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One may say that the theological views which are particular to the Moravian Church were formed by an awareness that Christianity at its heart is relational and devotional, not conceptual; that the fostering of relationship with God and Christian life are central, without which concepts have no "coinage." Conceptual, liturgical, and institutional expressions, while sharing the foundational experience of faith and life, are always shaped by historical and cultural concepts. Wilhelm Bettermann

The quote above was written in 1934. From the vantage point of an almost completed semester of studying Moravian theology, Bettermann's quote neatly sums up what I perceive to be the enthusiastic theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, toned down by August Gottlieb Spangenberg, and watered down by the social pressures of the 19th century. The Moravian Church of 2008 is, yet isn't, this same church as defined by Zinzendorf and summarized by Bettermann.

We discussed in class about the difficulty of actually defining the doctrines of the Moravian Church because of Zinzendorf's opinion that the theology of the *Unitas Fratrum* is a Heart Theology based on a Christian's relationship with Christ and other Christians. He firmly believed that you could not restrict this intuitive faith to set of doctrinal statements.

Spangenberg, on the other hand, being the very organized and systematic fellow that he was, attempted to define the Heart Theology

of the Moravian Church. His little spin on the beliefs of the Moravians eliminated many of the more radical and passionate beliefs and practices once espoused by Count Zinzendorf. So, Moravian theology took on a more Lutheran slat without losing its Pietist heart.

Finally in the 19th century, the members of the church altered the theology and practices of the church in order to appear more mainstream and conservative. Some of the differences of ideas that made the Moravians a more devoted people faded in the effort to attract new members who might have been hesitant to join a church that required a daily devotional commitment. Then again Zinzendorf, Spangenberg, and Bettermann (and probably many others) said that the theology of the Moravian Church was "shaped by historical and cultural concepts?" Thus the change in the early 19th century was a change necessitated by the current culture, just as Zinzendorf had predicted.

In 2008 many Moravians still have difficulty defining Moravian theology. The document that comes closest to being a statement of belief, or a creed, if you will, is the Easter Morning liturgy. If you read it, not as it is usually prayed but as a doctrinal statement, it reads like a creed. There are at least twelve, give or take, "we believe" statements. It covers all aspects of the faith system from the belief in a Creator God to live after the resurrection and it still retains much of Zinzendorf's theology, somewhat moderated by Spangenberg.

The liturgy begins with an ancient Easter greeting: “The Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed!” A Google search produced a book, *The Great Forty Days*, written in 1876 by Elizabeth Warren, who asserts that this greeting, pulled from the Gospel of Luke, is “universally the Easter salutation in the Greek Church, which, notwithstanding all its error, has kept fast hold of the doctrine of the Resurrection.” Any other definite statement about the origin and use of this greeting was not forthcoming in my cursory Internet search.

Scanning through the liturgy for elements of Zinzendorf’s theology we find the phrase “embrace your feet in faith” in the first hymn verse. This reminds me of the Valentine painting of the women at the feet of the crucified Jesus. The focal point of Zinzendorf’s Heart Theology was on the incarnation of Christ, which would allow us to literally embrace the body of Christ.

The first statement of our belief includes Zinzendorf’s belief in Jesus Christ as Creator. This position is repeated in the next statement of belief as well: “We believe in the only Son of God, by whom all things in heaven and on earth were created.” This paragraph also reflects the Zinzendorffian focus on the incarnation of Christ: “he himself became a human being” and “being found in human form, was in every respect tempted as we are.” Much of Zinzendorf’s theology and practice depended on the church members feeling a real connection to Christ just as he felt a real connection to Christ. Since they were to see Christ in every aspect of their lives, the Christ in

every Christian became a very real and physical Christian experience. He wanted them to live daily with worshipping Christ and loving their brother and sister Christians. Worshipping with, eating with, working with and resting with the other members of the *Gemeine* was a very real and physical experience.

The next statement of belief holds in tension the Lutheran belief of original sin tempered and Zinzendorf’s belief that this original sin was atoned for and is no longer an eternally condemning state of being. The Easter liturgy states that we are “lost and condemned human creature[s]” but we have been delivered from this state by “his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and dying.” And then there’s a telling word—happiness. Zinzendorf truly lived and believed that if a Christian lived a minute-by-minute life of worship in Christ, that person would live a life of joy even in times of trouble.

Next we have an echo of Zinzendorf’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit as Mother. In this paragraph we assert that the Holy Spirit comforts us “as a mother comforts her children” and also helps us and “intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” This image reminds us of our mothers who hugged us when we were sad, who taught us how to tie our shoes and who stepped in to fight off the bullies. Our mothers also teach us to talk especially the words for our parents “Abba, Father.”

The next statement is clearly the Zinzendorffian affirmation that we find Christ in the scriptures. The liturgy states that the

“Holy Spirit calls us through the gospel” granting us insight into God’s will for our lives.

Scattered throughout the liturgy is a hint of ecumenism with the phrases “who made us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints,” and “as the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and dedicates to God the whole church on earth.” Zinzendorf’s conviction that all Christians are brothers and sisters regardless of religious practices and doctrines is very fulfilling to today’s modern, multicultural, tolerant, PC society. Sadly there are only these few phrases. (Happily, there are more in the updated liturgies in the 1995 Moravian Book of Worship.)

Most of the rest of the Easter Morning liturgy follows some standard Christian doctrines and statements of faith. We recite the Lord’s Prayer together. The belief statement following the Lord’s Prayer is a narrative combination of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, rehashing the formulaic statement of our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the experience of his death and resurrection. There are several unattributed scripture passages, a recounting of the Last Supper with Jesus’ words about the bread and wine. There is no indication of the Moravians’ opinion about whether the sacraments are transformed as the Augsburg Confession states (and Zinzendorf believed) or whether they are symbolic as *The Ground of the Unity* implies.

An obvious difference between this 20th century Easter Morning liturgy and the liturgy proclaimed by the 18th century Moravians is that this liturgy is joyful and triumphant in

tone. We are happy and excited that Christ has defeated sin and death and that he has risen as proof that he is the Son of God. In the text, *Community of the Cross*, Craig Atwood describes that early liturgy as “taken from Luther’s Small Catechism, but [with] a distinctly Zinzendorffian cast.” Included was a section in which the worshipper desired “to die and be with Christ rather than live separated from him in this life.” It was also noted that they sang hymns of wounds and blood rather than the resurrection hymns we now sing.

The Easter Morning liturgy is an accurate reflection of what many Moravians believe to be their statement of faith yet it still does not speak to a few fine points such as the transformation of the sacraments vs. the symbolism of the sacraments and the very real presence of the Holy Spirit in the communion service. The Moravian Church has also refused to make statements about certain political issues confronting Moravians both in the United States and abroad. Perhaps that is intended as Zinzendorf intended. If a theology is somewhat vague, then each person is allowed to have his own opinion depending on the intimacy of their relationship with Christ, as long as those opinions don’t counter the essential element of any Christian faith: Christ was crucified for our redemption.

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