

# Faith, Love, and Hope: the Moravian Theological Heritage

2004 Moses Lectures

April 22, 2004 Moravian Theological Seminary

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## Lecture 1: Reclaiming the Moravian Theological Heritage

**Introduction:** I was overjoyed and honored to be asked to deliver the 2004 Moses Lectures for Moravian Theological Seminary. My time as a student at Moravian Seminary was one of the most important times of my life, and it is good to have this opportunity to thank the Seminary and its faculty for their role in my formation as a theologian, a minister, and a human being.

The Moses Lectures have made a valuable contribution to Moravian scholarship, and I have had the privilege of hearing or reading most of the previous lectures. In many ways, what I will attempt today builds upon last year's lectures by Hans-Beat Motel who offered a detailed vision for the world-wide Moravian Unity. Unlike some previous Moses lecturers, I make no claims to being a prophet. Some of what I say is indeed critical of the Moravian Church, but it is criticism offered in love. My goal is to bind our wounds and prepare for the future. But first we have to acknowledge those wounds.

It is not my intention to add to the controversy that has been raging in the American Provinces in recent years; however, we must address our current situation and its dangers. In the first lecture I will look at what I see as the root cause of our current malaise. We are suffering, I think, from theological amnesia, or perhaps we could say spiritual Alzheimer's disease. We have lost our memory and forgotten who we are. As a result, we are confused by the world around us and are reacting in fear. We do not even recognize our brothers and sisters, and we reject those who long for our love. As part of that lecture, I will argue for the central role of theology in the life of the church, including the Moravian Church.

The first lecture is diagnosis; the second lecture is an attempt at a cure. In it I will try to show how the Moravian theological heritage provides us rich resources for self-understanding and renewal. By examining who we truly are, we can move toward articulating Moravian theology and mission for the twenty-first century. These lectures are part of a larger work in progress, of which 200 pages have been written, so be aware that there is much more that could be said. Do not be alarmed that I ask some questions for which I have no answer or if I propose answers that we decide are wrong.

### **Identity Crisis:**

Some of the controversies currently in the Moravian Church are not unique to us. The sociologist of American religion, Robert Wuthnow, has identified a curious trend in Protestantism. At the same time that differences between denominations have eroded to the point of meaninglessness for most people, denominations themselves are dividing along social and political lines. This trend has particularly dangerous implications for the Moravian Church, because we make community itself a mark of the church. The word "schism" is not a part of the Moravian theological vocabulary. There is only one Moravian Church world-wide. Therefore the centrifugal forces in American Christianity are having a particularly painful and destructive effect on the Moravian Church.

One reason we are finding it difficult to confront the challenge posed by the current cultural changes is that we do not know what our church has taught or even how Moravians have done theology. As a result, in recent years we have defined doctrine through administrative fiat rather than sustained, serious engagement with both our own theological heritage and the main currents of

modern theological discussion. We try to cure the symptoms of our disease rather than confront the illness itself.

Worse, we often try to mask the symptoms through cosmetics, flashy programs, mission statements, and a hearty word of greeting. We do not know who we are, so we look desperately for someone to define us. We play dress-up in the robes of other churches or call in supposed experts to tell us why we are wrong rather than seeking to understand who we are and what is right. We beat ourselves up for not being like others rather than ministering out our deepest convictions. We have gotten caught up in the culture wars that rage around us without having a distinctive voice. We are paralyzed with fear, uncertainty, and division at a time when we need faith, love, and hope

### **A New Sifting Time?**

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that we are in the midst of the worst crisis to threaten the Moravian Church since World War II – perhaps since the Sifting Time of the 1740s. The term Sifting Time in Moravian theology is used to describe times when the community struggles to make sense of itself. It is “sifted” or tested by God. In the process of sifting, some leave the community and others join. In previous siftings, the community emerged stronger than it had been, even though a few individuals chose to leave. For instance, the first period of Sifting was in the months prior to the August 13, 1727 experience that we continue to celebrate as the rebirth of the *Unitas Fratrum*.

During a Sifting, there is a danger that factions within the church will reject sound biblical hermeneutics, standards of plain reason, and the rules of ethics and decency. Factions form that are tempted to reject all authority except personal religious experience and an ego-centric interpretation of Scripture. Individual obsessions are presented as the defining marks of the true church. Some respond to the conflict during a Sifting by isolating themselves. The image of Christian David building a home that intentionally faced away from Herrnhut is the classic example of this isolationism. Fanaticism, fragmentation, and apathy are the great dangers of a Sifting, but they are related phenomena. Apathy results from people withdrawing from the conflict.

Sifting times are dangerous. So far the Moravian Church has always emerged stronger, but the outcome is not certain. Today there are warning signs of disease in the world-wide Moravian Church that should not be ignored. Since no one, to my knowledge, has done a systematic study of the state of the church, what I say is based on limited knowledge. The fact that we are not engaged in open discussion is itself both a symptom and a cause of our current crisis. Here is a list of problems that I see at the moment:

- There is bitter division between traditionalists and charismatics, each claiming to be the only legitimate heirs of Hus and Herrnhut.
- Membership is declining rapidly in North America except for immigrant congregations.
- Giving is down while demands on clergy time are increasing.
- The Director of the Board of World Mission and most of the church’s missionaries resigned last year as an act of public protest against synod resolutions.
- Some pastors in the Northern and Southern Provinces have formed coalitions and have signed on to a “Confessing Church” movement.
- The 2001 Moses Lecturer was accused of having abused his ordination vows by publicly challenging Moravian doctrine.
- The *Ground of the Unity* has become a source of contention instead of unity.
- Stress on clergy families is very high, and clergy morale is low.

- Pastorates are increasingly being terminated because of the severity of conflict.
- It is difficult to establish new congregations that thrive.
- Congregations are choosing not to use the Moravian Book of Worship and other church materials.
- Pastors are creating their own rites rather than observing Moravian rites and sacraments.
- Fewer people are pursuing a calling in the ordained ministry.
- The average age of those who enter seminary continues to rise.
- Many retired clergy are serving congregations because of a shortage of pastors.
- Synods are viewed with dread rather than eager anticipation.

This is an impressionistic list, and I'm sure it could easily be lengthened and refined. I may be wrong on some of the details, but all of these items merit individual discussion and perhaps even arbitration in the church. Some of them no doubt represent the usual conflicts that we see in any human institution, but even those normal conflicts have a new bitterness about them. My purpose today, though, is not to analyze these separately but to see them all as part of a larger malaise.

What this list tells me is that people are confused, frightened, and threatened. It also tells me that when we have conflicts, we are reacting out of our worst impulses, flight or fight, rather than acting from our faith. We no longer know who we are, why we are joined together, and what we are called to do. The oft-quoted words of Yeats in his 1919 poem "The Second Coming" describe our current situation:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats reminds us that "passionate intensity" is not proof of the rightness and goodness of a cause. There are always zealots who will exploit chaos and confusion to assert their own power and wreak destruction on institutions and individuals. The history of violence and destruction within Christianity warns us of the twin dangers of apocalyptic fanaticism *and* inquisitorial orthodoxy. The flame of faith that should warm and enlighten us too quickly becomes a fire that destroys lives and homes. Too many of those who claim the heritage of the martyr Hus appear to be kindling the flames to burn others. This applies to both liberals and conservatives in the church. It is time for us all to pull back and think about who we are and what we stand for.

### **The Need for Unity**

Such conflict and division in any community of faith would be an occasion for grief and concern, but it is a tragedy that our Moravian church is in such a condition at a time when we are all in dire need of comfort, courage, and clarity of purpose. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001 we cannot ignore the fact that murder, mayhem, and wanton rampage are the fruits of religious fanaticism and the lust for power. It is too easy to see evil in others and ignore the evil in ourselves. It is always easier to destroy than to build; easier to conquer others than rule ourselves. Easier to cast stones than to build homes. Now is not the time to sow discord, inflame unholy passions, and create enemies. It is the time to do all we can to embody the spirit of Christ in the world. Christians, including Mora-

vians, need to hold to our best convictions at this time when we are most tempted to give in to hatred and injustice.

But it seems that just when we need to speak with prophetic clarity that there is no security where justice is denied, we are speaking with slander and malice against each other. Just when it is most vital that we offer the world the good news of redemption and reconciliation, we are gnawing on old and fruitless debates about salvation. Just when we need to step out in courage to embrace the world with sacrificial love, we are snarling at those who would rob us of our arrogance and superiority. Have we become those of whom Jesus spoke who “travel over land and sea to make a single convert and then turn him into twice the child of hell” that we are (Matt. 24:15)? How did it come to this?

I know that this is an academic lecture rather than a sermon, but theology is not a dispassionate discussion of abstract principles. It is part of the on-going struggle to live by faith in a difficult world. Theology, especially Moravian theology, is as much a matter of the heart and soul as it is the mind, so let me tell you that the current state of the Moravian Church causes me pain. I am greatly concerned, but even so, I do not think that the Moravian Church is dying, at least not yet. There are many signs of health in the church that should be celebrated.

For instance, one surprising consequence of the doctrinal controversies is that lay persons are more eager than ever for theological discussion and inquiry. In my experience, our laity are far ahead of most of our clergy in the effort to make theological sense of the world in which we live. Also, the Women’s Conference in Winston-Salem in 2003 demonstrated the great vitality of Moravian faith around the world. The refusal of the Conference to be drawn into sectarian controversy was a sign of hope.

**Neglect of our Heritage** No, we are not dying, but we are unhealthy. It is important to realize that even a toothache can eventually kill you if you ignore it. For decades now, we have ignored the theological health of the North American provinces. In many ways the divisions and distress that we are experiencing is a result of the Moravian Church’s neglect of its theological heritage. As a church, we were poorly prepared for the challenges we are facing at the moment.

Part of the reason for why we are unprepared is because of who we once were. One of the great strengths of the Moravian Church through the centuries has been the sense of community among the members and especially among the clergy. There was a time when most clergy were formed in Moravian congregations, attended Moravian schools, and were mentored by older Moravian ministers. They were instructed in the doctrine and ethos of the church by oral tradition and example. People did not study Moravian theology because they lived it. There was strength in this. Also a significant number of clergy had experience serving in other provinces of the Unity, which meant that there was a connectedness that went beyond official structures. It was a system that had its flaws, but it worked generally well. There was a shared language of faith, doctrine, and experience. Few saw a need to publish formal works on theology because tradition carried its own weight without the need to articulate it.

The old approach of teaching Moravian doctrine and practice by osmosis or oral tradition worked for many years, but it fell victim to broad social changes. A smaller percentage of Moravian clergy spend three years studying at Moravian Seminary than in the past. Fewer Moravian clergy have been formed and nurtured in the Moravian Church. As a result fewer Moravians, even those of us who are scholars, are able to give an account of Moravian theology that is compelling, honest, and sustaining. We have to recognize, though, that the old days are not going to return. We will have to become much more intentional about the theological formation of Moravian pastors and the articulation of Moravian doctrine.

### **Dangers of Assimilation:**

One of the major factors in the decline of Moravian theology was the reorganization of the church when the closed communities were transformed into typical Protestant congregations. During those years the looseness of Moravian doctrine and theology was an asset as the church gradually made itself at home in the general American Protestant setting. But there was a downside to the process of assimilation. The lack of formal and critical works of theological scholarship combined with the need for assimilation made it difficult for the church to distinguish traditional Moravian language from the new tones of American Protestantism.

For instance, the traditional Moravian focus on personal spiritual experience, including the experience of conversion, became confused with the American evangelical doctrine that an experience of conversion is the *means* of salvation. The traditional Moravian emphasis on the Scripture as formative for our life as individuals and as a church became confused with fundamentalist notions of inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Bible. The August 13 experience became confused first with 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalism and then with 20<sup>th</sup> century Pentecostalism.

On the liberal side of the equation, the Moravian integration of spirituality, economics, and social life became confused with the Social Gospel and its presuppositions. The traditional Moravian abhorrence of violence became confused with radical politics in the 1960s. The Moravian dedication to bringing the good news of redemption to the most oppressed people of the world became confused with American imperialistic missiology. In the process, we gradually lost the ability even to talk intelligibly about our own history as we forced it into the categories of American Christianity.

I am not arguing that the church should have turned Bethlehem, Salem, and Lititz into protected ghettos cut off from the world. Not at all. We needed to leave the protected communities, but we must recognize that in assimilation we lost contact with our own *theological* heritage. We lost a common Moravian language of faith and doctrine while importing theological and cultural debates that often make little sense in the Moravian Church.

Just one example of this would be the persistent controversy over Scripture. The Moravian Church has always recognized both that Scripture is authoritative for the church and that it is dangerous for people to take Scripture literally without principles for interpretation. We have always read Scripture Christocentrically not legalistically, and we were comfortable discussing the truth of Scripture without needing to assert the factual infallibility of the Bible. But we often find ourselves mimicking debates on Scripture in American Protestantism rather than understanding our own hermeneutical tradition, as Frank Crouch pointed out recently in *The Hinge* (10.3, Winter 2003).

### **Dangers of Nostalgia**

The process of assimilating also had a curious backlash. At the same time that the Moravian Church in America was adopting the language, doctrine, and piety of American Protestantism either liberal or evangelical, American Moravians also developed an almost fetish-like devotion to certain remnants of the worship life of the old communities. Lovefeast coffee, beeswax candles, advent stars, and brass choirs became the defining features of the Moravian Church for many people. Hence the joke, how many Moravians does it take to change a lightbulb? Change??

We joke about the Moravian desire to return to Old Salem or Old Herrnhut when we die rather than go to heaven, but there is a danger in this nostalgia. It is significant that Moravian traditionalism grew more powerful at the same time that the church was ignoring, forgetting, and suppressing its *theological* tradition. The church preserved the forms of the past instead of the substance. Moravian history became a matter of ancestor worship rather than a critical and fruitful engagement with the past. Pious myth was preferred to historical fact, and parochial pride to diligent study.

Nostalgia is a natural response to change and loss, but we must remember that nostalgia is an illness. It is a longing for a world we thought we knew and a romanticizing of our childhood. Nostalgia creates an imagined past that distances us from contemporary responsibilities. It is a preference for shadows rather than engaging in the on-going struggle to create an authentic identity. Nostalgia and the worship of tradition for its own sake will kill us.

Many of us are familiar with congregations that cannot change, but today we also have congregations that do not use a Moravian Book of Worship, do not use any Moravian educational curriculum, do not observe the Moravian sacraments, do not endorse Moravian statements on social issues, and whose pastors largely ignore Moravian history and doctrine, but who proclaim a Moravian identity by having a brass choir at Easter and beeswax candles at Christmas. Is it any wonder that “the centre cannot hold” and that we are in crisis? Is there nothing more to the Moravian church than a candle?

I hope you do not misunderstand me here. I am not opposed to cherished Moravian traditions. Lovefeasts, brass choirs, and sunrise services may at times be shadows rather than substance, but at least they are shadows of a once vital reality that can still communicate that reality. Iconoclasm is not the remedy for our current crisis. I have little sympathy for pastors who try to wipe away a congregation’s traditions in the interest of being relevant. Too often iconoclasm destroys a beautiful past in order to build a less attractive future.

Iconoclasts fail to observe that one person’s idol is another person’s icon. In destroying the unhealthy devotion of one person, you may destroy another person’s window into a deeper and richer reality. The distant echo of a vibrant past can still delight the ear and encourage the heart. It may even inspire one to create a more beautiful tomorrow. What is needed today, though, is seriously reflection on the meaning of Moravian practices and how they communicate Moravian theology. We need to recognize that practice is a part of doctrine, and become more intentional about what we say and do.

### **Theology is the Life of the Church**

Theological reflection is the great challenge of our time because *theology is the life of the church*. That may sound too bold. No doubt you are right now thinking of other things that are really the life of the church. You may say that preaching is the life of the church, or worship, or missions, or caring for the poor and homeless, or ministering to people’s spiritual and personal needs, or comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable, or creating a loving community, or even preparing the way of the Lord. Those are all vital aspects of the church, but even in discussing what is the essential mission of the church, we are engaging in theology. Whenever you assert that one type of ministry rather than another is the heart of the church, you are making a theological judgment. Even the idea of the church itself is a theological idea rather than a sociological one.

Churches may function or dysfunction like any social institutions, but when the church loses its ability to think about itself as the Body of Christ, it ceases to be the church. The way churches handle disputes and dissent is a part of their theological self-understanding. Theology is the engine of the church’s mission and message because theology is a conversation about God and God’s will in the world.

We should not confuse confessional statements or nicely memorized catechisms with theology itself. It is important to remember that theology was a word invented centuries ago by combining two Greek words: Theos and Logos. Theology, or God-Talk, simply means speaking about God in an intelligible way. It is not just any kind of talking about God. To be theology, it must be God-talk that makes sense. To use a bit of post-modern philosophical jargon, this means that theology is a form of

discourse and the church a community of discourse. Theology is meaningful speech both about the ultimate mysteries of the universe and the meaning of human existence. Theology is God-inspired and God-directed discourse that has an impact on daily human life.

The central mission of the Christian church is to speak intelligibly about God's work in creation, redemption, and the restoration of all things. Closely related to that central mission is the need to speak intelligibly about human responsibility and human response to God's work. All of the other activities of the church flow from this twin-mission.

For instance, the church does not send missionaries out into the world because the church needs to recruit members. We do so because we believe that God wants people of faith to proclaim redemptive love to all. Missions, therefore, are an expression of our theology and mission methods reflect our theology. Likewise worship is an expression of our theology. The church worships because it believes that its words about God are meaningful and should be shared within a community. We engage in Christian education because we believe that we should struggle together to understand God and our role in the world. Our congregations are visible expressions of our of *theology* and imperfect models of our eschatological hope.

### **Theology as Incarnation**

In the Moravian Church, we have traditionally understood that we serve and adore Jesus Christ because we believe that in him the Word of God became flesh and was made visible. According to ancient Christian teaching and hymnody, Jesus of Nazareth was himself a Theology. He was the Word of God in human form. The Theo-logos became an *anthropos*; he spoke intelligible words and engaged in prophetic actions. In order to worship, follow, and serve Christ, we need to engage in this same process of enfleshing the Word of God. Or, to put it more simply, we need to engage in theo-logy. Thus, all pastors, in fact, all Christians, are theologians, although many of us shy away from that task.

This is why the schools we establish to prepare men and women to serve as ordained clergy are called *theological* seminaries rather than pastoral training academies or schools of pastoral care. The church gives ordained clergy the primary task of speaking the word of God to us and words about God for us. The pastor is first a theologian, second a preacher, and third a teacher. All other duties flow from the central task of speaking an intelligible word of God whether in counseling or in building up a community of faith. The community of faith will not be built up if the church does not develop the minds of the clergy as well as their hearts.

Whether we do our task as theologians well or poorly, faithfully or slovenly, it is inevitable that ordained clergy will be engaged in theology and that people will be influenced by that theology. Since all other activities of the church flow from theology implicitly or explicitly, poor theology eventually creates unhealthy and even unwholesome churches. Poorly developed or ill-informed theology leads to infective preaching and pastoral care. It can even result in hypocrisy and spiritual abuse. At a minimum, poor theology leads to fragmentation, fanaticism, or apathy. Too many American churches promote ignorance rather than a quest for truth. We must remember that God never said, "Thou shall not think."

### **A Living Doctrine:**

I disagree with those who claim that doctrine is no longer important. Doctrine is an element of theology that we need to pay attention to. In doing so, we need to remember that doctrine simply means the teaching of the church. Doctrine is the church's way of transmitting the wisdom of the ages to each generation of Christians.

If the handing down of the traditional teaching of the Church becomes dogmatic, doctrinaire and judgmental, though, it ceases to function as doctrine, because it ceases to be pedagogical. Doctrine assists us in the theological task of coming to understand God and human responsibility before God. It is not to be a tool to judge and divide Christians, nor a litmus test for faith. Doctrine is best understood as a way to learn from the insights of the past in order to live faithfully in the present while wisely preparing for the future.

Every church must have a doctrinal tradition in order to function and carry out its mission. Without doctrine, a church has nothing to hand down to the next generation other than habits, prejudices, and instincts. Without doctrine, congregations drift according to each cultural or intellectual fad. They are like individuals who “redefine” themselves every few years and never know who they are.

To use Heidegger’s terms, such churches exist without “being there” or being anywhere for that matter. Without doctrine, there is no way to instruct, guide, and nourish those who enter the community from outside. Without a rich and supple doctrinal tradition, there is nothing to unite the community of faith other than bureaucracy, inertia, habit, and class consciousness. Doctrine is necessary for a church to live in the flow of time.

However, doctrine can become a substitute for genuine spiritual growth if we use doctrinal statements merely to codify the past. It is important to remember that learning from the past is different than being confined by the past. Entering into dialog with those who have gone before is different than letting the dead give answers to the questions and longings of the living. Even timeless truths are meaningless when they become ossified relics, unchanging and unchallenging. Rather than drawing from the Marrow of Theology, as William Ames encouraged centuries ago, we too often give people dry and lifeless bones.

Doing theology and teaching doctrine in the church does not mean studying the fossils of a once-living community of faith; it means giving words and concepts that express the living faith of a community that extends through time and space. Like worship, prayer, and service, doctrine is always contemporary while drawing from the deep wells of tradition. Like worship, prayer, and service, doctrine always looks to the future. To quote from Jaroslav Pelikan, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” We can paraphrase that to say that doctrine is living faith while dead faith is doctrinaire. Doctrine is a living thing.

Just as language allows us to formulate and express our ideas while also shaping our ideas, doctrine expands and shapes our understanding of God and the church. In a sense, doctrine is a narrative that gives meaning to the church’s existence. It helps to give an identity to the community of faith and guides the community in its actions internally and externally. When doctrine does not make sense or when doctrine is simply ignored, the community no longer has a meaningful narrative that provides a way to make sense of its own existence and purpose in the world. Anomy sets in, followed by fragmentation as each preacher tries to recreate the church in his or her own image.

There is an integral connection between a church’s doctrine, its sense of being in the world, and its identity or integrity. As a community of faith changes as part of the flow of history and the gaining of new insights, its doctrine will change. There is nothing wrong with the fact that the Moravian church has changed over time or that its theology has changed, but the changes in a community’s theology should flow from within the community of faith. It is one thing to adjust your self-understanding to reflect ways in which you have grown and the world has changed; it is another to reject your old identity and adopt a new one. It is also another thing to simply drift along with the trends around you and let others define your identity.

Unless doctrine is organically connected to the faith tradition of the community, to the worship and rituals of the community, and to the daily life of its members, there will be fragmentation and confusion until the correspondence between doctrine, faith, and life is restored. There will be a time of Sifting. This, I assert, is part of our current difficulty.

**The Need to Improve Moravian Theology** I realize that in speaking of a holistic approach to theology, I am in some ways speaking to the choir. I found when I was a student at Moravian Theological Seminary that the faculty valued theological reflection and the integration of one's theology and the practice of ministry. Courses such as Clinical Pastoral Education and Credo help future pastors to bring their practice and doctrine together on a personal level. Students at the seminary were taught to minister out of their experience of the living God.

It is not enough, though, to teach pastors to do this personally. What is needed today is sustained and rigorous attention to the wider Christian theological tradition using the tools of modern thought, just as the *Ground of the Unity* calls us to do. But we also must become more intentional about examining our own theological tradition and its meaning in context. This is even more important now that Moravian clergy are less likely to come from Moravian backgrounds or be educated at Moravian Seminary.

But I think we have to admit that even those of us who were raised in Moravian congregations generally have a very shallow knowledge of Moravian doctrine. This is because the Moravian Church has neglected serious theological study and publication for decades. In the twentieth century, the church turned away from theological publication. The last systematic theology written by a Moravian was published a century ago. It is remarkable that the church has not translated into English and published the major works of Zinzendorf, our most prominent and provocative theologian. Where are the works in English on Moravian theology, Moravian hermeneutics, and even Moravian pastoral theology that one would expect from a church that values education?

The need for such publication is critical, and the church must look to the Seminary to fulfill this task. Compare our efforts to those of the Mennonite Church or the Quakers or even the Church of the Brethren and you will see that we are derelict in our duty. Other than Arthur Freeman's book on Zinzendorf's theology and Daniel Crew's translation of Rican's history, where do we look for knowledge and insight about our church?

This is not simply an academic matter. It is of vital concern to the church and its mission. Much of the recent controversy in the church was located in our mission program, which provides a window into the problem I see in the church. The Moravian Church is and should remain a missionary church. I agree with Hans-Beat Motel that this is indeed a central aspect of our heritage, identity, and purpose. However, it is vital that we critically examine our own mission history and theology rather than simply raise money and send out preachers. We need to articulate clearly the distinctive Moravian perspective on missions otherwise we cannot do missions with integrity. How can we justify sending missionaries out under the authority of the Moravian Church if those missionaries do not understand and value the theology of the Moravian Church? Where is our integrity in mission and ministry?

Moravians should be teaching the entire Christian world about faithful and effective cross-cultural ministry that enriches lives rather than destroys cultures. That is our heritage. Since we have a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural church, we need intense discussion about the proper motivation and methods of spreading the Gospel in a multi-cultural world. We also need on-going discussion of the question of contextual theology. How do we have a Moravian theology that is integrated with local cultures?

An intentional and informed approach to missiology should enrich our spiritual lives as well as improve our ministry around the globe, but instead of the hard work of articulating a Moravian missiology, we import theology, ideas, methods, and mistakes from other churches. It is time to stop exporting American anxieties and neuroses to the world. We need to concentrate instead on building communities of faith wherever we go and demonstrating to the world that the kingdom of God is different from globalization. We need to find ways to create cross-cultural community that respects the particularity of different cultures.

Missions is just one area of the church that needs greater theological attention. It is easy to let others set our theological and social agenda, following the playbook that they have already written. It is easy, but that would only increase our fragmentation and dissolution. We need to know who we are before we can know how to change in a meaningful way. We have many more resources for confronting the challenges that face us in the world today than most pastors realize. Moltmann and Bonhoeffer, Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard gained insights from the Moravian theological heritage. Why shouldn't we? If we put our minds to it, we can create a vision of the Moravian Church that can inspire and inform others, but it is going to take some hard work.

## Lecture 2:

### Proclaiming the Moravian Theological Heritage

**Introduction:** In the first lecture, I proposed that the American Moravian Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a poor steward of its theological heritage and that we are now suffering from that neglect. In this hour, I hope to convince you that there is hope for a more robust future if we are willing to reclaim and proclaim our heritage. I hope you will also see that this proclamation is faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, will strengthen our brothers and sisters in the church, and bring hope to others in the world. Obviously, we do not have the time this morning to examine our entire history, but I think we can explore the foundation of a distinctive Moravian theological perspective that has guided us for over five centuries and continues to be relevant.

First we will look at the Unity of the Brethren, highlighting five key aspects of the Unity's theology and praxis that we can learn from. Then we'll look at our Pietist heritage and Moravian theology in the era of Zinzendorf and Spangenberg. If you are able to return after lunch, we'll discuss ways to make this heritage a living tradition informed by modern theology. Our goal is to speak intelligibly about God from a Moravian perspective. What I hope you'll see is that in looking deeply into our heritage we will find important points of contact with modern thought and the needs of modern people.

**The Unity of the Brethren:** As you are no doubt aware, Moravian history is divided into two distinct periods: The Unity of the Brethren and the Renewed Church. Historians have raised serious questions about the connection of these two periods and institutions. But since we Moravians do define ourselves as the *Unitas Fratrum* and assert that the modern Moravian Church is continuation of the Unity founded by Brother Gregory in 1458, we should learn from that heritage. It is dishonest to wrap ourselves in the glory of the Unity without letting the heritage of the Unity inform our doctrine, polity, and identity. So, let's look at that remarkable community's theology with a view to what will be helpful today. I am grateful to Daniel Crew's Moses Lectures "Learning from Luke of Prague," and will be drawing upon his work this morning.

The history of the Unity falls into several distinct epochs characterized by the Unity's engagement with the wider world. Initially the Unity called for such a literal following of the Sermon on the Mount that members were required to separate themselves from most areas of feudal society. Gradually our spiritual ancestors saw the need for Christians to live in the world even if they were not to be worldly, and some of the original prohibitions were lifted or moderated. This idea that the church can change remains a cardinal theological principle for Moravians, and was written into the *Ground of the Unity*.

During its two centuries of existence the Unity produced dozens of statements that show a continual process of rethinking basic doctrine and practice in response both to changes in society and their growing understanding of scripture. For example, the Unity became an active, if cautious, participant in the Protestant Reformation, but they did not unite with any of the new Protestant churches. The leaders of the Unity repeatedly affirmed that the Unity had a distinctive voice that would be lost if the church lost its separate existence. Despite this commitment to a separate witness, though, the Unity did conform to many aspects of Protestantism.

To many observers, the differences between the Unity of Brother Gregory and that of Comenius are so great that it is hard to see them as the same church; however, we can identify several characteristics of the Unity that remained consistent and which can help us define our Moravian theology today. This morning we'll highlight five of these aspects: the rejection of the Constantinian

Church; the idea that faith must be completed in love; a clear and coherent understanding of the church; a pedagogical view of faith; and the distinction between essential and ministerial things.

**One, Rejection of Christendom** It is important for modern Moravians to understand and celebrate the fact that the Unity was the first Western church since the age of Constantine to reject a union of church and state. They adopted the Waldensian understanding that the Catholic church had been hopelessly corrupted by the Roman Empire after the conversion of Constantine. Unlike the Waldensians, though, the Unity established a strong ecclesiology and created the first truly voluntary *church* body with a separate priesthood and regular worship since about the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Modern Americans accept the voluntary principle in religion as a matter of course, but this was basically forced on most Christian bodies and traditions. For the Unity of the Brethren, separation of church and secular authority was a matter of principle from the beginning. It was the Unity that first brought this perspective into Protestantism. Consistently, the Unity criticized both Catholic and Reformation churches for their reliance on the coercive power of the state. They argued that religious faith must be a matter of personal conscience and personal commitment. Truth cannot be defended by the sword and stake.

This is something that Moravians today need to remember as a living tradition. Many Americans are looking for the government to support religious beliefs and institutions. Our church, which was born in the crucible of religious oppression and virtually destroyed by religious prejudice, has consistently opposed the unholy alliance of church and state. We should not mourn the passing of the Constantinian era. If we had a better sense of who we have been and who we should be, we would have been able to bring a gentle, but prophetic word in our congregations and neighborhoods during these tumultuous times.

**Second, Faith completed in Love:** The Unity of Brethren also insisted that it is wrong to separate faith from works, the way many Protestant confessions do. We need to recognize that unlike Luther, the founders of the Unity did not separate from the state church because of a crisis of *faith*. They established their own community in Kunwald because the dominant church was not *practicing* the faith it preached. The Unity taught that there is no true faith without works of love, and they were very critical of Luther and most of his followers.

Most Moravians today are unaware that the Unity did not endorse the doctrine of justification by faith alone that many people assume is the core of Protestant teaching. Though the Unity rejected the medieval Catholic idea that external acts of piety are the path to salvation (pilgrimages, penances, sacraments, and tithing), the theologians of the Unity agreed with the mainstream of Catholic teaching that faith must be completed in love. Our ancestors fought hard for this principle in the face of diligent opposition from other Protestant churches because they understood that this was central to the mission and message of the Unity.

Our spiritual ancestors would have been completely baffled by the American evangelical tendency to divorce belief in Jesus as savior from the effort to follow the teachings of Jesus as the giver of the new covenant. They gave priority to the synoptic gospels, not the Gospel of John, and they read Paul in light of Jesus' teachings, not the other way around. The Unity did not hand out "gospel tracts" with a "five-fold path to salvation," but if they had, ethics would have been part of the plan. In this regard, the Unity anticipated the perspective of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians like Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer. True faith must be made visible through concrete action in the world. Moreover, the Unity recognized that we cannot separate personal ethics from social ethics.

Many people today, including many Moravians, are baffled by our church's tendency to move quickly from theology to practice, but that is because for 500 years Moravians have taught that

praxis is part of our doctrine. We are a tradition that stresses *orthopraxy* rather than *orthodoxy*. It is not accidental we are passionately engaged currently in a discussion over issues of social justice and personal morality. By understanding the theological heritage of our church, we should be able to move beyond the clichés of contemporary American political debate and arrive at positions that are true to our identity, plain reason, and the gospel. We should not be ashamed to proclaim that faith is completed in love.

**Three, Ecclesiology:** The Unity of the Brethren had an ecclesiology that was clear, coherent, and effective. Much of our current crisis in the Moravian Church is the result of a doctrine of the church that is none of these things. We can learn much from our ancestors about church structure. We should have someone in charge of ministerial education; another in charge of theological publication; and a third who acts as an advocate for the clergy, just as the Unity once did.

Moreover, the Unity, more so than any other Reformation-era church, understood that it was a church within the Body of Christ rather than the Body of Christ itself. They saw themselves as a Unity, or brotherhood, of those who had voluntarily come together in order to seek their salvation and better serve Christ. They understood that the rules of the Unity were an attempt to manifest the Law of Christ, but they were also aware that separation from the Unity did not mean separation from Christ. In this way, they were also able to respect individual conscience while avoiding rampant individualism. Priests of the Unity were expected to live according to the rules that all had agreed upon, and they had little sympathy for charismatic figures who believed that their spiritual gifts or provocative ideas set them apart from the community.

The focus of life in the Unity was the local congregation as a part of a larger Unity. It is in the local community that the Word is preached and the sacraments are properly administered. It is in the local community that Christians learn to love one another and to be loved by others. It is in the local community that Christians learn to live according to the values of Christ rather than the values of a violent and possessive society. It is in the local community that individuals are formed into living images of Christ.

But this local community does not exist for its own sake. The Unity never endorsed Congregationalism or local autonomy. The church is not to make itself into a mirror image of the secular world which works by competition. A local congregation was to be an expression of the Unity of the Brethren throughout the world and a living expression of the mystical Body of Christ. Put bluntly, for five hundred years, the Moravian Church has understood that it is called to create communities of faith that are part of a vibrant Unity rather than convert isolated individuals. They called each other brother and sister and meant it.

**Four, Pedagogy:** Education was central to the identity, mission, and theology of the Unity. They pioneered universal education and Unity schools were valued by non-members as much as by members. We are proud of Jan Amos Comenius, but it is important to recognize that his genius was nurtured within the Unity because the Unity valued education, publication, and intellectual achievement. One wonders what would happen to a modern Comenius in our church today. We need to remember that God never said, “Thou shalt not think.” Christ called us to open our hearts and hands; not to close eyes and minds. The Unity knew this.

Unlike the Moravian Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least the American branch, the Unity valued its scholars greatly and charged them with the task of teaching and publishing on behalf of the Unity. Each generation had at least one scholar, often a bishop, whose task was to write defenses of the Unity for the public as well as to provide theological and pastoral guides for use in congregations.

Education was part of the fiber of the church, and there were theological assumptions behind the pedagogy of the Unity that we should carefully consider. For one thing, the Unity recognized that women are also made in the image of God and have a rational nature. For another, they understood that the essential goodness of creation and the image of God were not destroyed by the fall. All humans can learn and should learn. A pedagogical approach to faith assumes that people change and develop in their faith. It also assumes that what is true is true regardless of who said it. All truth comes from the Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit. A pedagogical approach to faith is strong and forthright but also gentle and open. It rejects the use of fear and violence in proclaiming the gospel. It assumes that God made us in such a way that we will seek him and find him, so long as there is someone to help us on the way and we are humble enough to listen and change.

It has been decades since the Moravian Church consciously and deliberately raised up educators from our midst and viewed them with the same respect as pastors and musicians. When you read Comenius, you realize how much richer and more lucid the Moravian tradition used to be. We need to recapture that commitment to life-long learning, engagement with secular knowledge, and dedication to the task of teaching as well as preaching.

**Five, Essentials and Ministerials:** The fifth thing we can learn from the Unity is by far the most important, and we'll spend extra time on it since it provided the title for these lectures. Luke of Prague, one of the great thinkers and leaders of the Unity, made an important contribution to the history of Christian doctrine that has the potential to transform the ecumenical church. Unfortunately, most churches are unaware of Luke's ideas because Moravians have not promoted them. Even more unfortunate, most Moravians are unaware of what Luke taught because we do not proclaim it to ourselves, but I believe that we can and should reclaim this distinctive teachings of the Unity.

What is it? That churches should carefully distinguish things that are essential to salvation from things that minister to salvation and from things that are incidental. This is a much more useful distinction than the latitudinarian cliché that Moravians today claim as our motto: In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things love. The so-called motto sounds nice and makes for good speeches at synod, but as we have discovered in recent years, it is no help in making concrete decisions.

Luke's tripartite understanding of essentials, ministerials, and incidentals, on the other hand, allows for nuances that are important when formulating doctrine and rules to live by. Incidental things are those things that are appropriate for local communities and even different churches. There is a lot of latitude in incidentals and they should only be imposed on local congregations if it is important for the overall welfare of the Unity. What the pastor wears is largely incidental. Whether coffee or juice for lovefeast is incidental. It is sinful to divide a community of faith or to break off relationships over incidentals. Sadly, though, people have gone to war over vestments, literally.

**Essentials:** Essentials are another matter. These go to the very core of Christianity, and it is vital that they be clearly and rationally articulated. My daughter is studying in Egypt, and she has found that Muslims constantly question her about such things as the Trinity and the Incarnation, and that she is poorly prepared to discuss essential ideas. No one in Egypt cares about the difference between Moravians and Baptists or how to serve communion. They want to know how she, as a Christian, understands the nature and work of God. It has been a great challenge for her. As a community of faith, we need to do a better job teaching the core of Christianity.

For Luke and the Unity, the essentials are of two kinds. Foremost is the work of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification. Luke connects these three aspects of God's action with the three persons of the Trinity: Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit, and he emphasizes that God's action

does not depend on our acknowledgment. God creates even if humans choose to believe that the world is an illusion. We are creatures of God even if we pretend that we are absolute in ourselves and that humans alone have value.

Likewise, Christ's work of redemption is an objective work of God. While Luke did not agree with Luther that we are justified by faith alone; he did agree that we are *saved* by Christ alone. Mission efforts that are based on the desire to "save souls" are misguided according to traditional Moravian teaching. We save no one. Christ alone saves. There is much more that can be said about this, but for this morning the important point to note is that it is the work of Christ that is essential; not a particular Christology.

The work of the Holy Spirit in nurturing, guiding, and furthering the work of salvation is also essential. It is an on-going work of making believers saints. Preaching that puffs people up with pride for having a "second baptism" in the Spirit is misguided according to traditional Moravian teaching because the essential work of the Holy Spirit is a gift of God that is on-going. Furthermore, holiness in Moravian teaching is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, not our self-discipline. Righteousness is God's work, not ours, although we do cooperate, according to Luke. So, according to the doctrine of the Unity, what is essential in Christianity is the work of God not our doctrine of God.

**Faith, Love, Hope** There is another triad of essentials, however, on the part of the believer. It is essential that humans respond *subjectively* to the work of God through faith, love, and hope. One of the persistent strengths of Moravian doctrine has been the fundamental conviction that the objective work of God and the subjective response of humans work in tandem. It is a dialectical *relationship* between the Creator and the Creature; the Redeemer and the Redeemed; the Sanctifier and the Sanctified that brings wholeness in this life and the next. According to the Unity, we do cooperate with the work of God to make spiritual reality apparent in our lives and the world. Moravian theology, traditionally, has emphasized this experiential and participatory aspect of faith. It is in our faith, love, and hope that we display the image of the Triune God most clearly.

Faith is an essential, but faith cannot be coerced. Faith involves the individual's belief in the work of the God, trust in the work of the God, and personal commitment to the work of God. The Unity refused to separate faith as belief from faith as trust and commitment, except to say that belief without commitment is not saving faith. Agreement with the propositions of Christian dogma is meaningless without personal commitment to the divine reality behind those dogmas. Faith, for the Unity, has an existential aspect. It is a way of living in this world.

So far, Luke sounds like Luther, and they have much in common. But Luke and the Unity go beyond Luther by proclaiming that Love is also essential. Love is not icing on the cake of belief, as it is in some churches. For traditional Moravian teaching, faith without love is not truly faith. Dogmatic precision and biblical certainty without love can be abusive. Members of the Unity experienced such abuse at the hands of the Inquisition and the crusaders.

Love was the Unity's way of understanding ethics. Love is faith in action rather than an emotion. The way Christians love Christ is not in repeating the name of Jesus like a Buddhist mantra; it is an intense effort to follow the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Christians show love for their brothers and sisters by seeking the good of others and forgiving as they have been forgiven. Christians show love for their enemies by refraining from violence and revenge. This was the teaching of the Unity, and we can learn from it today.

The final essential was Hope, which was generally placed last because Hope looks to the future. Christian hope, according to the Unity, is based on the work of God. Like Hasidic Jews, Moravians understood that if there is indeed one God who created all things and who gives himself in love to

what he creates, then no disaster can separate us from the ultimate goodness of God. There is even the hope that St. Paul wrote of, that eventually all of creation will be reconciled to the Creator. Hope does not deny the fear and pain of the moment; nor the meaninglessness of tragedy, but it does look beyond the fear and pain of today to the coming consummation. Hope is what allows us to survive the night, knowing that there will be a dawn.

Eschatological hope provided the resources to imagine a more just and humane world. Eschatology was not divorced from the life of the community. The Unity avoided the fanatical belief that humans could inaugurate the millennial age, but the vision of the New Jerusalem offered guidance on how the church in the present age *should* live. The potential of eschatological hope to inspire the quest for social justice and the universal spread of the Gospel reached its apogee in the work of Comenius.

Much of what I've said is part of the broad catholic tradition of Christianity, but what makes the Unity's doctrine uniquely helpful is Luke's view that these *alone* are essential: the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit along with our faith, love, and hope. If we have only these; we have everything needed. If we do not have these; no dogma or institutional program will suffice.

**Ministerials** Luke goes on to state that there are many things that minister to these essential things. Ministerial are visible, tangible things in this world that God has provided to mediate what is essential. Many of these ministerial things are the things that churches mistakenly think are essential and try to impose on everyone. They are frequently the things that Christians passionately fight over and even sometimes kill over. They are also things that seminaries spend much of their time talking about and testing students on. They are the Bible, Sacraments, Church, Doctrine, Priesthood, and Pastoral Care.

It is wrong to dismiss such things as non-essential as the binary thinking of the motto would do. There is a world of difference between the Bible and Sacraments as ministerial things and music or vestments as incidentals. Ministerials are mediators of the sacred and should be treated with great respect. They are forms of authority in the Christian community. But they should never be confused with what is essential. They are sacred because they point us to what is essential. They are not sacred in themselves. They are sacred because they serve to make the objective work of the Trinity subjectively available to flesh and blood humans. They are sacred because they help us to have faith in the living God, to love our neighbors and our enemies, and to hope against hope.

Churches can become abusive, sinful, and dangerous when they make ministerials into essentials. When the Bible becomes more important than the living God to whom the Bible points, then the Bible ceases to be sacred, according to the Brethren. After all, the Inquisitors and Satan himself quoted Scripture. When the words of the Bible become more important to people than the Word of God communicated in the Bible, then the Bible becomes a tool of oppression and even evil. This happened when the Bible was used to promote and defend slavery. It happens when the Bible is used to promote and defend child abuse and hatred of women. It happens when the Bible is used to encourage hatred, violence, and greed rather than justice, mercy, and peace. It is important that Moravians always remember Paul's teaching that the letter is dead but the spirit gives life.

The same can be said for the Church, priesthood, and even the Sacraments. When the church and its clergy are more concerned about institutional survival than the witness and ministry of the church, then the church ceases to be sacred. The Unity recognized that the church must be self-critical. Every aspect of the church must be subject to loving criticism and evaluation. Each Moravian has the obligation to examine and criticize his or her own heart, using the resources of the community to keep faith, love, and hope alive. According to the teaching of our ancestors, if our church ceases to lead people to deepen their faith, love, and hope, then we are no longer a church.

**Pietist Heritage:** In addition to rediscovering and using the theological heritage of the Unity of the Brethren, we need to reclaim our Pietist heritage. For too long, we have accepted the picture of Pietism painted by theologians opposed to the movement. Some of the criticisms of Pietism as subjective, other worldly, and moralistic is when we see what the movement became not what it was in the beginning. The Pietist tradition can be a very helpful resource in addressing contemporary controversies.

**Pietism:** We do not have time here for all the details of Pietism, but it is good to remember that Pietism was a reaction to a situation in which faithfulness had become equated with doctrinal uniformity, divisiveness and bitterness. This was combined with a general ineffectiveness in addressing the needs of ordinary people. Social and family dysfunction were high and worship attendance was low. Does this sound familiar?

The Pietists argued that the church was wasting its efforts in pointless and destructive doctrinal disputes rather than addressing the physical and spiritual suffering of ordinary people. They outlined a pragmatic program of church and social reform that called for more reading of the Bible, formation of small groups within the church for education and support; recognition that Christianity is a matter of practice, not of knowledge; and the eradication of ignorance and poverty. The Pietists did not separate evangelism from social ministry. They were part of a single program of living according to the call of the Gospel. We can see much of the Pietist program in the so-called “new paradigm churches” today, but the Pietists would challenge those churches to greater attention to social justice.

Two of the central theological ideas of Pietism were that religious experience is a mode of knowledge and that there is a hope for a better time. Rather than frightening people into submission, Pietist preachers and writers tried to lift people’s eyes to a new horizon and called them to work for the kingdom of God that was already becoming visible. In its own way Pietism recaptured the Unity of the Brethren’s teaching that the essence of Christianity is faith, love, and hope.

Pietists also used mystical literature to enrich the spiritual life of Protestant churches. Especially important were the writings of a cobbler named Jakob Böhme, who taught that as believers are taken up through the divine fire of God’s love in Christ they attain true knowledge and are united in mystical marriage to Sophia or wisdom. Böhme believed that the institutional church may actually hinder the soul’s union with God and the manifestation of God’s Spirit in the world. Radical Pietists, drawing on the mystics, viewed true faith, love, and hope in the face of opposition as better indicators of the presence of the spirit of God than institutional power and doctrinal uniformity. Gottfried Arnold, for instance, had a positive view of various heretics in the history of Christianity especially Origen, Pelagius, Peter Abelard, Peter Waldo, and, you guessed it, John Hus. Arnold’s history of Christianity was a major influence on both Zinzendorf and Spangenberg.

**Zinzendorf:** This brings us to Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Pietism profoundly shaped Moravian theology and mission, but Zinzendorf charted a new and creative course that joined Lutheran theology and liturgy with radical Pietism.

There is no need to repeat what you have heard many times about Zinzendorf and his ideas, and time is running short, but let me say that the more I have studied Zinzendorf the more convinced I am that the entire church needs to rediscover the depth and breadth of Zinzendorf. We should not look at Zinzendorf and his era with nostalgia. Nostalgia is not the answer for our current problems. We cannot recreate the past, but the more we learn from Zinzendorf, the more we discover how modern he was. In fact, he may be considered the grandfather of modern theology because of his influence on Schleiermacher.

Let me take just a moment to highlight five Zinzendorf ideas that can help us in our self-understanding and in charting our future direction as a community of faith. They are Heart Theology, Christocentrism, Theology of the Cross, Maternal Imagery for God, and Community as a theological principle.

**One, Theology of the Heart.** Heart, for Zinzendorf, is not the seat of emotion; it is the center of the self. Heart is where thought, will, and emotion are united into a whole. I think this is what Jesus spoke of in the sermon on the Mount. It is what Zinzendorf learned from Pietism and also what led him away from a type of Pietism that was oppressing people with fear of damnation and delusions of righteousness. Zinzendorf knew that true faith is destroyed by hypocrisy and deception. True love is destroyed by pretense and self-righteousness. True hope is destroyed by fear and resentment. True ethics flow from the heart not a law book.

If we recapture our theology of the heart, we will discover that we do have a message for a suffering world. All people have a heart, and most people have a broken heart. Many have a twisted heart. This is where the struggle for salvation, for health, for justice, and for joy and peace is engaged. By returning to a theology of the heart instead of a theology of doctrinal purity, we will be able to draw upon the insights of the best modern theologians, ethicists, and psychologists. Modern theology is concerned more with the human self rather than metaphysics. By returning to a theology of the heart, we Moravians can connect with the ideas of Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Moltmann, and David Ford. Reclaiming and proclaiming our theological is not a retreat to the past, but a means to engage the present with integrity and vigor.

**Two, Christocentrism.** As Karl Barth once noted, Zinzendorf was one of the great Christocentric theologians of all time and as such was a true ecumenist. Zinzendorf took seriously the early church's teaching that Christ was fully human and fully divine. He quoted early Christian hymns that sang of the creator becoming a creature; of God lying in a cradle; of Yahweh suffering on the cross. For Zinzendorf all human beings, in fact all of creation, are already in relationship to Christ because Christ is the creator and redeemer. The mission of the Church is to help people rejoice in this relationship and to let the teachings of Jesus transform individual and social lives.

Any approach to missions and congregational life that violates the essential nature of Jesus is not Christocentric. I think we can also use a more complete Christology to wean us away from spiritualities that reduce Christ to our best buddy who confirms our self-deceptions and greed instead of the Lord who challenges us with the message of radical, sacrificial forgiveness. Christocentrism, for Moravians, means that the complete picture of Christ guides our spiritual, missiological, and social lives.

We also need to recapture the importance of the Incarnation when discussing Christocentrism. Zinzendorf and his followers believed that the Incarnation blessed all human life. The body and mind are as important in Moravian theology as the soul is. In traditional Moravian thought, God became a human being so that we might become truly human. This message of the goodness of humanity is needed today as thousands turn away from Christianity because of its traditional rejection of the body and sexuality. Our ancestors could preach, talk, and even sing about the goodness of human life, work and sexuality; why can't we in this supposedly enlightened age?

**Three, Theology of the Cross:** One of the most controversial aspects of Zinzendorf's theology is the focus on the suffering of Christ. The Passion was a dominant theme of Moravian liturgy, hymnody, and preaching until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If we are going to understand ourselves and our theology, we must look more carefully at this theology of the Passion rather than simply reject in embarrassment.

Here again, we have something for modern people. The success of Mel Gibson's movie on the Passion points to the desire and need of many people to contemplate the sufferings of Christ. I believe that Zinzendorf offered a much healthier perspective on the Passion than Gibson's film, which I personally find to be quite disturbing. I have written a book on the community of the cross, so let me just say that for Zinzendorf the death of Jesus was the atonement for sins and more. It was the proof of the complete humanity of the savior and the complete identification of the Creator with the suffering of his creatures. The Passion is an event in the life of God that gives hope to all who suffer.

Moltmann has grasped Zinzendorf's meaning clearly in his own faith and theology. For two centuries we Moravians worshiped a Crucified God, and this message of divine suffering resonates today. Rene Girard has argued that the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus is that God became a victim, and therefore the followers of Christ can identify with all victims of injustice and violence in the world. Our theology of the cross can save us from arrogance, complacency, and abusive zeal while addressing the deepest spiritual needs of our people.

**Four, Maternal language for God.** Drawing upon the writings of Böhme and Arnold, Zinzendorf tried to bring recapture early Christianity's perspective that we understand God more fully when we employ maternal language and imagery in addition to masculine terms. For over a quarter of a century Moravians sang litanies to the Holy Spirit as mother and they honored Mary as the mother of God. For nearly a century Moravian missionaries used mother language to communicate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to tribal peoples.

This use of maternal language was connected to the Moravian focus on the spiritual life of children and to women's leadership in the community. In our time, when so many are abandoning Christianity because of its historic misogyny and when people are fascinated by books of pseudo-history like The Da Vinci Code because of its positive view of sexuality and femininity in the divine, the Moravian Church can offer a healthy Christian message. By drawing upon our own heritage and resources we can offer the world a vision of faith and devotion that embraces rather than erases masculinity and femininity. It is a message that can help overcome some of the abuse of men and women that we see in America and around the world.

**Five, Community.** In contrast to much of American Protestantism, Zinzendorf understood that Christianity is not about individual salvation in isolation; it is about answering the call of Christ to enter the heavenly community. It might be possible to have faith all alone, although I doubt it. It might even be possible to have hope all alone, but I doubt it. It is nearly impossible to demonstrate love without a flesh and blood community. Moravian eschatology has emphasized the heavenly community and the New Jerusalem where shalom reigns. The church should be where this vision is nurtured and enfolded.

Zinzendorf's vision for the Moravian Church was not a bureaucratic, institutional church, but a world-wide network of communities gathered for mutual love and support. These were to be communities where individuals were able to become who God created them to be rather than being enslaved by fear, ignorance, selfishness, and self-deceit. We need to restore the centrality of community to our church and to our theological inquiry. Here is where the intellectual life of pastors and professors must be brought into connection with the practical life of Christians. We must learn from each other, teach each other, and bear one another's burdens. Here we see one of the strongest connections between the Unity of the Brethren and Zinzendorf's *Brüdergemeine*. We are called to be a community of faith, a community of love, and a community of hope.

**Conclusion:** I thank you for your patience and attention during a long morning of lectures. Believe it or not, we have barely begun to discuss the wonderful richness of the Moravian

theological heritage. I wish we had time to look at our current doctrinal statements, especially the *Ground of the Unity*, and see how they flow authentically from the Moravian heritage. I hope that today you have seen that the streams of our history emphasized that faith is practical, experiential, biblical, and communal rather than cognitive, dogmatic, individualistic, and divisive. The Moravian theological heritage defies the polarizing categories of liberal and conservative.

I hope that we will engage in serious discussion of what are essentials, ministerials, and incidentals as well as Zinzendorf's provocative and evocative theology. Most of all, I hope that we can restore our commitment to community by celebrating the work of God as Creator, Redeemer, and the one who blesses as we learn to live in faith, in love, and in hope. We Moravians need start thinking and talking about salvation again. For centuries we have known that salvation is release from anxieties and fears. It is release from self-doubt, self-righteousness, and self-assertion. Salvation means that we are redeemed from our isolation and united us in a loving community of faith. Salvation lifts our eyes to the bright horizon where we can see the beauty of the dawn. This is the message that we can take to a suffering world; to heroin addicts, prostitutes, slaves of the global economy, those huddled in fear, the hopeless, despairing, and grieving. There is no greater wisdom than Paul's doctrine that three things remain: faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is love, but in our day, what is most needed is hope.