

IMAGERY OF GOD IN MORAVIAN SONGS
FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SWEDEN

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In the eighteenth century, Sweden was reached by several waves of religious revivals that challenged the dominant doctrine of orthodox Lutheranism and were seen as threats to the very foundation of society. One of these waves was the Pietistic ‘Moravian movement’ (‘Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine’) that came to Sweden from Germany towards the end of the 1730s.¹ In their effort to spread the Word and make converts to their own form of Christianity, the Moravians employed several kinds of religious literature, among which were two collections of songs, *Sions Sånger* (‘The Songs of Zion’, first published in 1743) and *Sions Nya Sånger* (‘New Songs of Zion’, first published in 1778). Apart from a few that were translated from German, most of the songs in the two collections were written by Swedes.

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¹ Apart from in Pietism, the Moravian movement also had its roots in the so-called *Unitas Fratrum* (or ‘The Brethren of the Law of Christ’), which had formed itself around John Hus in the fourteenth century; cf. Stoeffler 1973, p. 137.

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At the end of the 1740s, approximately 18,000 copies of *Sions Sångar* had been printed in Sweden.² This impressively high number clearly indicates that the songs were popular, even outside of Moravian circles. The songs were also disseminated in handwritten form, as is documented by the numerous manuscript copies preserved in Swedish archives and libraries. The songs were not only read and sung aloud at the (mostly illegal) meetings of the Moravians, they also served as personal devotional literature read by individual Moravians. The purpose of the songs was to express and maintain faith among the believers, and to awaken the souls that had not yet been moved to convert to Moravianism.

In this article I examine some of the Swedish Moravian songs from a rhetorical perspective, focusing on the use of figurative language as a means of religious persuasion. I specifically address the question of why the figurative language characteristic of the *Songs of Zion* was regarded by non-Moravians as improper or even threatening.

The Moravian View of Language and Rhetoric

According to the movement's founder and most influential theologian, the German Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the Moravian faith was a "Herzenreligion", a religion of the heart.³ This view influenced both the Moravians' use of language and their attitude towards rhetorical theory and practice. Inspired by Martin Luther and by the German 'father of

² A revision of *Sions Sångar* was published in 1744. Furthermore, the 1743 and the 1744 versions were published together in 1745, and then, in revised versions, in 1747 and 1748, all under the title *Sions Sångar. Bägge Samlingarne* ('The Songs of Zion. Both Collections'). *Sions Nya Sångar* ('New Songs of Zion'), published in 1778, includes material that had until then only been known in manuscript versions. For the various editions and authors of the songs, see Dovring 1951, pp. 39-151 and 159-244.

³ Zinzendorf presents the foundation of the 'Herzenreligion' in his *Londoner Predigten* (1753); cf. Zinzendorf 1962-1985, vol. 5 (1963), pp. 154-155.

Pietism', Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705), Zinzendorf questioned the usefulness of the techniques of classical rhetoric, which he considered insufficient as a means of expressing and creating faith.⁴ This position has been labeled 'anti-rhetorical',⁵ but it should rather, I believe, be seen as championing an alternative rhetorical ideal: if classical rhetoric is defined as the art of persuasion, Pietistic and Moravian rhetoric exemplify the art of religious persuasion.

Zinzendorf aimed at developing what he sometimes terms a 'natural language' ("Natur-Sprache"), that is, an artless language in which no distinction was made between the language used in private life and the language used in public, religious contexts.⁶ In contrast to the highly elaborate religious discourse that had become popular in seventeenth-century Baroque literature, the Moravian ideal was a direct, uncomplicated language that communicated sincere feelings.⁷

The Moravians' view of language and rhetoric reflects the way in which they thought about the relation between faith, on the one hand, and emotions

⁴ On Spener and the 'Halle Pietism', see Stoeffler 1973, p. 49; Fafner 1982, pp. 341-342; Dieter Gutzen & Clemens Ottmers, "Christliche Rhetorik: Protestantismus", in HWRh 2 (1994), coll. 219-220; and Radler 1995, p. 232. Both Zinzendorf's mother and grandmother were followers of August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), the most influential pietist and teacher in Halle, where Zinzendorf went to school; cf. Stoeffler 1973, pp. 132-133.

⁵ See, e.g., Fafner 1982, p. 341.

⁶ Zinzendorf describes this ideal in a passage written in 1752 in his so-called *Jüngerhausdiarium* (5.8.52), a diary from the years 1747-1760: "[Dass] unsere Kirchen-Sprache anders wäre, als unsere Natur-Sprache in vita communi. Davor behüte der Heyland! Unsere Natur-Sprache wird allemal erst zur Kirchen-Sprache". I am indebted to Reichel 1969, p. 71, for the reference and the quotation.

⁷ For Zinzendorf's view on language and rhetoric, see Huober 1934; Bettermann 1935; Windfuhr 1966, pp. 440-456; Reichel 1969, pp. 66-72 and passim; and Freeman 1998, pp. 92-101 and 128-129.

and experience, on the other. Zinzendorf stressed that there are people who possess the proper knowledge of the importance of salvation, but that this knowledge alone is insufficient unless it is channeled through and processed in the person's heart in order for her or him to attain salvation. Specifically, according to Zinzendorf, the actions of Christ the Savior had to be felt and experienced in the heart.⁸ As the church historian F. Ernest Stoeffler pointed out in his study on eighteenth-century German Pietism, Zinzendorf underlined "the importance of experience in the realm of religious epistemology, and the importance of poetic imagination, rather than reasoned argument, in the attainment of meaning".⁹

Likewise, Zinzendorf's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was fundamental to the Moravians. According to this, any saved soul, regardless of gender or social position, should be able to express and communicate the experience of her or his encounter with Christ.¹⁰ In fact, a majority of the leading and most influential Moravian writers had received higher education and were well versed in classical rhetoric.¹¹ This explains why their songs do not break completely with classical rhetorical conventions, but rather represent modifications of well-known rhetorical models. Furthermore, the writers made frequent use of what the Swedish historian of literature Stina Hansson has termed 'extra-rhetorical models',

⁸ Zinzendorf discusses the importance of religious experience as opposed to intellectual perception of faith in *Der Teutsche Sokrates* (1725); cf. Zinzendorf 1962-1985, vol. 1 (1962), pp. 212-213. On Zinzendorf's concepts of experience and feelings, see Hök 1948, pp. 104-111, 122, and passim; Stoeffler 1973, pp. 140-159; Radler 1995, pp. 247-252; and Freeman 1998, pp. 73-78 and 90-92.

⁹ Stoeffler 1973, pp. 143-144.

¹⁰ See Stoeffler 1973, pp. 144-145; and Freeman 1998, pp. 250-266 and 275-282.

¹¹ Dovring 1951, pp. 159-244, shows that most of the identified Swedish authors were either priests or teachers.

that is, patterns drawn from contemporary letters, prayers, and devotional literature.¹²

The Moravian songs thus offer clear examples of a view of the use of language and rhetoric that was out of the mainstream. Nevertheless they have rarely been the focus of literary research. One explanation for this can be found in the long-lasting opposition to the Moravians' use of figurative language, which involved images that are often vivid, eroticized, gender unstable, and sometimes elliptic to the point of obscurity. Moreover, the songs may be described as formulaic and, as such, basically uninteresting if approached from an aesthetic point of view. Hence, in early twentieth-century scholarship the songs were considered overly eroticized and in poor taste.¹³ What research there has been has tended to focus on the descriptions in the songs of the Passion of Christ as well as on their presentation of Bridal mysticism, that is, the love between the saved soul (the Bride) and Jesus (the Bridegroom).

The eighteenth-century Swedish authorities and orthodox Lutheran clergy strongly disapproved of the Moravian songs, not only on account of their theological contents but also on account of their highly emotional language and realistic descriptions of the passion of Christ. Although descriptions of this kind were common in the period's devotional literature, for instance in the authorized Swedish Psalmbok of 1695,¹⁴ they occurred much more fre-

¹² See Hansson 1991, p. 233.

¹³ Reichel 1969, p. 49, offers examples of pejorative references to the Moravian movement such as a 'cult of blood and wounds' ("Blut- und Wundenkult"). A similarly negative attitude is found in early twentieth-century Swedish scholarship; see for example Lamm 1918, p. 91.

¹⁴ See the hymns in the section "Om Christi pino och dödh" ('On the Passion of Christ') in The Swedish Psalmbok 1695, pp. 284-315.

quently in the Moravian songs. This led to accusations against the Moravians of using the vivid depictions to seduce the readers of their songs, in particular the common people who were considered especially impressionable. Thus, an anonymous contemporary critic of the Moravian songs declared that this kind of language only stimulated the imagination and did not incite faith.¹⁵ ‘The flute sounds wonderful to the bird, until the bird-catcher has lured him into the net with its pleasant tune’, as another critic, the reverend Eric Beckman indignantly wrote in an anti-Moravian publication of 1749.¹⁶ The Moravians responded by arguing that the songs saved souls by way of their revelation of Divine truth, mediated through wonderful words and images. The songs were, as one anonymous defender declared, ‘lovely flowers filled with honey’.¹⁷

In the following examination of selected songs from *Sions Sångar* and *Sions Nya Sångar*, I highlight three interrelated issues that illuminate the Moravians’ use of figurative language as a means of religious persuasion: first, the Moravian view of how to become a ‘Bride of Christ’ by following ‘the Order of Salvation’, that is, the necessary steps in the process of reaching salvation; second, the use in the Moravian songs of the rhetorical technique of *evidentia*, that is, the appeal to the reader’s emotions by way of lively and realistic description of things and events, in order to create faith; and third, the Moravian gender ideals, with a special focus on the descriptions of God as a mother.

¹⁵ Cf. Anon. 1751.

¹⁶ “Pipan låter väl för fogelen, til theß fogelfångaren fått med theß behageliga låte locka honom in uti nätet”; Beckman 1749, p. 47.

¹⁷ “the med idel honung upfyllda härliga blomster”; Anon. 1750 [Preface, inc. “Benägne Läsare”, p. 1]. Dovring 1951, p. 201, ascribes this text to Johan Kryger (Krüger). The debate over the value of the songs is further discussed in Öhrberg 2007, pp. 59-62.

The Order of Salvation

At the foundation of Moravian theology was the process of attaining grace and salvation through conversion. This process reflected a specific anthropology, which influenced Moravian education as well as Moravian homiletic theory and practice. The Moravians' view on the Order of Salvation (*ordo salutis*) had its roots in the so-called Halle Pietism, a movement founded by Philipp Jacob Spener and August Hermann Francke. On the basis of the three stages in the process of salvation the Halle Pietism identified three kinds of people, "Tote, Erweckte und Bekehrte", that is, the dead (those who had not yet converted), the awakened (those who were in the process of converting), and the converted (those who had reached salvation). In Moravian theology the road to conversion went through faith alone, not through deeds as in Lutheran orthodoxy and Pietism. Another difference was that, according to Zinzendorf, the various steps in the process of salvation could be reached almost simultaneously, or in no particular order.¹⁸

The different stages in the salvation of the individual soul are described in the German theologian David Hollaz's (1704-1771) *Evangelische Gnadenordnung* from 1741. The Swedish translation of the book, *Nådenes Ordning* ('The Order of Salvation') was published, anonymously, in 1742, and soon became the most popular devotional book in Swedish Moravianism. It is written as a dialogue between a Teacher and a Soul; from their discussion the reader was to learn how to become a true Christian.¹⁹

¹⁸ For the Pietist and Moravian view on the order of salvation, see Hök 1948, pp. 127-158; Vikström 1974, pp. 49-51; and Radler 1995, pp. 250-251.

¹⁹ For an overview and a discussion of the devotional literature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden, see Hansson 1991, *passim*. On the period's didactic devotional literature, see *op.cit.*, pp. 190 and 237.

In his foreword to this didactic and devotional work, Hollaz explains that

[t]he purpose of this book is to bring the souls to faith and absolution through the wounds of Jesus. The order in which one reaches this, is [first] the recognition of sin and [then] the hunger for grace, in the poverty of the soul. It is of essential importance to observe this order so that one thing follows another and that nothing is ignored or done out of order, [since that would lead to] the souls' confusion and greatest harm.²⁰

The text of *Nådenes Ordning* is structured according to the different steps on the way to being saved, as defined by the Moravians. It is important to note that, whereas orthodox Lutheranism included penance in the process of reaching salvation, the Moravians focused on the love of God and His infinite grace, and considered the Law and God's punishment to be of secondary importance. This position also permeates Hollaz's book. Thus, in the second conversation between the Teacher and the Soul Hollaz writes about the miserable sinners who do not think that it is possible for them to attain salvation: 'They only need to believe; not forced by the Law, however, but in an evangelical way.'²¹

In the Swedish context, the issues of Law and Grace were further discussed by the influential Moravian priest Arvid Gradin (1704-1757), who served as Zinzendorf's emissary in Sweden. In his unpublished book on *Evangelii och Christendomens Hemlighet* ('The Secret of the Gospel and Christianity'), from the middle of the eighteenth century, Gradin defines the essence of

²⁰ "Ändamålet af thenna boken är, at, genom JEsu sår, föra själarne til Tron och syndernas förlåtelse. Ordningen, uti hwilko man här til kommer, är syndernas käntslo och hunger efter nåd, i Andans fattigdom. Angelägit är at wara funnen i then samma, at thet ena må följa på thet andra, och intet något förbigås eller ryckas utur sin ordning, til själarnas förwirring och största skada"; Hollaz 1742, "Företal" (unpaginated).

²¹ "Af theße fordras nu allenast Tron; men icke på et twungit Lagsens, utan på et Ewangeliskt sätt"; Hollaz 1742, p. 35.

Christianity as ‘the joyous message of the grace and absolution in the blood of Jesus that can be attained by all poor sinners’.²²

This did not imply, however, that the Moravians believed that faith was something easily acquired or retained. In *Nådenes Ordning* Hollaz emphasized that Christian holiness is expressed in daily improvement and the daily practice of faith.²³ According to Hollaz, faith and grace have to be constantly renewed and reacquired. This is a large part of the reason why the songs were so important for the Moravians. As a means of persuasion the songs were supposed to reach both the non-believers and those in the midst of the salvation process, by communicating the joyous message of God’s infinite love and grace. Furthermore, the converted Moravians could renew their faith through singing or reading the songs on a daily basis.

Many of the Moravian songs are structured according to the various steps in the process of salvation. An example is song number 28 in *Sions Sångar* (1748), by the productive and popular Moravian author Johan Kahl (1721-1746). The song is written as a dialogue between Jesus and a Soul, in which the despondent Soul poses questions to Jesus: ‘How is salvation possible?’ and ‘Can the Soul be saved?’. The pedagogical Savior then guides the Soul through the different steps, which are described in a highly concentrated manner, and, significantly, through images.

Towards the end of the song (in stanza 10) the process is completed with the Soul’s conversion:

²² “thet fröydefulla budskapet om then för alla fattiga syndare fria och öppna nåden och förlåtelsen i JEsu blod”; Gradin [s.a.], p. 65.

²³ “dagelig bättring och förnyelse”; “dagliga trosövningar”; Hollaz 1742, p. 138.

Yes, I believe that the weight of Your burdens gives me grace. With Your hands, enter me in the Book of Life, yes, with blood. Take me in Your arms, O Jesus. Place Your hands around me, that I may part from You no more.²⁴

Jesus answers that if the Soul always remains faithful to Him, His spirit will always remain in the Soul. In the last stanza (stanza 12), the Soul rejoices:

Come, welcome, sweet Jesus. Give me Your pawn of betrothal. Come meet me Yourself, Jesus: let Your word become true in me.²⁵

The progression of the song takes the shape of a rhetorical *climax*. Thus, by way of amplification, a series of images are brought together to indicate the different steps of conversion, culminating in the meeting between the Bride and the Bridegroom: through His burdens Jesus gives grace to the soul; with His blood He enters the Soul into the Book of Life; He takes the Soul in His arms and rescues it from its sins as a gift of betrothal; and finally the Soul requests Jesus to come and meet it. The song thus illustrates the process of salvation, from the Soul's inquiry into the possibility of salvation, through the guidance offered by Jesus, to the conversion symbolized by the union of Jesus and his bride.

Song number 52 of *Sions Sånger* (1748), which was also written by Johan Kahl, offers a similar, but even more explicit, description of the process of salvation:

²⁴ “Jo, jag tror til nåd mig länder/ Tyngden af tin bördos ok./ Tekna mig på tina hander./ Ja, med blod, I lifsens bok./ Slut mig i tin famn, o JESU./ Knäpp hop händren om mig så./ Jag från tig ej mer må gå”; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 28, p. 48.

²⁵ “Kom, wälkommen, JEsu söte./ Gif mig thin trolofningspant./ Kom mig JEsu sjelf til möte./ Låt tit ord på mig bli sant”; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 28, p. 48.

1. O! What is my heart going to think, when it lets itself be drowned in the blood of the Lamb; and I discover in spirit and will how gentle and loving Jesus is towards the sinner, and how blind I have been, I who have not experienced grace before.

2. O! How I am going to kneel happily before the Sacred Cross, and elevate Your blood, Lamb of God, for my precious peace of mind. O! How am I not to think constantly with veneration about what You have wanted to bestow upon me, and what I have inherited of Your grace.

3. In the meantime, my Lamb, I lay myself down before Your wounded feet, and as best I can, I beg You for a totally clear conscience. The Soul is satisfied at times, but it has no eternal peace and happiness in the precious wounds, as do the other sheep.

4. Yet, I find and discover that my heart becomes filled with courage. The Holy Spirit quietly strengthens the Soul and speaks with a lovely voice about the blood of Jesus; so that my low-spirited bosom, when it hears such joy, calls out in hope: Amen.²⁶

In the beginning of this song, the narrator imagines how the phase of awakening will begin. Prior to the awakening, the Soul is 'blind' (stanza 1), but then it is rescued as it kneels before the cross. The phase of awakening is explicitly referred to as a 'meantime' (stanza 3). During this phase the Soul lies at the feet of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, but the peace and tranquility that is found in 'the precious wounds' (stanza 3) – the salvation – is yet to come.

²⁶ "1. Ach! Hwad lär mit hjerta tänka,/ När en gång i Lamsens blod/ Thet sig låtit rätt nedsänka;/ Och jag uti håg och mod/ Röner huru mild och kär/ JESus emot syndar'n är./ Och hur' blinder jag har varit,/ Som ej förr then nåd ärfarit.// 2. Ach! hur' lär jag tå mig böja/ Glad för Helga korset nid,/ Och tit blod, GUDs Lam uphöja/ För min dyra själa-frid./ Ach hur' lär jag icke tå/ Jämt med wördnad tänka på./ Hwad tu welat mig förwärfwa./ Och jag utaf nåd får ärfwa.// 3. Medeltid mit Lam, jag ligger/ För tin såra fötter nid./ Och så godt jag kan tig tigger/ Om fullkomlig samwet's frid./ Själen är wäl stundom nögd;/ Men en ständig ro och frögd/ har hon uti dyra såren/ Icke, som the andre fåren.// 4. Dock jag finner och förmärker./ At mit hjerta fattar mod./ Anden uti stillhet stärker/ Själen, och om JESu blod/ Talar med en ljuflig röst;/ Så at mit försagda bröst./ Tå thet hörer sådan gamman,/ Ropar uti hoppet: Amen"; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 52, p. 90.

Eternal peace and happiness is still not in the soul's grasp, yet with the aid of the Holy Spirit hope for the future is in sight (stanza 4).

Many of the Moravian songs are meditations on the state of grace and therefore focus exclusively on the second and third steps of salvation. An example of this is found in song number 78 in *Sions Nya Sångar*, written by one of the many female Moravian authors, Maria Boberg (1686-1772), and first included in a manuscript song collection from 1754:

1. Bought bride, come to your bridegroom to receive your treasure; do not be afraid to go in to Him and worship at His feet; rest pleased and happy in His lap, enjoy a sweet rest in His embrace, every hour of every day.
2. You have been cleansed, adorned, and made holy in the blood of your bridegroom, and therefore you will always be in good spirits at His table of grace. Red wine that refreshes both soul and mouth flows to you from His open well, in the everlasting faith of a child.²⁷

The Bride is urged to go to her Bridegroom and pray at his feet (she is awakened). Suddenly she is in His arms, enjoying her peace (she is converted). This solemn atmosphere changes when she is washed in the blood of her Bridegroom, sitting at His table of grace, and drinking the red wine from His side wound, 'his open well' (she has reached salvation). In this song the process of salvation is accelerated and compressed, and the metaphorical description of the awakening and the conversion are linked together without any logical progression in the narrative. The song clearly is not a regular narrative, but rather expresses a state of mind. Thus, the words all describe the

²⁷ "1. Kom köpta brud till brudgum din,/ At ta din skatt emot./ Räds ei at gå til honom in./ Och låfwa wid hans fot;/ Ligg nögd och glad intil hans sköt,/ Njut i hans famn en hwilo söt./ Altid hwar dag och stund.// 2. Ren, prydd och helig är du gjord/ Uti din brudgums blod;/ Ty får du wid hans nådes bord/ Städs wara wid godt mod./ Rödt win som läskar själ och mun,/ Ös til dig ur hans öppna brun./ Med ständig barna tro"; *Sions Nya Sångar* 1778, no. 78, p. 82. The handwritten version of this song is found in MS A578b, no. 398, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Bride's positive feelings, as for example 'pleased and happy', 'enjoy', 'good spirits'. This reflects the Moravians' belief that conversion can only be reached through faith and God's grace and love. Salvation is the result of a sincere emotional experience, and it was this experience the Moravians aimed at reactivating through songs and other kinds of literature, thus informing the non-believers and reminding the converted of the blissful feelings of conversion.

Evidentia as a Means of Creating Faith

Dialogues in which a Soul is guided to conversion (as in song number 28 by Kahl), and meditations on the state of grace (as in song number 78 by Boberg) are features that the Moravian songs share with the period's Lutheran devotional literature.²⁸ Another characteristic that links the Moravian songs to a wider tradition of intimate devotional literature is the rhetorical technique of *evidentia*, the use of metaphors and detailed descriptions that appeal to the reader's emotions and serve to intensify her or his faith.²⁹

Many of the Moravian songs were modeled over contemporary prose texts or hymns concerning the Passion of Christ, but stand out through their employment of extraordinarily vivid imagery. An example is Arvid Gradin's

²⁸ On the similarities between Moravian and Lutheran devotional literature, see Estborn 1929, pp. 397 and 405-409; Lindquist 1939, pp. 407, 412, and 432-434; and Hansson 1991, pp. 294-297.

²⁹ On *evidentia* in classical rhetoric, see Lausberg 1973, pp. 399-408 (§§810-820); and Ansgar Kemman, "Evidentia" and "Evidenz", in HWRh 3 (1996), coll. 33-34 and 39-47. Belfrage 1968, pp. 260-264, shows that, when using the techniques of *evidentia*, eighteenth-century poets to a large extent followed the guidelines found in classical rhetorical handbooks such as Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*. Lindgärde 1996, pp. 165-167, sees a common pattern in the use of *evidentia* in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedish passion hymns.

song number 76 from *Sions Sångar* (1748), which offers a highly emotional description of the Passion of Christ:

1. So my heart now weeps over Jesus's distress and over all His pain, His suffering, cross, and death. I kiss Your feet, my dearest Lamb, and pray that the roots of the Cross's holy stem may be firm.

2. I see Your gentle face turn pale in Your distress; I see the hole in Your side, Your stitches and red nail-scars, the pierced hands and feet, Your wounds, the weals and bloody stripes that You receive from the blows. [...]

5. My heart burns within me when I see You on the cross. In Your pain I find a force that gives me life. When I have the feeling of Your blood in my heart and the impression of Your pain, then I find peace and courage. [...]

9. So help me become forever a bee that sucks from Your wounds, which give a sinner life and strength. O Jesus! Pull my heart to You every moment, so that I feel Your death and pain in me.³⁰

The Moravian songs were often written in the first person, and it is not unusual to find the first-person narrator, the 'I', intimately addressing a 'you'. This is the case here, in Gradin's song, where the singers/readers are invited to identify themselves with the narrative 'I'.³¹ The song opens with an apostrophe addressed to Christ, to whom the 'I' prays for everlasting grace. This part of the song is written in the present tense, which reinforces the feeling of

³⁰ "1. Så gråter nu mit hjerta/ Utöfwer JESu nöd./ Och öfwer al hans smärta,/ hans pina korß och död./ Jag kysser tina fötter/ Mit aldrakärsta Lam,/ Och ber om fasta rötter i korßets Helga stam.// 2. Jag ser tit ansigt' blida/ Utblekna I tin nöd,/ Ser hålen I tin sida,/ Tin' stygn och spik-är röd./ The genomstugna händer/ Och fötter, tina sår,/ The strimor och blod-ränder,/ Som tu af slagen får.// [...]// 5. Mit hjerta I mig brinner,/ När jag tig korßfäst ser./ I pinan tin jag finner/ En kraft som lif mig ger./ När jag uti mit hjerta/ Har kännning af tit blod/ Och intryck af tin smärta,/ Så har jag frid och mod.// [...]// 9. Så hjelp mig ewigt blifwa/ Et bi, som suger fast/ Ur tina sår som gifwa/ En syndar' lif och kraft./ O JESu! drag mit hjerta/ Hwart ögnableck til tig./ At jag tin död och smärta/ Rätt känbar har i mig"; *Sions Sångar. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 76, pp. 142-143.

³¹ [Editors' note: On the fictional 'I-you relation' between a first-person narrator and an absent addressee, see also Tua Korhonen's contribution to the present volume.]

realistic depiction. The rhetorical technique of *evidentia*, of ‘bringing before the eye’, further involves appeals to the singers’/readers’ senses, most noteworthy to their vision. Thus, the use of the imperative (e.g. ‘See!’) is a common feature in Moravian songs, for example as an appeal to contemplate the sufferings of Christ. In the same vein, in Gradin’s song the narrative ‘I’ is said to touch Jesus – by kissing His feet – in order to fulfill her or his desire for intimacy with God. The narrator even expresses the desire to be a small bee that feeds on Jesus, by sucking from His wounds (stanza 9). The image of the bee is one of several such images used in Moravian literature – another is the description of the soul as a tiny worm feeding and thriving on the wounds of Christ – that exposed the Moravians to charges of blasphemy from orthodox Lutherans. To the Moravians, however, images such as these did not challenge the Lutheran doctrine; on the contrary, they were meant to refer to the Holy Communion and to the soul feeding on the blood/suffering of Jesus – reminding the singers/readers how His death has made salvation possible.

Sometimes the Moravian songs contain a strikingly high number of vivid sensory images. This is especially true of the texts dating from the so-called Sifting Period (“Sichtungszeit”) in the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Moravian movement consolidated both internationally and in Sweden, and actively began to reach out to new members.³² Through their animated expressions of the faith – specifically when describing the experience of conversion – the texts were meant to appeal not only to sight, hearing, and touch; rather, all the senses, even taste and smell, were to be used to experience the presence of Jesus, as we learn from stanzas 7 and 8 of song number 125:

³² ‘The Sifting Period’ or ‘die Sichtungszeit’ is the standard term used in scholarship on eighteenth-century Moravianism; it alludes to Luke 22:31 where Jesus compares the soul to wheat to be ‘sifted’ by Satan.

7. I know no word in heaven and on earth that – amidst all the troubles here on earth – are so comforting for the heart and give such courage as these three words: my Savior’s blood.

8. It tastes sweet to me that Jesus has bled. He is now my support. He can also have mercy on my distress. I have now realized that all He has done is for wretched me.³³

In this song, written by Peter Berggren (?-1765), a musician at the Swedish Royal Court, the singer/reader is invited to experience how ‘my Savior’s blood’ – and the fact that Jesus has bled – ‘tastes sweet’. Berggren’s metaphorical language clearly reflects how fundamental the sensory experience of Christ was to the Moravians’ belief.

In her studies of Swedish devotional literature from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Stina Hansson has shown how images like these are found in Swedish meditative literature in general. Hansson emphasizes that no distinction can be made between the thing described and the image describing it: descriptions of eternal damnation, for example, are to be understood as presentations of ‘inner pictures’. The emotions brought about in the individual singer/reader were supposed to strengthen that individual’s faith.³⁴ The same can be said about the vivid descriptions of the Passion of Christ in the Moravian songs.

In song number 84, written by the Moravian priest Lars Nyberg (1720-1792), we find what may be described as meta-textual comments on the effects of *evidentia*. Thus, in the invocation to the singer/reader, Nyberg ex-

³³ “7. Jag wet intet ord/ I himmel och jord./ Som I alt beswär/ här neder på jorden./ Så hugneligt är/ För hjerta och mod./ Som thesse tre orden:/ *Min frälsares blod*. 8. Thet smakar mig sött./ At JESus har blött./ Han är nu min stöd./ Han kan ock förbarma/ Sig öfwer min nöd./ Jag har nu förspordt:/ Thet är för mig arma/ Alt hwad han har gjordt”;

Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne 1748, no. 125, pp. 230-232.

³⁴ See Hansson 1991, p. 245. For a discussion of ‘inner pictures’ created in the songs of Zinzendorf, see Huober 1934, pp. 48-49.

plains how the song is to be understood and put to use: ‘You, the pure-of-heart: believe, see what Jesus does and suffers in order that you may find peace.’³⁵ The next eleven stanzas contain a description of the Passion of Christ along with reflections on the meaning of His suffering. In stanza 13, then, the narrator directly addresses the singer/reader: ‘You who sing this song and hear about the death of Jesus, say: will His soul’s suffering not move you to reflection? Can you look at all His pain, and not give Him your heart?’³⁶ In stanza 14, the songwriter concludes: ‘Whoever merely thinks quietly about His death and wounds, to him grace will flow, as finally the heart can contemplate in the valleys of poverty where God Himself speaks to the soul.’³⁷ The questions go to the core of the Moravian understanding of the songs as a part of the religious experience of salvation, since they seem to ask: if you sing this song and contemplate His passion, are you then not likely to be moved and thus reach a state of grace?

It was the intense use of figurative language, particularly in the descriptions of the Passion of Christ, that the Swedish authorities and the orthodox Lutheran priesthood considered seductive and criticized the Moravians for using. Furthermore, the Moravians were criticized for using these words and images with no regard to the appropriate liturgy according to the ecclesiastical calendar.³⁸ In other words, the criticism was directed not only at *what* the

³⁵ “I Renhertade at tro,/ Ser hwad JESus gör och lider;/ På thet I må finna ro”; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 84, p. 158.

³⁶ “Tu, som sjunger thenna sang/ Och om JESu död får höra,/ Säg: kan ej hans själa-twång/ Tig til eftertanka röra?/ Kan tu se på al hans smärta/ Och ej honom ge tit hjerta?”; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 84, p. 160.

³⁷ “Then som blott i stillhet wil/ På hans död och strimor tänka,/ Honom flyter nåden til,/ Som kan hjertat änt’lig tänka/ Uti fattigdomens dalar,/ Ther GUD sjelf med själen talar”; *Sions Sånger. Bägge Samlingarne* 1748, no. 84, p. 160.

³⁸ See Dovring 1951, pp. 123-125.

Moravians said but also at *when* they said it. The basic premise behind the criticism was that the vivid imagery in the Moravian writings would spur the reader's imagination and produce harmful fantasies. Implicit in the accusation was thus the idea that, although the elite had the ability to see through the language, the common people were defenseless against it: the imagery was an example of the Moravians' sophisticated tricks, that is to say, of their wrongful use of rhetoric.

Clearly, the criticism of the Moravians and their response to it form part of the long-standing discussion on the status of religious language. Luther had recommended a clear and simple style of writing and speaking; consequently he regarded the excessive use of rhetorical devices, first and foremost metaphors, as counterproductive and even as dangerous. Hymns should be clear, simple, and proper, in the style of the *Book of Psalms*.³⁹ From the critics' point of view the Moravians could therefore be accused of discarding Luther's recommendations of the rhetorical ideals of *perspicuitas* and *decorum* in favor of obscure language.

The anti-Moravian criticism, based on religious differences and linked to conflicting perceptions of the nature and purpose of rhetoric, also had political implications. As expressed in the Swedish Constitution of 1720, religious ideas were intertwined with ideas on government and the established political order. Thus, the first paragraph of the Constitution underlined the necessity that there be national unity in the orthodox Lutheran faith.⁴⁰ With their great

³⁹ For Luther's view on rhetoric and language, see Stolt 2000, chs. 2 and 3; and Birgit Stolt, "Luthersprache", in HWRh 5 (2001), coll. 677-690. Veit 1986, pp. 8-44, discusses Luther's view on music and hymns; cf. also Belfrage 1968, pp. 75-78. On the eighteenth-century debate on religious language, see also Cullhed 2002, pp. 286-302.

⁴⁰ See The Swedish Constitution of 1720, §1.

popularity, not least thanks to their 'blasphemous' songs, the Moravians were evidently considered a threat to the very foundation of the Swedish society.

Moravian Gender Ideals

If the orthodox Lutherans disapproved of the frequent use of images in the Moravian songs, they were even more appalled by the gender ideals expressed in the texts. The Moravian view of gender roles was fairly radical. According to Zinzendorf's interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, all the saved, regardless of gender or social status, were allowed to formulate and communicate their experience of the encounter with Christ. As a result, women could play an active role in the Moravian public sphere, for example as preachers (although they were only allowed to preach to other women), authors, and missionaries.⁴¹

This comparatively tolerant view on religious expression was unacceptable to the hierarchical, patriarchal Swedish society of the time. This appears, for example, from an anti-Moravian publication by the orthodox German theologian Johann Georg Walch, which was translated into Swedish in 1749, at the initiative of the Swedish Church. The Moravians' claim that commoners were under no obligation to obey persons of authority, should be seen, so Walch argued, as a consequence of their understanding of the apostolic office. What would happen, he complained, if offices were given to people with no regard to gender, age, or experience? What would happen if women, or commoners, were allowed to interpret the Word?⁴²

⁴¹ Moravian gender ideals and the possibility of active roles for women in the Moravian movement are discussed in, e.g., Uttendörfer 1919; Westman Berg 1955; Dresser 1996; Hættner Aurelius 1996, pp. 261-262; Öhrberg 2003 and forthcoming.

⁴² See Walch 1749, p. 251.

Indeed, the Moravians valued highly what were then considered to be ‘feminine’ qualities, such as the ability to express emotions in a spontaneous, natural, and simple way.⁴³ In his theology, Zinzendorf described the Holy Spirit in maternal terms, since this is the divine person who brings life and comfort.⁴⁴

In Moravian literature, including both *Sions Sångar* and *Sions Nya Sångar*, the Holy Spirit is therefore sometimes referred to as ‘mother’. An example of this is found in the eighth stanza of a song written by the preacher Anders Carl Rutström (1721-1772): ‘Come Holy Spirit, our only comfort, and lay us to Thy breasts! Gracious mother, give the sucklings a drop from Your great well.’⁴⁵

Orthodox Lutherans in Sweden reacted strongly to descriptions like this. Thus, in a theological publication from 1751, the reverend Johan Kumblaues (1714-1760) wrote:

The Holy Spirit ought not be called our Mother but only our Father, since He, together with the Father and the Son, created us all; but above all [the Holy Spirit ought to be called] the Father of the faithful, since He, together with the Father and the Son, has made them born again, taken them as His own children, and loves them with a decidedly fatherly love.⁴⁶

Also Jesus is sometimes described in maternal terms in Moravian literature. As Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out, images of the wounds and

⁴³ This was first discussed in Uttendörfer 1919, pp. 5-9.

⁴⁴ On this aspect of Zinzendorf’s theology, see Stoeffler 1973, pp. 146-150.

⁴⁵ “Kom helga and vår enda tröst,/ Och lägg oß intil dina bröst!// Gif spenabarnen hulda mor;/ En droppa af din källa stor”; *Sions Nya Sångar*, 1778, no. 36, pp. 45-47.

⁴⁶ “Then H. Ande bör icke kallas vår Moder; utan allas vår Fader, emedan han, tillika med Fadrenom och Sonemon, skapat oß alla; men besynnerligen the trognas Fader, emedan han, tillika med Fadrenom och Sonemon, födt them på nytt, uptagit them sig sjelfwom til barn, och omfattar them med besynnerlig faderlig kärlek”; Kumblaues 1751, p. 22.

blood of Christ had been used in the Middle Ages to describe how God cares for the souls of believers: the Church is born through the wounds of Christ, and He nurtures the souls with His blood.⁴⁷ The Moravians employed both this and other bodily metaphors to accentuate God's maternal qualities.

Thus, in the songs there are many examples of the converted soul being embraced by the Bridegroom or seeking bodily shelter with Him in other ways. The third stanza of a song written by Erland Fredrik Hjärne (1706-1773) offers a beautiful description of the caring and loving divinity, combining God's paternity and maternity:

Is awake, sleeps safely, rests at His back, which is powerful enough to protect me. Things may be in turmoil, the world may tumble: Jesus stays the same as He has always been, more gentle than a wet nurse, more [gentle] than mother and father, in this way I can be free and safe.⁴⁸

In *Nådenes Ordning*, David Hollaz had emphasized God's being loving and caring, as opposed to His being lawgiver and law enforcer. The Moravian songwriters used images of maternity to express exactly this understanding of God. Both the imagery – which, however, was not nearly as bold as that found in German Moravian literature⁴⁹ – and the notion of God expressed in the metaphors provoked the anger of the orthodox Lutherans. As a result, in the editions from 1747 and 1748 of *Sions Sångar*, the Moravians were forced to expunge all maternal descriptions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ However,

⁴⁷ See Bynum 1982, pp. 110-169.

⁴⁸ “Wakar, såfwer trygg,/ hwilar wid hans rygg,/ Som är mäktig nog at mig förwara./ Wil det om mig bullra,/ Werldens klot omkullra./ Jesus är den samma,/ Som han warit har./ Mer öm än en amma,/ Mer än mor och far, såleds kan jag fri och säker wara”; *Sions Nya Sångar* 1778, no. 133, pp. 135-136.

⁴⁹ For examples, see e.g. Atwood 1999.

⁵⁰ See Dovring 1951, p. 146.

the imagery was reintroduced in the 1778 edition of *Sions Nya Sångar*, which was printed in Copenhagen, Denmark, beyond the reach of the Swedish authorities.

Conclusion

The Moravian songs form a major element in eighteenth-century Swedish religious literature. Read as devotional texts as well, the songs reached a large audience also outside of Moravian circles. A means of religious persuasion, the songs were thought to be an effective way to strengthen the faith of believers and to convert nonbelievers. In many ways the songs conform to classical rhetorical patterns and may be compared to the hymns used in orthodox religious contexts. However, the obscure language and extremely vivid imagery of the songs reflect an alternative rhetorical ideal. On account of the songs' controversial theological content and figurative language, the Swedish authorities saw them as an example of the Moravian threat to orthodox Lutheranism and to Swedish society.

Although the Moravian songs occasionally share traits with the hymns used in orthodox contexts, they reflect a distinctive view of the process of reaching salvation. According to the Moravians, good deeds could not prepare the soul for its meeting with the Bridegroom; on the contrary, salvation could only be attained through the emotional experience of the sufferings of Christ. By way of 'visualizing' the Moravian ideas concerning grace, the songs were thought to create and intensify faith. The songs also illustrated the different stages in the 'Order of Salvation' and thus reached out not only to the converted but also to those in the process of being converted.

In their repeated criticism of the Moravian movement, the Swedish authorities pointed specifically to the language and contents of the *Songs of Zion*. The metaphors depicting Jesus and the Holy Spirit as maternal figures

and the Moravian gender ideals reflected in this metaphor were a thorn in the eye of the regime. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of all Swedes united in one faith would fade away. Through their strong influence on the religious climate in eighteenth-century Swedish society, the popular and widely disseminated collections of *Songs of Zion* can be said to have contributed to this process.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Brohed 1973, pp. 7-8; Lenhammar 2000, pp. 38-39, 79-80 and 89-92. On the political implications of Moravian literature, see Öhrberg 2005.

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