

# Responses

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## **Carol Connolly Bruce**

I am grateful to Dr. Dunn for his courage and invitation to dialogue about the future of the Moravian Church in America. It was a privilege to receive Dr. Atwood's request to write a response.

Dr. Dunn's thesis is that the Moravian Church in America is dying. Perhaps the best way for me to address Dr. Dunn's assertion is to begin by telling my personal story. Like many members, I came to the Moravian Church as an adult. My husband-to-be and I were engaged and in search of a church. Like many couples today, we were uniting as members of different religious traditions. I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church; he grew up Methodist. I remember Wayne Burkette advising us that worshipping together as a family is more important than which tradition we chose. We followed his counsel and began worshipping at Home Moravian Church in 1984.

However, it was not until 1989 that I became a member of Home Church. You see, when a Roman Catholic joins any other faith tradition, the consequence of this act is excommunication. This may seem silly to you, but for a Roman Catholic, it is a serious matter. My decision to join a Protestant denomination did not carry the blessing of my faith tradition nor my family of origin.

Why did I choose to leave the tradition of my childhood and become a member of a Moravian church? I am certain I did not excommunicate myself to join a dying institution. Home Church drew me to her because I needed to worship in a community that continually affirmed my identity and wholeness by saying to me, "You are a daughter of God."

I experience this affirmation in our praying the liturgy, and, especially in the celebration of the sacraments. Each time we baptize an infant during worship, we corporately proclaim who we are and whose we are. As each infant is baptized, we, the congregation, renew our covenant relationship with God. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember who we are and whose we are, publicly as a community. Struggling to live in the world as a whole person, I desperately needed this affirmation then, and continue to need it now. I experience worship, particularly worship of word and sacrament, as life affirming.

Let us return to Dr. Dunn's claim that the Moravian Church is dying. I believe that to the extent the Moravian Church forgets or discards its rich liturgical heritage in both word and sacrament, our experience as Moravians may indeed no longer be life affirming.

Some of you may be wondering, well is not the Roman Catholic tradition rich in liturgical and sacramental life? Yes, it is. In times of deep personal crisis and need, I return to a Catholic Church for Mass and the Eucharist where it is celebrated daily. So, why did I leave to join a Moravian church?

I was starving for something that at the time I could not find nor name. I later learned that what I craved was not available just anywhere. After joining Home Church, I discovered a dormant and much unfulfilled appetite for biblical and theological study, and spiritual formation.

Awakened by the preaching and teaching at Home Church, I embarked on a deliberate path of study and spiritual formation. Our Moravian heritage and tradition gives us much guidance and support in spiritual formation, if we take the time to follow it. Gemeinschaft is an excellent program for this part of our walk together as Moravians. Although much sacrifice is required to make room for it, Gemeinschaft was a very life giving experience for all the members of the groups in which I participated.

As for biblical and theological study, let me be clear about what is not life giving. I am a product of a religious upbringing filled with rote memorization of catechism, rigid theology, and subservience to church authority and doctrine. The religious weight of the Pope and Vatican can be very oppressive. For a second opinion, read Garry Wills Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit (Doubleday, New York, 2000). A heavy handed, inflexible, pious, judgmental, auto-

cratic approach to biblical interpretation and theology demeans and diminishes who we truly are, our relationship with God, our ability to receive God's grace and spirit, and our ability to offer our gifts to the community. It smothers the joy and life out of us.

What kind of theology and interpretation of scripture does the Moravian Church present and proclaim from the pulpit, in the sanctuary, and in the classroom? Is it rigid? Is it fixed? Does it provide closed answers? Does it pretend to have all the answers? Does it control and manipulate? Is it judgmental and guilt producing? Does it condemn? Does it exclude some of God's children from salvation? Where is the emphasis, sin or grace? If the answers are yes and sin, then I agree with Dr. Dunn, we are choosing death.

For you see, my only Moravian experience is at Home Church. I wonder how I would experience worship, the theology that informs it, and biblical study at other Moravian churches. One glimpse was a devotional study booklet our Women's Fellowship used a few years ago. A Moravian minister authored it. After working through the introduction and first chapter, I knew the booklet embodied a theology that presents us as less than who we truly are. To envision ourselves as less than who we truly are is to deny life.

I believe we should take very seriously Dr. Dunn's invitation to begin a dialogue about who we are, what we value as Moravians, and how we embody those values in the world in which we live today. This is difficult and uncomfortable work. I

also agree with Dr. Dunn that we need to do this work with courage and vision.

It takes great courage to speak publicly one's truth without blame or judgment. It takes a vision of hope to be a church that knows its identity and intentionally lives out of it. It takes tremendous integrity to be faithful in this work. Integrity to resist temptations to act from fear. Integrity to resist temptations to emulate our culture and society. Integrity to resist temptations to control and dominate. Integrity to resist our

## Galen Hahn

What I hear Truman saying is that a pathway of assent to correct beliefs in faith is not valid and that it may be the primary cause of the demise of the Moravian Church, North American style. I believe the Moravian Church is experiencing numerical decline and frustration in our efforts to reverse that decline. I feel, though, that the culprit is not so much to be found in our simple theology, often referred to by the motto, as it is to be found in our relationships, a reticence to relate adequately to others. We need to lay aside, I believe, our fears, pride, and deeper commitments to other things (like not stirring the waters) and be even more focused on our relationship to God. May we keep that which is essential in our understanding of the pathway to God and enter more fully into the present day work of the Spirit in our midst.

The essential for me is more a matter of relationship than one of correctly stated

need for security and stability. Integrity to listen deeply and remain open to God's spirit, God's grace in the ongoing act of creation, and an uncertain outcome.

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*Carol Bruce writes as a lay member of Home Moravian Church on sabbatical from her work as a business consultant.*

dogma. Worldly relationships are about control. The dream of our ancestors was to conquer every problem or challenge before us. When we understand things, we feel that we can bring them under our proper control. Much of that has happened during the last half of the twentieth century. Our knowledge has increased exponentially, and we are able to manage more and more of this world. But we have not yet brought God under our control. That is not because of our understandings; it is because of the nature of our relationship to God.

We Moravians control through our polity; we are episcopal and trace our authority back to that given to Peter by Jesus. We control through history and a constant reference to such; we were the first organized church of the Protestant Reformation. We control through economics in the world of Moraviandom; the small numbers of our North American expression happen to be in the wealthiest nations of the world, so we have more money to contribute and rationalize that the giver of the monies should call the shots. We control through theology by suggesting that which is simplest is best,