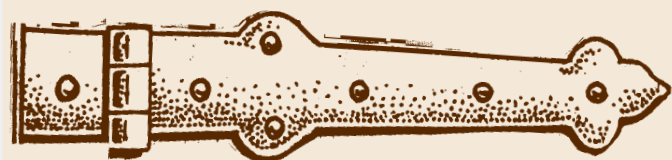


The Hinge

International Theological Dialog for the Moravian Church

The Role of History in Finding a Moravian Identity

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction of Co-Editors | 1 |
| Paul Peucker | 4 |
| Responses | |
| Jeff Coppage | 16 |
| Mark Ebert | 19 |
| Fred Linyard | 20 |
| Christie Melby-Gibbons | 22 |
| Corey Whittaker | 24 |
| Book Reviews | |
| <i>To Live Upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast</i> by Rachel Wheeler | |
| <i>America's Economic Moralists: A History of Rival Ethics and Economics</i> by Donald E. Frey | |
| Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood | 26 |



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The Hinge

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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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About the Co-Editors: Ginny Hege Tobiassen

Moving into a position as a co-editor of *The Hinge* along with Janel and Christian Rice is an exciting opportunity in a life that lately seems to have about all the excitement a person can stand. In August 2007 I left a 25-year career as an editor in the book industry to pursue the Master of Divinity degree at Wake Forest University School of Divinity. This change brought me back to my hometown of Winston-Salem, making it possible for me to worship again in the Moravian Church. As I write this, I am serving as a pastoral intern at Konnoak Hills Moravian Church in Winston-Salem.

Living outside of a Moravian region, I had spent most of my adult life worshiping in other denominations, but I never stopped identifying myself as a Moravian. A pastor's daughter, I considered myself as Moravian as they come. It was a surprise, then, to realize that I had actually never been an adult in the Moravian church. Paul Peucker's article in this issue reminds me that my "history" with the Moravians is heavily flavored with nostalgia for the lovefeasts, candle teas, music, and camp experiences of my very happy childhood and adolescence.

Nevertheless, studying under Craig Atwood at Wake Forest showed me that somehow, between all those lovefeast buns and cups of coffee, in my childhood I had absorbed not just real Moravian history but Moravian theology. Scratch me and you'd find a pietist whose theology bore the unmistakable hallmarks of Zinzendorf's "religion of the heart." I am discovering that underneath the nostalgia is an authentic Moravian with roots in the 18th century (we'll lay aside the question of whether those roots go back farther!). History, real history, does shape us. The challenge for me now is to bring that rich historical background into the 21st century and into my own adulthood, which requires living within and loving the church as a human institution with all the flaws, hurt feelings, structural problems, and good intentions that involves.

I believe that working on *The Hinge* will help me reshape my memories of the church of my childhood into a realistic picture of that church today—and, best of all, to make a deeper and wider acquaintance with members all over the world, all living out their convictions about what it means to be a Christian who identifies as Moravian.

I thank Paul Peucker and the respondents for this issue. We editors encourage readers to send us their own thoughts about history and the Moravian identity. You can write to us through my e-mail address, virginia1@bellsouth.net.

I thank Craig Atwood and the board of *The Hinge* for the opportunity to serve, and I look forward to working with Janel, Christian, and the *Hinge* readership.

— Ginny Hege Tobiassen

About the Co-Editors: Janel Rice

It is an honor to serve as co-editor of *The Hinge* with Ginny Hege Tobiassen and my husband, Christian Rice. After I reentered the Moravian orbit at the Moravian Theological Seminary, I discovered *The Hinge*, and I have found its conversations and theological dialogue crucial for both our Moravian Church and my own personal development.

Baptized a Moravian as a child, and a happy product of Palmer Moravian Church in Easton, PA, I didn't truly connect with my faith on a personal and intellectual level until college. As I got more involved in Ursinus College's chapel program and felt my heart stirred by worship, community service and reading groups, I began to read about the Moravian Church's history. I found it fascinating. Following college, I recognized that God was calling me to pursue the study of religion, and I entered the Master of Divinity program at Harvard Divinity School. After spending four years in Boston (and working as a Presbyterian Church intern, a prison educator, and a religious bookstore employee), I entered the Moravian Theological Seminary for my "Moravian year." Soon I received a call to serve on the pastoral team at Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem, where I have been for nearly five years.

Brother Paul Peucker's article in this issue of *The Hinge* brought me many smiles as I realized how his analysis fit my own faith journey. My reengagement with the church began in college as I read Moravian history in books like Bishop Art Freeman's *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart*. I carried that engagement with me to Boston, where classmates or curious strangers who asked about the Moravian Church would hear a polished five-minute synopsis of 550 years of history, from the Ancient Unity through Zinzendorf to today. Living as (and feeling like) a Moravian exile in New England, studying with the goal of becoming a Moravian pastor, I certainly embodied de Schweinitz's claim that an identity could be found in history.

Serving now at Central Moravian Church, I am surrounded by the history of the early Moravians in Bethlehem, and I work amidst the beauty of a 269-year-old church community. Paul's call to construct both an appreciative and critical inquiry into our history rings true for me as I minister to a living, growing congregation which also honors its heritage. I hope that this issue is just one of the ways that we can continue this dialogue about our "usable past" and current engagement in our world. I thank Paul Peucker, the respondents and my co-editors for this fascinating conversation.

— Janel Rice

About the Co-Editors: Christian Rice

I am honored to have this opportunity to serve as co-editor of *The Hinge* with Ginny Hege Tobiassen and Janel Rice. I recently graduated from Harvard Divinity School with a Th.D. in Christian Ethics. I am now on the faculty of Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, teaching in the Philosophy and Religion department, as well as directing the college's civic engagement efforts.

In Cambridge, I saw myself as part of the Moravian diaspora, worshipping out of necessity with Presbyterians and Congregationalists. When I returned to Bethlehem a few years ago, I was delighted to rejoin the Moravian fold as a member of Central Moravian. It was a chance to reconnect with the faith tradition of my childhood and youth, as I was raised in a Moravian church. Certainly the nostalgia of which Paul Peucker speaks in this issue of *The Hinge* will always remain vivid to my senses. My memories of lovefeasts, trombones, and distinctively Moravian hymnody all coalesce to create a warm feeling deep in my subconscious—the feeling of being home.

Yet I believe that my affection for the Moravian Church is grounded in something more than nostalgia. Despite being born into the tradition, I would like to think that I might have also chosen it, were I to have simply and fortunately stumbled upon it. I resonate deeply with the tradition's ecumenism and non-dogmaticism. I often have thought that Moravians say a lot about their understanding of God by not saying much at all. We tend to be reticent about points of Christian doctrine that have divided Christians for centuries. Quite to the contrary, I have heard it said that ours is a tradition whose greatest heresy is to break relationship with each other. What a precious gift we have to offer!

I am thankful for this opportunity to serve, and am grateful to be working with Ginny and Janel.

— Christian Rice

Beyond Beeswax Candles and Lovefeast Buns: The Role of History in Finding a Moravian Identity

Paul Peucker

Adapted from the Walter Vivian Moses Lecture in Moravian Studies, October 9, 2008

Recently I heard about an initiative by a group of Moravians hoping to encourage area newcomers to visit the Moravian Church. They decided to go into the neighborhoods where the newcomers lived, dress up in historic Moravian costume, light lanterns, sing Moravian hymns, and tell the people about the Moravian Church.

In another Moravian community programs are offered for the numerous visitors during the Christmas season, hosted by impersonators playing Count Zinzendorf and his daughter, Benigna. These “Zinzendorfs” bring the tourists the Christmas message as well as information on the history of the Moravian Church.

An article appeared in the *Raleigh News and Observer* of October 4, 2008, about several local churches dropping the name of their denomination. One of them was Christ the King Moravian Church in Durham, who had recently changed the sign on their building to simply “Christ the King.” The Moravian minister was quoted as saying: “We don’t want unchurched people to stumble over the name Moravian, when we are trying to introduce them to Christ the King. We want them to

meet the Lord and we want them to meet us, His church. After that we are delighted to let them know about some great Moravian church history.” In other words: First we need to get them in the doors, and then we will tell them all about our history!

I am sure you are familiar with this phenomenon: History is used to explain what the Moravian Church is and what it stands for. History is so much a part of the identity of the Moravian Church that it comes naturally to a Moravian, when asked about the present, to speak about the past.

Moravians can also be protective of their history. Not too long ago a scholar was scheduled to visit Bethlehem to speak about Moravian history in the 1740s. Before the arrival of the speaker I was approached by several people who were concerned about the lecture: Would the audience understand the speaker’s remarks on Moravian faith and practice during those controversial years? Would people think Moravians still adore the blood and wounds of Christ and continue to make decisions by drawing the lot? It was my impression that

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the critics feared the lecture could harm the romanticized image of the Moravians with their candlelight services, trombone music and lovefeast buns.

I have experienced this protective attitude in my own field as well. Archivists can sometimes be hesitant to give “outsiders” access to records from the blood and wounds era or from the Sifting Time, or even records of controversial times in the more recent past. There seems to exist an underlying worry: What will people think of us? For some reason, we Moravians believe that a blemish on our history can tarnish our identity.

Moravians are proud of their history, their unique customs and traditions. Moravians also define themselves, to a large extent, by their history.

How much is this true of other Christian denominations? How does a Roman Catholic describe her church? Does a Lutheran give us a brief biography of Martin Luther when asked to explain his church affiliation? Does a Lutheran or a Catholic really care when a scholar uncovers an embarrassing fact from their history?

In this article I will argue that history has played a defining role from the beginning of the renewed Moravian Church. Moravians have consciously used history to create and construct a common identity. They have cultivated their Moravian identity by pursuing a culture of remembrance.

In the first part of the article I will look at how Moravians used history, how they

perceived history, and how they changed their historical narrative to adjust to new situations.

In the second part, I will discuss what role history plays in the current Moravian Church. As we have already seen, history is still important to Moravians today, but there are also many misconceptions regarding Moravian history. I will argue that history can still be a vital element of our identity.

Part I: History and Moravian Identity

We are who we say we are. By the stories we tell and the background information we provide about ourselves, we determine our identity. Groups define themselves, to an important degree, through history: By remembering, sharing stories, and following rituals they construct a common identity. The emerging nation states of the 19th century used history in developing a national identity through educating citizens, erecting monuments, creating national museums, and celebrating defining moments from their history.

Let us consider the early years of Herrnhut; but first, let us forget what we know. Forget about how Herrnhut later developed into the center of a worldwide religious movement. Forget about how the founding of Herrnhut is interpreted as the renewal of the long lost church of the Unity of Brethren. These are parts of the historical narrative the Herrnhuters created for themselves.

With these elements removed, what do we see? We see the estate of a Saxon nobleman, Count Zinzendorf, who held a position at the

court in Dresden. The pious count wanted to use his estate for the extension of the Kingdom of God. He called a new minister to Berthelsdorf; he married a pious wife; and he allowed religious refugees, such as the Schwenckfelders from Silesia and Protestants from Moravia and Bohemia, to live on his lands.

The initial center of all this activity was the newly renovated manor house in Berthelsdorf. Zinzendorf and his wife spent much of their time in Dresden, where they met with like-minded people in their home. Zinzendorf believed the true church of Christ did not exist as an institution, but was made up of true believers, independent of their religious affiliation. Zinzendorf invited others to join him in his effort to extend the Kingdom of God. The Berthelsdorf estate, including Herrnhut, became a gathering place for pious people from all over central Europe.

What was the identity or self-concept of the inhabitants of Herrnhut in those early years? Elsewhere I have argued that they first tried to model their community on the ideal of the early Christian church.¹ When they discovered that the organization of their community was similar to the ideals of the Unity of Brethren, the Herrnhuters added another historical identity.

About two-thirds of Herrnhut's initial inhabitants came from Moravia and Bohemia. At least some of them had a notion of the Protestant heritage of their ancestors, but precisely how much they knew about the Unity of Brethren still needs to be investigated. I think it likely that Zinzendorf encouraged them to

learn about their past. Zinzendorf himself read a history of the Unity, written by Comenius, while he was traveling in Silesia during the spring of 1727. When Zinzendorf reported on his findings upon his return to Herrnhut on August 4, it was an eye-opening experience for many Herrnhuters, who saw many similarities between what had been accomplished in Herrnhut and what they learned about their own past.² Some refer to this as the "miracle of Herrnhut," although at least one skeptic called it Zinzendorf's "pious fraud."³

I personally don't believe in miracles, nor do I believe it was a fraud. There is a simple explanation: For both the Herrnhuters and the Unity of Brethren, the ideal of early Christianity served as a model. Therefore it is not surprising the Herrnhut Moravians discovered similarities with the history of the Unity of Brethren. I cannot go into more detail at this point, but the whole question of continuity and discontinuity between the Unity of Brethren and the Moravian Church would serve as a fascinating topic for another Moses lecture.

Important in this context is the fact that the Herrnhuters discovered an identity by looking at their own history. In the summer of 1727 the Herrnhuters found strength in their faith and in their newfound identity. It is no coincidence that the famous revival of August 13, the spiritual birthday of the Moravian Church, took place the very next week!

From then on the Herrnhuters believed God had renewed the ancient Unity of Brethren within their midst. The religious

community that formed on the estate of Count Zinzendorf had found an identity. Let us call this the “Moravian identity.” I would like to argue that this Moravian identity initially served external purposes and was used to obtain formal recognition from churches and governments. As the “renewed Moravian Church,” the Herrnhuters could work within the legal framework of an old and recognized church and refute accusations of separatism.

Internally, however, something more was required. As more people joined the Moravian Church and new communities were founded throughout the world, the church found it crucial to create an identity for its members. History was part of this process, along with traditions such as the liturgical rituals, the typical Moravian language, the Moravian dress and the choir ribbons, as well as the physical architectural design of the Moravian communities. By the 1740s all these elements contributed to establishing an identity for the ever-expanding Moravian movement. Here we wish to focus on the role of history.

An overview of festivals and holidays during 1743 lists 42 festivals to be observed within the Moravian Church throughout the year.⁴ Ten were related to events in the Moravians’ recent past. These included occasions still celebrated today, such as August 13, 1727 (the spiritual birthday of the Moravian Church), and November 13 (Elder’s Festival); but they also included events such as the January 17 “miracle festival, when Br. Israel was rescued on the rock” of the coast of Tortola in the Virgin Islands.⁵ The great number of historical

festivals is an indication of how the Moravians incorporated events of their own recent past into the church’s narrative. Sharing stories was a community experience. Those who heard the stories could relate to the events along with those who had actually experienced them. Thus these stories became a part of the collective Moravian consciousness.

Moravians were creative in the way they organized the celebration of historical events. Let us consider an example of how an experience by Count Zinzendorf was made part of the common Moravian narrative. During 1742 Zinzendorf stayed in Pennsylvania. He undertook several journeys from Bethlehem, visiting American Indians and settlers throughout the area. On one of his journeys Zinzendorf and his group pitched their tents in an area called “Wyomik”—probably near present-day Wyoming, Pennsylvania, in Luzerne County. This area was then deep in American Indian territory. Unknowingly, Zinzendorf had pitched his tent over a snake’s nest, and while he went about his usual business of writing letters and keeping his diary, the snakes came out of their hole and crawled around in Zinzendorf’s tent. However, they left the count alone and did not harm him.

This incident immediately became a favorite story, widely told among the Moravians. The message Zinzendorf and the Moravians imposed on the story was of course connected to the snakes. According to biblical imagery the snake is a symbol of evil. So when the snakes in Wyoming, far away from what Europeans

considered civilized territory, did not harm Zinzendorf, it meant that the kingdom of evil was succumbing to the kingdom of God. The story called to mind the “new heaven and new earth” of Isaiah 65, where “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together...and dust shall be the serpent’s food.” It also evoked texts in the gospels saying that a disciple of Jesus shall not be harmed by snakes (Luke 10:19; Mark 16:18). The story of the snakes in Wyoming became proof of the victory of God over the power of evil. They proved, too, that Zinzendorf was a true disciple who was on a mission from God as he travelled through the wilderness.

The story of Zinzendorf and the snakes was memorialized in various ways. In the Moravian hymnbook of the 1740s there are five hymns that refer to Wyoming!⁶ In 1747 the snake story was even the center of a public birthday celebration for Count Zinzendorf: During a lovefeast in Marienborn a painting depicting the story was revealed, and the events from five years earlier were recounted once more. Another painting of the Wyoming incident is known to have existed in London, where the main staircase of Lindsey House was a splendid display of various paintings representing the history and worldwide connections of the Moravian Church.⁷ One of those paintings depicted Zinzendorf and Anna Nitschmann inside a tent at Wyoming. Martin Mack, one of Zinzendorf’s travel companions, wrote a colorful account of the incident more than twenty years later.⁸ And in the nineteenth century *The Moravian* published an article entitled “Count Zinzendorf and the Rattle-Snake.”⁹ Through hymns, paintings, celebrations,

telling and retelling, the event passed into the collective memory of the Moravians. The story confirmed and strengthened Zinzendorf’s position as the Moravians’ undisputed leader as it became part of the common narrative of the young movement.

At the Moravian history conference held at Moravian College in 2006, Gisela Mettetele pointed out that church history for eighteenth-century Moravians was not a history of institutions and dogmas, but rather a history of lived faith by the children of God throughout the world.¹⁰ For them their collective history was comprised of the individual stories of numerous witnesses to faith, found in reports submitted by various congregations and in the memoirs of those who had died. By means of the *Gemeinnachrichten* or the “Congregational Accounts” these testimonies were shared with Moravians all over the world. The collective memory of the Moravians was truly global.

German historian Matthias Pohligh argues that, in addition to dogma and theology, memory constitutes the identity of a religious group.¹¹ Pohligh studied the role of history among German Lutherans during the period following Luther’s death in 1546 through the first centennial celebration of the Reformation in 1617. His findings show intriguing parallels with the Moravians and how they formed their identity 150 years later. Pohligh found that church history played an important role in defining Lutheranism in the decades after Luther’s death. It also helped establish boundaries by condemning deviations from

true teachings. Another interesting parallel is how 17th-century Lutherans upheld the idea that the Reformation did not institute a new religion, but restored an old one. Moravians, too, claimed that theirs was not a new church, but an ancient church renewed.

Zinzendorf died in 1760. A few months later the Herrnhut elders considered placing a memorial plaque for him in the Herrnhut *Saal*.¹² This monument was never realized, but the deliberations indicate that Moravians felt that an important phase in the life of their church had come to an end and a new period was about to begin. Moravians began to reflect upon and write about their history, producing a history of their mission enterprises, a biography of Count Zinzendorf, and a history of the Moravian Church.

Following Zinzendorf's death Moravians began to reinvent themselves. No longer the radical Pietists of earlier years, they became the "quiet in the land" (Ps. 35:20). Most of their theological ideas were toned down; theologically not much separated Moravians from the Lutherans anymore. History now played an even more important role in Moravian identity. When dogma and theology no longer defined Moravian confessional identity, Moravians had to rely on their distinctive liturgical forms, their traditions, and, foremost, on their history.

Moravians began to develop an elaborate culture of remembrance. At each funeral a biography of the deceased was read to the congregation, taking the listener back through time. As part of the Easter morning sunrise

service members who had died during the past year were remembered. Each Moravian cemetery or "God's Acre" exhibited hundreds of monuments for deceased brothers and sisters, forming a continuous connection from the present to the past. Even the congregational settlements were living testimonies to the past, where Moravians could not escape their history. Moravians continued to live in what French historian Pierre Nora termed *lieux de mémoire* or "sites of memory," history-laden places such as Herrnhut, Zeist, and Bethlehem (to name but a few).¹³ This culture of memorialization was nourished by annual celebrations of historical events: August 13, November 13, the choir festivals, and the church anniversaries. And when the younger generation's enthusiasm for the church seemed to fade, a solution was found in the publication of historical books for the young.¹⁴

Although Moravians continued to employ the narrative of their past to define their confessional identity, the narrative did not remain the same, but continued to develop over time. In his eight-volume biography of Zinzendorf, Spangenberg consciously presented an image of the count not as he had actually been, but as Spangenberg wanted him to be;¹⁵ or rather, to use Spangenberg's own words: "nothing but truth, but not the entire truth."¹⁶

So when we say that history shapes our identity, this can also work in the other direction: Our desired identity can shape our history. We create the narrative that fits our self-concept.

An excellent example of this process is the American Moravian Church in the early years of its independence as a province. Freedom from any supervision by the worldwide Unity, as realized in 1857, was interpreted as freedom from the oversight of the German Moravian Church. In a time when America's self-confidence as a nation was growing, American Moravians tried to find their own identity. The narrative from their past was too closely interwoven with the German Moravian Church.

A speech by Edmund de Schweinitz is very enlightening in this context. In 1867 de Schweinitz addressed the American synod, which was meeting at Lititz, Pennsylvania. The title of his address was "The Historic Character of the American Moravian Church." De Schweinitz was worried about the American Moravian Church after the sweeping changes of recent years. The opening up of the congregational settlements to non-Moravians in the 1840s and the provincial independence of the 1850s had not resulted in a substantial increase in church membership: "We are in imminent danger of disintegration, of drifting in the wake of other Christian denominations, and of finally perishing amidst the absorbing strength of their under-current."¹⁷ Since Moravians did not differ theologically from other mainline denominations de Schweinitz feared the Moravians were lacking a distinctive identity ("character"). However, de Schweinitz claimed that an identity could be found in history. The history de Schweinitz wanted Moravians to concentrate on was not the German Moravian history of Herrnhut of the eighteenth century,

but rather the Bohemian history of earlier years: "We pass by the associations that blossom around the Hutberg of Saxony, not in the spirit of disdain, but with sincere veneration, and go back beyond the times of Christian David and Zinzendorf and Spangenberg, to the days of those Bohemian fathers who were gathered, four centuries ago, as we are met now, to deliberate on Zion's peace and Zion's prosperity."¹⁸ Like earlier generations, de Schweinitz proposed to use history in defining the identity of the church; but de Schweinitz differed from earlier generations in which aspects of Moravian history he deemed useful:

From these fathers we derive that historic character which we may lawfully assume in the future. It is in harmony with our present position in the United States, and it is just what we require in order to render that position strong and practically available in our labors for Christ....

It will promote unity among us, preserve us from disintegration, keep off from our altars strange fire, create a common tendency, a harmonious aim, and, by the blessing of our fathers' God, crown our work with abounding success.¹⁹

History can shape our identity, and concurrently, our desired identity can shape our history. History is part of the Moravian confessional identity. This is especially important for a church that does not have a distinctive dogmatic identity.

Customs and traditions are also part of a common history. A group observing traditions

believes it is linked to the past, when earlier generations observed the same (or similar) traditions. Moravians had a wide array of traditions that were observed by fellow Moravians around the world. Observing traditional customs is a practical way of engaging in historical discourse. They could be old traditions such as the reading of the Daily Texts, the distribution of lighted candles during the Christmas Eve service, or the use of particular hymns and choir anthems. New traditions also developed: A prime example is the Advent star that began to advance throughout the Moravian world in the early twentieth century.

Hedwig Richter has pointed out in the *Journal of Moravian History* how traditions were invented during times of crisis. Following World War II, when the Cold War was at its height, the 1957 general synod of the Moravian Church introduced the Unity Prayer Watch. It followed the example of the 18th-century hourly intercession and was intended to be observed by Moravians around the world.²⁰

Such invented traditions serve to create and to strengthen a common bond for Moravians worldwide. By drawing on the past, the prayer watch appealed to the collective memory of the Moravians. The founders of the Unity Prayer Watch took a part of the usable past and made it useful for the future.

Part II: Moravian History Today

History can be useful, but it can also be problematic. Not all Moravians are as “history-minded” as I would wish them to be. On the other hand, sometimes a preoccupation with history is an obstacle to facing the challenges

of the day and moving forward. History can also keep us captive and suffocate us; there are many misconceptions about the meaning of Moravian history.

As part of my previous position as Unity archivist in Herrnhut, I was responsible for publishing a new calendar every year. The calendar included a selection of images from the archives: beautiful, decorative portraits, views, and maps from the 18th and 19th centuries. More than once I was criticized for using images from the past: Would it not be better to compile a calendar depicting, for example, current missionary work of the church? My response: I had no objection to calendars with contemporary images. Such endeavors, however, were not part of the mission of the Unity Archives. The mission of the archives is to preserve the historical heritage of the church and to make it useful for the present. Just as the church has a mission board, a seminary, and a publication agency, the church also has an archives responsible for preserving the records of the church. The work of the archives is not more important than that of the other agencies, but it is certainly not less relevant.

Skeptics sometimes fear that Moravian historians want to return to the theology and ways of the past. Dealing with Moravian history, however, does not mean the current Moravian Church should imitate previous generations. It is crucial to understand that the faith of our ancestors was fundamentally different from the faith of our contemporaries. The study of history cannot present us with examples meant to be copied in our own time.

Nevertheless, the study of history can teach us other things. It can explain where we came from and how we have developed over time. It can also reveal characteristics of the Moravian Church that still are relevant today: the emphasis on ecumenical ideas, the importance of song, the strong connections throughout the Unity—to name but a few. By providing a better understanding of the past, the study of history can help us understand who we are today.

I believe we need to study the Moravian past in its entirety. Some people are uncomfortable with the 18th-century Moravians' focus on the symbols of the passion of Christ. What later generations have dismissed as “repulsive blood and wounds theology” was, however, the heart of the Moravian experience during the 18th century. We cannot expect to develop a full understanding of our past if we study only the parts that appeal to us today.

We must also take care not to reduce Moravian history to nostalgia. That is what we risk if we limit our past to a collection of beautiful but peculiar customs, such as beeswax candles and lovefeast buns, *Haubes* and sugar cake. Nostalgia to me is the wearing of historical costumes, outrage about revisions to a Christmas Eve ode, or heated arguments about the correct way to make lovefeast coffee. Nostalgia can indeed strengthen the identity and the bond of a group, but not necessarily in a sound and productive manner. The group can become inward-looking and cease to be inviting to outsiders.

I do believe history can play a crucial role in the Moravian Church of today. Much has changed since the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when the Moravian world was characterized by a strong unity and uniformity. As Peter Vogt points out in the *Journal of Moravian History*, Moravians of those earlier years exhibited a common identity because of a unity in organization and leadership and a unity of worship and faith.²¹ Today much of this unity is shattered. The Moravian Church is organized in autonomous and very different provinces. Unity of worship is a thing of the past, and there are great theological differences as well. It is as if diversity in worship and faith has become the new unifying factor: We are all different, with a different understanding of our faith, but we still are one.

What is the source of this unity? I would argue: To a large extent it is our common history. A common Moravian history will continue to serve as a unifying factor within the church, but the narrative will change and develop as we integrate the histories of the “missionized,” indigenous people into the larger picture.

In order to make good use of our history, we need to approach that history from several perspectives. This idea draws on the assertion by German church historian Albrecht Beutel, following the terminology of Friedrich Nietzsche, that there are three approaches to church history: monumental, antiquarian, and critical.²²

Monumental church history provides the reader with examples, models, teachers, and comforting narratives. History that serves

to create a common identity is monumental church history, according to Beutel. For Beutel this is a limited use of church history, because it serves only to confirm one's own theological and denominational standpoint.

Antiquarian church history focuses on details, and by doing so, it loses sight of the greater context. Details become so important that the larger picture is lost. Like other Moravian historians, I can plead guilty to this accusation, having once published an article with the title "The Eighth Notes in Gregor's Hosanna!"²³ At the Moravian History Conference of 2006, Jon Sensbach pointed out that one reason Moravian history is rarely acknowledged by general historians lies in the fact that Moravian historians are too preoccupied with the details of their own history.²⁴ I understand the importance of the bigger picture, and I agree with the call for contextualization. I also believe, however, that if we do not understand the details, we risk misrepresenting the greater picture.

Both an exclusively monumental approach and an exclusively antiquarian approach have their shortcomings. But Beutel agrees that both the monumental element and the antiquarian element are essential to the study of church history as long as a third element is observed: a critical approach. A critical approach to church history ensures insight into the limitations of one's own theological position; it provides historical knowledge and insight; and it liberates us, Beutel argues, to Christian agency (i.e. what we are commissioned to do).

History has a place in our church today. First of all, we have inherited testimonies from the past, and we must care for them. We possess a great number of historical buildings, records, and objects, and it is our cultural obligation to preserve them. We should also use this situation to our own advantage; our rich history can be made usable and productive.

Various church congregations of different denominations have learned, in their planning, that in order to fix current problems they must find a way into the future. Increasingly, congregations are turning to a method of organizational development that teaches the incorporation of past experiences into a vision for tomorrow. This method of "appreciative inquiry" is a tool for renewal and change. Appreciative inquiry aims at evaluating an organization's performance and increasing its effectiveness. It allows people to explore the stories of the past and to use the best and most valuable narratives to construct a hopeful image of the future.²⁵ Appreciative inquiry seeks a "usable past" that can be employed for defining a positive self-identity.

To me this sounds like something our Moravian ancestors understood well. Mark Lau Branson writes about appreciative inquiry on the website of the Alban Institute, a resource center for congregations facing the challenges of a changing society: "We tell and re-tell our own church's story and our personal spiritual autobiographies." Is this not something Moravians from the past were competent at doing? Branson also encourages people to look

at the history of their context: the stories of their neighbors and the local history of their city. This will result in “a congregation’s discourse about identity (who are we) and about agency (what we are to do).”

By studying and discussing our history, Moravians can gain a better understanding of the church today. This understanding will provide us with tools to move into the future—so long as it is based on something more than an idealized, simplified narrative of the past. We cannot perpetuate oversimplified tales about days gone by, or wallow in nostalgia. We need a historical narrative, grounded in serious research. We need the critical, scholarly element of church history that complements the monumental and antiquarian approaches. In our reflection on the past we need to continue asking critical questions, engage in dialogue with scholars, contextualize the Moravian experience and return to primary sources.

In the few years that I have lived in Bethlehem, I have seen how Moravian College increasingly uses Moravian heritage as part of its identity. For many years Moravian College has organized conferences on Moravian music, and it is now also co-sponsoring the conference on Moravian history and culture. Moravian College also offers an undergraduate course on Moravian history. Moravian history is becoming part of the identity of the college in an academic, non-denominational way.

It should go without saying that Moravian history is essential for the education of future Moravian pastors at Moravian Theological

Seminary. By reflecting on the past, by discussing the experiences of former generations, by critically analyzing the development of the church through the ages, and by asking questions to which no definite answers exist, we can train pastors who are capable of successfully leading our church into the coming years.

Long ago, Moravians used their historical narrative to construct a common identity. A focus on history has become a substantial part of the Moravian identity, but it does not stand in the way of facing today’s challenges. Critical reflection on Moravian history can be helpful in understanding who the Moravians were in the past and who we are today.

When we are firmly based in our past, we can face the future with confidence.

Endnotes

- ¹ Paul Peucker, “The Ideal of Primitive Christianity as a Source of Moravian Liturgical Practice,” *Journal of Moravian History*, no. 6 (2009): 7–29.
- ² Selections from the Herrnhut diary of 1727 are published in *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder: Quellen zur Geschichte der Brüder-Unität von 1722 bis 1760*, ed. Hans-Christoph Hahn and Hellmut Reichel (Hamburg: Friedrich Witte Verlag, 1977), 95–108.
- ³ Enrico Molnár, “The Pious Fraud of Count Zinzendorf,” *Illiff Review* **11** (1954): 29–38.
- ⁴ “Charnier, bestehend aus etwa 400 Stücken, daraus der Gemeinde ihre Kette von innen und aussen zusammenhängt” (1743), R.2.A.7.8., Unity Archives.
- ⁵ Interestingly, there were no festivals related to the ancient Unity.

- ⁶ No. 1853, 1857, 1902, 2201, and 2205.
- ⁷ Vernon Nelson, "Lindsey House Chelsea, Its Grand Staircase and Upper Saal," *Moravian History Magazine*, no. 30 (March 2008).
- ⁸ See William Cornelius Reichel, *Memorials of the Moravian Church* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1870), 105–106.
- ⁹ *The Moravian* (1861): 324.
- ¹⁰ Gisela Mettke, "Erudition vs. Experience: Gender, Communal Narration and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century Moravian Religious Thought," in *Self, Community, World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 193.
- ¹¹ Matthias Pohlig, *Zwischen Gelehrsamkeit und konfessioneller Identitätsstiftung: Lutherische Kirchen- und Universalgeschichtsschreibung 1546–1617* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
- ¹² "Bey der Gelegenheit wurde gefragt: ob wir ein Monument für den seligen Papa auf dem Saale errichten sollen? * ja. Das beste wird vermuthlich ein Monument von Messing mit einer lateinischen Inscription seyn." (It was discussed if we should erect a monument for late Papa in the church. [answer of the Lot:] Yes. It will probably be a monument made of brass with a Latin inscription). Minutes of the *Enge Konferenz*, Apr. 26, 1763, R.6.A.b.47.c, p. 145, Unity Archives, Herrnhut.
- ¹³ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984–1992).
- ¹⁴ [Jeremias Rislér], *Erzählungen aus der alten und neuen Geschichte der Brüderkirche. Der Jugend in den Brüdergemeinen gewidmet*, 2 vols. (Barby: Conrad Schilling, 1803–1805).
- ¹⁵ Gerhard Meyer, introduction to August Gottlieb Spangenberg, *Leben des Herrn Nicolaus Ludwig Grafen und Herrn von Zinzendorf und Pottendorf*, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Materialien und Dokumente, Reihe 2 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1971), vi.
- ¹⁶ Minutes of the meeting of the *Enge Konferenz*, Jan. 2, 1763, R.6.A.b.47.c, p. 1, Unity Archives.
- ¹⁷ Edmund de Schweinitz, *The Historic Character of the American Moravian Church* (Bethlehem: Moravian Publication Office, 1867), 11.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. The Hutberg refers to the hill near Herrnhut where the cemetery of the Herrnhut congregation is located and where many of the leaders of the early years are buried.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ²⁰ Hedwig Richter, "De-Nazification, Socialism and Solidarity: Re-Establishing International Relations in the Moravian Church after 1945," *Journal of Moravian History*, no. 3 (2007): 7–29.
- ²¹ Peter Vogt, "Everywhere at Home: The Eighteenth-Century Moravian Movement as a Transatlantic Religious Community," *Journal of Moravian History*, no. 1 (2006): 7–29.
- ²² Albrecht Beutel, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Kirchengeschichte. Begriff und Funktion einer theologischen Kerndisziplin," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* **94** (1997): 84–110.
- ²³ Paul Peucker, "Die Achtel im Hosianna," *Herrnhuter Bote* (Feb. 1997): 16–17.
- ²⁴ Jon Sensbach, "Searching for Moravians in the Atlantic World," in *Self, Community, World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 35–53.
- ²⁵ Mark Lau Branson, "Ten Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry," www.alban.org.

Responses

Jeff Coppage

History can be a powerful vehicle for transformation and reconciliation. I read Paul Peucker's article thinking of a living witness to his thesis. One example of how the Moravian "culture of remembrance" is intertwined with our contemporary "history of lived faith" is the remarkable partnership between a secular history museum (Old Salem Museums and Gardens), denominational leaders, and a contemporary congregation: St. Philips Moravian Church. As part-time interim pastor for St. Philips since October, I have marveled at the degree to which the museum's "critical, scholarly approach," used to tell the story of race relations among early Moravians in Salem, has been "usable and productive" to the faith of current St. Philips members.

One of the "blemishes" within Moravian history in North Carolina is certainly the use and owning of slaves by the Salem congregation right up to forced emancipation in 1865. The church record-keepers of the time were indeed "protective." Some history was even erased.¹ Surviving records include paternalistic and highly spiritualized religious justifications for slavery and racial injustice. This was consistent with the prevailing theology of class and racial hierarchy held by Count Zinzendorf and most other Christian leaders.²

The slaveholding period has been

documented extensively in recent decades by historians such as Jon Sensbach and C. Daniel Crews.³ The historical record now reveals many Moravians in early Salem to have been good-hearted, caring people who had theological and cultural blind spots when their economic interests conflicted with their more Christ-centered egalitarian world view. Their story of selective self-deception certainly evokes "questions to which no definite answers exist."

Sometimes it helps to see, hear, touch, and feel the wrongs of the past in order to make things right. It is to the Moravian Church's great benefit, then, that many details of the slaveholding era are now on public display within Old Salem Museums and Gardens' historic St. Philips Moravian Church complex. The rebuilt 1823 log church and the restored 1861 brick church first served Moravian slaves and African freedmen, then African-American Moravians until 1952. The congregation's sponsor was Salem Congregation, primarily the women, and the Moravian mission organizations that earnestly supported the church's activities. The St. Philips congregation baptized children, built vibrant Sunday schools, had weddings and funerals, and held poignant lovefeasts (complete with the requisite beeswax candles and lovefeast buns). The historical project has preserved and enhanced what is clearly a sacred "site of memory."

Old Salem employees Mo and Martha Hartley (archeologist and planner respectively) now lead the Historic St. Philips project. Very aware of the transcendent nature of the project, they note, “It seems to us that repentance is central to spiritual health, and that repentance cannot take place without some kind of conscious awareness that transgression has occurred. History, honestly and rigorously viewed, can provide a kind of meditation on spiritual health from the individual level to the level of a society.”⁴ Rev. Cedric Rodney, retired St. Philips pastor, once described the St. Philips project this way: “A building consecrated to the worship of God in 1861 becomes an instrument for learning, growth, and reconciliation.”⁵

Church members have contributed richly to the vitality of the project. From the visionary leadership of Rev. Rodney, who shepherded much of the project, to the current members who give tours to the public, there is a blossoming “history of lived faith.” Old Salem employees have been empowered to assist the congregation when museum and congregational missions overlap, arranging periodic worship services and training church members as docents. The Hartleys sense that “there is, across the board, a re-emerging recognition that St. Philips is in fact a Moravian Church and not simply a museum stop in a tour of Old Salem Museums and Gardens.”⁶

I recently asked St. Philips members for their thoughts about the influence of Old Salem’s project on their personal faith, their Moravian identity, and the life of the congregation. Their responses align well with Peucker’s article.

Brother Conrad Mitchell writes that the project “has strengthened my faith.... It exposes the strength of the church today in its willingness to publicly explain the past action of the Salem organization.” Brother Alphonza L. Gaydon Sr. adds, “It has given us the opportunity to visualize our past and will help us shape our future.”

Sister Lethia Coleman observes, “We step out in faith with every commitment to Historic St. Philips. The 5th Sunday service is a welcome chance to meet new people and to tell them that history is still being made by African Moravians.... [Through the docent tours] children by the hundreds will know about our beginning and hopefully some of them will want to be part of its continuation.... We are now part of a living past, a living present, and a living future.... I think that the Moravian identity has always been the Unity of the Brethren. The St. Philips complex now identifies the African American Brethren as part of the Unity.”

The hard work of all involved has achieved the goal of “appreciative inquiry” as Paul Peucker describes it, allowing people “to use the best and most valuable narratives to construct a hopeful image of the future.” For me, particularly poignant are the rediscovered gravesites and headstones now visible through an opening in the 1861 brick church’s flooring. Recovered only after long-term archeological work, they exist now in stark contrast to the centuries of carefully manicured veneration given to God’s Acre a few blocks north. In what might be considered a Moravian heresy, the graves of early black

Moravians were nearly lost to history through systemic neglect and spotty record keeping.⁷ The recent willingness to “integrate the histories of ‘missionized’ people” is an important step forward for the Kingdom of God.

A powerful testimony to the redemptive power of those gravestones appeared in a 2008 *Wall Street Journal* article quoting jazz musician and scholar David Chevan: “One of the most important Afro-Semitic Experience concerts we have ever given was at a Saturday night concert at St. Philips Moravian Church in Old Salem, N.C. This was a former slave church and many of its worshipers were buried beneath the floor of the church.... It was a standing-room-only audience that was on its feet almost the entire night as we played for the ancestors beneath our feet.”⁸

Moravians have not attracted great numbers of nonwhite members in North Carolina. Embracing our history with integrity is sowing seeds for a more hopeful future. Living into authentic unity can be discomfoting, but the St. Philips project shows that employing “a critical approach to history” can also warm our Moravian hearts.

Endnotes

¹ Leland Furguson, “The Historical Archaeology of Early African Americans in the Moravian Town of Salem, North Carolina,” <http://www.cas.sc.edu/anth/faculty/LGFergus/Ferguson.html>

² Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 30–34.

³ C. Daniel Crews, *Neither Slave nor Free: Moravians, Slavery, and a Church That Endures* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Moravian Archives, 1998).

⁴ Personal correspondence.

⁵ Michael O. Hartley and Martha B. Hartley, “St. Philips: African-American Moravian Church,” *Old Salem Museums and Gardens: A Biannual Magazine for Friends and Supporters* (Fall/Winter 2009), 10.

⁶ Personal correspondence.

⁷ Furguson, “The Historical Archaeology”: “In 1890 an addition to the front of the church was built over the earliest part of the cemetery (the Stranger’s Graveyard), and in the second decade of the 20th century the entire churchyard, including the post–1816 part of the cemetery, was landscaped: grave depressions were filled, walkways and retaining walls were built and the gravestones were removed and hidden. The cemetery was essentially erased.”

⁸ Nat Hentoff, “Jews and Blacks Join in This ‘Yizkor,’” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2008, D9.

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Mark Ebert

I love history. I always have. History is one of the subjects that kept my attention in school, and let me tell you, keeping my attention was not an easy thing! Being stuck in a classroom all day was not my cup of tea. Of course as I grew older and moved on from school into a more real life, most of what I had learned from those history classes seemed to fade away.

Although I grew up Moravian, I don't remember ever having been told much of the Moravian Church's history. Sunday school was always about the well-known Bible stories, and preaching was just something to endure. The few church times that I did enjoy, as all good Moravians do, were the Christmas and Easter seasons. Those times are what became church to me. After leaving home to live life on my own, however, most of that also faded away—or so I thought.

Then I met Jesus! There is something about meeting Jesus that just makes everything you know or thought you knew different. Coming back to church was not that hard; even though I had not been for so long, I had still been able to make most of the Christmas and Easter services. But now I wondered: Who were these Moravians, and why was I one of them? There had to be more to it than “beeswax candles and lovefeast buns”! So, to history I went.

The first stop on my journey was my own family history of how we had become a part of the Moravian Church. I was surprised to find that my own Moravian history went back

to the early 18th century. Next was to study and understand what these early Moravians believed. What I learned was that the early Moravians *knew Jesus*! They did not just know Him in a go-to-church-on-Sunday kind of way; they knew Jesus in a much deeper way than I had ever thought of. If I were to be a Moravian as these folks were Moravian, God had plenty of work to do in me!

Have you ever thought of what it would take for you to believe in something so much that you were willing to leave everything you knew and even die for it? History records many stories of how believers came together in a place called Herrnhut, and these stories are not easy to hear. Most people came to Herrnhut seeking refuge from persecution and death and with the desire to worship in freedom. As I read these stories I ask myself: Why would these people endure such hardship and remain faithful to their beliefs?

Then there was a man named Zinzendorf. History tells us that from an early age this man knew Jesus. To Zinzendorf there was but one thing in life: to serve his Lord and bring souls to the Kingdom. At one time Zinzendorf is quoted as saying, “My own will is hell to me.” Wow, those are hard words! But God had a plan, and in His sovereignty He brought these people together for the purpose of creating one of the greatest mission movements ever. And the rest, as we say, is history.

Or is it? Is stopping in Herrnhut near enough for us to understand what God had

done in these people? Can we understand how God could lead them to go to almost every part of this world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to leave family, homes, jobs, everything, and in some cases in the face of certain death? Who were these people?

“History” said real slow, as some here in the South have a habit of doing, comes out “His Story.” Each individual in the history of the Moravian Church has had his or her own “His Story,” which was and is the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This story is lived in and through the lives of those who are willing, those who really know Him. As I am beginning to understand this, I realize that the only history I can really depend on is *His* story. Many other historical statements and events shaped what we know as the Moravian Church, and all those have their place and meaning, but only one thing can truly identify who we should be as Moravians: that is “Christ and Him Crucified.” Let history simply identify Christ; only in Him will we find our Moravian Identity.

In Joshua chapter 1, the Hebrews had been led by Moses for 40 years, and all of those who had come out of Egypt had died in the desert. After hundreds of years in Egypt, they had forgotten who they were and the promises that had been made to them. At the river Jordan, God tells Joshua, “My servant Moses is dead. Now go and cross the Jordan into a land that I am about to give you. I will give you every place you set your feet, as I promised Moses.” Moses did his job and now God is saying to Joshua that it is his turn: “It’s your time to make

history. Move on to your destiny that has been promised from the foundation of the earth.”

I hear my God telling me, “Mark, my servant Zinzendorf is dead; now it is your time to make history and live out my story with your life!”

Our Lamb has conquered. Let us follow Him.

Mark Ebert is Director of Volunteer Ministries for the Board of World Missions.

Fred Linyard

My response to Paul Peucker’s article is very personal—not a close critique of the article but a sharing of thoughts that followed my reading.

One sometimes hears the criticism that we Moravians in the British Province—and I suspect this would be true of the Continental European and American provinces as well—are more interested in our past than in our present and future. In view of this criticism, it is helpful to have Paul’s perceptive article setting out the importance of history in helping to shape our identity as a church. It is a biblical insight that history should not be an obstacle to living in the present but that “remembering” can lead us to a deeper commitment to the ongoing work of God. It is crucial, then, that while we may explain who we are by referring to our history, we should always present ourselves as a church for the present, alive to the needs of contemporary society and trying to meet those needs.

I welcome therefore the distinction Paul makes between history and nostalgia.

Recognizing the importance of our history is not the problem. It is romanticizing elements of that history in some of our worship practices and our general outlook that causes problems and makes us look like a church stuck in the past, with no relevance to the contemporary world. This means, I think, that we have to adopt worship styles and general attitudes and activities that speak to our world and serve that world, rather than simply imitating 18th-century Europe. At the same time, re-emphasizing the history of our church might help preserve our particular Moravian identity.

Equally important is Paul's contention that our desired identity can help to shape the account we give of our history. We must be careful, though, not to suggest that there was deliberate manipulation of the story, the "pious fraud" that one writer speaks about. Historical narrative is always an interpretation of events, and is to that extent subjective, but the events of our history are real, whether or not we can fully know them. Our task is always to discover as much as we can of that reality. It is out of this that we discover who we are.

One example of how this works out which Paul touches on, and which particularly interests me, is the question of continuity or discontinuity between the *Unitas Fratrum* and the Moravian Church. Did the present-day Moravian Church begin at Herrnhut or can we legitimately claim descent from the Brethren of Bohemia and Moravia?

The account of Edmund de Schweinitz's speech to the American Synod of 1867 is an

interesting example of how history can be used to further a desired end. I suspect that in America, as in the British Province, the emphasis on the ancient church was partly to do with a wish to move away from German influence—a wish that in the second half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th may have had a political as much as an ecclesiastical motivation.

Nonetheless, the issue is an important one and affects the way we think of the Moravian Church today. Perhaps we can never answer the question definitively, though I would like to think of the link as more direct than Paul suggests. For me, as a young man, it was the story of the beginnings in Bohemia and Moravia that caught my imagination—the story of a church practicing simplicity in faith and worship, and emphasizing Christianity as a life to be lived rather than a set of doctrines to be believed. This, together with the ongoing story of Moravian missions, confirmed my commitment to the Moravian Church. It was only later, when I spent a year at Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem and studied Moravian history from a slightly different angle, that I began to appreciate the importance of Zinzendorf, not just as the renewer of an already existing community but as a great, creative religious genius. The simplicity and commitment of the brethren who came to Kunwald and established the first congregations of the *Unitas*, together with their courage under persecution, remain central in my thinking, but that story is enriched by the story of Herrnhut and the beginning of Moravian missions.

Finally, although we cannot explain who we are without reference to our history, we do need to recognize that other elements have had a part to play in establishing our identity. Worship styles may vary between and even within provinces, but there remain practices that reflect our common heritage, especially in the Holy Communion and in the specifically Moravian services such as the lovefeast (with or without fancy dress), as well as in the liturgical practices and customs associated with some of the seasons of the church year, especially Advent and Easter. Emphasis on the particular nature of our international fellowship, summed up in the concept of the Unity, is another important element in establishing our identity.

Perhaps above all, the essence of “being a Moravian” is to be found in what the late Bishop Clarence Shawe called “the spirit of the Moravian Church.” In a series of lectures, using history, theology and biography, he tried to go beyond the externals and get to the heart of Moravianism. It seems to me that this remains an excellent example of how, while being deeply rooted and grounded in history, we can go beyond history to discern the character of the Moravian Church.

The Rev. Fred Linyard served in the British Province and the Jamaica Province. Retired since 1994, he is a member of the Ockbrook Moravian Church in Derby, UK.

Christie Melby-Gibbons

History indeed shapes our identity, so it’s understandable that archivists are sometimes leery about letting certain tidbits of our history get into careless hands. However, our own hands often shape history to be how we’d like to remember it, conveniently scrapping historical facts which might embarrass, incriminate, or convict us now. Intentional history-tweaking is shameful, but usually it’s simply the passing of time that serves to exaggerate or sanitize history.

I think it’s time that we get over our fear of what people might think of us. What if we Moravians got bold with our historical blemishes, acknowledging our humanity and its perpetual tendency toward flaws? What if we candidly embraced our tarnished past (and present)? This might actually render the Moravian identity a bit more irresistible to folks who know little to nothing about us—particularly those who’ve been turned off by the way much of the institutional church has failed to acknowledge its contaminated past (and present). Perhaps these individuals who are so adamantly disinterested in nostalgic religion might be the ones to eagerly join us in our quest for “critical, scholarly” Moravian historical research.

The question remains: Who are Moravians? Concocting innovative ways to tell (*and show*) the world who we are as Moravian Christians today is essential to our continued existence. Dressing in mid-1700s garb is a quaint and memorable way to tell folks about who the Moravians were at one point in our history. And,

yes, charging (mostly wealthy) tourists to come and see a play about a Moravian settlement set in the mid-1700s is a good fundraiser and a good way to tell folks about how the Moravians first came to North America. However, my fear is that the folks upon whose doors those 18th-century role players have knocked still have no clue who Moravians *are*. I also fear that those who've paid to watch a glorified version of Moravian history go on their way thinking that Moravians are an antiquated group of religious puritans whose heyday is long past.

Why have we immortalized mid-1700s attire anyway (haubes for women, white puff sleeves for men) as a Moravian fashion *must*? Why not what folks were wearing in the mid-1400s in the land that's now the Czech Republic? After all, that's part of our Moravian history, too. The Blata folk costume, for example, was worn in areas such as Tábor and Moravia. The women wore lavishly beaded and sequined, embroidered costumes. The plena (a long scarf) was tied through a multi-layered, embroidered bonnet with a laced collar. The výkladek (another collar) hung around the neck over an embroidered shirtfront.¹ Heck, why not hark even farther back to what folks wore in ancient Palestine—muted-color linen ankle-length inner tunics; shirt-like linen tunic-coats worn over the inner tunic; and hard leather sandals? These are all merely historical details.

In all these details let's not lose the larger picture of who Moravians were and are: Christians—Christ-ones—those who seek to emulate the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Joyfully embracing this identity will render us more inviting,

outwardly focused and relevant (!) to those who find themselves on the outside of what we call the Moravian Church. Like de Schweinitz in 1867, many today fear that Moravians are in *imminent danger of disintegration*, of being absorbed into the sloshing sea of *other* denominations. Perhaps this is (and always has been) the case, and perhaps absorption would be a good thing. After all, we're merely Christians of the Moravian brand.

Paul Peucker writes that we are *who we say we are*. Yet I've long thought that we are what we *do*—that our identity is determined by our activity, not our verbiage. If there's anything I've learned as an insider of the institutional church it's that our self-proclaimed identity often does not match the identity that others witness when observing how we live. Surely this has always been a struggle for the church—because it's comprised of humans—and even for those whom we glorify from our Moravian heritage.

The theologies and daily life of our spiritual ancestors fundamentally differed from our own theologies and daily life today. Even so, we've maintained some ancestral customs: Daily Texts, candlelight services, lovefeasts, etc. At some level, our observance of these customs does link us to previous generations; but how strong is the link when much of the life has been drained out of those customs? Many a lovefeast I've experienced contained no trace of celebration or love. We venerate the 1727 Herrnhuters' experience of revival on August 13 by trapping the lovefeast custom in 18th-century garb and song. Can we not reimagine the lovefeast for today?

We can! This year at the Moravian Church of Downey, we will be hosting an August 13th Hootenanny in the alley behind the church building. We hope to have jugglers, stilt-walkers, folk music, hula hooping, art booths, a taco vendor, etc. This is one of our attempts to put the celebration and love back into our customs and festivals, which, while rooted in our history, must remain joyful and relevant to people today. What is important to preserve is not the nostalgic details of our festivals, but their celebratory nature.

History indeed plays a defining role in the renewed Moravian Church. Renewal, however, is ongoing—not a one-time deal.

Endnotes

¹ Czech Republic - The Official Website. Operator: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Information on folk costumes found at <http://www.czech.cz/en/culture/charm-of-traditions/folk-costumes>.

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Corey Whittaker

What's in a name?

As our culture becomes more cynical about organized religion, more hesitant to step in the doors of a church and less likely to really engage with congregational life, church leaders must always ask, "What are the speed bumps at the entrance to my church?" We're not talking about roadblocks, which keep people away altogether, or potholes, which damage

people as they come in, but speed bumps that slow people down. These may be things under our control, like the appearance of our facilities, or out of our control, like bad press about churches in general. Either way, our job as leaders is to lead people into the body of Christ with as few bumps as possible, but without at all compromising the whole Gospel. The first impression is very important, whether that impression comes from a friendship, an advertisement or a sign on the road.

Many churches try advertising in different and catchy ways. Some of these advertising methods are just fine; some perhaps go too far. Other churches have community events so that new folks find it easier to cross the threshold. Still others try to make their building look and feel welcoming. Probably a bit of all of this is good as we look at reaching out and drawing others in.

One of the speed bumps that we recognized at Christ the King is the word "Moravian." Now, before readers get defensive, let me emphasize: The *word itself* is the speed bump. Not the meaning, or the history, or the traditions; just the word. For this reason, we decided to remove it from our sign at the road, which now just says "Christ the King." If you come in the door, you will see Moravian band and lovefeast pictures, the Moravian seal and that very word "Moravian" on bulletins and other places. But you see, you came in the door.

When new members join our congregation, they come to the board and talk about their faith and anything else they want to share, so the board can know them better and welcome them. Two themes regularly come up in these

conversations. The first theme is “At first I drove by.” Many people say they first drove by the church but did not come in, because they did not know what a Moravian Church was. For some, years passed before they came in for a visit. Their unfamiliarity with the word made it a speed bump.

The second theme often begins with the phrase “As soon as I walked in.” People tell us that as soon as they walked in, they began to feel at home, or feel loved, or feel God’s presence. Without exception, however, no one felt loved or welcomed as they just drove by. So, historically, our hook is just inside the front door—if they can get there.

In my own case, when I was searching for a youth ministry job nine years ago, I came across the ad for a position at Christ the King Moravian Church. Even having had church history classes, I had to refresh my memory about the Moravians. I did not want to pursue a job in a church with which my beliefs would be fundamentally incompatible theologically or culturally. So even in looking for a job, the word Moravian became a speed bump. People looking for a church usually take even less time considering each option, and any possible deterrent can send them down the road. Most people will not do the research. They will just keep going.

In our area the Moravians do not have a long history. Christ the King Moravian Church was established in Durham in 1989. We have many people here from the Midwest, the Northeast and other areas who are totally unfamiliar with the Moravian name. If you moved here from

Pennsylvania, you might readily be drawn to the Moravian label, and if you searched for Moravian and Durham online, you would certainly find us. But for many, that one word is a barrier to fellowship, simply because it is unknown. There also may be someone driving by who has unfortunately had a bad experience in a Moravian Church and will not even give us a chance because of our sign. Our concern is for our neighbors who drive by every day, yet keep going just in case Moravian means something weird. It is often said—I don’t know if it’s true—that people confuse Moravian with Mormon. That’s not a mistake we want to happen.

We believe one of our greatest assets is our love for each other and for those who visit us. The Moravian Church has a long tradition of hospitality, and we experience it in the church today. When you join us, you learn that rich history of proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. We don’t hide our Moravian identity at all; we simply don’t announce it to those it may confuse. When I meet people, I don’t introduce myself as “Corey Whittaker Christian Person.” The fact that I am a Christian comes soon enough in conversation and is very important in my relationships. But if I talked like that, many conversations would end just as soon as they started. We want the opportunity at Christ the King to introduce ourselves and let our actions and words define “Moravian.” We don’t want ignorance, uncertainty or ambiguity to do that for us.

Corey Whittaker is youth pastor at Christ the King Moravian Church in Durham, NC.

Book Reviews

Rachel Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008). Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood.

Stockbridge, Massachusetts, is famous in American history as the refuge of the Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards when he was ousted from his pulpit in Northampton, but Stockbridge also represents an early attempt to bring native peoples into colonial society. Stockbridge was established by New Englanders as a mission station where natives were to be assimilated into English religion and culture. In neighboring New York colony the village of Shekomeko was one of the most important Mohican settlements. It was there that the Moravian missionary Christian Rauch made a lasting impression on a sachem named Tschoop by sleeping in one of their tents rather than fearing for his life. Rauch's trust in the essential goodness of the natives and his eloquent preaching about Christ convinced Tschoop to convert to Christianity. He was baptized as Johannes and became one of the most effective Moravian preachers in America. (He also became something of a literary hero. In the James Fenimore Cooper novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, the two noble Mohicans, Uncas and Chingachgook, were based on two Moravians in Shekomeko, Tschoop and Shabasch.)

Stockbridge and Shekomeko offer two distinctive windows into the world of the Mohicans and their response to Christian missionaries. Wheeler demonstrates that native peoples were not passive recipients of Christianity; they critically examined the message that was preached and adapted it for their purposes. They were open to Christianity, in part, because of the social disruption caused by European colonization. The natives in Stockbridge hoped that they could secure a place in New England society by adopting Christianity and fighting alongside the Americans against the French. For the most part, this strategy failed because few New Englanders recognized natives as equals, even when the natives were baptized. Jonathan Edwards was an exception, but he could not prevent the gradual usurpation of native lands and erosion of native rights in Stockbridge. Eventually, most of the Mohicans there relocated to Wisconsin. Some returned to their original religion, but many remained Christian.

The story of Shekomeko is both more hopeful and more tragic. Wheeler documents the difference between Moravian and Puritan mission theory and practice. Whereas the Puritans believed that European civilization was a prerequisite for receiving the gospel, the Moravians believed that God was already at work among the natives before missionaries arrived. Unlike many colonists, the Moravians were not seeking to take land from the natives nor to use them as pawns in colonial wars. Moravians were also remarkably accepting of the native economy and social structure. The Moravian emphasis on the power of the blood and wounds of Jesus to cure sin and heal the soul resonated with Mohican beliefs in spiritual powers. Moravians relied heavily on native preachers, like Johannes, who communicated the

gospel in native idiom and helped organize the Mohican Moravian church. As far as religion goes, the Moravians were far more successful than the Puritans, but they could not protect their converts from the worst effects of colonization. By 1800 Shekomeko was abandoned and its population scattered.

As a tragic summary of the Mohican Moravian experience, Wheeler offers the story of Joshua. He was the son of the native preacher Johannes and lived for sixty-four years as a Christian. During that time he was forced to leave his home many times because of European violence. He was arrested by the British on suspicion of being an American spy during the Revolution, but several members of his family were murdered by an American militia at Gnaddenhutten. All of his ten children died before him, and he saw the world he knew slowly being destroyed. He questioned the goodness and power of Christ, but did not renounce Christianity. During a revival of native religion led by a prophet named Tenskwatawa, Joshua was murdered because he was a Moravian.

Wheeler argues persuasively that there were few good options for Mohicans in their relationships with colonists. All choices led to loss of culture, social disintegration, exile, and violence. Though the Moravians offered the hope for a better way, they were powerless to protect the Mohicans.

Wheeler has done a masterful job of telling two inter-related stories in ways that illuminate both. She handles the Moravian sources particularly well, and is to be commended for recognizing that the Mohican Moravians were both Moravian and Mohican. Her analysis of tribal and colonial politics is nuanced and instructive, but she is at her best when discussing ways that native peoples incorporated Christian ideas into their changing worldview. Particularly intriguing for Moravian studies is her assertion that by 1803 the Moravians had changed their approach to native peoples and missions in general. She notes a growing racism in Moravian accounts and less use of the kinship language of “brother” and “sister” that characterized the first generation of missions. Anyone interested in Moravians missions historically or in the present should read this book carefully.

Donald E. Frey, *America's Economic Moralists: A History of Rival Ethics and Economics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009). Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood.

One of the most important areas in social ethics is the economy, but few modern pastors or theologians are interested in economic theory and methods. Over the course of the 20th century the field of economics became dominated by specialists who developed complex mathematical and computer models that mystified the average person. As a result, economics as a discipline became strangely divorced from the quotidian world where real people buy and sell, live and work. In fairness, one could say the same thing about theology.

In his most recent book Donald Frey, an economist at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC, examines the history of American economic theory, especially as it intersects theology and moral

theory. *America's Economic Moralists* is thorough, insightful, and compelling. Frey undermines the claim that economics is an objective science, and he shows that the major schools of economic theory are based on fundamental assumptions about human beings and morality. From the Puritans to the Chicago school of economics, economic models reflect the ethical perspectives of the economists. This ethical dimension of economic theory has been more pronounced in some models than in others, but there is no such thing as morally neutral economic theory. In essence, Frey argues, theology plays a significant role in economics, especially when economists claim to be agnostic.

Frey proposes that two rival conceptions of the world govern different economic theories. The first, which he calls "autonomy morality," asserts that humans are individualistic and motivated exclusively by self-interest. This morality is the basis of much *laissez faire* capitalism, and it elevates individual freedom of choice to the primary value for society. It is often coupled with a view of nature as a competition for scarce resources. Although rooted in the Enlightenment, autonomy morality found support in Darwin's theory of evolution as "survival of the fittest." Frey argues persuasively that this approach to the economy actually encourages the preservation of the status quo, especially the preservation of wealth in the hands of the powerful and the oppression of the weak. Frey shows that despite persistent claims to the contrary, empirical evidence does not support the claims of autonomy morality, particularly in the economic sphere. In short, Adam Smith's "invisible hand of the market" is as much a matter of faith as the providential God of the Puritans. Frey is particularly bothered by Christian thinkers (such as the Baptist Francis Wayland) who promoted autonomy morality.

The rival to autonomy morality is "relational morality," which Frey argues is more consistent with a Christian worldview. Relational morality views humans as existing in a web of relationships, including family and neighbors. Frey examines several different schools of Christian thought, including the Puritans, the Moravians, and the Social Gospel movement, to demonstrate that rival theologies recognized the fundamental truth that individuals have responsibility for the welfare of others. His analysis of Moravian economic theory is very helpful, and he rejects the argument that Moravian communalism was simply a practical response to frontier conditions. Rather, he sees the Moravian economic system as a sophisticated attempt to actualize the Gospel of Jesus in all areas of life, including labor and commerce. More pertinent for contemporary discussions, Frey examines several 20th century economists, such as John Kenneth Galbraith, who embraced relational morality as a foundational aspect of sound economic theory. A solid economy is one that provides the maximum benefit for all who are affected by it. For Frey, Christian theology should and can inform economic theory by reminding economists that human beings do have responsibility for the welfare of one another.

Pastors and lay persons should read this book. It is a masterful history of rival economic theories that can inform political and theological discussion. Although the prose gets rather dense, Frey writes for the non-specialist. Moravians, in particular, will be interested in his claim that Moravian theology has addressed economic issues.

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