

Self, and on. We Moravians have in the past, are in the present, and will in the future make our contributions through the grace of God and the guidance of our Chief Elder. As Alfred, Lord Tennyson, wrote:

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where thro'
Gleams that untravelled world.

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Kerry Krauss

A Moravian Quest for Identity

In 1998 I had the privilege and opportunity to serve as the “youth” representative for the Moravian Church on the National Council of Christian Churches. That year the annual conference was held in Chicago. One particular night the entire Council was bussed to the church in which the Council actually had its official beginning. On the bus ride, I was sitting next to a bishop in the American Methodist Episcopal Church from Cincinnati. He was a fine gentleman. When he asked me what “communion” I was with (NCCC lingo for “denomination”) I answered, “Moravian.” His eyes lit up, and his smile broadened into a huge grin. He told me how he receives a Daily Text every year and how proud we ought to be for our role in shaping the spiritual landscape of America.

I was dumbfounded. For a moment, I thought about correcting him: MORAVIAN not MORMON. But the more I thought about it, the more I was certain he knew what he was talking about. Why wasn't I as

sure as he was? I was born a Moravian and in the 28 years I had been living I had never heard anything about changing the spiritual landscape of America. During three years at Seminary, I never heard anything about changing the spiritual landscape of America. Several months into my first pastorate, the thought of changing the spiritual landscape of America had never once crossed my mind. So was I sitting next to someone who didn't know a thing about the Moravian Church, or was I sitting next to someone who knew and understood the Moravian Church better than we are able to know and understand ourselves?

The Moravian Church, to borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, “is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” For 545 years we have stumbled forward. We have “changed the spiritual landscape of America.” We have inspired and impressed our Christian brothers and sisters around the world with our faith, devotion and energy. We ourselves, however, have been largely

ignorant and oblivious to what the Lord is doing through us. At least, I believe we are ignorant and oblivious to what the Lord is doing through us currently.

I have privately compared the Moravian Church to a person riding backward on a horse. The horse keeps moving forward, but we neither know how nor why nor where. We keep looking backward and are able to see the progress that has been made, but only retrospectively. Looking backward, we can neither repeat the glorious leaps and gallops that the church has made, nor can we avoid the obstacles and barriers that threaten to unseat us.

John Ortberg, in the introduction to his book If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), preaches, "I believe there is something, Someone, inside us who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. There is something inside you that wants to walk on water, to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventure of following God."

My greatest fear is that the Moravian Church in North America has succumbed to a belief and witness based on the fear of failure rather than desire for success. We're not as driven to succeed for Christ's Kingdom as much as we are driven to avoid failing Christ's Kingdom. At some point in our history, the Moravian Church (along with many other mainline Protestant

denominations) became comfortable, content, and complacent. I can imagine no greater threat to the success of the Moravian Church than our own comfort, contentment, and complacency.

The whole of Scripture, the entire earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, the witness and experiences of the early Christian Church, and the fathers and mothers of the Moravian Church call us to serve Jesus **boldly, passionately and without fear**. Jesus challenged the status quo of his day and taught his followers to want and expect more. The Church in its infancy refused to grow comfortable, content and complacent. The early Moravians, both in Prague and Herrnhut, hungered to make a difference in their world. Is this what our congregations are currently working for? Is our witness bold, passionate and without fear? Are we really trying to make a difference in our world? Or are we trying to preserve a history and heritage? Are we trying to sustain what is? Or, even worse, are we expending our talents and energies working to hold on to something that no longer exists and can never exist again?

Complaint is easy. Solution is somewhat more difficult. I do not believe there is any one step or easy solution. I do not believe there is a church-wide, systemic solution. Nor do I believe that a Synodical Resolution can magically reinvigorate our Church. There is no simple solution to make all of our troubles disappear.

I know this next statement is going to sound contradictory to what I have been previously expressing. It may even be a bit hypocritical, but I believe the solution to the *ennui* and stagnation in which the Moravian Church is currently mired lies in our past.

The solution lies in our relationships and in our ability to relearn what “Moravian Community” and “Moravian Relationship” mean for a culture and generation that is growing increasingly more and more afraid of “community” and “relationship.” The solution lies in our ability to find our Moravian identity, and express that identity in new and meaningful ways.

Here is an example. Recently, the father of a Moravian pastor died quite tragically in a house fire in Allentown, Pa. At the memorial service there were two Moravian clergy, one Moravian bishop, one Moravian seminary student and one Moravian pastor’s wife. There were several members from a local congregation that the pastor formerly served. In the midst of a large room filled with people, I found myself wondering where this pastor and his family were being supported. Did the rest of the Moravian Church know of his pain and loss? Was the Church aware of this person’s need? Did they care? Where was the Moravian community? Where were this pastor’s brothers and sisters?

I concluded that day that we have forgotten how to support each other. We have forgotten what it means to consider each other “Sister” and “Brother.” We have

forgotten that relationship and community are the heart and soul of all things Moravian. We have lost the most important part of our identity and character. Our forefathers and foremothers in Herrnhut, Bethlehem and Salem knew what it meant to be in relationship with each other. They knew the great joy and the great sorrow of living, believing and serving Christ as a community. We have lost this. We need this. We suffer because we don’t have it.

I don’t believe rediscovering our Moravian identity will be all that difficult. It will take some work, and some time, but it’s not an impossible task. The real difficulty lies in expressing that identity in new and meaningful ways for a new generation of people. This has always been a problem. This will always be a problem. Ever since the first generation of disciples passed away, each successive generation has been forced to accept, reject, blend, borrow, add and subtract to the corpus of faith. In doing so, each generation has claimed ownership and has redefined the Christian tradition. I would add that this process has occurred with great success.

The same can be said of the Moravian Church. We have learned and been enlightened by Hus and his struggle. We have prayed ardently with Comenius. We have wandered through Europe trying to avoid trouble. We have settled in at Herrnhut and allowed the Holy Spirit to breath new life and new energy into us. We have truly gone to all the world to make disciples of all

peoples and nations. Each successive generation has had to claim ownership in the "Moravian" heritage and has then redefined and reclaimed it according to each generation's standards, sensibilities and experiences.

This is, I believe, an important and necessary aspect of our faith and the way God intended it. Isaiah prophesied, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" I believe that God is trying to do something new with the Moravian Church. Are we ready? Are we able to perceive it?

There is an immutable law of God that dictates that there is pain involved in creating and re-creating. It is a law we encounter over and over in the natural world. It is a law we encounter over and over in our personal lives. It is a law we encounter over and over in our faith, politics and culture. Pain is a part of the creation. I imagine there was a degree of pain at the beginning of Creation. As day and night were born, light and darkness, land and sea, plant and animal, man and woman; as these parts of the created whole were born, there was pain. As salvation came to the world in the person of Jesus Christ there was pain; not only the physical pain of child birth, but the social pain of giving birth in a stable, and the spiritual pain of being a part of God's plan.

There was pain on Good Friday as Christ's body was broken and his blood was shed as a sacrifice for our sins. There was the joyful pain of Sunday as new life and new hope entered the world through Christ's resurrection. There was pain at the birthing of the church on Pentecost as the Holy Spirit breathed fire and flame on an expectant and hopeful people. The body of Christ has continued to endure through centuries of pain, sometimes at the hands of others, sometimes self-inflicted.

The lesson is simple but profound: rebirth is painful. I believe God is moving the Moravian Church to a transformation that could rival the August 13th experience. Transformation is never easy. Given the option of painful transformation and contented lethargy, it is understandable why we might choose the second. However, if we continue to avoid the transformation to which we are called, if we continue to avoid the pain and discomfort, if we continue to avoid the "new thing" that God is doing in our midst; then the world will one day only know of what the Moravians did so many lifetimes ago. We, and only we, have the ability to avoid that fate. Let us be brave; let us take courage and pride; let us to serve Jesus **boldly, passionately and without fear**. God will reward our faith.

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