

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.*

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## **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.

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## **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,