

To love each other heartily
in truth and in sincerity
And under cross, reproach and shame,
To glorify His name.

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The Moravian Church and Generation Why

Since the social revolution of the sixties, we have gotten into the habit of asking the question, why. My mother, a teacher, used to say that this is the difference between her generation and mine. Her generation did not question the conventional wisdom and knowledge. My generation, the baby boomers, was compelled to ask the why questions.

When I was growing up in the Lutheran Church during the fifties and sixties, we were well drilled in Bible verses, Luther's Small Catechism, liturgy, on so on. I still draw upon that training for much of value. I go to church every Sunday. I lead a Bible study. I count among my best friends the members of my church family. My life would have a big hole in it without my church and my church family. I still study the gospels, the prophets, the ancient patriarchs, as well as other religious systems. When I pray, I pray personally to Someone in a conversational manner and usually get feedback and comfort from that inner relationship. I claim Jesus Christ as my spiritual way, both in heart and head.

The things of the heart are feelings, faith, the confidence of things unseen, peace, serenity, and comfort in the presence of God, fellowship, relationships, the spiritual energy, and even the irrational or mystical -- the things perceived through methods other than logical reasoning. The Moravian Church does well in the heart department. The music, worship, prayer, meditation, healing, symbols, holidays, and the church calendar, all enhance the things of the heart. And they are good. However, many people of my generation and subsequent generations need more in the head department, not less in the heart department but more in the head department. Different ways work for different people. I want my Moravian Church to open minds as well as it opens hearts. I hope for a niche somewhere in the Moravian Church where we of the Why Generation can gather. Just a little niche.

I.

I must confess that I have been a student of the Jesus Seminar in the past, although not lately. The Jesus Seminar exposed me to the incredibly wide world of gospel study

from the point of view of history. Who was the Jesus of history? What did he actually say? What did he actually do? What sources in addition to the New Testament gospels and letters can we draw upon to understand Jesus Christ, his life and times, and the Word of God that he knew and taught to us? This is what the Jesus Seminar calls Bible literacy, and here are some of the questions that Biblically literate people commonly ask:

Why is there no birth story in the gospels according to Mark and John?

Why are some of the things we learn about Jesus Christ in the gospel according to John different from the things we learn about Jesus Christ in the gospels attributed to Mark, Matthew, and Luke?

How and when were the gospels written, why and by whom? Why were they chosen for the New Testament and none of the other dozen or so known gospels?

What was the place of women in first century Jewish society? What was the place of women in the first century Jesus movement?

How and why were the first three centuries of Christianity different from the centuries since?

A study undertaken from the viewpoint of Bible literacy, myth, metaphor, and

history is fascinating. It brought me, a baby boomer, to a spiritual comfort level in my head and in my heart. In fact, I think that the comfort level in my heart derives from the comfort level in my head.

II.

Besides Bible literacy (not literalness), the most important need for the established Christian church to address is the exclusiveness-inclusiveness issue. I think the time has come to acknowledge the value of other ways to walk "The Way." The time has come to acknowledge that other great spiritual leaders taught essentially the same things (at least the things that we can know) that Jesus taught, and that different religions can enrich each other. God works from the inside out, not the outside in. That is one of the radical differences that Jesus made (Thomas 3, 113, Mary 4:3-7, Luke 17: 20-21).

Let us look at some examples of what inclusiveness might mean in the sense of sharing with other great religious systems. What might we Protestant Christians share with Roman Catholics, Hindus, Tao-ists, Confucians, Moslems? Consider this passage quoted by Chu Chai in the introduction to I Ching: Book of Changes (tr. by James Legge, New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1964):

One Yin and one Yang constitute what is called Tao. That which is perpetrated by it is good. That which is completed by it is the natures (of men and things). ...How prolific is its Te (Power) and

how great its achievement! The abundance of it is what is meant by “prolific Te” (Sec. I, Ch. 5).

Doesn't make sense? Work with it for a while, and see what Judeo-Christian parallels you can come up with. Some, maybe most, established Christian denominations might relegate the *I Ching* quickly and simply to the trashcan. Yet what of the Hindu Upanishads as described by Heinrich Zimmer in his book Philosophies of India (ed. by Joseph Campbell, Princeton, N.J., 1951)?

They (the philosophers of the period of the Upanishads) turned their backs on the external universe—the realm interpreted in the myths and controlled by the complicated rituals of the sacrifice—because they were discovering something more interesting. They had found the interior world, the inward universe of man himself, and within that the mystery of the Self (p. 356).

One of the prayers of the Upanishads reads, “From the unreal, lead me to the real; from darkness, lead me to light; from death, lead me to deathlessness.”

Anne Bancroft, in her introduction to The Dhammapada (Rockport, Mass., 1997), says this of the Buddha's methods of teaching, “His explanations are adapted to the capacity of his audience to understand them.” That was Jesus' method of teaching

too. Here are two of the many aphorisms attributed to the Buddha:

Celebrate the one who has woken.
Celebrate the fire of his sacrifice and learn from him the way (verses 392).
Neither matted hair, nor noble birth nor caste makes a wise man, but the truth and integrity with which he is blessed (393).

What of this from the Fattiha, the opening to the Qu'ran as quoted in Islam (ed. by John Alden Williams.)?

In the Name of God,
the Merciful, the Compassionate.
Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds,
The Merciful One, the Compassionate One,
The Master of the Day of Doom.

Thee alone we serve,
to Thee alone we cry for help.
Guide us in the straight path
The path of them Thou hast blessed.
Not those with whom Thou art angry,
Nor those who go astray.

Do we have anything to share with these foreign religious systems? Do some of their tenets and heroes sound familiar? I think we hold a lot in common. God by any other name is always God.

III.

In the post-modern age, the age of science and information, we must practice inclusiveness in order to reconcile ourselves with how we understand the universe. We do not have the same mind-set of ancient or medieval people or even people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We know that "out there" is outer space with planets, stars, and black holes. The sky is not a big dome beyond which are celestial realms occupied by angels, demons, and gods. Science has learned that the sky is, well, air. We need new images and new paradigms. For example, Albert Einstein proved mathematically that the universe is eternal. His famous principle ($E=mc^2$) communicates something to us about God. Energy and matter are forever changing into one another, and time is the joker in the deck.

Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared. The speed of light is infinity. Nothing can go faster than the speed of light. Now, multiply the speed of light by itself, and that number is beyond human comprehension -- like God. One ancient culture even named its ultimate god Kronos or time itself.

Is there a way of imaging God other than anthropomorphically? Might prayer be conceived of as communion with an Almighty who is greater than the sum of all the parts of the universe? Can this be the "ground of all being" that Paul Tillich was talking about? Science and faith are not

incompatible. They are not mutually exclusive. A host of new archeological discoveries around the world is adding to the mystery of our planet. I think that the spiritual has a lot to do with the scientific and vice-versa.

IV.

The Moravian Church has a bold history of mingling with other denominations and other peoples. We can build on that history by expanding ourselves, that is, by becoming more inclusive. Are we strong enough, courageous enough, to establish missions of the head as well as missions of the heart? I think the Moravian Church is qualified to take this step. Our membership numbers have fallen, but we are solid in the things that count: things like tolerance, compassion, restraint, and liberalism (e.g., women in the ministry). We need missions of the head to minister to the Why Generation. However, let us not forget that inclusiveness includes so-called traditional ways of thinking and feeling and relating to God that have nourished and sustained so many people for so many generations. Each individual will find his or her own essentials of the spirit.

The fact of the matter is that there are no essentials, only complements, tolerance, and in all things love. We in the western world contribute through Jesus Christ. There are many ways to relate to the Eternal: "out there," inside out, person-to-person, self to

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