

Linda Osborne

I was intrigued by the question, what is Moravian theology and if we indeed do have a theology where can I find it? So I went on a mission, and what I found was truly enlightening. Lots of books have been written about Christian theology and Christian doctrine by numerous authors. Good books with good theology in them, but none of them said “Moravian Theology.” So I began to read, *Confessing Our Unity in Christ*, by C. Daniel Crews, a Moravian archivist. This was a book about the historical and theological background to *The Ground of the Unity*.

Zinzendorf wanted to keep the Moravian Church a “little church within the church” (6) and for a while the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran state church was the confession that the Moravian Church used. The Augsburg Confession was acceptable to the Moravians and they felt no need to formulate a confession of their own. “Having nearly come to disaster at the very beginning because of factious quarrels over doctrinal differences, and have been delivered from this only by the unifying experience of the Savior’s grace and love on August 13, 1727, the Moravians, were naturally wary of attempting to forge binding theological systems” (6). So no formal confession of faith was ever formulated, but Zinzendorf’s solid core theology of “Christ and Him crucified” (7) still remains today and is reflected throughout our hymns and liturgies.

Zinzendorf’s theology did not allow for a total systematic theology and the church

was required to be in legal conformity with the Augsburg Confession. “In a Synod at Marienborn in 1740, also known as the Doctrinal Synod, the Moravians did give a formal expression to their basic beliefs. They said however: Every church and every dispensation has insights of its own. If one puts them in they become a confession of faith, like the one we presented to the King of Sweden in 1735. We, however, make no symbol of them as did the Lutherans in 1577, which may not later be altered. We want to retain freedom, so that our Saviour may enlighten our doctrine from time to time.” (8)

The Moravian Church does have written theologies, liturgies, hymns, and doctrines, but they are not written in stone. They are ever changing as the Savior enlightens us. It is as if we have a confession of faith and written theologies, but they may be edited at any time. We have an unwritten policy that when writing or rewriting such important documents, we must “save room for the Savior.” I completely applaud this concept. Who knew?

In looking at the Easter Morning liturgy in the blue hymnal of 1995, *Moravian Book of Worship* and the red hymnal of 1969, *Hymnal and Liturgies of the Moravian Church*, there were differences. First of all, the pronouns changed from “I” in the red hymnal to “we” in the blue hymnal. “Jesus descended to the dead” in the blue but the red states that Jesus “went also by the Spirit and preached unto the spirits in prison.” Did some theology change

here? Also, the blue hymnal states, “on the third day he rose again” but the red hymnal adds, and “with Him many bodies of the saints who slept.” This change is very interesting. I personally like to believe I go to be with Jesus immediately upon death. The revision opens up some room for thought and your own theology. When I was doing my CPE at Baptist Hospital, the grieving family felt such comfort thinking that the next time their loved one opened his or her eyes; they would see the face of God. Did the liturgy change to allow room for the Savior here? Not too much has changed, but the meaning is still the same. Some wording has been changed to perhaps allow for a better understanding for today’s world.

Within the Liturgy of Thanksgiving in the red hymnal there appears a sentence, “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.” Little bit of Zinzendorf here, but the blue hymnal says nothing about the bride. How sad? These are some of the revisions in wording, but the statement that I am trying to make is this—yes, we have a theology in the Moravian Church and it is not written in stone, for now and evermore. It evolves slowly as the Church and the world itself evolves. *The Ground of the Unity* is printed in the *Unity Book of Order* and is our church’s official statement on doctrine. The Moravian doctrinal statement “has sought to give expression in its own time to God’s eternal truth revealed for our salvation. The form, wording, and emphases may have varied, though we trust that the central core has remained firm” (27).

The Ground of the Unity has and always will be scripturally based but *The Ground of the Unity* does not claim to be the immutable expression of all of theology for all time and that dedicated Christians may differ in their interpretation of special scriptural passages. These scriptures do “unequivocally, and unashamedly point to Jesus Christ, our Savior and only Redeemer for all, and they insist that true faith must manifest itself in lives of loving service and humble yet joyful hope”(28).

Moravians do have a theology and it does offer space for the Savior to lead and guide us as we walk this journey of life. But one thing for sure still stands hard and fast. Christ is the Chief Elder of the Moravian Church and “Christ and Him crucified remain our confession of faith.”

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