

culture in our manner of worship. Those “growing” churches you talked about are often filled with contemporary culture’s music and need for flashy video screens and the like. I happen to believe that the church cannot be separated from culture regardless of the biblical dualism we keep adhering to about the church and the world. We Moravians tried the separatist mode and found that culture could not be kept out of the church, because we church members are part of the culture. I believe that we have ignored the cries and needs of our people who long for meaning and depth beyond the doctrinal boxes we have insisted upon. We maintain control of the box by claiming that to open the box would be to accommodate culture. No wonder the church hasn’t budged on its exclusivity claims for centuries.

I agree with you when you say that a faith journey isn’t just one’s own individual journey. Becoming a community requires common values and beliefs. However, we Moravians have always understood the danger of claiming common beliefs and their time-boundedness. I am not saying we

should not have common values. They simply cannot be believed by everyone in the community 100 % and we must allow for such freedom. If John Hus had not had the courage to publicly speak out against the common values and beliefs of his faith community, where would we Moravians be today?

You quote Bishop Anderson to bolster your conviction that Christianity is a revealed religion. If that which we believe, based on the Bible, is revelation, then is there no more revelation? Cannot God speak and reveal new truths and new ways of understanding? Isn’t that what Jesus was about in his own faith community? Why must we continue to insist upon correct belief based upon a time-bound set of interpretations of God’s “revelation?”

Once again, thank you to all of the respondents. I hope that we can continue to talk with one another about the life of our church, and how we can respond to the longing and desires of all of us to experience God’s presence in the midst of our life together.

Book Review

Robert Wuthnow, Growing Up Religious: Christians and Jews and Their Journeys of Faith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 234 pages plus endnotes.

The esteemed sociologist of religion, Robert Wuthnow, addresses a question so fundamental that it has often been ignored by sociologists, historians, theologians, and church planners. What is the actual experi-

ence of the vast numbers of Americans who grew up in religious homes? Rather than focusing on unusual aspects of religion (e.g. cults), Wuthnow focused on the normal life experience of religious people.

Since most religious people who grew up in America are either Christian or Jewish, his study concentrated on these religions. The findings may be illuminating for pastors and administrators in the Moravian church even though the Moravians were not one of the fifteen denominations addressed.

The research was based on extensive interviews with 200 people, 107 women and 93 men. Their stories had a great deal in common. Religion, for them, was part of the social fabric of their lives. Religious activity in the home was far more influential than religious activity in church or synagogue, although attendance at church or synagogue was significant. The home ritual of saying grace at meals or reading the Bible and praying together is far more significant in one's religious upbringing than attending Sunday School. In fact, Sunday School attendance by a child appears to have no bearing on whether the person will be religious as an adult. (This has been confirmed in other studies.)

It is also interesting that doctrine played little role in religious people's lives, except for self-proclaimed fundamentalists. What was important were the rituals of worship, family celebrations, the presence of religious objects in the home (even for evangelicals), and a parent's willingness to communicate a religious outlook on life.

What people value most in religion is a sense of deeper values and the experience of community, including community through time. Interestingly, even people from traditions that stress a conversion experience (Baptists and Pentecostals) related that they personally did not experience a dramatic conversion but rather grew into faith

through the church community and family ritual.

Wuthnow's research may be criticized for being too limited, but the results of his in-depth interviews do correlate with other, broader religious surveys. One may also suspect an unconscious sociological bias in the interviews themselves so that respondents would tend to focus on social rather than theological issues; however, the book reveals a genuine empathy for religious life. Respondents had ample time to elaborate upon their own religious ideas. It is interesting that many of them rejected the theology they were taught as children but still sought to integrate their understanding of God with their daily lives as they matured.

One may suspect a "liberal" bias in Wuthnow's work since it so clearly confirms the understanding of nineteenth century liberals such as Horace Bushnell; however, most of the respondents were raised in conservative homes and many still profess conservative religious values. Here again, there was less difference between conservatives and liberals in their actual experience and attitudes towards religion than one would predict.

This is definitely a book worth reading. Interestingly, it seems to affirm the traditional Moravian approach to the religious life. Doctrinal distinctiveness is less important to real people than the practice of religion and a deep appreciation for the sacred dimension of life. Perhaps we should be more self-aware of our own heritage and what actually does help people live out a relationship with God.

-- Craig D. Atwood