

Perspectives



“I Will Let You Find Me”: A Word for the New Year

AS A GIFT FROM THE MORAVIANS, I PASS ALONG A WORD FOR THE YEAR 2000: “IF you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me” (Jer 29:13-14).

A happy result of last summer’s establishment of full communion between the Moravian Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be greater familiarity among Lutherans with the Moravian *Daily Texts*. Lutherans (and other Christians) didn’t have to wait for full communion, of course, and many did not, especially in Germany where the original German edition of the *Losungen* seems to adorn most pastors’ desks and many Christian kitchen tables.

The daily texts date back to May 3, 1728, when Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf handed out a *Losung* (or “watchword”) for the next day to each member of the Moravian congregation at Herrnhut, Germany. The first printed edition of the *Losungen* was published in 1731. The cover page promised a daily message from God that would be “new every morning.” And so it has been. For 269 years, growing numbers of Christians have read the word for the day from the Moravian books. Now in their 270th year of publication, the *Losungen* appear in 46 languages in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Reading the daily texts with this in mind gives one a brief but exhilarating moment of the communion of saints. (The English, German, or Spanish edition of *Daily Texts* can be ordered by calling the Moravian Church Board of Communication in Bethlehem, PA [800-732-0591].)

The actual *Losungen* are Old Testament texts, drawn annually by lot in Herrnhut from a collection of approximately 1800 passages. Corresponding New Testament texts are then selected, giving preference to maintaining a continuous reading of particular books. The daily exercise is completed with prayers and hymn verses.

At least in the German edition there is also a *Jahreslosung*, a watchword for the year, provided by the Ökumenischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Bibellesen in Berlin. That *Jahreslosung* for 2000 is the promise from God through Jeremiah, “If you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me” (Jer 29:13-14).

This biblical promise, with its juxtaposition of human seeking and divine self-disclosure, nicely matches the tenets of Zinzendorf’s pietism in which the Moravian Church has its origins. According to *Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*, the basis for the Lutheran-Moravian agreement, Count Zinzendorf

took Luther as his theological guide. His engagement with Luther led him out of the intra-pietistic arguments about struggles for salvation and sanctification and to a reliance on God’s justifying grace in Jesus Christ. Using the Augustinian-Lutheran theme of *simul justus et peccator*, Zinzendorf turned away from the predilections in pietism toward legalism and a rigid construction of the steps involved in conversion. While at Wittenberg, he developed an intense loyalty to

the Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism, and Luther's hymns and devotional writings.

If Zinzendorf learned from Luther, Lutherans can benefit from Moravian perspectives on the Christian faith, which affirm

that at heart Christianity is relational and devotional, not abstract or conceptual. The central goal of theology is to foster the Christian life. Theological inquiry is only partially planned and structured by humans; it is also an openness and discipleship to the Savior. For Moravians, prayer and worship are essential components in undertaking theological study and discourse.

Thus, among other things, the *Daily Texts*. Thus, also, the happy promise in the *Losung* for the year 2000 that, in the midst of their real seeking, the people of God will be surprised to meet One who has already made himself available to be found and has been seeking them all along.

This word is especially appropriate for the new year and, indeed, the new millennium when one considers its context in the book of Jeremiah. For a people in Babylonian captivity, the promise is part of "the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer 29:11). Further, all of this comes in the context of Jeremiah's God-directed letter to the exiles, urging them to

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters....But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jer 29:5-7)

Let's see: Despite the very real exile in which you live, God promises you a future. So, in the meantime, Live! And, by the way, love your neighbor; for God's love of all means that your welfare is tied up with theirs.

What a remarkably more hopeful, more useful, and more faithful word than the call heard often in these latter days to circle the wagons, turn inward, despise the world, and anticipate (gleefully?) God's wrath. The fear of impending judgment is, to be sure, never out of place in a sinful world, and certainly not in the world that we call home. It is altogether likely that much of the glitz of our chrome and neon culture will tarnish in our own lifetimes. We, too, might come to know exile. But Jeremiah insists that, even in the midst of judgment, God's ultimate word is one of hope, that God has in store a future for humanity and all creation, that the love of neighbor is still our vocation—because Jeremiah believes the gospel; the prophet believes in a God who remains Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer in spite of all human apostasy. This is the God whom evangelical preachers are called upon to proclaim as the millennium changes; this is the hope evangelical preachers are called to announce; this is the work evangelical preachers are called to commend. "I will let you find me," says God. Thank you, Moravians, for reminding us.

—F.J.G.