

Recovering our heritage: envisioning our future

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Recovering our heritage

We live in a problematic but intriguing era, when the pronouncement from the heavenly throne in Revelation, "Behold I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5) would sound like the pronouncement of a cultural analyst or a futurist. We live in a time of rapid change, instability and multiplying problems. Yet as we look back at history there were many periods more difficult to live in than ours and if we trust the God who loves us, in all situations he will work with us for good (Rom. 8:28).

The church is faced with the task of living in, maintaining its faith in and speaking in a relevant way to a developing global society with its economic, political, ecological and population problems. The world is pluralistic in politics, economics and religion, which interjects complexity into attempted solutions. The church is faced with this task at a time when culture no longer supports religion, economic resources are diminishing, other religions are competing to answer spiritual longing, and the means by which religious reality is maintained have been seriously affected (the authority of religious institutions and traditions and the possibility of creating a community supportive of faith in the church and in the family). The responsibility now falls more on the individual believer. For example, in some recent Catholic literature (1) the need to interiorize values and faith within the individual rather than the individual depending upon the church for this has been stressed. The individual must be able to sustain faith and make Christian decisions, functions previously performed by the church. Moreover, the literature on the developmental stages of faith which is now appearing acknowledges personal appropriation and individuation of faith as an essential part of maturation (2).

Church and theology are responding and seeking to cope with the political, economic and social movements of the time, to rethink bases of authority, to involve laity in the church's ministry - necessitated economically and sound theologically, to preserve and save whatever of community can be saved. They are seeking to help laity and pastors alike deal with stress, and to reach deep into the experiential realities of the faith and interiorize Christian values in ways that provide transcendent resources for living in a secular and pluralistic society. But this is not a simple matter, and political and religious movements to the right seek to recreate the old ways and simpler approaches.

The issues of contemporary society are not really all that new. The Enlightenment even in the 17th century began to pose many of the questions which today affect our understanding of the authority of religious traditions and institutions. The Ancient and Renewed Moravian

Churches, as did others, struggled with the issue of what it is essential to believe within the tradition. The Ancient Moravian Church, in changing historical circumstances, formulated different views about its relationship with society and politics. Zinzendorf called the Renewed Church to think seriously about the issues posed for faith by nascent biblical criticism and the philosophies of the culture...and sought to fill the experiential emptiness of the established churches with the reality of the risen Saviour. This reminds us of the comment in Ecclesiastes that "there is nothing new under the sun". What may be new to us has likely in some fashion been dealt with before.

In our individual lives, we deal with life out of the accumulated wisdom, or foolishness, of our life experience. Perhaps we may also have absorbed some of the wisdom of others, contemporaries or ancestors. If we have not, then we must live only out of the limitations of our own experience, conducting the same experiments to which others may have already formulated solutions. Life is really too short to seek wisdom within the confines of one's own individual existence.

Whatever problems the church and Christians must cope with today, the Christian community stands within a 3000-year stream of living experience. One thousand years of this represents the history of life and experience with God embodied within the biblical material, and 2,000 years represents the history of the church. Our own denomination has behind it a 500-year history. What a wealth of life experience, if it is only appropriated. Thus to adequately envision our future we need to recover our heritage...and to recover it in a way that is contemporarily usable.

Essentials, ministerials, incidentals

From accumulation of life experience one begins to be able to sort out the important from the unimportant, the essential from the peripheral. This seems to have happened even from the early days of the Ancient Moravian Church. Amedeo Molnar, one of the foremost authorities on the Ancient Unity, points out: "The Brethren of the Unitas considered the recognition of the difference among the things essential, ministrative, and incidental and the understanding of the theological importance of their mutual relationship and non-mixing, practically during the whole time of their historical existence, a special expression of God's favor which they had received. The staking out of these differences was to them the most precious principle and, in its consequences, also most revolutionary.." (3).

The "essential things" have to do with relationship with God and salvation. "Ministerial things" serve what is essential and by "incidental things" are meant "orders, regulations and customs pertaining to Christian piety" (Struple, p. 270). This caused the Ancient Church to focus on the centrality of relationship with God, and the Christian's response to him in faith, hope and love; to know that this was the real source of Christian life; and to place doctrine and liturgy over which Christians long argued in the category of the ministerials. There is no more important insight which comes from our heritage, an insight which has affected the character of the life and faith of the Moravian from the fifteenth century to the present.

The theology of Zinzendorf in the Renewed Moravian Church preserved these insights, though recasting them into a Christocentric form, adding to them personal insights gained from his life and his response to issues

posed by the Enlightenment. True religion was "heart religion", the relationship of the believer with the crucified Saviour and the experience of his Atonement. Religion is not dependent on concepts and reason, for that limits religion to those with education and intellectual capacity. Relationship is available to all, even to the infant and the senile. Concepts and worship forms are the response to the heart relationship with the Saviour which are determined by the historical and cultural contexts in which they develop, and therefore vary. Thus if concepts, theological systems and liturgical forms are understood to be ultimate expressions of truth, they will divide Christians. It is only the religion of the heart that unites, and this relationship with the Saviour is a gift of God's grace, which is not in human control (4).

Theological reflection then according to the Moravian heritages has a very distinct purpose which is quite different from "Arriving at the truth". This was well-expressed by the Joint Theological Commission of the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church in America in its report to the Provincial Elders Conferences of November 27, 1979: "Theological reflection in the Moravian tradition is not to be understood as an attempt to arrive at final answers but is a way of thinking about God and His relationship to us so that He can, through His Spirit, draw us to Himself, and to His Son, and we can know Him as the Source of our living. Such reflection should lead to sharing of ideas and experiences, articulation of our faith, new levels of trust toward each other as persons through whom God partially discloses Himself in various ways, stimulation of the Christian life and our attentive waiting upon God for His clarification of our understanding."

Faithful life

Both the Ancient and Renewed Moravian Churches began in movements which sought to restore the quality of the Christian life. The Ancient Church, drawing on the Sermon on the Mount, the Taborite movement and to some extent medieval asceticism, tried to develop a style of Christian purity, somewhat isolated from its society. Throughout its 200-year history, it then had to come to terms with ways it could become a part of its society (without qualifying its essential values) and modify its discipline in the light of new understandings. It was able to do this because it knew that "ministerials" and "incidentals" all serve the "essentials". Though it did not at first have the strong emphasis on grace which was part of the Second Reformation, it knew that how one lives must grow out of and serve one's relationship with God.

The Renewed Moravian Church was strongly related to both Lutheran tradition and Pietistic developments. Zinzendorf felt that he had rediscovered Luther (5) and in his emphasis on grace as the basis of life he was quite Lutheran. One of the concerns of the Ancient Moravian Church about the Lutheran movement was its lack of discipline, but for the Renewed Church this was supplied through Pietism.

Zinzendorf was clear that the Christian life must begin with the resources of the relationship with God (Christ) and the new reality (creation) which comes into being in Christians because of this. Zinzendorf points out that "We can do nothing, before we have something." "The Beginning is not to be made with Doing what our Saviour has commanded: For, as has been often mention'd before, whoever will

begin with Doing, when he has yet no strength in Spirit, but is dead and blind, has no Grace, has not yet perceived that Power of God in his Heart, but stands still upon his own Bottom and Strength, he can do nothing at all, but whatever he doth in his own Activity, is but like a Cobweb, i.e. good for nothing.

The Foundation he lays, is too shallow, and that will sink him into deeper Perdition, the more he fancies himself to stand upon a sure Bottom.

We can do nothing, before we have something.

We must have Grace and Forgiveness in the Blood of Christ. We must first know why he is the Lord of the whole Universe, so that every particular Soul must experience, why he is her Lord.

And every Soul must be able to say with the utmost Cheerfulness. He is my Lord" (6).

Contrary to the "moral struggle" characteristic of Halle Pietism, Zinzendorf's approach to life was a happy one. In a play on words he speaks of morality and behaviour as not a *Muss* and *Last* (compulsion and burden), but a *Lust* (a pleasure). It is a joy, grace and privilege (7). As Paul recognized, to legislate morality is only to demand of persons what one cannot do because of one's human constitution, and ultimately this frustrates one and causes one to rebel (8). Church discipline then is not morality legislated, but rather it is an expression of the reality which lies at the heart of the individual and congregation, and facilitates the order of their lives: "As long as Church-Discipline consists of nothing but Orders, which lie already in the Minds of all discreet Brethren and Sisters; which the Brethren and Sisters cannot but be always agreed in, because they are Orders *stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae*, it being impossible that the Congregation could subsist a Day, if Things did not go in this Order, according to these Principles; so long it is excellent" (9).

This was the intent of the Brotherly Agreement.

The Christian life is then to be lived out not in a carefully studied and introspective fashion, but in a spontaneous living out of inner realities:

"But what is the proper Advantage, the Preference, which we have above other even blessed Dispensations, Religions or Institutions, which likewise are edifying; It is the Speediness of the Matter, this is it properly, the Plan.

The Church is a school of the Children of Wisdom; a nigh Opportunity to get that from the Saviour, which we stand in need of; it is the Happiness of walking in this World, as He also walked; we get such a Nature, that without much Thinking, without going far about or pursuing many Considerations, without consulting Books, we can really and effectually behave so, as if we had studied it; it flows of itself. Therefore the Scripture speaks so much of the Divine Nature, of the Mind of Christ; Let this Mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Phil. 11,5. for Things are so as the Apostle says, (Eph. v. 1) Be ye Followers of God, as dear Children. Not such Followers as Students or Sectaries are of some one; but if ye will be Followers of God, of that God who was manifested in the Flesh, be it then in the same Way as a Child is a Follower or Successor of his Father; so that one says, "He is the Father's own Picture", he perpetuates the Memory that there was once such a Man in the World, who lives still in his Children and Posterity by the Likeness and Family-Face: So likewise Jesus the Son of God, who once has been in the World, lives now manifestly in all those in whom He is form'd, till He shall come again; so that one may see still that there has been once

a Saviour in the World; that there has been a Man who himself was the essential and living Law of God, who had it in his Heart, and needed not first to study and meditate much upon it..." (10).

Zinzendorf was not so naive as to feel that the new reality in the life of the Christian completely transformed one. One always remained a justified sinner. By acting simply and spontaneously one could become aware of all that was within one, even those elements which were part of our humanity and not an expression of the new creature in Christ. When one knew what was within one, then one could deal with it. Most importantly, allowing Christ through the Spirit to transform one's heart was the appropriate approach to dealing with behaviour. But Zinzendorf also was not overly pessimistic about human nature. The Atonement of Christ had affected the whole world, removing it from the results of original sin and breaking the power of Satan over life. The Spirit, through the suffering of Christ, has been poured out on the world, working in each person and nation in ways and times right for them. Sin after the Atonement happens by relapse of humans into their original situation (11). Thus the nature of children could be approached very positively in the Moravian educational systems as something that could be built on, and the concern for all was to prevent the relapse, or where it had happened to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in bringing the person back under Christ's Lordship, free from the power of Satan, and to allow the Spirit to bring into reality the new being.

Moral behaviour could be expressed quite simply as doing what is suitable to Jesus: "Since the Lord Jesus became a man, so is all what the Saviour according to his heart has expressed to be thought and done moral; and what his heart rejects...that is immoral...Now what is suitable to Jesus decided morality"(12).

Zinzendorf describes the effect of the perpetual look of Jesus in our hearts: "Here there is no need to tell people, do not steal, do not get drunk, do not lead a disorderly life, do not be so fond of the creature, do not set your heart on this and that, do not be hostile. Now there is no need to preach one point of morality after the other at a person, not even of the most refined and subtle. Even though a person were to be most adept in the matter and become an example to the whole country, still there would be no need for reasoning. For every loving look from the Saviour indicates our morality to us throughout our whole life: one dissatisfied, one sorrowful, one painful look from the Saviour embitters and makes loathsome to us everything that is immoral, unethical, and disorderly, all fleshly-mindedness, as often as it is necessary.

I suppose that we remain men; it is a part of the state of sin not to think more highly of ourselves. But we shall succeed, if our Head but look now and then, as some interval, upon us...

And when you have once caught sight of the beauty of His suffering, so that in all your life you will not be able to get rid of that sight, then He conducts you with His eyes wherever He will have you; then with His eyes He teaches you what good and evil is. Your knowledge of good and evil lies in His eyes, not in the tree from which Adam poisoned himself, from which Adam ate his curse" (13).

What then characterizes Zinzendorf's approach to the Christian life is simplicity, utter simplicity. One could describe it as responding to the suffering Saviour and allowing him to conduct one's life. Both in theological reflection and ethics Spangenberg's hymn expresses the character of the Moravian approach:

When simplicity we cherish,
Then the soul is full of light;
But that light will quickly vanish,
When of Jesus we lost sight...

Who in Jesus Christ abideth,
And, from self-dependence free,
In naught else but Him confideth
Walks in true simplicity (14).

Faithful words

Words need to bear some relationship to reality, otherwise they are meaningless and empty, merely word-games. Christian words have two primary functions: to assist persons in interpreting life (identify what they are experiencing) and to function as mediators of new life-possibilities (which is what the words of the Gospel do). In the interpreting of what is going on in a person's life one soon becomes aware of whether the words applied to our experiences are true or not. One may say, "What you are saying does not fit; it does not describe my experience." In the second case, where words offer new possibilities, one cannot adequately test out their reality until one has given them some time to bring about what they promise. Thus Paul was confident that the power of God could be communicated in his proclamation of the Gospel, but he wanted to exercise care that he did not use words that were merely "lofty", but were faithful to God and would ultimately be verified in Spirit and power (I Cor. 2:1-5).

In the early church, the words the Christian church used about its Gospel were changed to some extent as the church moved into various cultural contexts. In I Cor. 9:19-23, Paul points out how he became all things to all men-- "for the sake of the Gospel". Thus we find that at times he expresses himself in Jewish terminology (e.g., Galatians) and at other times in the terminology of Hellenistic religion (e.g., I Corinthians and Colossians). However, the changes in words descriptive of the Gospel were not merely accommodations to the problems of communication. In several cases the church had learned by its historic experience that new words and new descriptions were needed and old ones were no longer adequate. For example, the delay of the Second Coming of Jesus and the disappointment of the form of future hope embodied in Christian Apocalyptic thought caused some to reinterpret eschatology, so that in the Gospel of John all that had been expected in the future was to be experienced now in Christ. Of course, this did not mean that Apocalyptic everywhere died out. The book of Revelation, reaffirming Apocalyptic, was probably written about the same time as the Gospel of John. Another interesting example is that of Christology in the early church. It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus' disciples only understood him in a limited way during his ministry with them. However, after the Resurrection and Pentecost their understanding of him grew and they began to say things about him that went beyond their previous understanding of him.

The Christian church has several choices with regard to its theological language. It may qualify, interpret and re-word its language to bring it into conformity with reality, it may make its words "faithful", or it may

seek within the confines of a close-knit community, withdrawn from all that will challenge the reality of its words, to give its words a reality they would not have for persons confronted with ordinary life-processes. This latter is what the Christian community represented by the book of Revelation did. It represents a Christian community, totally withdrawn from its world and society, maintaining by its own inner life the reality of its words...and shoving off the ultimate verification of them to the end of time-- a very neat trick which bypasses all need for verification. There is a truth to the ultimate verification being eschatological, but most of the New Testament tradition speaks of at least an "earnest" or foretaste of God's reality in the present.

To seek words about life, Gospel and God which are faithful to reality does not mean that individuals can judge all experience by the narrow stream of their own lives, nor does it fail to recognize that perceptions of life may be different and be expressed differently in various situations. For example, Luke and Paul seemed to have different types of religious experience: for Luke this was symbolized in the Spirit and the Resurrection of Jesus; for Paul this was symbolized by including the cross of Jesus with whatever was experienced of the power of God, an approach which Paul seems to have felt was more "realistic". Though the issue cannot be simply settled and though some aspects of reality will always elude our description, we must try to make our words "faithful".

Zinzendorf gave great attention to this. When only twenty-three years old, he produced "Thoughts on Speech and the Use of Words" (15). Since he came to understand the essentials of Christianity as an experience of relationship with the Saviour and his Atonement, he sought for ways to communicate experience. As was customary of the well-educated at that time, he was conversant with a number of languages, including classical languages. So he frequently chose words from other languages which would serve better to communicate experience than some German words. He expressed a preference for the "pictorial language" of the Bible. He composed poetry and hymns (16). He called Jesus Christ our "Bridegroom", God our "Father", and the Holy Spirit our "Mother". His extensive use of the imagery of marriage to describe the relationship between Christ and the church and his descriptive language about the sufferings and wounds of Christ, derived to some extent from Lutheran piety and mysticism, are all to be understood as attempts to communicate the experience of God to the believer. His extensive rethinking of the nature and limitations of theological reflection and his founding all on Christology are attempts to be "faithful" in words.

What follows here is then an attempt to raise questions about our words in three areas of theology: the place of Christology in the Moravian Church, and the areas of eschatology and religious experience.

In the area of Christology, the evidence of the New Testament is varied. The Synoptic Gospels present a Jesus who confronts persons with the Kingdom of God and teaches his disciples about his heavenly Father. The Gospel of John presents a Jesus who is conscious of his own preexistence, speaks openly about his coming from heaven (e.g., 6:38, 16:28), has the power to lay down and take up again his own life (10:17ff), and returns to heaven to prepare there a place for his disciples (14:1-3). He is "the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (14:7). Thus John is Christocentric, even including a Prologue to the Gospel which speaks of "the Word's" role in creation and Old Testament history. While the Johannine presentation of the Gospel is Christocentric, that of the Synoptics is Theocentric. Paul at first glance is quite

Christocentric, with a very high Christology. However, when one reads closely, one finds something else. In the opening addresses of Paul's letters those to whom the letters are written are sometimes identified as "saints in Christ", but where the ultimate ownership of the church is mentioned, one finds the phrase "Church of God". When Paul speaks of the divisions of the Corinthians he also criticizes those who say, "I belong to Christ" (I Cor. 1:12). This strange remark which has puzzled exegetes seems to find its explanation in I Cor. 1:26ff where Paul indicates that "He (God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus... therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord (God)'" In I Cor. 15:20-28, Paul indicates that Christ is now in the process of extending his reign over every rule and authority and power. "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone." In Judaism there was the idea of a preliminary Messianic Kingdom before the final establishment of God's Rule, and this seems to be the way Paul understands the time between Christ's historical ministry and the End and final Kingdom of God. Once Christ has completed the extension of his Rule he then steps back and delivers over all to the Father, for this is the purpose for which he came: to bring all to the Father. Thus for Paul, Christocentrism, if one may speak of his views this way, is a necessity of this age because of what God has chosen to do in Christ, but the final goal and end of Christology is Theology. Of course, these comments of Paul were before the development of Trinitarian doctrine.

Zinzendorf is sometimes spoken of as the most thorough-going and consistent Christocentric of all time. One contemporary writer calls him "the noble 'JesusFreak'" (17). Without taking time to cite evidence for every detail, Zinzendorf understood that God could not be grasped by human reflection or perception, only by revelation. Therefore, the only aspect of the Godhead or Person of the Trinity who has been directly experienced (before the sending of the Spirit) is the Son. The rest of the Trinity is only disclosed through conversation with the Son. In his Catechism for the Heathen, he first deals with the whole of Christian faith and life in terms of the Son. It is only when the questions turn to Baptism that the Father and Spirit are also mentioned. A question then asks, "Who is that all?" The answer is that the Father is the Father of Jesus and that he is too high to be described. Jesus will tell the person about him when Jesus' Father is his Father. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' Father's Helper and the baptized have him for a Mother (18).

Zinzendorf relies heavily on Johannine theology and in his Christology prefers the Gospel of John to Paul. He sees John as the climax of Christological development and insight in the N.T. literature and in his second attempt at a translation of the N.T. he places the Gospel of John first as a key to the rest (all other books are arranged in the order of what he understood to be their historical origin). Jesus was God's agent in Creation and thus the whole world and all souls belong to him. He was also God's agent in Old Testament history and wherever God was experienced in the Old Testament, this was really an experience of Jesus. The Father in himself could not be experienced. Wherever anyone has ever had a legitimate experience of the God who is the creator of the world, this was an experience of Jesus. Thus in the Catechism for the Heathen Zinzendorf begins by identifying people's experiences of a Creator with Jesus, telling them who the Creator is.

When Jesus, after his death and resurrection, ascended to heaven, he then took a rest from his labors. The Holy Spirit had been poured out on the world through his Atonement, and now the Father was working through the Spirit, subjecting all to the Saviour. (However, Jesus was still being experienced through the Spirit, the mark of conversion for Zinzendorf was for the person to gain a glimpse of the Saviour, and the Christian life was to be directed by the Saviour). When ultimately the Spirit brings all to the Saviour in manners and times that are right for them, then the Kingdom will be handed over by the Father to the Son, and the Son will reign forever. Thus Zinzendorf explicitly disagrees with what Paul said in I Cor. 15 about the delivering of the Kingdom to the Father (19) and offers various solutions to Paul's statement. Zinzendorf's Christology had a number of values for him and others:

- 1) It grounded all in grace and revelation. All was dependent on God's gift. God and his grace could not be grasped by human effort. This is well expressed in Zinzendorf's poem "Allgegenwart" ("Omnipresence") composed in 1725:
 8. Why, thou foolish child,
Wilt thou fetch Me from the depths?
Where do you think I can be found?
Seekest thou Me heaven's poles?
Seekest Me in the creature?
My nature, which no eye sees,
Has built itself a body
And still you miss My presence.
 9. Humanity, come and see
The concealed abyss
The hidden majesty
In Jesus, the humble child!
See whether one in grace stands free,
See whether He your praise deserves!
Whose heart with love for Him is filled,
Who believes, from all care is freed (20).
- 2) It was the essence of simplicity. All of Christian faith, understanding and life came from the relationship with Jesus, which relationship was not primarily dependent on conceptual understanding.
- 3) It was rooted in historical reality, especially the unforgettable reality of the cross which could be "painted" vividly before the minds and imaginations of believers.
- 4) It was relevant. Since God disclosed himself in Jesus, his Son, in a way that fully took up human existence, even sexuality, all persons can identify with various stages of Jesus' life process and use him a model.
- 5) It fitted Zinzendorf's experience. He says that he long struggled with doubt concerning a God whom he could understand with his mind, but he had no doubts about the God, Jesus his Saviour, whom he knew with his "heart".

- 6) It provided for respect of universal religious experience, by identifying all religious experience as an experience of Christ. Therefore the function of the missionary was to be like Peter to Cornelius in clarifying the experience of Christ which the Spirit had brought to the hearts of persons.
- 7) It provided for mission without pressure (or as Zinzendorf calls it, "the itch of making many Converts"). Since Christ is Creator, all souls belong to him and he will see that they are brought home to him at the appropriate time.

Most Moravians are to some extent Christocentric without really being aware of or accepting Zinzendorf's total view. One problem with his view today is that the same biblical criticism which he used so successfully in his day has now pointed up that there is a good deal of biblical material besides Paul that does not support his views. He did not adequately deal with the presentation of Jesus in the Synoptics, which is quite different than that in his favored Gospel of John. The more serious problem with his view is that where his emphasis on Jesus as the agent of universal religious experience gave him a way of recognizing the legitimacy of religious experience in the lives of non-Christians, many non-Christians today cannot accept this and so our assertion of Christocentricity becomes an assertion of our particularity. Thus what distinguishes us as Christians (Christ, the Way we have come to the Father), no longer functions as a dialogical bridge to the religious experience of others...as Zinzendorf intended it. We will more and more live in a pluralistic society where we as Christians must both maintain the uniqueness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and find a "commonality" with others so that we can dialogue and cooperate in the interests of greater understanding and the improvement of the quality of life in our world. Particularly with the resurgence of national religions, such as Islam, the recognition that we worship the same Father, though understand him differently, offers opportunity for dialogue which our assertion of Christ as the only way to the Father will not. Dialogue may be one of the few options left open to us in our relationship with Islam in the near future and even with some segments of Judaism. Thus the Father, at the risk of losing some simplicity, may have to be taken out of Zinzendorf's closet. The primary question, and it is a Zinzendorffian question, is, "What will facilitate the relationship of people with God in our day, be responsible to the truth (ultimately, God), be responsible to the limitations of our understanding, and be the statement of the Gospel that God would lead us to in our time?" (Zinzendorf's Christocentricity was stated over against the limitations he perceived in the Enlightenment, Deism, some forms of Mysticism, and Lutheran Scholasticism).

In the matter of eschatology, Zinzendorf has some very significant things to say, relevant to the rising current of interest in eschatology in our time. He strongly opposed speculation about the nature of and the timing of the Second Coming of Jesus and the establishment of the Kingdom. He felt that this subject in the biblical materials was under the classification of "secrets", matters not adequately expressed in Scripture so that conclusions could be clearly drawn. This can only be a matter for private speculation and was better not discussed publicly. Certainly one should not try to force one's ideas on others. (Here Zinzendorf opposed the Pietist N.T. scholar Albrecht Bengel who did a great deal of eschatological speculation). Zinzendorf did develop an eschatological

scheme related to the church's mission which felt that the Jews would need to be converted before one could expect large conversions from the rest of mankind (contrary to what Paul says in Rom. 9-11), but this was part of his strategizing and he did attempt a number of conversations with Jews. On the whole, however, his eschatology was Johannine, or "realized eschatology": realized in the Christian community and experience. Beyreuther describes it in this way: "The world above is to him and the Brethren the real one, the earthly world is only a copy which points to the future. The congregation lives in a close relationship with the congregation above, it is one congregation with it. Even in the construction of the Brethren's places of worship this feeling is expressed... If a member of the congregation, a redeemed sinner, goes home, it is only a going through a curtain to the congregation above... If a Brother goes home on a festival day of the congregation, he is understood to be "a deputy for the festival to the congregation above." The whole worship service is related to this. Since 1748 the Liturgist and his Helpers appear at the Lord's Supper in the white gown of the "one who overcomes" (the white gown of Revelation)..." (21).

The Moravian "Saal" is white inside, with clear or frosted windows letting in the light and symbolizing the presence of heaven. The choir organization of the congregation, and of the cemetery (God's Acre), repeats that of the heavenly congregation.

In a day when eschatological speculation is again rife, and this happens during every difficult period in history, we can learn from Zinzendorf as to the inappropriateness of such speculation and redirect our attention to the ways in which the transcendent realities affect the life of the earthly congregations. To engage in such eschatological speculation is to found our faith on the least Christian of the New Testament materials (the book of Revelation which shows little reflection of the historical Jesus and his teachings), to ignore the lessons of history about such speculation, and to ignore the clear advice of Jesus in such passages as Mark 13:32ff, Luke 17:20ff.

The last area I would like to examine is that of religious experience. Today the church is confronted not only by the charismatic movement, but a general hunger for religious experience. Zinzendorf and the Moravians of the 18th century dealt extensively with religious experience and made it the basis of their understanding of religion. To my knowledge there was no speaking in tongues, but there were manifestations of emotionalism and excess during the "Sifting Period" in the 1740s-- which was then corrected in the latter decade of Zinzendorf's life. During the 1750s the Moravians had attained a measure of "maturity" in the handling of religious experience.

Though experience came to have emotional manifestations during the "Sifting Period", Zinzendorf believed that religious experience was not primarily emotional in nature. Experience is the result of the real, objective Saviour through the Spirit coming into contact with the "heart", the new inner person which the Spirit brings to life. This inner person has five senses just, as the outer person does and is able to sense the presence of the Saviour (22). Zinzendorf's idea was really akin to what today would be called "extrasensory perception".

One may understand the experience of God as being subtle, mysterious, in and among the realities and difficulties of life, ... or one may understand the experience of God, if it is legitimate, as overcoming all of the difficulties of life and being overwhelming in nature. The book of Acts presents this second interpretation of religious experience and many

charismatics fasten upon it as a paradigm for their experience. I do encounter some persons whose religious experience seems to be of this second type, but the majority of persons I meet do not have this type of experience. Their experience is more that of the first type where one is left with the problems of one's life, but somehow the transcendent reality of God is sensed in the mysterious processes of life, encounters with other persons, and deep resources to live with one's problems. This would seem to have been Paul's experience when he prayed for relief from his "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7ff). His great description of the experience of God is in II Cor. 4:7ff: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal bodies."

Like Paul, Zinzendorf affirmed a "Theology of the Cross" in opposition to a "Theology of Glory" (which emphasizes the way the power of God overcomes life) and in opposition to the religious and philosophical systems of his time which thought that God and life could be figured out. For Zinzendorf, not only the nature of God, but the nature of life and the nature of the church's existence became apparent in the Cross (23). In this he believed he was affirming Pauline and Johannine insights.

One of the primary needs each Christian has is to somehow sort out the factors of life and be able to identify the presence, activity and effects of God; otherwise our religious language is empty, perhaps an expression of human longing, with little correspondence to reality. The development of Spiritual Formation as a science today is a significant contribution to this area and is similar to what Zinzendorf was doing: trying to get Christians to take God for real, not merely intellectually; trying to help them identify what he is doing in life; and trying to provide the tools for the imagination (experiential language and pictorial language) and the communal and personal structures for life which would allow God to become perceptible and Christian life to be possible.

Notes

- 1) John English, *Choosing Life: The Significance of Personal History in Decision Making* (Paulist Press, 1978).
- 2) E.g., James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper and Row, 1981.
- 3) Milo Strupl, *Confessional Theology of the Unitas Fratrum*, Vanderbilt University, Ph.D., 1964, p. 155. Also see Amadeo Molnar, "The First Reformation", *The Bulletin*, Moravian Theological Seminary, vol. 1972-77, Bethlehem, Pa.
- 4) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, *London Predigten*, Abth. II, 1753, pp. 153f; *Der Öffentlichen Gemein-Reden im Jahr 1747, 1749*, p. 78; "Gedancken vor gelehrte und doch gutwillige Schüler der Wahrheit", *Der teutsche Sokrates*, Samuel B. Walter, 1732, pp. 280-90; *Der Predigten die der Ordinarius Fratrum von Anno 1751 bis 1755. zu London gehalten hat*,

Abth. IV, 1757, pp. 35ff.

- 5) E.g. August G. Spangenberg, Darlegung richtiger Antworten auf mehr als dreyhundert Beschuldigungen gegen den Ordinarium Fratrum, Marche, 1751, question 103; Apologetische Schluss-Schrifft, Marche, 1752, p. 481.
- 6) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, Sixteen Discourses on the Redemption of Man by the Death of Christ, preached at Berlin, 1740, p. 72.
- 7) Spangenberg, Schluss-Schrifft, pp. 480, 482.
- 8) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, Twenty-One Discourses or Dissertations upon the Augsburg Confession, trans. by F. Okeley, W. Bowyer, 1753, pp. 119ff.
- 9) Zinzendorf, Twenty-One Discourses, p. 127.
- 10) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, Seven Sermons on the Godhead of the Lamb, James Hutton, 1742, pp. 41ff.
- 11) Zinzendorf, Twenty-One Discourses, pp. 76-77, 109-110.
- 12) Spangenberg, Schluss-Schrifft, p. 484.
- 13) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects In Religion...1746, trans. and ed. by G. Forell, University of Iowa Press, 1973, pp. 84-86.
- 14) August G. Spangenberg, Hymn 388, Hymnal and Liturgies of the Moravian Church, Provincial Synods of the Moravian Church, 1969.
- 15) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, "Gedenken vom Reden und Gebrauch der Worte", in Barbysche Samlungen, 1760.
- 16) See Graf Ludwigs von Zinzendorf Teutsche Gedichte, Herrnhuth, 1751.
- 17) George Forell, in his translation of Zinzendorf's Nine Public Lectures, p. xxx.
- 18) Büdingsische Sammlung einiger in die Kirchen-Historie einschlagender sonderlich neuerer Schrifften, Band III, Korte, 1744, pp. 402ff.
- 19) Zinzendorf, Twenty-One Discourses, p. 51.
- 20) Graf Ludwigs von Zinzendorf Teutscher Gedichte, Erster Theil, Herrnhuth, 1753, pp. 106-108.
- 21) Erich Beyreuther, Studien zur Theologie Zinzendorfs, Neukirchener Verlag, 1962, pp. 168-169.
- 22) E.g. Spangenberg, Schluss-Schrifft, pp. 450, 541.
- 23) Nicolas von Zinzendorf, Vier und dreissig Homilien über die Wunden-Litaney der Brüder (1848), n.d., pp. 60ff.

Zusammenfassung (von Prof. Freeman)

Unser Erbe rückgewinnen, unsere Zukunft in den Blick nehmen!

Angesichts einer pluralistischen, sich rasant verändernden und in mancher Hinsicht problematischen Welt ist die Kirche gut beraten, den Wissensschatz ihrer dreitausendjährigen Geschichte aufzuspüren und aus ihrer langen Erfahrung mögliche Antworten auf gegenwärtige Fragen zu entdecken. Die Brüderunität hat eine fünfhundertjährige Geschichte, die eine reiche Quelle bildet, aus der sich eine Fülle von Erkenntnissen für die Zukunft schöpfen läßt.

Besonders hilfreich ist die in der alten und erneuerten Brüderkirche gemachte Unterscheidung zwischen den "wesentlichen" und den "dienlichen" Dingen und den zufälligen Dingen von beiden. Die wesentlichen Dinge beziehen sich auf das Verhältnis zu Gott und das Heil des Men-

schen, die dienlichen Dinge (wie heilige Schrift, Predigt und Sakramente) dienen den wesentlichen. Der zufälligen Dinge bedienen wir uns gewöhnlich bei der Ausübung unseres christlichen Lebens. Zinzendorf stimmte darin entschieden mit der alten Unität überein. Das persönliche Verhältnis zu Gott als das Herz der Religion erkennen und nicht eine Institution, Liturgie oder Begrifflichkeit ist nicht nur biblisch, sondern ist auch eine Hilfe für die menschlichen Nöte in unserer Zeit.

Die alte und erneuerte Brüderunität bemühten sich um einen angemessenen christlichen Lebensstil. Insbesondere Zinzendorf sah, daß das Leben seine Nahrung aus der persönlichen Gemeinschaft mit Gott, mit dem Heiland empfängt. "Wir können nichts tun, wenn wir nicht zuvor etwas bekommen haben." Christliche Ordnung besteht darum nicht in einer gesetzlichen Moral, sondern in Richtlinien oder Regeln, um den freudigen Prozeß in unserem Leben zu befördern, den Christus in Gang gebracht hat. Schlicht formuliert: Sich-christlich-verhalten heißt das tun, was Christus gefällt, wenn er uns mit seinem Blick vom Kreuz her leitet.

Die Unität war immer darauf bedacht, glaubwürdig und der Wahrheit verpflichtet zu reden, indem sie ihre Einsicht und ihr Verständnis der Schrift auf den sich wandelnden historischen Kontext und ihre christliche Erfahrung bezog, ganz so wie die Urkirche ihr Verständnis von Christi zweitem Kommen im Licht des Fehlschlags einer in apokalyptischen Formen entworfenen Hoffnung neu definierte. Zinzendorf lag vor allem an dem Realitätsgehalt der Worte und dachte über Art und Zweck theologischer Begrifflichkeit nach. Es ist in seinem Sinne, wenn wir uns heute um eine theologische Sprache mühen, die in unserer Zeit glaubwürdig ist. Auch wenn heute viele von einer in apokalyptischen Bildern formulierten christlichen Hoffnung angezogen werden, so können wir von Zinzendorf lernen, daß nach der Erfahrung und nach einem schriftgemäßen Verständnis christlicher Hoffnung die Endzeit nicht vorausberechnet werden kann und daß wir darum viel besser daran tun, uns auf Gottes Gnade für die Gegenwart zu konzentrieren. Bezüglich christlicher geistlicher Erfahrung argumentierte Zinzendorf, daß die paulinische Kreuzestheologie sowohl der Absicht Gottes als menschlicher Erfahrung gemäßer sei als eine Theologie der Herrlichkeit, die sich einseitig auf Gottes Allmacht stützt.

Obwohl Zinzendorfs Sicht von Eschatologie und christlicher Erfahrung unserer Zeit glaubwürdig erscheint, sollte die Brüdergemeine in Treue zu Zinzendorfs Prinzipien ihren traditionellen Christozentrismus neu bedenken. Die zu Zinzendorfs Lebzeiten aus sehr bewußten Gründen sachgemäß vertretene Christusfrömmigkeit entspricht doch nicht völlig dem biblischen Zeugnis und mag in unserer pluralistischen Welt nicht mehr sachgemäß sein. Heute erscheint uns die "Heilandsfrömmigkeit", obwohl sie Zinzendorf damals so nicht verstand, als eine eigentümliche Besonderheit des Christentums, die gültige religiöse Erfahrungen in anderen religiösen Traditionen nicht adäquat anerkennt. Der christlichen Mission steht heute in vielen Teilen der Welt nur noch der Weg in den Dialog mit anderen Religionen offen, aber nicht mehr die "Bekehrung". Hier mag der Theozentrismus paulinischer Theologie, gegen den Zinzendorf starke Einwände hatte, sachgemäßer sein als der Christozentrismus des Johannesevangeliums, den Zinzendorf so liebte.

Es ist darum im Sinne Zinzendorfs zu fragen: Was erleichtert heute die Beziehung des Menschen zu Gott? Was entspricht gegenwärtig der Wahrheit (letztlich Gott)? Worin liegen die Grenzen unseres Verständnisses? Und was wird die Gestalt (statement) des Evangeliums sein, zu der Gott uns in unserer Zeit führen will?