

ORDINARY COMMENTS
EXCITING POSSIBILITIES

WHAT COUNT ZINZENDORF WOULD SAY TO US
FOR OUR TIME



A SERIES

A Series, part of which appeared monthly in the Moravian in the year 2000.

Revised for the 2003 Lenten Series of Central Moravian Church, Bethlehem, PA

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Discovering Our Future Through Our Past

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Introduction

The title "Ordinary Comments" is a play on words, meaning comments by the Ordinary rather than "plain and ordinary comments." Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 18th century leader of the Moravian Church and its most significant theologian, bore the title "the Ordinary of the Moravian Church." "Ordinary" had a variety of meanings, especially indicating someone in leadership.

On May 26, 2000, the 300th birthday of Zinzendorf was celebrated around the world. In the Calendar produced by the Herrnhut Archives for this year, illustrated by significant artistic works, there is a painting by Johann Valentin Haidt, portraying Zinzendorf as "the teacher of the nations of the world," illumined by light from the wounds of Christ. Around him gather persons from all the Moravian missions as well as from Europe. Johann Gottfried von Herder, the Weimar poet, said of Zinzendorf after his death that there were few like him, who could claim congregations and disciples all over the world.¹

Zinzendorf's birthday places him three centuries into the past. But the world in which he lived, and its issues, gave birth to our times. His insights sound like they were spoken to us. He died 240 years ago, but he still lives in his love for Christ and his love for the Moravian Church to which he gave new life. Perhaps one lifetime is not enough time to speak the meaning of Christ. As part of the great cloud of witnesses who live in heaven, he does have more than one lifetime. And since he believed that in prayer and worship we join the heavenly congregation, he is not far away.

Throughout the year 2000, issues of *the Moravian* provided an abbreviated form of the "Comments." These *Comments* provide a place for one of the most significant and adventuresome figures in Moravian Church history to speak to us. Thus we again hear his voice in words often patterned after what he said long ago but addressed to us and our day. I have not footnoted his comments in order to preserve the sense of his words as contemporary and not interrupt the flow of thought. However, in my *Ecumenical Theology of the Heart* there is extensive translation and quotation of his thought and words and plenty of footnotes for those who love them.

One might think that the historical gap of 300 years between our time and his would make him stranger to the political, social, philosophical, scientific and religious contexts of our day. But there are two decisive factors to consider. The first is that the 18th century, his century, birthed so many of the perspectives and issues of ours (e.g. modern science, historical criticism, the political revolutions in North America and France). The second is that Zinzendorf fully realized that all attempts to understand world and life are, and must be seen as, contextually determined. Thus contextual difference is not to be ignored. Even God is understood always to work contextually, something to which the great variety within Scripture bears witness.

I would hope that the thoughts expressed in *Ordinary Comments* might become a resource for individuals and congregations to form their faith and life in ways that foster understanding and enable joyful living of

¹ Most of the footnotes will refer to my book *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf*, Board of Communications, Moravian Church in America, Bethlehem, PA, 1998. This is a comprehensive study of Zinzendorf's theology and many of the Zinzendorf resources have been translated for this publication. Originally footnotes were left out of *Ordinary Comments* to stress the contemporary character of Zinzendorf's thought, but footnotes were felt needed by some to enable further exploration of what was presented as the thought of Zinzendorf. One could probably present my book, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart*, as the primary source for the perspectives presented here, thus necessitating only one footnote. Yet when one sees the extensive footnoting in this book it is clear that in my research I have thankfully depended on the contributions of many.

the gifts of God's love and person. Most important, the reader is invited to try out, live with, and explore the contents of these pages.

Ordinary Comments on *Christian Unity*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I have been watching the life of the Moravian Church with great interest. I know you are having some very painful struggles with divisions in the Church in North America, Europe and Central America. But you also have been doing some very exciting things. In May of 1995 the Church of England and the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland agreed upon the Fetter Lane Common Statement. In August of 1999 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved the consensus paper *Following Our Shepherd Into Full Communion* approved the previous year by the two North American Moravian Provinces. For several years Moravians and Episcopalians have been meeting informally in North Carolina, a conversation now broadened into a national dialogue.

Your journey into relationship with other Christians reminded me very much of the way we in my time worked out relationships with the Lutheran and Anglican Churches so that we could cooperate with them in mission in the colonies controlled by the countries they served. One of the more famous consequences was the 1749 Act of the English Parliament which recognized the Moravian Church as an "ancient Episcopal Church."

Most important in relating to other Christians is to be with them, to look into their eyes and hear their words. One of the most powerful influences on my concern for Christian fellowship was the year of travel I did after completing my formal education. While I had been raised Lutheran, I now visited Christians of other backgrounds and furthered my education in such places as Switzerland, Holland and France. I became better acquainted with the Reformed Church. And most important, I met Cardinal Noailles of Paris whom I dearly came to care for after we stopped trying to convert each other.² I discovered that he had Christ in his life as I had Christ in my life, and that made us one even though there were many things on which we could not agree. That came to be my principle: I was at one with whoever had Christ in their life. Christ knew what he was doing when he chose to be there. And there is nothing wrong with having religion in different forms. God designed it this way because people needed religion in a form suited to their culture and person. Each form also has a treasure to offer those who do not belong to that religion. Cardinal Noailles was godparent for several of my children and I published a *Christian-Catholic Song and Prayer Book*.³ I also came to learn a lot from the spiritual life of certain Catholics.

When I was in Pennsylvania in 1742 we tried an interesting experiment. We were always trying experiments. Before Moravians really got started in Pennsylvania, German speaking Christians, and some English speaking, were invited to a conference of churches in Pennsylvania which resulted in an attempt to create a "Congregation of God in the Spirit." Each church would retain its identity within this congregation, but together they would establish schools and engage in missions. We thought we might work together in the West Indies and amongst the N. American Indians. This soon fell apart, but from this

² LA CATHOLICITÉ DU MONDE CHRÉTIEN d'après la correspondance inédite du comte Louis de Zinzendorf avec le cardinal de Noailles et les évêques appelants 1719-1728 PAR SALOMON, 1929.

³ Nicholas von Zinzendorf, *Christ-Catholisches Singe- und Bet-Büchlein* ..., n.p., 1727. The first part consists of songs from the *Heiligen Seelen-Lust oder geistliche Hirten-Lieder* of Johannes Scheffler (Angelus Silesius). Reprinted in Beyreuther and Meyer, eds. *Ergänzungsbände*, v. 10.

we learned something we could try in Europe. When I went back the next January we established three "Ways (Greek *Tropoi*) of Teaching." There were Lutheran, Reformed and Moravian "Ways." The Moravian Way was a term for those who came to my home from Moravia and brought with them the faith of the Ancient Moravian Church. Separate membership lists were kept. And two creeds were adopted: the Augsburg Confession for the Lutherans and as a general confession, and the Articles of the Synod of Berne for the Reformed. We tried to be a symbol of the way Christ lives in the various churches.

But Christ is not only related to Christian Churches. In the New Testament there are creation stories in John 1:1-18, Col. 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3. Each passage sees Christ as the agent of God in the creation of the world. If Christ is the agent of God in creation, then whenever other religions talk about their experience of a Creator, they are really talking about their experience of the part of God we call Christ. Thus we share with Jews and Muslims a common spiritual heritage. The way Jesus' own spiritual life was nourished within Judaism ought to make for a special Christian appreciation of Judaism. I know that it is hard to tell other religions that the God they have experienced is really Christ, but at least we can know that we have a special connection with them even though we can't work it out now. And Christ knows we all belong to him.

To say that Christ is central in all religious experience is not just to say that others cannot be saved without Christ. It is to recognize that in a world which saw God as a great and powerful emperor, and in a world where people would still like to see God that way, Jesus portrays a God who comes into the world for us, suffers and is wounded, renounces the use of power and assumes the role of a servant to humankind. Even after his Ascension Jesus comes back to show his disciples he is still wounded (John 20). If we did not look to Jesus we would get the wrong ideas about the way God is in the world. And we might see God as angry and judgmental rather than as gentle and loving. Christians have as much to learn from this as do others. Jesus' disciples really struggled with God's acceptance of suffering and rejection of power.⁴

There is no better advice that I can give you than for you to look for the Christ in others and to appreciate that, as in the rest of life, we are enriched by variety. We perhaps cannot produce a common description of religion, but we can have a common heart in which dwells our common Savior who has been wounded for us all. And who but God knows what we can accomplish if we pursue mission together.

Documents for those who want to read more:

Anglican-Moravian Conversations: The Fetter Lane Common Statement with Essays in Moravian and Anglican History, The Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, Occasional Paper No. 5, 1966

Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion: Report of the Lutheran-Moravian Dialogue With Recommendations for Full Communion in Worship, Fellowship and Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, 1998.

Arthur Freeman, "The Moravian Church," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2002, with the cooperation of Netherlands: Brill

Arthur Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf*, The Moravian Church in America, Board of Communication, 1998, also available in German.

Walter H. Wagner, *The Zinzendorf-Muhlenberg Encounter: A Controversy in Search of Understanding*, Nazareth: The Moravian Historical Society, 2002.

⁴ See Jesus discussion with Peter in Mark 8 and with James and John in Mark 10

Ordinary Comments on *Prayer*

It's good to be back --- not that I was ever completely away. What you love well you love long, and that is certainly the way I feel about the Moravian Church. Today you ask me about prayer. We certainly did a lot of praying, including the 100 years of intercession for our Church and its mission started in 1727. But I would like to approach the question of prayer from a special Moravian perspective.

When I was only eight years old I found myself struggling with serious doubt, even though I had the protection of my grandmother's home. I could not help but think of my father who was taken from me the year I was born, and my grandfather a few years later. Now the Age of Doubt in which I lived was taking my God away. How could I face life?⁵

As strongly as skepticism struggled with my thoughts in my youth, so Jesus remained mine in my heart, which was full of love for him. I set aside my doubts about the existence of the Father because in my heart I knew the Son. That the Son of God was my Lord, that I knew as certainly as I knew my five fingers. So many years had I loved him, so often had I prayed to him; so many memories sweet and bitter, so much praise and prayer.

Whatever of God I could not know or understand, I knew Jesus. As he came into the world to bring God to us, so had he come into my life. As a child I held many conversations with him. And I knew that he was the gift beyond all gifts.⁶ I did not have to try to find him, I did not struggle to get him into my life, I did not have to get my life all straightened out before he came. He came as a gift, and all of my life grew out of that. Life was not easy for me as a child. There was not only the loss of male figures in my family, but my mother and some of my tutors operated with the accepted principle that a child's will should be broken to make him obedient and compliant. Thank God for my grandmother!

On becoming an adult I had the whole world of Europe to become acquainted with and had to struggle with how to serve Christ while my family wanted me to be a lawyer in the Saxon court. I traveled to Denmark, Holland, France, the West Indies, the new American colonies, England and even Russia. And Jesus was there with me, my Companion who helped me to know where to go and what to do. What best described my experience of life was "living with the Savior." Or as the German phrase might also be translated, "going around with the Savior." And we certainly did a lot of "going around." This was a wonderful experience for he created me and knew me, and he lived and grew up in this world just as I did -- and so he understood the various needs and problems of the different stages of my life. And he suffered as I and others do. I can't forget that even after his Ascension into heaven he could appear to his disciples and show them his wounds. He was still wounded! When I think of the deep wound in his side, like the "rock of ages cleft for me," I can feel myself being secure inside him, though I would often describe life as his living within me.

To answer your question about prayer I must transform it. Certainly in our Moravian settlements we had our daily worship services. We began the day with hymns, a morning benediction when the "watch word" for the day is announced, besides other devotional moments during the day. In the evening there were services for the whole congregation and short services in each choir house. During the night the watchman sang hymns on the hour and throughout the day persons prayed in hourly intercessions. But even beyond this, prayer is more living with and talking with Jesus throughout the day, something which never ends. It

⁵ Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart*, pp. 60 ff.

⁶ Freeman, pp. 75ff.

does not stop because it is the source of our lives. In this living with Jesus, Jesus helps me to understand what to do and directs me – even with his eyes if not with his words. I guess that the best explanation of prayer might be that it is staying in touch with the Source of my life. We use various words to describe the way we live with Jesus and how he lives with us.⁷ Often he is called "Savior," a biblical term in much use among the Pietists. Because many in my time used the image of the human soul marrying the Savior, at times we call him our "Husband." Because he is much involved in the affairs of the church, we call him our "Chief Elder." In the latter part of my life I came to especially like the biblical term "Lord," applying it to him as the Head of our spiritual household.

All that matters most in the Christian life comes out of living with the Savior. He brings us God. He brings us life. He doesn't expect us to know and understand everything. But what he does want us to know he teaches us to know when we need to know. That certainly simplifies life a lot. Thus in his presence we find strength and help, and in his wisdom we find guidance and understanding. And as his special gift, since relationship is so meaningful to all from infant to elderly, the Savior gives himself to all in relationship -- even if they can not understand this yet. After all, as Creator he has made each one and holds him or her in the love of his heart.

Though so much of our life centers on the Savior, for it is through him that we know God, we tried to balance this with our liturgies in the congregational services: some were directed to the Son, others to the Father and some to the Spirit. From 1738 on I began to realize the way the Spirit of God worked in our lives to keep us close to the Savior. As I usually tried to use experiential words to speak of God, we decided to use the term "Mother" for the Spirit who cares for us as a mother.⁸

Living with the Savior really sums up all that matters most in the Christian religion. Try living with him as your Creator, Savior and Companion. My whole life has been an experiment in this.

Ordinary Comments on *Evangelism*

I would like to talk with you about evangelism which is central to the mission of our Church, and so sometimes I will just talk about it as mission.⁹

In my time the Moravian Church deeply committed itself to sharing Christ with the world. We established some congregations where the life with Christ could be lived and we spent years experimenting with how we might organize the life of our congregations so that they would best serve our people and serve our mission. We realize that you cannot preach Christ without a Christian community in which persons can discover what it is like "to live with the Savior," which is the essence of the Christian faith.

But we didn't wait until we had everything figured out before we started our mission. In fact it was clear to me that to engage in mission has to do with the very nature of the church, and so it could not be delayed. The church does not just have mission, it is mission and it cannot be church without mission. Shortly after the spiritual experience of Aug. 13, 1727, which gave us new confidence in the reality of our Savior and helped us to overcome our differences, we were already establishing societies for spiritual growth in congregations of the state church. By 1732 we sent missionaries to the Danish West Indies and in 1735 to Georgia. Some of our congregations became Settlement Congregations, whole villages organized to support our mission, while some became Pilgrim Congregations, like Bethlehem,

⁷ Freeman, p. 192 ff.

⁸ Freeman, pp. 105 ff.

⁹ Freeman p. 68.

Pennsylvania, where many of the adults were involved in actual mission work and their children were cared for by the congregation. In fact, I even took a Pilgrim Congregation with me on many of my journeys. In so many ways we were on the way for Christ. We didn't have all the answers, but we knew Christ did and we were following him.

How did we understand what we were doing? We knew that much of the world and its religions believed in God in some sense, but we were convinced that to know what God was like needed some revelation. This is one of the reasons why Christ is so central. As I expressed in a poem about the human search for God:

O! Come here and see
the concealed Abyss,
the hidden Majesty
in Jesus the humble child.
See whether humanity lives by grace;
See whether He, for whom the heart's love grows,
deserves your praise.
Whoever believes is freed from all care.

The amazing thing is that Jesus describes for us not a God high in the heavens, but humble and involved in life on earth, not a God of great and terrible power, but a God of great compassion, a God who does not sit on a throne but whose nature is expressed in the birth of a child in a manger and the suffering and woundedness of our Savior on the cross. Who could have guessed this? Even Christians have trouble thinking that God is really like this, a fact which humbles us when we think we own God and the proper understanding of God.

And to know God in Christ is "to live with God in Christ." Christ does not just tell us about God, but he is God with us and is the way God is. Thus we live out our lives with the One who has all the answers, who will give us the answers when we need them, but who in the meanwhile companions us through life. What we need most is the relationship with the Savior, the foundational relationship which makes life possible.

Now I must remind you that Jesus is not only Savior but Creator.¹⁰ Most of us are accustomed to think of God the Father as Creator, but that is not what the New Testament says nor what Moravians in my time believed. John 1:1-18, Col. 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-4 all indicate that the world is created through that part of God we came to know as God's Son. If that were not true God would have had the New Testament writers say something else, but this is a major NT theme. This means that not only is Jesus the very One whom all religions have experienced as Creator (and thus we can build on their experience), but that the One who would save us is the One who made us. Thus the Creator who made us enters world and history to help us in our life process and complete what we were created for. The Savior as our Creator already knows us as individuals and loves us as individuals. The Savior knows what is needed and what our particular journey in this world will be like. Though we have to plant congregations and though we have to make the information about the Savior known, evangelism (understood as aiding the completion of the process of our creation) is the Savior's business. Thus we don't have to push or shove anyone. The Savior will work with each person in a way right for them. Our responsibility is to listen to the person, try to understand what the Creator-Savior is doing in his or her life, and then to serve the Savior's process and not to spoil it. If the Savior can't finish the process in this life, he will complete it in the next. It is the

¹⁰ Freeman, pp. 83 ff.

Savior's process, not ours. Our job is to be there and facilitate it. That is why Moravians could go to a mission field and wait years for converts. One must respect the Creator-Savior's process with people.

You are living in a world which is thinking again about the Christian mission and trying to understand how to express it in the modern world. I would like to suggest that you let Jesus take you where he would take you. It is really his mission. It is from him, about him, and for him, and he knows where it should go. This means that we are taking seriously that he rose from the dead and is alive. If he is not alive, then we have lost both the reason for and content of our mission. For a long while I was not much aware of how much the ending of the Gospel of Mark affirms this. It's good to know that I can learn new things. After the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples that he would again go before them as the shepherd goes before the sheep (Mark 14:28) and the words of the young man at the tomb to the women Easter morning repeat this (16:7). Thus after his resurrection Jesus does not go into heaven and sit down,¹¹ but goes into the world before us, leading us where we should go and guiding us to do what we should do. He is still doing this.

Ordinary Comments on *Missions*

Mission is of the very nature of the church. It is the way the church lives out its life with Christ. Its life with Christ is not just for itself, but for others. That is the way Christ lived his life. Something of quality in the life with Christ is lost when it loses its outward direction. It is no longer true to itself. And we begin to sense this in the loss of vitality in church and individual life. An important constituent of the life of the church, and individual Christians, is that it is for others. Thus Christian life contributes creativity, new possibilities and a strong sense of the presence of the spiritual to the world where it is lived. It reminds all of what God intends life to be.

Today the Moravian Church is all over the world because of its sense of mission. While I was a student at Halle I became acquainted with missionaries sent by Halle and later developed an "Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed" which was committed to Christian ideals and mission, having as its motto: "No one lives to himself." Within a few years of the spiritual experience of August 13, 1727, we began our world mission by sending Leonard Dober, a potter, and David Nitschmann, a carpenter, to the Caribbean Island of St. Thomas.

Halle was looked upon as a resource for missionaries. Early Lutheran congregations in Pennsylvania looked to Halle for pastors and Henry Muhlenberg, the founder of the Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania, was sent from there. There was also a Society for Propagating the Gospel of the Anglican Church. What we started at Herrnhut was in its beginnings a fellowship of Christians from various backgrounds, but we gradually developed into a Church with its own orders of ministry, and thus we can say that we became the first Protestant Church to engage in foreign missions as a Church. In fact, our missions soon became our "reason for being." There was no Moravian congregation or settlement that was not involved in mission in some way, and a few of them, called Pilgrim Congregations, had as their primary purpose engagement in mission with many of the adults serving as missionaries. It was amazing how people responded to this sense of mission, many having only the training which they received in the life of the congregations.

¹¹ Although this is the presentation of the status of Jesus after his Ascension in Hebrews 10. Here Jesus ascends and takes his rest, turning over his work to the rest of the Godhead.

Because you are in North America you may be interested in a particular mission we had in Pennsylvania. I know that Moravians later came to feel that I tried to keep the Moravian Church in N. America small since in Europe we always tried to cooperate with the territorial churches and thus stayed small. However, I had quite a different vision for the church in Pennsylvania.¹² The "New World" was a place different from Europe and it was a new place where we could discover what the church could be. Some even felt that if the church established a real and faithful church in N. America and converted the Indians that Christ would come again and the end of the world would come. I never did believe in speculating about this end of the world stuff, but I did see new opportunity.

Bishop Spangenberg and I became acquainted with the Associated Brethren of Skippak. This was a group of persons from five different Christian backgrounds dedicated to creating a climate of cooperation, rather than competition, for the churches in Pennsylvania. It was felt that without the Christian hostilities often characteristic of Europe the church could create a new Christian world in N. America. Most Protestant churches were invited to an assembly of churches in January of 1742

not to wrangle about opinions, but to treat with each other in love on the most important articles of faith, in order to ascertain how closely we can approach each other fundamentally, and, as for the rest, bear with one another in love on opinions which do not subvert the ground of salvation.¹³

From January to June in 1742 we held seven meetings. Moravians participated, but not as a church until June when we had enough Moravians to organize a congregation. Gradually our ideas moved from establishing an assembly of churches to founding an ecumenical church called "The Church of God in the Spirit" in which each denomination would retain its identity. This is something I later brought back to Europe where for 50 years the Moravian Church contained within it the Lutheran, Reformed and Ancient Moravian "Ways" of being and teaching Christianity. In Pennsylvania this Church of God in the Spirit was to take over Moravian missions in the Caribbean, start missions to the N. American Indians, and began a school. I even gave up my positions as Count and Bishop to try to fit into this New World. While I was still in Pennsylvania a Lutheran leader arrived and after a few years a Reformed leader arrived, both of whom wanted to do things the European way. Gradually interest in this unique Church of God in the Spirit died out and by 1747 the Moravian Church pursued its own future in N. America. Out of this did come the Moravian mission to N. American Indians. Sadly often Moravians experienced the hostility of settlers because of their advocacy of Indian causes. But that is what Christ wanted us to do. You can't always be sure how things will come out, but you know in your heart that there are certain things you must do.

Johann Gottfried von Herder, the Weimar poet, said of me after my death:

He could claim he had congregations or disciples in Herrnhut, Herrenhaag, Herrendijk, Pilgeruh, Ebersdorf, Jena, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, Oxford, Berlin, in Greenland, St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, Barbados, Palestine, Surinam, Savannah in Georgia, Carolina, Pennsylvania, Guiana, Liefland, Esthonia, Lithuania, Russia, on the White Sea, in Lappland, Norway, in Switzerland, on the Isle of Man, in Ethiopia, Persia, among the messengers to the heathen on land and sea.¹⁴

¹² Freeman, "Materials on the Pennsylvania Synods," p. 328, "Bethlehem," p. 266 ff.

¹³ Freeman, p 268.

¹⁴ Freeman, pp. 22-23.

I would rather say that Christ had congregations and disciples in all of these places and that I, perhaps, played a small part. On the day before my death in amazement I said to David Nitschmann:

Did you suppose, in the beginning, that the Savior would do as much as we now really see, in the various Moravian settlements, amongst the children of God in other denominations, and amongst the heathen? I only entreated of him a few of the first-fruits of the latter, but there are now thousands of them. Nitschmann, what a formidable caravan from our church already stands around the Lamb.¹⁵

Ordinary Comments on the “Sifting Time”

Extending from about 1743 to 1750 in Europe and until 1752 in North America there was a period which we came to call the "Sifting Time."¹⁶ This was named after Jesus' comment to Simon Peter in Luke 22:31-32, "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Chances are that you may not have heard of this. For quite a while Moravians did not like to talk of this time, but today there is more reflection on it not only from the perspective of its problems but of its values.

Everyone makes some mistakes. This is true not only of people but of churches.¹⁷ If one becomes too afraid to make mistakes, one would never do anything. The history of the Moravian Church from its renewal in Herrnhut until the time of my death was a time of constant experimentation. We knew that Christ was real and that what he did for us was real. We knew that wherever people gathered around him, there the church existed. But how should this church be set up including Lutherans, Reformed, Brethren from the Ancient Moravian Church, and others? We knew that we had a mission to take Christ to the world, but there was little experience of how to do this except for the missions of the Catholic Church and the mission efforts by Halle. The Moravian Church was the first Protestant Church to go into foreign missions. Then there was the fact that many of the forces of our culture seemed to deny the reality of God and Christ. We had to explore ways that Christ would want to use to bring his benefits to people in a world that doubted his reality.

And there were differing ideas held by different persons. I had hoped that the spiritual experience of August 13, 1727, would have solved all of our differences. Before this I even came back to Herrnhut from my work in the Dresden Court and met many hours with the different factions of our growing religious community. I then established the rules for their living on my estate and together we developed the Brotherly Agreement. All of our work and the spiritual experience created a unity out of many diverse persons. But as you might guess, this ideal state did not last. Late in 1741 I came to Pennsylvania and when I returned to Europe in 1743 there were again many differences in the Church. Differences keep arising, as they have today in some of our Provinces. This was one of the reasons we stressed some of the aspects of the Sifting Time, seeking to find creative ways to root everyone in the same foundational spiritual experience.

Now let me briefly share with you some of the emphases of the Sifting Time. One was a focus on the suffering and wounds of Jesus, with a special emphasis on his side wound which, as your hymn indicates, is the "rock of ages cleft for me." The unique feature of Jesus' teaching is that we have a God who is

¹⁵ Freeman, p. 38.

¹⁶ Freeman, pp. 296 ff.

¹⁷ Freeman pp. 295 ff on Discernment.

willing to suffer for us and join us in our sufferings. John 20 speaks of Jesus still bearing his wounds after his Ascension into heaven: he will always be wounded for us. The blood of Jesus provided a way of describing his effect upon the world. His blood flowed from the cross and tinged the earth, to forever change the conditions of human existence. The world no longer lived under the curse of the Fall. The receiving of Christ's blood in Communion allowed his blood to flow in our veins and to transform us. We even developed a Litany of the Wounds which described Christ's sufferings in graphic detail and helped us to receive their meaning. The emphasis on his wounds meant that we found our life in him and the reality of his suffering. We did not just have ideas about him, but presented him in graphic language so that his reality might be the basis for ours.

Another aspect of the Sifting Time was the Order of Little Fools. This Order got out of hand because it attracted too many people. It was intended to give a few people a chance to experiment with what it meant to live only from Christ rather than from our own intellect, capabilities and cleverness. Thus one tried to be simple, like a child, and to depend on Christ for everything. The closeness with Christ of which we were aware also caused us to use terms of endearment for Christ. In the German language the way to do this was by using diminutives.

A most significant image of the relationship of the person to Christ was that of the marriage of Christ with the human soul so that he was called "our Husband." Since all souls were assumed to be feminine, Christ could "husband" the souls of men as well as women. Even though this may sound strange to us, there were others who used this language in my time and it was also part of the language of religious mysticism. Often in mysticism this marriage was seen as the end of a long struggle and process, but we understood this as the gift of Christ at the beginning of the Christian life. It indicated that Christ gives us a relationship with him from which we can face and live life, not as a reward for a long and hard struggle to somehow deserve this.

Another significant image was the Holy Spirit as Mother. The words that we use of God should describe how God functions with us and how we experience God. The Holy Spirit cares for us as a Mother while the creator of our spiritual family, Christ, is in heaven. Now the Spirit reminds us of him, preaches him and helps us with all our needs.

This was a very creative time with composition of many liturgies and music, the creation of artistic pieces and poetry. The creative power of God flowed into the creative gifts of humans and produced much that was good.

When I finally realized that I had allowed myself and others to take some of these things to excess, I accepted responsibility (one always has to accept one's own responsibility even though others may share it), I called an end to what seemed to be excess though I continued to stress what was right and good in this time. Sadly, I recalled my son to England where I was at the time. He had been much involved. In two years he died. He often felt remorse over some of what happened. I only wish I could have helped him more to understand that if we really engage in the adventure of life to which Christ calls us, we are bound to make some mistakes. And the gift of Christ's grace and love always reestablishes our dignity and value.

Ordinary Comments on *the Choir System*

Because the Moravian church sees music as such an important expression of spiritual life, when we mention the terms *choirs* or *bands* we immediately think these terms have something to do with music.

But *bands* and *choirs*¹⁸ had to do with providing people with places and groups appropriate to their age and interests which would support their spiritual development, their relationship with Christ, in appropriate ways. This is very much like the church school classes and fellowship groups for different ages and purposes in our present Church.

In the summer of 1727, before our spiritual experience of Aug. 13, we began the use of *bands* as voluntary associations of small groups of persons, each led by a *band* convener. By 1734 the number of *bands* in the Herrnhut congregation had grown to 100. As I once indicated, our meeting as *bands* and confessing the state of our heart to each other was not done because we could not get along without the advice of another person. We did this so that we might learn to see the rightness of each other's hearts, becoming sensitive to each other's pain and learning to rely on each other. As Brother Christian David expressed it, we meet together in *bands* to give each other the freedom for heart, life and journey, to test and express everything, and so love one another as our own life. We do this to keep watch, pray, struggle and fight for one another, and to support one another, helping make life easier. Therefore we have the community which is proper to the Gospel.

By 1731 another form of community division, called classes, came into being under the influence of the Pietistic attempt to analyze spiritual development and to assign persons to stages in this development. For example, among the men there were classes for Beginners, Children, and Young Men, moving from a simple faith to greater understanding, maturity and responsibility. However, I came to see the division of persons into classes according to spiritual development as a mistake. Real fellowship was destroyed by trying to analyze how far people had progressed, how spiritual they were. And most important of all, this was wrong theologically. Though we need to be realistic about our human problems and struggles, in the Christian religion we are all the same because we see each other from the perspective of the gifts and love God has given us. We may be different from the human perspective, as we view our lives' struggles and attainments, but from God's perspective we are all equal, having equally received the benefits of Christ's death and relationship with us. We see persons not according to how far they have gotten in improvement and "perfection", but according to what God has given. This is what the Protestant principle of justification by grace means. What makes us who we are is God's gift, not our accomplishment. I am so happy that Roman Catholics and Protestants have now worked out an agreement on this important principle which so long has divided us.

The *choir* system had its beginnings in earlier divisions of our Church according to sex, age and station in life. In many of the Moravian settlements we can still see such buildings as those for the Single Brothers' Choir or the Single Sisters' Choir, where they not only lived but carried on their crafts. The *choir* system came to include *choirs* for children, little boys, little girls, older boys, older girls, young unmarried men, young unmarried women, married persons, widows and widowers, and even children in the womb, not yet born. Each *choir* had its own leaders and appropriate spiritual care. The existence of the "embryo choir" for children not yet born says much about the Moravian understanding of religion. The unborn child needs prenatal care because he or she is really a person and because Christ is really in relationship with her or him. Understanding is not the essence of religion. Relationship is. This wonderfully makes religion available to everyone, from the embryo to the elderly senile, from the brain damaged to the Seminary professor. And this means that the educational work of the *choirs* was not just centered on transmitting information about God but cultivating and making the person aware of relationship with God appropriate to the stages of life. In our modern world there is much discussion of "stages of faith." We were exploring this a long time ago.

¹⁸ In German Bände und Chore.

The choir system also gave women their own choirs and places to develop their leadership capacities, eventually leading to the ordination of a number of women.

The division of persons according to age and status recognized two foundational principles. First, God always works with each person in a personal way, within the limits and possibilities of their context and person. This is why when you read the Bible you discover differences between books and writers. God gave each person and religious community what they needed in their time. God does not work in general, and most of the time we should not either. In the Church we need to provide groups where God can work personally and contextually.

Second, both Jesus and his mother Mary modeled this in their own life. When you read the Gospels you find Jesus and Mary as human beings who model the interaction with God in the stages of their own development. Thus they guide us in our development. In the case of Jesus this happens not just by looking to the story of his life but by his present interpersonal relationship with us where he, as our life Companion, actively instructs us in the stages of our life. The Holy Spirit, who relates to us much as a Mother, also instructs us, takes us into her school. We regarded the congregation as the School of the Spirit.

The Moravian Church of the 18th century engaged in a great deal of experimentation, seeking to find the best ways not only to carry on mission but to help persons to live with Christ. Experimentation was important to find the forms of church which nourished persons in their life context. Experimentation and change can be seen by some as producing anxiety and thus to be avoided, but they can also be seen as a great adventure into the possibilities God offers. Moreover, the church must be living out its possibilities because people wonder about what the Christian message means and what it is like to live with Christ as Companion. We need a place where they can come and see. This is one of the functions of every church – to be a place where people can *come and see*, an invitation which is extended to potential disciples of Jesus twice in the Gospel of John (1:39 and 46) and can be seen as the major theme of this Gospel. Thus Christians need to take their spiritual life seriously, not only for their sakes but for the sake of others. What will people see in the life of your congregation when they come to see -- and what will people see when they come to you?

Ordinary Comments on *the Future*

This year was my 300th birthday. It isn't often that one gets a chance to celebrate 300 years of life. I am so happy that you have invited me to share thoughts in *The Moravian* this year. When people are willing to hear what you have to say, that really means that you aren't dead.

I am so excited for the future of the Moravian Church. When we started we had a few people on my estate. Now we are all over the world, 19 Provinces, with schools and hospitals and significant resources. When we started we had no idea what this was going to turn into. Now we can look back and look out into the world and see what has happened – all from very limited resources. How can we doubt that in some way we will handle the future?

Don't let my 300 years fool you. I am young enough to still look into the future. Now I have no magic spectacles to see into the future and predict, but as much as I can I will hold a vision of the future before my eyes --- and yours.

It is awfully hard to live without a vision. Without a vision there is nothing to pull you forward and inspire you. Life can become merely the sum total of what has been. Don't worry too much about whether the details of your vision are right – you will work it out as you go.

Christian faith is full of future. Just read the New Testament literature and listen to the expectations and hopes of the early church. Some in the church liked to predict and argue about the details of the future, such as in the book of Revelation (of which I was not very fond). But there is something even more important that the early church said about the future. The most important thing that the early church said about the future was that God was in it. They also believed that Jesus was in it. While some New Testament writers saw Christ as going to heaven after his resurrection, others saw him as staying down here and leading his disciples again as a shepherd would lead his sheep (Mark 14:27-28), taking them into the future. Paul even speaks of Jesus' spirit teaching Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer (Gal. 4:6) Even though I often thought of Jesus as in heaven, I knew that he was very close to us all and I believed that heaven was also very close. In the 1740s we had a number of paintings done of groups in the church, such as the single sisters or the first converts of our mission fields, and we always insisted that the painter put Jesus in the picture. In the hymnal of 1735 we had an etching at the front which portrayed Christ in the balcony of the church while the congregation worshiped on ground level.

When we see God and Jesus as the content of the future, two things happen:

First, we realize that in our future mission, as in the past, our most important task is to carry within life and mission the living presence of God and Christ, even though we know that we do this imperfectly. God does not ask that we do it perfectly, but that we do it. Our mission is only secondarily to explain things. Our primary mission is to carry within our lives the reality we would explain. This is a reality which people need and from which they can live. If we can only let people know that it is, that it exists, then often God will do the rest, working with persons according to their differences and needs. We have a personal God who works in personal ways.

In letting people know that this reality of God exists, we must also let them know what it is like, how it exists. That is important because often people think that God is a God of great power, dwelling in heaven on a throne – and thus far off. When God comes near with power all problems should get fixed. That is how we judge whether God is near. If we still have problems, God is not near or things are likely our fault.

But Jesus teaches and models a God who comes into the world, subjects himself to the world's conditions, suffers what people suffer in this world, and is tormented and crucified by the political systems of the world. Even after his resurrection he still bears his wounds to show solidarity with our wounds (John 20). And when the Spirit comes she (I often called the Holy Spirit "Mother") comes into real people (not perfect people) to show that God is to be carried in the lives of real people.

Secondly, while we may struggle over what to do in the future, what to do is more God's business than ours. Our job is to allow our lives to be the place where God can be within the world. As we carry within our life the living presence of God and Christ, we also carry the resources and directions for our future mission. The blueprint of the future is only partially in our design. It is especially in the God who has offered to live out his design in us, sharing his life with us, sowing his kingdom in us

All this makes the future rather simple, though it may not seem that simple when we try to examine it. Our task is simply to carry into the future and into the world the reality of God and Jesus who resides in our

lives. This reality is the essence of both our message and method. This reality will communicate what needs to be communicated and will lead where we need to be lead. It has worked in the past. Try it.

Ordinary Comments on *Postmodernism*

In my day I read most of the literature and examined most of the ideas developed within my culture. If I was going to live in my world and serve Christ, if I was going to know how to speak about Christ, I had to know my world and its people, how they thought and spoke. Throughout all biblical history God always spoke to people where they lived. That was the way God stayed relevant and close to them.

I was born in a day of great promise. It was called the Enlightenment. People were discovering new things about life through science and reason, the application of their own intelligence. They had a new optimism about progress and human possibility and were breaking from the binding authority of religious and political institutions, believing that reason called into question both religions and political systems which did not fit the principles of wisdom and social well-being. It is no accident that both the American and the French revolutions happened in my century. Religion was important, but they believed that true religion was reason-governed, a natural religion which underlay all the historical religions.

But this day of promise was also a day of great doubt about things which were close to people's hearts. Some of the philosophers, torn by the pain of their inner struggle, gave up their religion. Even from the time of my childhood I struggled with doubt. It was not only that I was hearing the arguments against God and religion, but I had lost my father and grandfather and my mother moved away when she remarried. And my lifetime followed the great 30 Years War when half the population of Europe died in some areas. If it had not been for my grandmother who raised me, my doubt might have been unbearable. She not only made me secure, but she taught me to know Christ in my heart.

Today we call the attitude of the last century Modernism, though most people recognize that it had its roots in my time, in the Enlightenment. Since the 1970s a new approach to life has been developed called Postmodernism, which of course means "after modernism." You can see that I keep up on these things. These two larger categories encompass many scientific, social, political, literary, artistic, and religious movements. Thus it is hard to simplify them. But there is something that I learned in the 18th century which is very much like Postmodernism, and that is what I want to share.

I realized the problem with overdependence on reason and science. Very simply, it can be stated as "while reason may know some things, for others you need the heart." Before my time people thought that most everything could be figured out from the church's theology, the Bible or philosophy. During my time reason and science were the primary authorities. But there were some who thought differently, such as Blaise Pascal who lived in the century before me. Pascal moved beyond mathematical reasoning (he was a mathematician) to intuition, the knowledge of the heart, for him fueled by a revelatory experience he could only describe as an experience of "fire" which brought him certitude and peace. "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know," he said. "...the heart is the place in us in which God acts, makes himself perceived, as well as felt or loved, and in short operates our salvation."¹⁹

You can tell by the way it is described that "heart" does not literally mean the organ beating within your chest. I like to speak of it as the "inner person" who has five senses similar to the outer person. Another term which could be used is "intuition."

¹⁹ Freeman p. 43.

I came to believe that the "heart" has its own ways of knowing what the mind cannot grasp.²⁰ This is particularly true because when one knows God or Jesus, one does not just know information about them. One knows *them*. In fact Postmodernism calls us to realize that the realities which we know and try to describe are more central to understanding than the ideas by which we try to describe them. The possibilities of head knowledge are limited.

We know God and Jesus as real persons and it is persons that we need. The analogy for knowing them is that of interpersonal relationship. And this is what makes knowledge of God wonderfully available to all. If knowledge of God depended on the mind, then only the most intellectual person could really know God. But that does not fit our experience. The baby knows God as he or she knows parents. The blind and deaf persons know God. The senile elderly person knows God. And all the Gospels clearly point out that God came to us in Christ, a person, who raised from the dead continues to be our Companion and Lord. And this makes Christianity so simple. The Savior looks at us, we perceive him and respond, and we have everything we need. We have him. Nothing more than this do we need to be Christian. Nothing more than him do we need to be a Christian and to experience the life which God gives. And in the case of a child, the Savior can give himself to the child even without the child needing to respond. The Savior wishes to do this because he is also the child's Creator (John 1:1-5). And whatever we need to know with our head, we have the Bible, we have our church's theology, and as life proceeds Jesus will help us to learn.

It's exciting to think we Moravians anticipated some of the insights of the 20th century a few centuries earlier. We are rather smart about some things. This is the heart of the Moravian understanding of religion. Of course there are many aspects of Postmodernism with which we do not agree. But we do have an important contribution to make. And it is good to realize that our history may be the bearer of wisdom for the present. In my time much of science and culture was opposed to this role of the heart, but in your time even science is exploring new ways.

Ordinary Comments on *Education*

When I became of school age I was sent to Halle, a boarding school where my family felt that I would meet the right people and get the right education. Of course, I was sent with a tutor, as was the custom. Because of the loss of persons in my life, father, grandfather, and the remarriage of my mother, it really hurt to be separated from my Grandmother. But it did give me a good education, taught me how to live with others, and gave me some vision of what serving Christ might mean. My mother escorted me to Halle and told them that I was gifted but proud and they would need to break my will. This was part of the style of raising children in that time, making them obedient. But I never forgot the pain it caused me and later vowed never to let them do that to children in the Moravian Church. Children are little majesties, baptism is their anointing, and from that moment on they should be treated just as a born king. ... such a creature should be treated gently like a raw egg and like a treasure which you are to carry in a brittle vessel across a narrow bridge to hold with fear and trembling.²¹

Because I knew that I experienced Christ when I was a child, I became interested in the religious experience of children, preaching sermons just for them. I also believed that even infants could experience Christ and that you might be able to tell this by the expression on their face. Even an embryo in the mother's womb could experience Christ, much like the time in Luke, chapter one, where John the Baptist in his mother's womb leapt for joy when Mary with Jesus in her womb came into the room. Since religion

²⁰ Freeman, p. 41.

²¹ Freeman, pp. 279-280.

was primarily a matter of relationship with Christ, not understanding, a child could have religion just as the child has relationship with parents without the understanding which comes later. When we divided up the Church into choirs, groups according to age, status and gender, in a number of locations we also had embryo choirs to care for children not yet born.

Education was very important to the Moravian Church and we often founded schools wherever we went: in Europe, England, North America. In those days they did not have public schools. When we provided persons with education, we had to decide what sort of education they needed. Certainly we wanted them to have the information they needed for life and we especially equipped with knowledge of medicine and science those who would be going to the mission fields.

There are two principles which guided our education. First, all are equal: men and women, adults and children, Europeans and natives in the various mission fields. Though each group has special needs, they all have an equal right to education. Thus many of our women were prepared for leadership positions, even for the ministry, very unusual in my time. Second, the primary concern of education was not to fill heads with information before they could understand it or needed it. Rather our primary purpose was to help persons encounter God and the life God brings them, and to experience and learn how to live in relationship with God. Once one was in contact with God, then God could guide persons in their actions and needs. I often expressed this as "living with Christ" or, as the importance of the Holy Spirit developed in our Church after 1738, we often spoke of the Spirit as "Mother", caring for the life of the Church as a mother would care for her children. We even spoke of the congregation as the "school of the Spirit" where we are taught by the Spirit. And we understood that to enter into the family of the Church was to enter the family of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit.

All of this meant that education in our schools and churches was centrally concerned with relationship, relationship with persons but especially with God. Where there are relationships, those with whom you have relationship can continue to teach you. You don't have to know everything right away. Especially when these persons in relationship with you have promised to love you all their life, then they can continue to teach you all your life, and can teach you the particular things you need to know when you need to know, things which someone else may not need to know. The God with whom we have relationship is the source of everything and when this God is our God then all is available to us when it is the right time for God to share it with us. Most importantly, God's love for us shapes our love for ourselves and gives us understanding of our identity and worth, all of which is crucial for our human functioning. And the relationship which we have with the fellowship of persons God has created becomes the supportive relationship from which life is lived. Thus in German or Latin we use a name for the Moravian Church which means "fellowship or church of brothers and sisters."

Besides the schools we founded, we arranged people in our churches into various groups for educational purposes and spiritual development. At first adults joined small groups called "bands" to share their spiritual life. Then we tried dividing persons into "classes" according to how far they had progressed in the Christian life. However, I realized that this was wrong because it made some people feel more spiritual and accomplished than others. Really, our life depends on what God gives us more than what we accomplish. In fact, if we do not know the love and gifts God has given us, it is very hard to accomplish much of anything. Thus we rejected dividing persons into classes. Then we divided persons into "choirs" according to age, sex, and station (such as married, single, widowed). This gave each person the attention needed for his or her age. We also were deeply impressed that the Gospels describe the human development of both Jesus and Mary, his mother, and thus we received guidance from their development for the various groups in the Church.

Look around at Moravian College and Theological Seminary. Consider Salem College and the Academies in Winston-Salem, Bethlehem, Lititz. Consider all of the educational activities in our congregations. That is our heritage. The Word "education" comes from a Latin word which means to "draw out". We do not merely teach subjects, but draw out of youth and adults what God has placed within them, respecting their uniqueness and differences. And we constantly introduce our students and members to what it means to be part of the family of God.

Ordinary Comments on *Christmas*

Thanks so much for letting me visit with you for the last year. I hope that my "Ordinary Comments" "Counted" for something. Now that I am back, I think I will hang around – just in case. It's hard for someone whose life was preaching to stay quiet and it's impossible for me to be content with only the 18th century. After all, you are here and somehow I should be too. Please, please see that they don't wait another 300 years to remember me.

There are so many kinds of religion and so many different perspectives on God. Usually we create God images out of those who wield great power in this world. God is like a king who holds absolute power over us all and rewards and punishes as he wills. God is seldom thought of in democratic terms. God is far away in heaven on his throne. If he were closer his power would not let the world continue the way it is and would overcome everything. If he were closer there would be no doubt about him for his glory and brightness would be overwhelming, perhaps more than we could stand.

I am always amazed when I think of Jesus who created the world and yet came to share life with us and live life like us. He brought no display of great power to overcome all the world's problems. He lived our life for we are his creation and he needed to show us how. The two most amazing parts of his story are that he was born like us and suffered like us. I can always see him in my mind suffering on the cross with his mother and the disciple John nearby. I can also see him in a manger, a tiny child born of a woman, held in his mother's arms, knowing how long it would take to grow up and knowing what would happen to him. It's important to remember all this at Christmas time. To be born as an infant and to suffer on a cross is not like any God of whom I had ever heard. I keep telling myself: "No religion could have invented this unless it were true."

*What did you think
when you opened
your eyes
and looked
upon this strange
world
you'd brought to be
and loved,
sometimes from far?*

*What did you think
when you felt life
moving in arms and
legs,
when you lay
upon the softness of
your mother's breast?*

*What did you think
when you knew
how long it'd be
before you walked
and only sounds,
strange,
came from your lips?*

*What did you think
when you knew
upon the cross you'd
die
and struggle, infant-
like,
to grasp your destiny
without power?*

*What did you think
of that vast world
beyond the crib
to which you came,
for which you'd give
your life?*

*And did you wonder
why
and did you wonder
how
it'd all come out
and did you wonder
what they'd think
of you, when they did
know? Arthur Freeman*

But there was something else he did by being born of a woman. The ancient world had some questions about women, their competence, their emotional stability. Some of this crept into various places in the New Testament where it seems to say women should not hold public office or teach men. But how can you question the value and competence of women when a woman bore God. That should have put the end to that sort of thinking and given women an equal place in the life of the church. At least in the Moravian Church we tried to live this out.

And through Jesus we learned something of infants. In my day many used to think that children were rebellious and their will had to be broken. But each child is a person, a spiritual being, a child of God, to be treasured and respected. And each child can personally know God.

If we want to know what God is like we have to go to the manger and the cross, to hear the cries of an infant and the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We need to go to places where God renounces the use of power, places where God's love and gentleness are transparent. No religion would have invented this unless it were true. No religion could have guessed that the meaning of world and life could be cradled in a manger and nailed to a cross. How much we have to learn from this strange and wonderful God.

Well, *auf wiedersehen: until we meet again.* Have a wonderful Christmas.
Nicholas Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf

A PLACE FOR NOTES ON SOME THOUGHTS AS I READ