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Moravians have had a long, complex, and sometimes colorful history. Starting as a persecuted order, they found refuge and inspiration in their relationship with Count Zinzendorf. Although most of his more radical ideology has been erased from Moravian worship, his dedication to living for Christ lives on within the Moravian community. Consequently, Moravian theology, as manifest in *The Ground of the Unity*, is service to God as manifest in taking an identity within God, working for ecumenism, undertaking missions, and serving humanity. This theology of service is vital in a world whose human inhabitants are increasingly self-absorbed.

Identity within God: An essential piece of Moravian theology is its carving of a place within society as a distinctly Christian community. Moravians are united in their belief of Jesus as the only incarnation of God upon earth (1). They agree upon the redemptive nature of his death as well as belief in him as the only means of salvation (1). The presence of Jesus in the sacraments is acknowledged, though the nature of that presence is not clarified. Additionally, the spirit of Jesus is understood to be guiding the Moravian Church (1).

Moravians define themselves as Christians through their focus and reliance on God as guiding them. In *The Ground of the Unity*, Moravians acknowledge their church as “a Church of sinners” that “[requires] forgiveness daily” (1). Thus, Moravians maintain a perspective of humility, in which they recognize

their dependence upon God. This dependence is taken even further when it is said that Moravians “live only through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (1). The first line of *The Ground of the Unity* makes the Moravian identity within God clear, as it states “The Lord Jesus Christ calls His Church into being so that it may serve Him on earth until He comes” (1). The Church is established for the service of God, and thus the Moravian identity in relation to God is one of Christian service. Thus, the Moravian Church has “the aim and end of its being based upon the will of the Lord” (1).

Working for Ecumenism: One of the central tenants for Moravians is ecumenism. This has been a Moravian focus since their beginning. Having suffered during the Thirty Years War, which was focused on religious differences, the Moravians wished to avoid such violence on the grounds of doctrinal divergences, and thus embraced ecumenism as a founding principle. Ecumenism serves God by preserving His/Her people from destruction and promotes a united church in His/Her name. Accordingly, *The Ground of the Unity* addresses ecumenism. It bases the Moravian openness to doctrinal changes in the desire to avoid doctrinally-based conflict, as too much emphasis on particular doctrinal stances has been highly divisive in the Christian community. Instead of pointing to a foundational doctrine, aside from the Incarnation and Resurrection, *The Ground of the Unity* reasserts the Moravian understanding of Jesus Christ as essentially a mystery beyond

human comprehension (2). Additionally, the Moravian Church understands that divisions within the church also obscure the true meaning of the Gospel.

In addition to a deep desire to avoid inter-religious conflict, the Moravians embrace ecumenism for the sake of pursuing a unified Christian church. Moravians understand the death of Christ as serving to “unite the scattered children of God” (3); thus, they work towards the realization of this unity. However, the Moravians are clear to maintain that unity does not mean homogeneity. They assert that they “recognize that through the grace of Christ the different churches have received many gifts” (3). Thus, the ecumenical focus of the Moravian Church allows a toleration of inter-denominational difference that coexists with a striving for inter-denominational unity.

Undertaking Missions: Another founding principle of the Moravian Church was missions. Although the idea of missions did not originate with the Moravians, they further developed the process. In fact, Moravians became known for their missions as they put the full weight of their community behind mission-work. They were distinct in recording elements of the native culture of the peoples they were trying to convert, including the language of several Native American groups. Zinzendorf supported missions and their cultural sensitivity; he felt that all peoples had a notion of God before the missionaries arrived, and that missionaries could tap into that. He seemed to reject the notion of non-Christian peoples as being less

than human.

Missions serve God by bringing the message of the Gospel to the world. Thus, the Moravian commitment to missions remains, as seen in *The Ground of the Unity*. Moravians are to undertake missions, “both at home and abroad” (3). However, they are to perform this duty “with unselfish service” (3). One may stretch the definition of “unselfish service” to incorporate the cultural awareness of the past Moravian missionaries, in order to promote it to the current ones. Missions are a manifestation of the belief that Christ died for the salvation of all of humanity. Also, they can be understood as a “fearless testimony”, which Moravians are ordered to give “in every age” (2).

Service to Humanity: Moravians have a history of serving humanity. Even in times of war, Moravians pacifism prompted them to care for the wounded among their enemies. Although Moravians are no longer strict pacifists, they continue to serve humanity through charitable works in their community. Even when they lived in closed communities, the Moravians still maintained interaction with the outside world.

Both of the previous principles of Moravian theology fit within the overarching theme of service to humanity. Ecumenism, as it deters violence and helps Christians in working towards their vision of a united Church, benefits people. Missions help bring Christianity to other cultures, as well as allow Moravians to act as witnesses on the behalf of Christ. Additionally, mission and service to humanity

are directly linked in *The Ground of the Unity* (1). Thus, both ecumenism and missions serve God as well as humanity.

A Much-Needed Doctrine: Moravian theology, as exemplified in service to God and all that entails, is needed in the world today as a counter-balance to the prevalence of egotism. In addition to fighting secular self-centeredness, Moravian theology must face it within the religious sphere as well. An example of egotism taking on the veneer of Christianity is the sermons of Joel Osteen. I will briefly compare Moravian theology to a sermon given by Joel Osteen to show the importance and need for Moravian theology in the world today.

While Moravians define their purpose as to serve God, Osteen would seem to define his congregation's purpose as to be served by God. According to Osteen's sermon, one has only to be open to God and open to seeing God as working through even the bad events in one's life, in order to receive God's rewards. There is no essence of serving God or one another in this sermon. The focus is entirely on oneself and the benefits one can derive from being a Christian. Moravians emphasized that each individual must develop a personal relationship with Christ; however, they did not intend for that relationship to become the focus to the point of excluding an individual Moravian's other Christian duties. For Osteen, the Moravian tenants of service to God and service to humanity have been collapsed and reversed; humanity is forgotten, and God is to serve the believer.

In conclusion, *The Ground of the Unity* shows Moravian theology to be service to God through identifying with God, striving for ecumenism, undertaking missions, and serving humanity. In an age of extreme self-centeredness, a Moravian theology of service is sorely needed. Moravians are Christians who serve Christ in even the darkest of times; one only need look to the story of the Moravians who impressed Wesley by maintaining faith in the face of a potentially lethal storm to understand the Moravian sense of service. This dedication, much more than Osteen's gospel of "belief while waiting to be served," will provide inspiration in a world that sorely needs an ethic of service.

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