, the 550th of the Moravian Church, did not appear to play a direct role for the Synod, but the message is a program and a clear sign of our membership in the worldwide church and reflection on its roots. The Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua does not look back on 275 years but only on 158 years of mission work. In 1849 the first German missionaries from Jamaica arrived at Bluefields, and this event was duly celebrated 150 years later (in March 1999). I was able to represent the worldwide Unity at those celebrations. A particularly moving experience during that time was the sunrise procession to the small God's Acre of the German missionaries which took place just as on Easter morning and the liturgical service of thanksgiving which was held at the graves whose markers had all been provided with a fresh coat of white paint.

"A Miskitu is a Moravian" is a longtime saying which denotes that the Moravian Church in eastern Nicaragua has become a church of the people similar to the situation in the Moravian Church in Surinam and some areas of the southern highlands in Tanzania. The saying naturally only pertains to a segment; at this Synod activities were conducted in four different languages—Miskito, Mayangna (formerly called Sumu), Spanish, and English, the latter for the admittedly decreasing number of Creoles.

The multi-ethnic diversity of the province which was mentioned in the text cited at the outset points to one of the challenges for the Iglesia Morava: the numerically dominant Miskitos must afford the other groups and

their work an appropriate role in the province. The Mayangnas in particular have clearly gained ground in this respect over the past 20 years, not without external support. This is evidenced by the Herrnhut mission support for the publication of a hymnal in the Mayngan language. In the church leadership not just the five geographic but also the various ethnic groups must be represented; thus this board's 5-member representation always creates nearly impossible problems for the Synod. The Iglesia Morava is intent however, as noted above, to be a multi-ethnic church and with the election of Cora Antonio as chairperson of the Board—the first woman in this position—has also come closer to the goal of equality between the sexes. Ordained women, by the way, have been working in the Iglesia Morava for about the past 15 years.

The Nicaraguan province experienced a revival near the end of the 19th century which grounded the entire church and strengthened it in its service. Today worship attendance, especially in Bilwi, is of amazing size; communion services are so well attended that even in the large, barely 20-year old, city church two services must be held. On the other hand the divisions created by the charismatic movement in the neighboring province of Honduras have reached the Nicaraguan province as well leading to the formation of new congregations. The influence of the charismatics is, however, noticeably less here than in Honduras. That is another reason why it is important that the Iglesia Morava remembers its membership in the worldwide Unity as was clearly expressed in the words of the announcement of the Synod.

Other challenges stem primarily from the economic situation of our country. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, and the east coast, home to the Iglesia Morava, is the least developed part of this Central American country. Infrastructure is meager across much of the country; as a result Bilwi is still not accessible year-round by road from the capital, Managua. Many congregations in the Iglesia Morava have neither electricity nor telephone service. This is why the United States—Miami is only a mere 2½-hour flight from Managua—has an almost irresistible attraction to many Nicaraguans. Currently hundreds of thousands of them live in the USA, among them many Moravians including former members of the church administration and bishops, who are missed by the country and the church. There have been regular economic setbacks as a result of hurricanes in the past twenty years, and these have particularly devastated the Moravian Church. In 1988 Hurricane Joan almost completely destroyed Bluefields including the since rebuilt Home Church of the Iglesia Morava.

The deep wounds that were inflicted especially on the citizens of the east coast by civil war in the 80s have not yet healed. The notable medical work of the Moravian Church, exemplary for the entire country, almost came to a complete halt as a result of the destruction

of the hospital in Bilwaskarma. After the Bible School there, the local theological training post of the Iglesia Morava, also became a victim of these battles, after a long interruption, was able to resume its work in Bilwi. Correspondence education has played a large role in training and continuing education; by these means several hundred elders and other lay members have been prepared for church service in the outlying congregations. Therefore the announced charge of the Moravian Church, to which it renewed itself at Synod, will be fulfilled.

550 years of the Unity, a long history of mission; there are some aspects of it which the members of the Iglesia Morava are not (any longer) aware of, and the result is that connections to the worldwide Unity are primarily with the two provinces and mission boards in the USA. But the message of the Synod shows that the church is prepared to allow its rich heritage from the Unity to henceforth become vital.

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From Where Have We Come? Where Do We Stand? Where Are We Going?

Frieder Vollprecht, Bad Boll

From where have we come? Where do we stand? Where are we going? Any anniversary must address these three central questions if it is not merely to be a historical remembrance. Remembering the past does not automatically provide vitality for the future. It could give way to nostalgia which simply glorifies the past but otherwise does little if anything to relate to the present or the future. But if remembering creates a dialog between past and present—between that which once was and that which now is—then it is more likely that impulses to guide the future can be discovered as well as the possibility for those to have a positive effect.

Thus the past must be critically examined. Undesirable developments and thought and behavior patterns of the past from which it makes sense to part must be scrutinized as well as traditions which are held onto at all costs merely to preserve one's identity. It is also possible that traditions which once were good and have been wrongly forgotten can be rediscovered and can come alive again in similar or modified ways. The present must likewise be examined in a critical manner. We must identify points in which our current standard and level of knowledge should be handled in ways different than those of our forefathers to prevent stagnation or the creation of an illusory world that no longer connects to reality. This is

as much part of a critical dialog with the past as the identification of trends that can successfully be accepted, promoted, and further developed. Such a process will insure that all which is valuable remains to be passed on as a precious inheritance for future generations possibly to combat certain currently popular trends.

There exists a considerable discrepancy in many ways regarding the outward and inward perception of the Moravian Church. Because of its history, its theological imprint, and some of its attractive forms of community life, the Moravian Church continues to be held in esteem and even garners admiration. This church with its special traditions is expected to insert itself ecumenically into all sorts of places to play a special and distinctive role. In contrast there is the reality in many countries (not only in Europe) of the church's small size, leading some to ask if the Moravian Church will even exist in 25 years. Small congregations may often develop a surprising tenacity to survive. Nevertheless we must remind ourselves that every average city in Germany has more citizens than the Moravian Church. And we must see to it that we do not sink into irrelevance due to our small size while trying to meet every outside expectation of the Church.

In the global perspective there has long been a shift of the center of gravity of the

Moravian Church from the North to the South. The worldwide Moravian Church is already now—when one looks at it as a whole—an African church with a few non-African dependents. When future development is considered this will likely become an even stronger trend since the growth of the church is greatest in eastern Africa. Soon there will be six provinces in Tanzania rather than the four current ones, possibly even eight. And in virtually all its neighboring countries there are congregations and groups seeking connection to the Moravian Church.

In view of this development it becomes even more important for the Moravian Church to find a way which allows everyone to have bona fide participation at all levels (material, organizational, spiritual, and theological); which overcomes forms of domination and paternalism that still continue in the Church; and which honors existing realities. Therefore going back to the rich heritage of our traditions (which also can and must transform during the process) becomes very important. It is the only thing which can prevent the Moravian Church from passing on its name in outward growth while succumbing to influences from external pressures to the point where its character is unrecognizable. In nearly all provinces there is now some degree of Pentecostal influences. Should the theological development of the Moravian Church continue to go in a direction that more or less resembles those, then it truly would give up the connection to its heritage.

How far away the Moravian Church

is from having a clear identity is seen by the volatility that topics such as interfaith dialog, gay partnerships, or finances have, not just in the worldwide Unity but in our own province as well as in individual congregations. Again and again these topics polarize. And not just a few people have turned their backs on the Moravian Church because they no longer felt at home there with their beliefs.

Naturally, however, it does no good simply to make such conversation taboo. To remain viable and to have significance in the future, it will be necessary for the Moravian Church to develop an identity that can integrate a variety of pieties and not seem exclusive. This can only be done through listening to one another, as has been our Moravian tradition. The traditional distinction between essentials, incidentals, and nonessentials can be helpful in this regard with agreement being constantly sought anew about what the essentials in which we must be united are and what, by contrast, can be settled in liberty.

One area in which the Moravian Church because of its foundation of integration rather than exclusivity could take a leading role is that of fostering a new understanding among the various world religions. On the foundation of Zinzendorf's theology the Moravian Church has the right to be considered a leader in the modern ecumenical movement. After all, Zinzendorf and before him Comenius were among the first who saw Christianity in its various forms of confession and denominations not as a catastrophe or evil which had to

be quickly and completely overcome but as richness. Even today overcoming multiple beliefs is often handled with the attitude “All will agree with me and become like me.” How unrealistic this is can be seen by the fact that there are often larger differences within a single denomination than between people of various faiths and denominations that live within a similar culture.

To allow others to stand in their own beliefs, accept them, and allow them to go their own way while still considering oneself a companion—what we have learned in ecumenism—can be helpful to the learning process which still lies before us with members of various religions. This must not necessarily stand in contrast to mission work. Mission cannot be primarily understood as merely the attempt to convince others of our own beliefs since each person’s creed is after all just a patchwork requiring continual revisions and amendments.

The first missionaries from Herrnhut were intent on regarding all whom they encountered at the same level and in humane ways just as God meets us, and thereby to be a witness for Him and His love of mankind. Can we, the

Moravian Church, with a background of multicultural experiences over the past 275 years play a leading role in the dialog between religions? An orderly and peaceful coexistence is present in many provinces of the Unity especially there where it has grown for hundreds of years, for example in Surinam. On the other hand in many areas of Europe people seek ways to draw boundaries between groups. Here is another case where we can learn from the experiences of others. It truly is not the task of mission or the function of Christianity to create conflicts or to seek separation, but to work for peace and justice among all types of people as a witness for the God whose will it is for peace and justice to reign.

Frieder Vollprecht, born in 1960, was pastor at Neuwied from 1993 to 1997 after previously holding various roles in eastern Germany. He served from September 1997 until 2002 as pastor of the congregation in Paramaribo as well as at the theological seminary there. In May 2002 he was elected by the provincial synod of the European Mainland to their Board which he now leads.

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