

Thank you Riddick Weber for raising significant issues. Keep on.

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¹ An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (Bethlehem and Winston-Salem, The Moravian Church in America, 1998).

² A Collection of Sermons from Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Journey (Bethlehem and Winston-Salem: the Moravian Church in America, Department of Communication, 2001 anticipated).

Keith Stanley

The era of AIDS has reminded us of the dual potential of blood, keenly felt by ancient Greeks and Jews alike, as source both of life and of deadly pollution. This has had marginal effect on ordinary Christian practice—much less consideration of Zinzendorf's wounds-theology—except upon those who fear contamination from their fellow-believers and prefer to drink the Blood of Christ by intinction rather than the common chalice.¹ But we continue to prefer an empty cross and a Reformed risen Christ — washed and draped in unstained white — to the wounded, tormented figure of Byzantine and Western mediaeval devotion. Riddick Weber's welcome paper prompts both a brief glance at the precursors of Zinzendorf's wounds-theology and a further suggestion for its relevance today.

I. Though it has strong earlier roots, emphasis upon the wounds of Christ is especially characteristic of Western devotion in the 14th century, a time of ecclesiastical abuse and conflict that cried out for reform. One result was a remarkable spiritual renewal, inspired by the ideal of authentic individual religious experience, that has given us some of the great mystical writing in Christian history, from *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Richard Rolle to Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena; this is also the ferment out of which the *Unitas Fratrum* and, ultimately, Zinzendorf's wounds-theology, will emerge. A significant expression of the new devotional emphasis may be found in the prayer *Anima Christi*, an anonymous composition of the early 1300s, which is still well loved and much used by Roman Catholics and Anglicans as a post communion meditation:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesu, hear me.
Within thy wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from thee.

During this period the blood and water that flowed from Christ's pierced side is commonly associated with the mingled water and wine of the Eucharist; in a related notion, just as Eve was derived from Adam's side, so the church was born from the side-wound of Christ, the second Adam. Variants proliferate.

For Dame Julian (*Showings* 60), "Our tender Mother Jesus he may homely lead us into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show us there a part of the godhead and of the joys of heaven." On this conflation of nourishing breast and birth canal Leo Steinberg comments "Where are we, having passed through that portal? And who in this passage is 'us'? It is both the liquescent self and the throngs of the faithful, all at once sliding in between two of Christ's ribs. Whatever Mother Julian is doing here, she is not seeing a physique of this or that sex, but gazing — to quote from Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* — upon 'unendurable glories veiled in a merciful mist.'"²

Further development of these ideas, again anticipating Zinzendorf, is apparent in the next century in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* 2.2, where each individual soul is described as a bride of Christ

("Therefore, faithful soul, prepare your heart for the Bridegroom, that he may come to dwell within you") and 2.4, where we are urged to seek refuge from hurt in Christ's wounds "Rest in Christ's passion and dwell willingly in his sacred wounds. If you flee devoutly to the wounds and precious stigmata of Christ, you will find great comfort in your suffering."

It is worth noting also that a new phase in this period of spiritual renewal — self-consciously regarded by its practitioners as "modern devotion" (*devotio moderna*) — is accompanied by a theological impulse, not unlike that among Enlightenment Christians, to bridge the gap between conventional thinking and the new 'mystical' experience by a bracingly critical view of both. For Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris (1395?-1418), "Mystical theology is the knowledge of God drawn by experience from the embrace of unifying love" (*theologia mystica est experimentalis cognitio habita de Deo per amoris univi complexum*). A contemporary of Jan Hus, Gerson was forced by theological and political controversy to flee his post, though he died not by martyrdom but in a monastery in Lyons.³

In St John of the Cross — to pursue for a moment the imagery of Christ as bridegroom of the soul — we find an even more radical, if perfectly traditional, anticipation of the physical language of devotion that has been so offensive to critics of Zinzendorf. In John's first great work, *The Spiritual Canticle of the Soul*, written in 1578 while imprisoned in unspeakably

squalid conditions by church authorities in Toledo, we read (Canto XXVIII):

There He gave me his breasts,
There He taught me
The science of full sweetness.
And there I gave to Him
Myself without reserve:
There I promised to be His bride.

This deliberately paradoxical imagery, inaugurated as early as the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Augustine, among others, and developed by the seventeenth-century devotional poets George Herbert and Richard Crashaw is expanded more broadly (and famously) by the unequivocally manly John Donne:

Batter my heart, three-personed God....
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Among Zinzendorf's contemporaries the influence of these traditions, via German Pietism, can be sampled almost at random from the texts of Bach's cantatas (the closest most of us nowadays get to this world), which train an unflinching eye upon the Incarnation and its implications. Contemporary Moravians are largely unaware of wounds-theology, which has been carefully expunged from the 1995 *Book of Worship* (cf. the hymns on pp. 152, 161, 173, and 193 of the 1969 *Hymnal* that are no longer with us). The result, for the doctrine of the Real Presence, is a not infrequent mentalism that borders on Gnosticism, both in private theology and in church life, reducing the prime celebration of the Incarnation and its

implications to an expression of casual good cheer, remote from the Holy Table, with handshakes and a balancing act of service book and plastic cup or host.

II. Metaphors do not make life but they can help to express and enliven it just as actions do (a tender embrace, a punch in the nose, Holy Communion). Zinzendorf's piety is not an aberration in Christian history but an individual expression of an established tradition that became central to the devotional life of the western church. His wounds-theology is not and should not be a source of embarrassment any more than the excesses of his adherents, which he took vigorous efforts to moderate. What matters for us is the occasion for invoking this complex of ideas. Riddick suggests pastoral application in times of great trial. I would suggest that the wounds of Christ should not only inform our everyday experience of trials great and small but serve as a constant liturgical reinforcement of our debt to and our fellowship with Jesus. We need to join Him not just on the road to Emmaus but on the journey to Calvary, and remain there at the cross in the way He Himself ordained: an injunction that is not so much canceled as confirmed by the symposium in the Upper Room, where His identity is established precisely by His wounds. We may not wish to reproduce the Eucharistic liturgy of Zinzendorf's Bethlehem, with its prostrations and emotional ecstasy inspired by a sense of participation and indeed rebirth in these wounds; nor is the ideal of individual perfection within the life of a closed religious community presently at issue. But surely we can find means to share in a common rite the practical truth that only

through an ongoing, essential, sacrificial transformation of the self through unification with Christ can we begin to apprehend the meaning of the atonement and of a triune God.

Beyond the weekly communion practiced by early Utraquists, Moravian celebrations have ranged from monthly to quarterly and back again. Often involved in the eighteenth-century marginalization of the Eucharist among Protestants was a certain Enlightenment embarrassment with sacramental worship itself, along with a Pietist inclination towards unmediated experience of God already present in the believing heart. Modern studies on the relevance of ritual have advocated an integration of heart, mind, and action. A Greek Orthodox priest, recently asked how often one should receive communion, compared the issue to a question of how often we should breathe. Eucharistic worship is not a periodic prize for good conduct, conferred with a handshake and wink: it is a way of life defined by risk, and a perpetual invitation to “unendurable glories veiled in a perpetual mist.” And here, I think, Zinzendorf’s wounds-theology might best be restored and here convey its most meaningful benefit.

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¹ Communion straws seem to have been available to mediaeval laity, so it should be no surprise to learn that packets of individual hosts and filled cups, hygienically sealed, are now available for consecration and distribution, so as to avoid all intermediary human contact in providing a guaranteed no-risk communion.

² Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1996), p. 377.

³ Gerson was in fact a member of the French delegation to the Council of Constance, and Hus was condemned in language framed by Gerson himself: a circumstance all the more painful to observe, as both were convinced of the need for reform—in Eucharistic practice as in the Church at large—but differed radically in their approach to achieving it; ironically, it may be that Gerson has more to offer the modern Moravian concept of a religion of the heart than does Hus.