EARLY MORAVIAN PIETISM

BY MILTON C. WESTPHAL

Lansdowne, Pennsylvania

THE visitor to the modern steel-town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is impressed with the noise and bustle of a community which never would be suspected of having a distinctly spiritual origin. He might easily pass by the group of stone buildings on Church Street, which once housed the stalwart adherents of the Moravian Pilgrim Congregation, without noting that the historic edifices are essentially different from the many other closely built dwellings and business structures which encroach upon them. Yet within the walls of these venerable piles were enacted scenes whose romance and passion have never yet been adequately appraised for their significance in the varicolored history of American Protestantism.

Even the townspeople of Bethlehem are almost entirely oblivious of the fact that the name “Moravian Brethren” is one by which to conjure up a noteworthy succession of valiant religious characters, whose heroic deeds and pious strivings are still to be celebrated in an epic of the love of the Brethren for “The Christ of the Many Wounds.” To be sure some of the remnants of the early fervor of the Moravian Church still remain to impress themselves upon the work-a-day minds of modern Bethlehemites, but American Moravianism has undergone a radical transformation. The former holiness and the communal economy of that exclusive brotherhood have been surrendered. The fervent pietistic spirit, which prevailed when foot-washing and the “kiss of peace” were characteristic symbols, now lingers only as a passing memory. Modern Moravians have endeavored to be continuously loyal to what they consider the essential mission of their church, but they have dropped many of the traditions and customs which formerly marked them as a peculiar people.

The Easter morning litany is still unique as a distinctly Moravian service, and annually attracts hundreds of curious spectators as well as hundreds of devout worshipers to the venerable shrine in Bethlehem long before daybreak on Easter morning.
A picked trombone choir sounds forth the cherished Easter chorals from the church tower while darkness still envelops the sleeping city, and then descends to the door of the church to announce the early service. The Easter litany is chanted before a chancel as crowded with white lilies as the body of the church is with worshipers. Then at an accurately determined time the congregation proceeds to the cemetery where the litany is concluded just as dawn breaks upon the solemn scene, made each year more solemn by the growing memory of hundreds of such Easter services which, through the generations, have been celebrated on "God's Acre."

The modern Moravian love feasts also persist in the practices of the Bethlehem Congregation to typify the spiritual joy of the Brethren. Since the days of Count Zinzendorf this revival of the agape of early Christianity has continuously served as a liturgical vehicle to prepare the faithful for the celebration of Holy Communion or to equip them spiritually for the proper enjoyment of other celebrations and religious festivals. Moravian cakes and coffee are distributed to the congregation while a chorus sings some of the traditional hymns or the organ softly plays the choral themes of a former day. "The Moravian love feasts are intended to set forth by a simple meal of which all partake in common, that there is no respect of persons before the Lord, and that all believers are one in Christ, united among themselves by the closest bonds of Christian love."\(^1\)

Then too, there is the annual Bach Festival, which takes place each spring in Packer Memorial Chapel on the campus of Lehigh University. This festival, though less than a half century old, is Moravian born and serves to celebrate the Moravian love for choral music. To be sure, the Mass in B minor, and the sacred cantatas by the great master are not essentially Moravian, but they were created by a soul who was native to the German Pietism from which the Church of the Brethren sprang forth. Consequently when Fred Wolle, the Moravian founder of the Bach Choir, chose Bach to be the classic expression of the pietistic fervor of his forbears, he enabled modern music-loving America to taste the religious spirit of those brave souls, who broke a trail

\(^1\)H. E. Stocker, *Moravian Customs* (Bethlehem, 1928), pp. 72-73.
into the wilderness to found a community that should be the physical expression of their spiritual ideals.

For the origin of the Moravian Church we are led back by church historians to the days and scenes in which the Bohemian reformer, John Hus, wrought his significant work. He is recognized as the spiritual father of the movement. His teaching they reproduced in their confessions and catechisms. His sermons inspired their ministers and furnished material for their lay readers. His hymns gave the impetus for that deep, devotional music which subsequently played so significant a rôle in their worship and communal life. His heroic stand against the papacy, and his conviction that the scripture is the only voice of authority for Christian doctrine became the Rubicon of their unbending protestantism. His martyrdom was made the more glorious by many of their number who did not shrink from suffering a like fate for the cause.

As early as the year 1457 we find a mixed group of Bohemians, Moravians, and a few Germans, seeking a haven for their religious fellowship on the estate of Lititz, in the midst of the dense forests of north-eastern Bohemia. Among them were nobles and common people, priests and university men, with the venerable Patriarch Gregory as their leader. Hunted and persecuted though they were by Church authorities, they seem to have had no desire at first to form a new denomination, but had only determined to band themselves together into a Christian association. Under the name of Unitas Fratrum, they set forth four principles which should be the expression of their purpose. First, they would recognize the Bible as their only source of Christian doctrine. Second, they would conduct their public worship in accordance with scriptural teaching and on the model of the apostolic church. Third, they would receive the Lord's Supper in faith, and take care to avoid every authoritative human explanation of its significance. Fourth, they would ever regard a Godly Christian life to be essential to a saving faith.

The years subsequent to their inception at Lititz are memorable for the courage with which the Brethren endured all manner of persecution and still realized a significant advance in their movement. When King George Podiebrad noted how rapidly this heterodox group was increasing, he issued a royal com-
mand that all his subjects must either identify themselves with the Utraquist or with the Roman Church. In the execution of this command many of the Brethren were brutally murdered, others were burned at the stake, and still others, like Gregory, their patriarchal leader, were cruelly tortured on the rack. Those who were not apprehended by the king’s agents escaped only through the intervention of the dense Bohemian forests, wherein for two full years they lived the life of hunted deer.

When King George Podiebrad finally relinquished his persecutions against the Brethren, having grown weary of the prolonged and ineffective campaign, they began boldly to lay plans for the extension of their movement. Through the good offices of a Waldensian bishop named Stephen, three of their number were ordained to the episcopacy, and thus they established a ministry of their own. Then, with that characteristic missionary passion which has never abated even to this present day, the Brethren braved all manner of opposition in Bohemia, Moravia and Poland to add unto their numbers and to establish churches. When the Lutheran Reformation broke over Europe the fruits of their heroic missionary enterprise showed itself in more than four hundred well established churches with a membership totaling more than two hundred thousand souls.

But such success was to be short-lived. For when the Counter-Reformation set in under the determined leadership of Ferdinand II in 1621, thousands of families fled to Poland rather than surrender their faith and remain in Bohemia. As a consequence, Lissa, in Poland, now became the center of the Unitas Fratrum, and until the war between Sweden and Poland, the Brethren continued to grow and prosper. But when Lissa was sacked and burned in 1656, the ecclesiastical center of the church was destroyed, and its parishes were gradually absorbed by other protestant bodies, notably by the Reformed Church of Poland. Subsequently for a half century the Unitas Fratrum ceased to exist except in the secret longings of the Brethren.

The years between 1656 and 1722 are usually referred to by Moravian historians as the period of “The Hidden Seed.” During these years many, who conformed outwardly to the Reformed Church in Poland and to the Catholic Church in Moravia and Bohemia, secretly cherished the traditions and the ideals of the
Unitas Fratrum. Among those who fled from Poland when Lissa was destroyed was one named Comenius, who had been consecrated bishop of the Brethren in the year 1632. He found a haven in Amsterdam, where he busied himself in literary and educational work. Before he died in 1671 he published a catechism of the Brethren and another work which he entitled: "The Discipline and Church Order of the United Brethren of Bohemia." Shortly before his death he predicted the reestablishment of the Brethren's Church, and personally took steps to preserve the apostolic episcopacy of the Moravian Church through the consecration of Nicholas, the court chaplain of the Duke of Liegnitz, and of Peter Jablonsky, a minister in Danzig. These two afterward ordained Christian Sitkovius and Daniel Ernst Jablonsky. Thus through the ingenuity of Comenius, the episcopacy of the Brethren was perpetuated for a period of fifty years in the persons of men who were at the same time serving as clergymen in parishes of the Reformed Church.

At this point we must take note of the rise of Pietism in Protestant Germany, for it was not until Pietism had prepared the soil of that land to receive "The Hidden Seed" that the now submerged Unitas Fratrum could enter upon a new era of visible life. Pietistic tendencies had appeared in Lutheran and Reformed circles shortly before the end of the sixteenth century, but they had to await full development until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. When the Thirty Years War ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, religious life in Protestant Germany was at low ebb. The control of the church by civil authorities in the various principalities did not make for spirituality. Moreover, the leading divines of the church were becoming more and more involved in theological controversy, while the laity was being stifled into listless conformity to fixed creedal standards and formal religious exercises. These conditions, together with the demoralizing effects of the long war's aftermath, threatened the vitality of the movements which had been so signally initiated under the leadership of Luther and Calvin.

The prophet of the Pietist Movement was Philip Jacob Spener, a graduate of the theological faculty of the University of Strassburg and subsequently a Lutheran pastor at Frankfort-on-the-Main. He was profoundly influenced by the German mystic,
Johann Arndt, whose *Wahres Christentum* became the second Bible of German Pietism. In 1665 Spener wrote a preface to Arndt's book entitled “Pia Desideria,” which set forth the needs of German Protestantism in six definite proposals, stated briefly as follows:

1. The organization of small Bible-study groups within the churches for a more careful study of the Word.
2. A recognition of the universal priesthood of believers by permitting the laymen to share in the spiritual government of the church.
3. An emphasis upon the fact that the knowledge of Christianity must be attended by the practice of personal piety.
4. A more sympathetic and kindly treatment of the heterodox and the unbelieving.
5. A reorganization of theological training, placing greater emphasis upon the devotional life.
6. A different style of preaching, more given to the simple presentation of New Testament truths and to direct appeals for personal regeneration.

Spener's influence spread throughout Germany with remarkable speed. The Lutheran clergy seems to have been waiting for such an impetus. Not many months had elapsed after the release of the “Pia Desideria” before pastors everywhere were trying to put Spener's proposals into effect. Probably the most enthusiastic and outstanding apostle of this new Pietist movement was August Herman Francke, who founded the famous orphanage at Halle and collaborated with Spener in bringing about the founding of the University of Halle. Subsequently Halle became the center of the pietist movement, and the names of Spener and Francke are linked directly or indirectly with not only the reborn Unitas Fratrum, but with practically all the German Pietist sects which had their development on the hospitable soil of Pennsylvania.

Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf was a product of Francke's Orphanage School and a godson of Spener. His background had been conducive to the kind of pietism which he encountered at Halle, and what he learned under Spener and Francke only served to confirm the religious tendencies which had manifested themselves at an early age. His tender years had been
profoundly influenced by the over-zealous piety of his mother and grandmother, and it is said that when he was just learning to write he was wont to scrawl messages to God on little slips of paper and then throw them out of the window. It is said that at the age of six Zinzendorf regarded Christ as his brother and would talk to him for hours as with a familiar friend.

While at Halle, the young Count and a group of fellow-students organized a secret society which they styled the "Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed." The rules of this society required that its members should steadfastly maintain the doctrine of Jesus; walk worthily in it; exercise charity toward their fellows; and apply themselves to the conversion of Jews and heathen. This society was founded when the young Count was fourteen years of age. In later years it was repeatedly revived under Zinzendorf's leadership, and in 1724 it boasted a wide aristocratic fellowship. Christian VI of Denmark, John Potter, Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor, the Cardinal of Noailles, and General Oglethorpe of Georgia, were among the distinguished members of this fraternity. Later Zinzendorf organized a kind of grand chapter of this movement, which was called the "Order of the Passion of Jesus," and was composed mostly of Moravian and Anglican bishops.

Through the insistence of an uncle, who was quite out of sympathy with the pietist movement, Zinzendorf was forced to leave Halle at the age of seventeen. He was then sent to Wittenburg to finish his education. After reading law for two years at Wittenburg, he abandoned his studies and began a series of travels through Holland, Switzerland and France. At the age of twenty-one, under pressure of his family, but contrary to his own desires he accepted the position of King's Councilor at the court of Augustus the Strong, of Saxony. In this capacity he soon made himself unpopular by his vehement denunciations against the intrigues, the prejudices, and the corruptions which he detected in the life and policies of the Saxon court.

It was in the year 1722, only a few months after Count Zinzendorf had begun his service at the Saxon court, that a small company of fugitives from Moravia, under the leadership of Christian David arrived at Zinzendorf's estate near Bethelsdorf. These were seeking a haven from religious persecution, and also
a place where they might establish a community into which they could build the ideals of the Unitas Fratrum. News of the growing influence of Pietism in Germany had brought courage to the harassed Bohemian and Moravian Brethren, and they came to look upon the country of Arndt, Spener and Francke as their Promised Land. Moreover, the reputation of the youthful Count Zinzendorf as a zealous pietist whose connections with Halle as well as his influence in aristocratic pietist circles were known to Christian David and his fellows made him appear a most likely patron for fostering the reéstablishment of the Unitas Fratrum.

Zinzendorf seems to have quite readily agreed to harbor these religious fugitives, perhaps for more reasons than the one which grew out of his sympathy for their piety. His estate was after all a veritable wilderness, and never had been able to boast of profitable tenants. He could lose nothing by allowing these reputedly thrifty folk to clear ground and build homes on his thicket-covered acreage. Moreover, the Count saw in this company of folk dependent upon his patronage an opportunity to teach his characteristic doctrines of free redemption, justification, and salvation through the blood of Christ. He was in growing disfavor with the Saxon court because of his preachings and denunciations, and here was an opportunity to exert his religious fervor with telling effectiveness.

At first Count Zinzendorf was not interested in the reéstablishment of the Unitas Fratrum. He was personally loyal to the Lutheran Church and was desirous of having the Moravian exiles unite with the Lutheran congregation at Bethelsdorf. He felt, with most other aggressive German pietists, that a reform in the direction of a more inward religion was due to take place in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, and that nothing could be gained by establishing new denominations. The Brethren did worship at Bethelsdorf for some time in accordance with the wish of their patron, but before long they began to insist that the constitution of their Ancient Church was older than any other form of protestantism, and, in keeping with the spirit of the Ancient Brotherhood, they must be a separate people. The Count quite unsuccessfully opposed this disposition of the Brethren, and not until serious complications between himself and the Saxon government resulted in his banishment from Saxony for
a ten year period did he definitely identify himself with them. As late as 1731 we find him at the coronation of Christian VI of Denmark soliciting the office of court chaplain, thus manifesting his willingness to serve the Reformed Church in an official capacity. He delighted in styling himself as "ein freier Knecht des Herrn," and persistently maintained that his connection with the Moravians was not for the establishment of a sect, but rather for the unifying of protestantism.

It may not be said, therefore, that Zinzendorf was the founder of the Moravian Church, as some would lead us to believe. His interest in and his connection with their movement was born of his pietistic zeal and was little inspired by the desire for historical continuity with the original Unitas Fratrum. Zinzendorf would have been much more pleased with the exiles from Moravia and Bohemia if they had accepted the protection of the Lutheran Church, and probably he would have never been banished from Saxony had he succeeded in keeping the religious experiment on his estate from being a schismatic movement. To be sure, he very profoundly influenced the theology and the religious practices of the Brethren, and he is to be credited with giving the impetus to those extremely physical forms of Moravian piety which ushered in a period of morbid religiosity, much to the chagrin of saner and more virile Moravians.

The pious settlers on the Count's estate named their community Herrnhut, and proceeded to set up a religious and economic order of life which may best be styled a theocracy. All secular and religious affairs were regulated by the congregation and a church council which had been selected by lot. The communism attempted in the primitive Christian community as outlined in the Acts of the Apostles (Chapter 4), became the ideal for these pioneering Moravian Brethren. They had nothing to start with but the goodwill of Zinzendorf and their willingness to labor with their hands, so from the very first Herrnhut became a communistic settlement. Houses were erected to accommodate the single men, the single women, and the married couples, and each group was organized into a social and religious unit. Food, clothing, and other necessities of life were provided for through group labor, and all things were held in common.

With the banishment of Zinzendorf from his native Saxony
the reborn Unitas Fratrum embarked upon an era of missionary extension. To be sure the missionary genius was in the character of the Moravians from the start. Moreover, Zinzendorf himself had been fired with missionary zeal while still a lad in Halle, under the influence of Francke. But the situation in which Zinzendorf found himself at the time of his banishment made the missionary enterprise almost a necessity. He was not only in disfavor with the Saxon court, but he had many enemies among the Lutheran clergy. He was labelled a fanatic to be shunned and curbed. No field of endeavor was open to him except that of missionary extension under the auspices of the peculiar people to whom he had given Herrnhut for a haven. On hearing of his banishment, Count Ysenburg-Wächtersbach invited Zinzendorf to Wetterau to occupy his rundown estate of Ronneburg. It was the only place to which he could turn at the moment, and he accepted gladly in spite of the fact that the half-ruined medieval castle of Ronneburg was said to be one of the most forbidding places in all Europe. Here Zinzendorf gathered several families from Herrnhut and set about to institute the "Congregation of Pilgrims" which was destined to become the organized missionary expression of the Moravian Brethren.

After preaching for a season to the people of mixed nationalities who lived in the vicinity of Ronneburg, and after organizing a community similar to the one at Herrnhut, Zinzendorf set out on an extended missionary journey through Europe in the company of several leaders of the Brethren and their families. Ultimately Moravian settlements modeled after the community at Herrnhut were established at Herrnhag, Marienborn on the continent of Europe, and at Fairfield, Fulneck and Okrook in England, and at Gracehill in Ireland.

It was not until December of 1741 that Count Zinzendorf and his daughter Beninga set foot on American soil. They had been preceded by several Moravian missionaries who had worked first in Georgia and then in Pennsylvania. Nazareth and Bethlehem had been the scenes of missionary endeavor before the coming of the Count, but as yet there was no Moravian community established in Pennsylvania. For some time previous to the arrival of their distinguished visitors a group of loyal Moravians had been working feverishly to complete a log house at Bethlehem. Just
before Christmas the task was completed and ready to house the guests from the fatherland. Myers gives an account of the Christmas celebration at Bethlehem in 1741: "Christmas Eve was celebrated by a love feast in the little cabin. All were present, and, inspired by the occasion, the Count impulsively began to sing the old Christmas hymn,

"Not Jerusalem,
Lowly Bethlehem
'Twas that gave us
Christ to save us,"

and seizing a candle he led the way into the adjoining cattle stable under the same roof, where sheep and oxen stood in their stalls. The quick fancy of the Count at once grasped the likeness to that other Bethlehem of centuries ago, and he gave its name to the settlement then and there."²

The religious scene which presented itself to Zinzendorf when he set foot on Pennsylvania soil caused him deep concern for the unity of Protestantism. He had come to America as a patron of the Moravians and his first concern would naturally have been to take up land for the Brethren and lay the foundations for a Herrnhut in the New World. But the religious confusion which existed among evangelicals in Pennsylvania tempted the Count to throw his full effort into organizing the Germans of all sects into a kind of Evangelical Union. Being under the delusion that the adherents of these separatist groups were eager to be emancipated from their extreme sectarianism, he set about to bring into being what he designated as "The Church of God in the Spirit," and called upon the leaders of the various religious groups to confer with him to this end. Sache gives an excellent summary of the situation to which Zinzendorf addressed himself: "All shades of sectarianism exist here down to open infidelity. Besides the English, Swedish and German Lutherans, and the Scotch, Dutch and German Reformed, there were Arminians, Baptists,—Mennonites from Danzig, Arians, Socinians, Schwenkfelders, Old German Tunkers, New Tunkers, New Lights, Inspired, Sabbatarians or Seventh-Day Baptists, Hermits, Independents, and Free Thinkers."³

² E. L. Myers, A Century of Moravian Sisters (New York, 1918).
Between January and June of 1741 seven conferences, or Union Synods were held, but each assembly promised less than the one previous, and at the end of the series of synods the sectarian lines were intensified and the religious warfare increased. An analysis of the records of these conferences would lead us to surmise that Zinzendorf himself was an impediment to the realization of his purpose. His hot-tempered impulsiveness always prevented him from being the kind of rare diplomat who can bring order and unity out of religious chaos. As one of his critics is quoted to have said: "He wanted to put all the sects under one hat, and unfortunately insisted that it be his hat they were to be under."

After the definite failure of his efforts toward Christian unity in Pennsylvania, the Count addressed himself to the establishment of the colony at Bethlehem, and to missionary efforts among the Indians. The record of his labors and his experiences with the Indians may be found among the cherished treasures of the Moravian Church in their archives at Bethlehem. That Zinzendorf was a man of consecration and capable of making great sacrifice for the Christian cause is readily recognized by students of his career. His deeply religious nature drove him hard and sought expression in a missionary zeal which was at once effective and contagious. As a theologian he was readily eclipsed by his Moravian colleagues. As a pietist he was unfortunately given to morbid contemplation of the physical aspects of Christ's suffering. As an organizer and economist he piled up burdens that the Brethren staggered under. But as a missionary leader he was outstanding, and it is no accident that the Moravian movement to which he gave more than forty years of his life is today recognized as standing first among all Christian denominations in missionary activity.

Space does not permit us to trace the unfolding of the Moravian system of religious and communal life at Bethlehem. We must satisfy ourselves by glimpsing here and there in the records to note the distinctive features of this interesting people. Zinzendorf remained in America only a year and never again returned to the scene of his missionary labors among the Indians. The position of leadership in the American experiment came to August Spangenberg, who had led the first Moravian company to Georgia in the year 1734, and who in the many years he served the Breth-
ren as bishop crossed the Atlantic several times. In the year 1744 he returned from Europe with a carefully formulated plan in mind, and set about to establish what has come to be designated as "The General Economy."

Essentially, the plan which Spangenberg effected was based upon the community experiments at Herrnhut and Herrnhaag on the continent. There were to be two congregations, "Die Pilgergemeinde" (The Pilgrim Congregation), and "Die Ortsgemeinde" (The Local Congregation). In order to carry out their special mission to go unto the ends of the earth with the gospel, those who were capable of spiritual labor were to reside at Bethlehem in the buildings of the Pilgrim Congregation and devote their full time to the preaching and teaching of the Word. In support of this Pilgrim Congregation there were to be two local settlements, the one in Bethlehem and the other in Nazareth. The members of these local settlements were to support the itinerant congregation by farming and the pursuit of trades. All were to live a communal life, calling nothing their own, but laboring only for the spread of the gospel.

These two congregations were further subdivided into choirs, and the plan called for the housing of these choirs in separate buildings. There was to be a house for the single women, a house for the married couples, and a house maintained for the children of the members of the Pilgrim Congregation. Ultimately there were eight choirs in the Pilgrim Congregation at Bethlehem, the children, the older girls, the single sisters, the married couples, the widows, the widowers, the older boys and the single brethren.

In the choir system of the Moravians may be discovered the most significant pietistic developments. The establishment of these houses for single men and single women was regarded as a special covenant of grace. The inmates freely pledged themselves to piety, chastity and to the unflagging pursuit of spiritual knowledge. They were governed by strict discipline and supervision and their life was so ordered that meditation on religious themes and the pursuit of pious exercises were given the first place in their attention. At the head of each choir was an overseer with a number of helpers, who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of their wards. Each choir had its own worship services with liturgies especially developed for their use. Furthermore, each
choir was subdivided into bands which held sessions at appointed times for prayer, song and testimony. The married choir alone was divided into five groups; the recently married; those married for several years; the elderly couples; the nursing mothers; and the pregnant women.

In connection with each of the choirs there was a celebration once a year commemorating some outstanding event in the history of the Moravian fellowship. There also were several annual festivals of the combined choirs when the entire fellowship united in their celebration of the great days. Before the members of the choirs could engage in these activities it was necessary for them to have personal interviews with their overseers in order to receive admonitions and to answer questions as to the state of their souls. These interviews were held monthly, and also in preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper.

It was in the development of the liturgies for the observance of these various celebrations that the Brethren made their significant contribution to protestant worship and to religious music. Most of their leaders were masters of worship methods, and not a few have contributed great hymns to the literature of the church.

In connection with all special festivals there were love feasts. The choirs held their own love feasts, and at times the smaller groups within the choirs held love feasts. There were also many occasions when all the choirs combined in love feasts with the entire congregation, but on such occasions they sat in the places assigned to their separate choirs. This custom of observing love feasts originated after the memorable celebration of the Lord's Supper on August 13, 1727, in Herrnhut. At that time the congregation experienced a special visitation of the Holy Spirit, and were subsequently compelled by a new spirit of brotherly love.

The only ties that bound the members of the Moravian community together were their promises voluntarily made to one another. Their vows were not regarded as permanently binding, and anyone at any time could withdraw himself from the fellowship. It was their mutual goodwill and their sense of a religious mission, peculiarly theirs, which held them together. The members willingly donated their time and labor in exchange for no other compensation than food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their children. They sought no other reward than the
joy of seeing the gospel preached. They asked no other prize than the salvation of their souls. Material reward in the form of wages in such a spiritual enterprise was for them much beneath the dignity and sacredness of their work. The private possessions of the members were not surrendered upon entering the Moravian fellowship, but there were only a few who had any considerable means before they joined in the experiment. Essentially the plan was a community of labor rather than of means.

In the Pilgrim Congregation the claims of the church upon the individual completely broke up the family circle. As soon as a child could toddle about it was placed under the care of the matron and teachers in the Kinderhaus, and the parents were free again to go and do the Lord's work. The training of the children by the church for the church was characterized by a strict religious discipline, and the Kinderhaus was closer akin to a military academy than to a home in the austere atmosphere which it maintained.

The spiritual life in the Local Congregation, or Ortsgemeinde, was based upon the principle that all work may be done as though it were a religious service. The swineherd was on a mission for his Saviour as well as the bishop who ruled over the church. According to an observation made by one of their overseers and handed down to us in Moravian records: "They mix the Saviour and His blood in their harrowing, mowing, washing, spinning,—in short, in everything. The cattleyard becomes a temple of grace which is conducted in a priestly manner." The times of sowing, of reaping, of threshing, of slaughtering, were all given religious significance. Special litanies were developed for the use of the workers before they set out upon the tasks of the season. Before daybreak the farm hands would gather for a brief devotional service, which would be concluded with a love feast, and then they would start to their sowing, or reaping or threshing to the accompaniment of music.

The idea that God personally oversees the physical, material and external conditions of his people was applied to every phase of Moravian communal life. So constant and intensive was their pursuit of piety and so real was their experience of God's personal presence that they almost had a sense-perception of God. The vivid imagery of their early hymns is indicative of the fact
that Christ was physically real to them—his body, his blood, his many wounds, his bloody sweat, were strikingly tangible to them. In consequence of this exceedingly vivid experience of the presence of God revealed in Christ, the Brethren were borne along by a faith based primarily on personal contact with Christ.

Moravianism at its best has been characterized through the generations by a vivid sense of God's presence. And that emphasis on the experimental side of religion has helped them chart for themselves a direct course without turning aside to delay their spiritual voyage with involved and inconsequential theological controversy. They have been thoroughly Christo-centric in their doctrine and practice and have preached an experience rather than a closely reasoned creed. As a church they have given assent to the great dogmas of Christian theology, but they have never insisted upon personal assent to any of them.

There are, however, unmistakable traces of a sensual fanaticism to be discovered in the records that come down to us from the decade between 1746 and 1756. The impetus that Count Zinzendorf gave to religious emotionalism resulted in phases of extreme sensuality which were the source of serious concern to the stable, common-sensed Spangenberg. Zinzendorf himself had long suffered from a pathological condition which gave rise to demonstrations of emotionalism, and caused him to be often carried away by morbid visions and phantasies. As he advanced in his spiritual pilgrimage his pious exhortations of earlier days gave place to vivid word pictures of the merits of Christ's blood and wounds. He began to develop a sensual symbolism about the sufferings of Christ, and passed this symbolism on to those who went out from his influence. As a result the simple-minded brethren began to compete with one another in a kind of “speaking with tongues” in which they strove to show evidence of spiritual superiority. They styled themselves as “Närrchen,” or little fools, as “Herrschen,” or little masters, as “Würmlein,” or little worms. They let their fancy play about the spear-wound in Christ’s side, and claimed they were doves flying about in the atmosphere of the cross. They spoke of themselves as fish swimming in the blood of Christ, or as bees sucking on the wounds of Christ.

In the choir rites, especially those of the single brethren and the
single sisters, this extreme sensuality found its freest expression. No incident or deed in the life of Jesus was missed in the headlong desire to discover mystical significance for the edification of the faithful. Moreover every physical aspect of his trial and crucifixion was enlarged upon to satisfy the morbid tastes and erotic meditations of the choir members. Gambold shows how the disciples at the Last Supper were privileged to eat the body of the Lord and drink his blood. The argument which he records is to the effect that when Jesus took the bread in his hands his palms were dripping with sweat, and so the apostles were privileged to take into their bodies real particles of his agonizing body. By the same reasoning, they drank in the wine which he offered them a tincture of his blood, for as he took the cup his tears dropped down into it and mingled with the wine. In the "Wunden Litaney Reden" many evidences of this kind of eroticism are to be discovered, but limited space forbids us to quote extensively. It may suffice to point out that not only the nail-holes, the spear-hole, the blood which flowed from his wounds, were objects of adoration for the Brethren in this strange period, but even the spittle which ran down his beard, the thorn-wounds on his brow, and the vaporizing sweat of his body came in for their full share of morbid meditation.

The hymns and litanies which come down from this decadent period are replete with imagery that constantly borders on sacrilege, and it is easy to understand why men like Spangenberg did their utmost to stamp out the spirit which gave rise to such sensuous and repulsive sentiments. Moravianism at its best never tolerated such emotional extravagance, but it was Zinzendorf and the inner circle of erotic disciples who gave the impetus which led to such deplorable extremes. It has taken many revisions of hymnals and liturgies to eradicate the traces of sensuality and morbidity which the men and women of that decadent decade left upon the worship literature of the church, but a study of the present day Moravian Hymnal and Liturgies readily results in the conclusion that the church has thoroughly repudiated such tendencies and has successfully eradicated their influence.

The rule of the General Economy lasted until 1762, when adverse conditions made its abrogation necessary. The numbers in

the choirs of the Pilgrim Congregation became too great for the Local Congregation to support. Moreover, financial excesses indulged in by the Brethren on the continent under Zinzendorf’s leadership had plunged the church deeply into debt. As a consequence the Brethren were forced to change their own economic status in order to liquidate the debts lodged against their church. Workers were asked to engage in private enterprises and support themselves and those dependent upon them. In addition to cutting off the economic protection of communal life, the church requested that all those engaged in private enterprise should pay a goodly portion of their earnings into the church treasury. It is to their everlasting credit, therefore, that although they had to abandon their communal life and be thrust into the secularizing influences of their new economic situation, they maintained the essential features of their piety intact, and coöperated in paying the debts of their fellowship to the last penny.

With the abrogation of the General Economy many of the distinctive features of Moravian life and worship were dropped, or gradually became obsolete. The choir system persisted as an inherited form of organization within the congregation, but the pietistic fervor which was kept warm only through a carefully disciplined life under a common roof soon gave way, and in its place there developed a rare family piety which abides in many homes until this day. By the same processes of change the love feasts and the frequent church festivals became fewer and fewer, so that in this present day there are Moravian churches which have never introduced love feasts and there are also several older Moravian churches which have abandoned them.

*In presenting this paper I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the scholarly work of J. J. Sessler, Communal Pietism Among Early American Moravians (New York, 1933). Although I have not quoted from his book, I have been taught and directed by his presentation.*