

THE MORAVIAN MISSION TO THE AMERICAN INDIAN: EARLY AMERICAN PEACE CORPS

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THE Moravian Church has always been a church of practicality. When the followers of John Huss fled from persecution to the Valley of Kunwald, in Czechoslovakia, they formed a religious group whose very essence was a practical and personal approach to God. The living of a good life was always of more importance than mystical interpretation of scripture. The Unitas Fratrum passed through many periods of persecution and hardship. At one time it was almost obliterated by anti-Moravian forces. From its founding in 1457, to 1722, the followers of this peaceful and devout sect experienced desperate difficulty. Not until they found a haven in Saxony did the church again begin to thrive. Perhaps it was this two-hundred-year period of persecution that made the Moravians understand and pity the plight of the common man. At any rate, they began to look with new hope to the shores of a vast and rapidly developing continent, America, where they felt that "the temptations of the world could be shut out and the highest form of spiritual life developed."¹

This article deals with one segment of the activity of the Moravian church in America—the missions to the American Indian. Stories vary as to how the Moravians were stimulated to begin their mission work, but of this we are sure: they dedicated their existence to this end, placing the conversion of the Indian in a position of priority. Paul A. W. Wallace, in *30,000 Miles with John Heckewelder*, sums up the Moravian position well when he says:

We must understand the instinctive sympathy which their own sufferings and exile enabled the Moravians

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¹ Mabel Haller, *Early Moravian Education in Pennsylvania* (Nazareth: The Moravian Historical Society, 1953), p. 5.

to feel with the dispossessed American Indians. We must understand the deep interest these followers of Huss and Comenius took in education. Above all we must understand the broad statesmanship—and inheritance from their former leaders in Bohemia, Moravia, Poland and Germany—which motivated their missionary work among the Indians and gave it form.²

By 1740, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was the base for all Moravian operations in America. From here, the Unitas Fratrum became involved immediately in three main objectives: missions among the Indians, work with other settlers in the area, and the establishment of schools. "It was the Indian mission that absorbed the greater part of their efforts."³

This paper hopes to answer certain basic questions with regard to the Moravian mission program. Did the Moravians differ from other religious groups in their approach to the American Indian? Was their approach an enlightened one for the times? Are there similarities between the Moravian mission approach and the methods of our modern Peace Corps? These questions can only be answered after one is familiar with both the general philosophy of the Moravian missionary, and the intimate details of his daily life. A good beginning would be a view of a typical day in the life of a missionary.

DAILY LIFE

The Moravian missionary in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America lived under conditions that few of us would envy today. His diaries and letters give detailed accounts of his day-by-day activity at the mission, and it is in these daily notes that the true picture of the missionary can be found.

The Moravian mission was usually established in a remote location, well removed from any of the white population. There were many reasons for this isolation. The Moravians believed that Christianization progressed most rapidly when the Indians were isolated from both the white settlers and their heathen fellows. But the religious motive was not the only one which made them favor an isolated location. The white settlers did not trust the Indian,

² Paul A. W. Wallace, *30,000 Miles with John Heckewelder* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), pp. 2-3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

be he Christian or heathen. Their experience with Indians had been one of constant struggle. Therefore, when thefts or other crimes occurred, the Moravian Indians, if nearby, were convenient scapegoats. The missionaries were realistic about the problem, as the following diary entry shows:

We saw clearly enough that we could not live with our Indians among white people, for when we did that, the savages came and did damage and killed cattle at the expense of our Indians. They knew very well that the latter and not they themselves would be accused of it. . . . Also, if the wolves mangled sheep or hogs, it would have to be the dogs of our Indians which had done it.⁴

But isolation also brought hardship to the missionary. He placed himself, and possibly his family, in voluntary exile from the civilization that he knew. He lived with his Indians, as one of them, and dedicated himself to their service.

The day always began with a gathering of the whole congregation for religious services. If the missionary were fortunate enough to have an assistant at the mission, the morning sermon might be delivered by that person, while the missionary "conducted the quarter hour service, and . . . the congregational service."⁵ Following the early morning service, the missionary generally met with his helpers' conference, a group of the leading Indians of the village, to discuss any pressing problems. The Moravian missionaries divided their converts "into choirs and classes, with an organization similar to all Moravian town and country congregations. The entire CULTUS of the Moravian Church was reproduced including daily devotions, Bible-study hours, quarter-hour services, and lovefeasts."⁶ The conclusion of early-morning religious services marked the beginning of an active day for the missionary. His diary for the day might note that "the all too little supervision of the children by their parents was brought up at the helpers' conference." Or he might record that he "baptized into the death of Jesus the little daughter of Brother and Sister John Henry."⁷

⁴ David Zeisberger, *Diary of Fairfield, 1791-1795*, edited by Paul E. Mueller (Nazareth: Moravian Historical Society, 1963), p. 67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶ Haller, *Early Moravian Education*, p. 194.

⁷ Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 156.

But spiritual duties took only a part of the missionary's day. The isolated location of each Moravian Indian town made it necessary for each of the villages to be self-supporting. Crops had to be planted and harvested. Trades had to be taught so that the Indians could build their homes and provide the crude items needed to furnish them. The missionary was not fortunate enough to have specialists in these skills to assist him in teaching the Indian these things, so he gave the major portion of his day to working with the Indian in the fields or the village. Part of his time "was spent in building huts, while planting was continued as well."⁸ Quite often, his own well-being came last, and "because of other and more necessary work, [he] had to be satisfied a little longer to live under huts until [he] could provide better dwellings" for himself and his family.⁹ At other times the missionary might be called upon to "fix a door or window shutter," or to "fell several trees around [his] house."¹⁰ When he saw the corn crop trampled by wild cattle and other animals, the missionary "approached the brethren to make a fence from rails," and was pleased to note that "everywhere, good fences, mostly from walnut rails, were made."¹¹

The dual role of spiritual adviser and practical assistant made the Moravian missionary a close associate of the Indian. He worked hand-in-hand with his converts to improve their material state, as well as the state of their souls. The missionaries were so much integrated into village life that they even "lived and dressed in the Indian manner, so that in travelling to and fro they were taken for Indians."¹²

Not the least of the missionary's difficulties was his adjustment to the physical conditions of life among the Indians. His house was often only a hut. Even when a larger dwelling was built, it was usually crude and barely habitable. Often he had "nothing

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gottfried Sebastian Oppelt, "Diary of the Indian Congregation in Pett-quotting to end of 1804," unpublished diary in records of Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, p. 52. Records from the Moravian Church Archives are quoted by permission of the Provincial Archives Committee of the Moravian Church. Further reproduction is not permitted except by written permission of the Archives Committee.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

¹² George Henry Loskiel, *History of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Indians in North America, in Three Parts* (London: for the Brethren's Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel, 1794), Pt. II, p. 37.

to eat but bacon and flour and some brown peas."¹³ In winter the snow and cold threatened his existence, while in summer "the insect pests and mosquitoes frequently got in and gave [him] little peace."¹⁴

One missionary recorded being caught in a severe rainstorm while on a trip. He noted that "it lasted so long that at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, when we reached Clarksville, and I dismounted my horse, the water oozed out of the tops of my boots, although I wore two greatcoats, one over the other, and had tried to protect myself as well as possible."¹⁵ As a result of this type of exposure, and his long hours of work, the Moravian missionary often had difficulty maintaining good health. If his family accompanied him to the mission, they too faced the dangers of disease, snakebite, and exposure to weather. The seriousness of sickness in a missionary's family is expressed in the following anxious diary notation from the Pettquutting Mission, in 1804.

On the 2nd Sister Oppelt fell suddenly so ill towards evening that she had to go to bed and the following day she got erysipelas. After she had been bled the sickness was broken, but she recovered very slowly. This was a hard trial for us because we are still pressed extremely hard by work and Sister Oppelt has all hands full of work to take care of her three children, and at the same time to cook for three adults, bake, wash, mend, and to make new clothing also. This often worries us how it shall go in the long run, especially when sickness enters into it.¹⁶

As he was generally the most knowledgeable person available, the missionary usually served as the village doctor. Part of his daily activity was, no doubt, spent tending to the various illnesses among his people. A man suffering with fever might be bled, or a woman with a wound might be "sent . . . for a plaster which indeed had such a good effect that she got better within a few days."¹⁷

¹³ Gottfried Sebastian Oppelt to George Henry Loskiel, Pettquutting, September 7, 1804, in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pa.

¹⁴ David Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 123.

¹⁵ John Heckewelder, "Brother John Heckewelder's Travel Diary from Bethlehem to Post Vincennes on the Wabash River, and Return 1792," original in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, quoted in Wallace, *30,000 Miles*, p. 285.

¹⁶ Oppelt, "Pettquutting Diary," p. 110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Education was an important part of Moravian mission life, and usually the missionary served as schoolmaster. On any typical day he conducted "school . . . by himself, in various classes, from morning till night." The mission school closed "only during the busiest planting and harvesting seasons, [and] men, women and children attended it." More than one traveler, passing through a Moravian village, noted "with what eagerness the Indians go to school to learn reading, writing, and hymns."¹⁸

At the end of his long day of work, the Moravian missionary sat before his fire, and recorded his activities in his diary. In the pages of these diaries we find not only the joys and satisfactions of mission life, but also the bitterness, the disappointments, and the fears that he encountered. After a particularly grueling day he might complain that "they [the Indians] spend more time eating than working, and even then grumble that they have to assist us in our building operations."¹⁹ Perhaps one of his constant problems, keeping the Indians away from liquor, had arisen, and "some of the brothers and sisters who had gone to the Traders, had taken too much brandy there. . . ."²⁰ Occasionally one finds an expression of complete hopelessness. In the heart of winter, sitting in a cold cabin, with little food for his family, one missionary wrote:

The Saviour must help us out, for I have seen it too clearly when one depends on people, even if they were our Brethren, one is left desolate. . . . So much work is awaiting me that I do not know where I shall start.²¹

More often, however, the complaints were of the age-old variety. The missionary felt, perhaps, that he was overworked, or that he had too much paperwork, or that the dual role of missionary and father to his family was too much for him. At least one missionary wrote to Bethlehem concerning all of these problems:

Now Brethren, picture to yourselves, when one has to work so beyond one's strength and then use the nights

¹⁸ Abraham Steiner, "Abraham Steiner's Account of his Journey with Johann Heckewelder from Bethlehem to Pettquutting on the Huron River, near Lake Erie, and Return 1789," quoted in Wallace, *30,000 Miles*, p. 252.

¹⁹ Harry Stocker, "History of the Moravian Mission among the Indians on the White River in Indiana," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, X (Nazareth, 1917), 285.

²⁰ Oppelt, "Pettquutting Diary," p. 70.

²¹ Gottfried Sebastian Oppelt to George Henry Loskiel, Pettquutting, September 7, 1804, in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem.

to write all the other work such as diary and accounts, carry on correspondence, sometimes till late at night talk with Indians and when one gets to bed at midnight and falls asleep, often is disturbed by the children during the night.²²

A day such as the one just described was typical for the Moravian missionary of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the days turned to weeks and months, and then to years, he labored to make the life of the Indian better. Although his primary objective was the conversion of the Indian to a Christian life, he realized that in order to succeed he had to wield "the axe as well as the sword of the spirit."²³

It was not by accident that the Moravian missionary was both a man of action and a man of the spirit. The approach that the missionary was to use, his methods, and the code which regulated his work were all specifically outlined by his superiors in Bethlehem. This approach must be clearly understood if one is to place the Moravian mission effort in the context of its times.

THE MORAVIAN APPROACH

There were two central characteristics of the Moravian approach to mission work. First, the Moravians insisted upon a missionary who met rigid standards imposed by the Elders at Bethlehem. Second, they realized that they had to work from within the Indian culture, accepting the Indian way of life, if they were to have any success. Their method was "simple but systematic. First they sought the Indians in their own villages, conversed with them, preached to them, created an interest by proving that they could be useful to them in many ways, and then established a permanent mission with a chapel and school."²⁴ To implement this simple method the Moravians needed a special type of person, and their system of selection and training reflected this need.

The Church of the Unitas Fratrum was well organized to recruit candidates for mission work. The Elder's Conference at Bethlehem received hopeful applicants and screened them thoroughly. Evaluations of the applicants were obtained "not only

²² Gottfried Sebastian Oppelt to George Henry Loskiel, Pettquutting, November 10, 1805, in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem.

²³ Haller, *Early Moravian Education*, p. 194.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

from the Choir Helper, and Choir Servant, but also from those Brethren who [were] most intimate and best acquainted with such a Brother's whole behaviour; For the tree is known by its fruit.”²⁵ Since the missionary had to live among the Indians, under severe conditions, he had to have certain characteristics of temperament to be able to cope with the hardships he would encounter. The Elders stipulated that the missionary should have an “evenness of temper, between patience in waiting and eagerness in hastening.” They also hoped that he would be “fervent and zealous; otherwise it is good not to predetermine anything, but look to the Saviour, waiting his hour, for opening the door.”²⁶

Once settled at the mission, the duties of the missionary were “to study the Indian languages; to train native assistants; to teach the Indians to read and write; to translate into the Indian language all the important parts of the Bible, as well as many hymns; to instill the principles of peace into the hearts of the converts; to educate the congregation in the idea that whatever nationalities it represents, and tribal distinction it embraces, the Christian Indians are all one in the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁷ The requirement that the missionary be familiar with the Indian language was most important. The Moravians realized that “the first and most important thing for a traveller is a competent knowledge of the language of the people among whom he is, for without this knowledge it is impossible that he can acquire a correct notion of their manners and customs and of the opinions which prevail among them.”²⁸ Diary accounts and letters show that this requirement was taken seriously by the men working with the Indians. Brother Haven, in a letter to Bethlehem from his mission site, wrote: “I can now report concerning the language that it continually improves; when I give an address freely, pray to the dear Saviour for support, so I am assured by all my dear Indian fellow members, they understand me well.”²⁹ Oc-

²⁵ *Instructions for the Members of the Unitas Fratrum who Minister in the Gospel among the Heathen* (London: Printed for the Brethren's Society, 1784), p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁸ John Heckewelder, *History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations, who once inhabited Pennsylvania and the neighbouring state* (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1818), p. 117.

²⁹ J. Benjamin Haven to George Henry Loskiel, Pettquonting, July 21, 1805, in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem.

casionally a missionary would become so expert in the Indian language that he would note in his diary that he "delivered the sermon in Indian. . . ."³⁰

The training of the Moravian missionary was thorough. Since occupational preparation was a part of the Moravian way of life, "every able bodied man was required to learn a trade."³¹ As a representative of his faith, he was well versed in the tenets of his religion. He knew the language of the people he would serve. In addition to these assets, the Moravian missionary entered into his work with zest, so that even the Elders were often "astonished at the willingness and desire of the brethren for [mission] service . . . especially as the service of the gospel among the heathen is no easy matter."³² The training of the missionary was considered to be of such importance that a missionary training school was opened in Bethlehem as early as 1744.

The Moravians realized, however, that the success of their mission work depended upon more than a qualified agent to carry the Gospel to the Indian. It was their belief that the best results were obtained when the missionary worked within the context of the Indian culture. They "entered upon their work with a genuine respect for the people they had come to help. They did not try to break the Indian's spirit by reviling all his old customs."³³ The Moravians felt that Christianization had to take place within the framework of the Indian way of life. Therefore, they did not attempt to superimpose the white man's civilization on the Indian. Nor did they view the Indian as a hopeless sinner, to be pitied and scorned. The missionary was "never to lord it over the heathen, but to live humbly among them."³⁴ The Indians must have been impressed by these men who worked with them in the fields and shops, preached to them in their own language, and visited with them "in their huts and dwelling places, to become acquainted with their usual course and manner of living

³⁰ David Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 151.

³¹ Elma Gray, *Wilderness Christians: The Moravian Mission to the Delaware Indians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 27.

³² Gottlieb Spangenberg, *An Account of the manner in which the Protestant Church of the Unitas Fratrum, or United Brethren, preach the Gospel and Carry on their Missions among the Heathen* (London: H. Trapp, 1788), p. 62.

³³ Kenneth G. Hamilton, "Cultural Contributions of Moravian Missions Among the Indians," *Pennsylvania History*, XVIII (1951), 1-15.

³⁴ David Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 7.

at home."³⁵ The Moravian missionary worked to "cultivate a confidential intercourse with the people committed to his charge . . .," and he tried to maintain that relationship as long as he was "privileged to serve them in the Gospel."³⁶

By basing his relationship with the Indians on the keynote of equality, the Moravian missionary showed the Indians that he was sincere, and worthy of their trust. This trust was rare in Indian-white relations. The Indian was cheated, bribed, and misled by most white men with whom he came into contact. His lands were constantly usurped and his domain reduced. After the American Revolution, "the United States, encouraging the flow of population into the west, busied itself with extinguishing the Indian title to the land. In few quarters, official or unofficial, was there any sympathy with the Indian who was thus perforce losing his homeland, and there was almost no understanding of his motives and mores."³⁷ It is not surprising, then, that the Indians distrusted the white men who "held their good Book in one hand, [while] in the other they had murderous weapons" to attack them.³⁸ The Moravians worked hard to break down this distrust. They were acutely aware that the slightest error could ruin months, or even years, of hard work. The missionary Zeisberger noted that:

The chiefs and Indians had always harbored the suspicion toward us, when we lived in Pettquutting³⁹ that we would leave them and secretly go away at some time opportune for us. Therefore we had proved to them at every opportunity that was not at all our intention, but that we would maintain our friendship with them and not break it.⁴⁰

Men like Zeisberger did manage to gain the trust and sometimes even the devotion of the Indians. Zeisberger himself became so well known and respected by the Indians that "he was always the first character sought for, to effect a settlement, when matters of

³⁵ *Instructions*, p. 54.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁷ Wallace, *30,000 Miles*, p. 258.

³⁸ Heckewelder, *History, Manners and Customs*, p. 179.

³⁹ Pettquutting: A Moravian Indian town, founded in 1787, on the Huron River, near present Milan, Ohio.

⁴⁰ David Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 58.

an unfavorable nature had taken place between two nations. In what he said they placed full confidence."⁴¹

By sending qualified men to live among the Indians, the Moravians hoped to sway the Indians from their heathen life to the Christian faith. But they did much more than that. Their missionaries, equipped with practical skills, the language of the people they were to serve, and a genuine respect for the Indians, often restored the confidence of a broken people.

SOME CONTRASTING VIEWS OF MISSIONARY WORK

The Moravian approach to missionary work seems an enlightened one when viewed from the perspective of the present day. In evaluating their work, however, it is more important to know whether their methods were unique for their time, or typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

From the days of the earliest settlers in America, the Indians were looked upon as "objects to be pitied and more frequently despised."⁴² The Puritans, for instance, believed that the Indian belonged to an inferior race, one which was accursed. John Eliot (1604-1690), a sincere and dedicated missionary, "found it hopeless to expect English Officers in [the] Indian Churches; the work is full of hardship, hard labour, and the Indians not yet able to give considerable support and maintenance; and Men have bodies, and must live of the Gospel; And what comes from England is liable to hazard and uncertainties."⁴³ This attitude toward missionary work is expressed in the journals, diaries, and accounts of most of the Protestant missionaries who were active during the eighteenth century. Often the work of the missionary was considered distasteful. "Few ministers . . . were willing to undertake such work for any length of time."⁴⁴

Those who did dedicate themselves to serving the Indian often held a most critical view of the Indian way of life. Eleazar

⁴¹ John Heckewelder, "John Heckewelder's Narrative of the Indian Mission on Muskingum," original in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, quoted in Wallace, *30,000 Miles*, p. 86.

⁴² Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood: Prentice Hall, 1960), p. 82.

⁴³ John Eliot, *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England, in the Year 1670* (London: John Allen, 1671), bound in *Old South Leaflets* (Boston, 1890), p. 3.

⁴⁴ James D. McCallum, *The Letters of Eleazar Wheelock's Indians* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), p. 14.

Wheeloock, an eighteenth-century Congregationalist missionary, commented that

he would recommend to the savages a more rational and decent manner of living, than that which they are in, and thereby, in time, remedy and remove that great, hitherto insuperable difficulty, so constantly complained of by all our missionaries among them, as the great impediment in the way to the success of their mission, viz., their continual rambling about.⁴⁵

Few of the missionaries could find any virtue in the Indian's culture. They felt that the way to improve both his spiritual and material state was to remove him from his native environment, "where the Indian children would not only be out of the way of temptation but would be stimulated by the example of law abiding whites."⁴⁶ This condemnation of the Indian culture in favor of imposing the white man's civilization was a typical view, held by most of the missionaries of the time. David Brainerd, Presbyterian missionary to the Indians of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, complained of "inconvenient situations, savage manners, and [an] unhappy method of living." He deplored not having "seen an Englishman for a month or six weeks together," and noted that his spirit became "so depressed with the melancholy views of the tempers and conduct of the Pagans, when some time confined with them, that [he] felt as if banished from all the people of God."⁴⁷

All of the comments noted above express the same type of feeling. Unlike the Moravians, these missionaries refused to realize that the Indian had a tradition, a culture, of his own. They believed that the Indian should learn to live as they lived. The goal in ministering to the Indians was "to win over the Heathen native to a knowledge of God, and a firm attachment to our national interests."⁴⁸ Although motivated by religion and a deep concern

⁴⁵ Eleazar Wheeloock, *Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity School in Lebanon, Connecticut* (Original published in 1762. This edition bound in *Old South Leaflets*, Boston, 1890), p. 3.

⁴⁶ McCallum, *The Letters of Wheeloock's Indians*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ David Brainerd, *Memoirs of the Reverend David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians on the Borders of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania*, edited by Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: S. Converse, 1822), p. 358.

⁴⁸ William Smith, *A Discourse concerning the Conversion of the Heathen Americans* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1760), p. 17.

for the Indian, the missionaries of these denominational groups did not realize, as did the Moravians, that the Indian had to be dealt with on his own terms. A missionary of the Unitas Fratrum wrote, in December of 1799:

Upon the whole we can truly say that peace and concord among men, which the angel of the Lord declared would be the happy consequence of the birth of a saviour is, thanks be to God, realized and enjoyed in this detached corner of the earth. And this, let it be remembered, is among a society who follow the chase chiefly for their livelihood, whose national character is blended with much ferocity, and who in a savage state, have been accustomed to give a free scope to most of the baser and least controllable passions.⁴⁹

The Moravians, too, recognized the baser elements in the "national character" of the Indian. But they did not hope to change these by imposing a new civilization on the savage. Rather, they brought the tools of education and economic aid to the Indian and attempted to adapt them to the Indian culture.

THE MORAVIAN MISSIONARY AND EDUCATION

Education was an important part of life at a Moravian mission. But education was broad in scope, much like our present-day conception. Although the purely academic phase was important, the Moravians included agricultural work, training in trades, and domestic instruction in their program of education at the mission. The Elder's Conference in Bethlehem was forward-looking in its realization that evangelization and education went hand in hand. In fact, "one implied the other, for how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard."⁵⁰ Wherever a mission was started, a school soon followed.

The school was usually one of the first buildings to be built at the mission site. But, if conditions prevented the immediate con-

⁴⁹ "Diary of the Indian Congregation at Goshen on the River Muskingum," unpublished diary in archives of Moravian Church, Bethlehem, p. 6.

⁵⁰ John Greenfield, "Moravian Educational Labors Among the Indians." *The Pennsylvania German*, VII (Lebanon: The Report Publishing Company, 1907), 415-420.

struction of a school building, the missionaries were not deterred. The diary of one mission states:

With the commencement of this month, the school here was discontinued for the winter. For want of a school-house, it has been kept hitherto in our temporary church, which is too open to be made use of for that purpose at the present season.⁵¹

Because of other demands upon the children, school was sometimes open on only "three days of the week, beginning at 9 A.M. and ending after 3 P.M."⁵² The curriculum of the mission school was wide, including reading, writing, language, arithmetic, religion, and music. The Moravian Indians were encouraged to attend classes, and one traveler among them noted:

I should mention with what eagerness the Indians go to school to learn reading, writing, and hymns. Brother David conducts school here by himself, in various classes, from morning till night. School stops only during the busiest planting and harvesting seasons.⁵³

Although most Indians completed all of their formal education at the mission school, occasionally one would show exceptional promise and be sent on for further training. One most unusual case was an Indian called John, who "was several years at school in Princeton College, New Jersey, where he acquired a pretty copious acquaintance with the English language."⁵⁴

Part of the aim of formal education at the Moravian mission was to break down those areas of Indian custom that were harmful to either individuals or to the tribe as a whole. This was a ticklish task, since the missionary always tried not to offend the sensitive feelings of his people. One of these areas was personal hygiene. The Indians were not aware of the need for personal cleanliness and virtually ignored sanitation in their daily lives.

⁵¹ "Goshen Diary," p. 9.

⁵² Jesse Bickensderfer, "Establishment of the Moravian Congregations in Ohio," *Transactions of Moravian Historical Society*, I (Nazareth, 1870), 154-176.

⁵³ Abraham Steiner, "Abraham Steiner's Account of His Journey with John Heckewelder from Bethlehem to Pettquonting on the Huron River near Lake Erie, and Return, 1789," original in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, quoted in Wallace, *30,000 Miles*, p. 252.

⁵⁴ "Goshen Diary," p. 5.

As the modern teacher does today, the Moravian teacher took advantage of the classroom situation to instill basic habits for personal health in his students. Brother Schmick, for instance, "had always insisted on their [the Indian children] washing their hands and faces before coming to school; no doubt a very necessary thing. So, no sooner did he appear at his place in the school again than they all held up their clean brown hands and showed their freshly washed faces."⁵⁵

The Moravians gave instruction to adults as well as children, but they believed that the children held the real hope for the future of the American Indian. This concern is shown in their attitude toward education and the special care they took in the religious instruction of the children. Although the children "constantly attended the evening meetings, for the congregation," the missionaries also held "a separate meeting, regularly, once a week," for the children only.⁵⁶ This concern was not confined to church and school. If the parents seemed neglectful, the missionary "admonished them to have more regard for the welfare of their children, and not to let them have their own way and become a prey to Satan, something they would someday rue mournfully."⁵⁷

The formal and academic part of Moravian mission education also served practical ends. It enabled the Indians to familiarize themselves with the scriptures, and to write their own language. Writing was an innovation to the Indians and the missionaries noted that their people were:

. . . fully sensible of the many advantages of being able to express themselves by the help of written letters, in preference to the sending of verbal messages, as is the practice among the heathen Indians. The young people therefore exercise themselves diligently in this art, and some who have never had the opportunity of receiving regular instruction are become considerable proficients therein.⁵⁸

The school was an important part of Moravian mission life.

⁵⁵ Max J. Hark, "Meniolagomeka. Annals of a Moravian Indian Village an Hundred and Thirty Years Ago," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, II (Nazareth: 1886), 143.

⁵⁶ "Goshen Diary," p. 22.

⁵⁷ David Zeisberger, *Diary*, p. 156.

⁵⁸ "Goshen Diary," p. 3.

When visitors passed through a Moravian Indian town, the missionary often reported that "the people marveled about our Indians that they could read and sing so beautifully and they often mentioned they [the Indian children] would be more fortunate than their children who were unable to receive any instruction."⁵⁹

Although the formalized aspects of education were important, the Moravians realized that the Indian had to be educated in areas much more basic to his survival. These included agriculture and trade training. The missionaries did not delude themselves. They realized that their hopes for a spiritual rejuvenation depended upon their ability to bring the Indians to "good order outwardly." They "advised them to a regular labor, e.g., to plant in due season, to hunt, to fish, and do everything needful." They taught the Indians how to "keep and preserve what they get, for the winter."⁶⁰

The Indians were generally receptive to the teaching of the missionaries in these areas. They soon realized that careful planting and harvesting would relieve them of the annual winter hardship that had come to be their lot. Still, the missionary had to be careful. He could not control, only suggest. He "by his example urged the Indians to clear their land, build fences, hoe and dig the ground, and plant it with beans, corn and other vegetables."⁶¹ Along with the emphasis on agriculture, he stressed trade skills such as carpentry and masonry. The Moravian Indians developed a rather high degree of proficiency in these areas, and often were able to "show a great superiority over all other Indians." They were able to "excel the white people on the frontiers, professed carpenters and masons excepted." And "in the cutting of timber with the hatchet, in the smoothing of it with the broad-axe and plane, and in the splitting of clapboards, they . . . acquired much expertness."⁶² Trade education was considered to be of such importance that it was mentioned rather forcefully in the missionaries' instruction manual. The manual said:

The establishment of trades at several of our missionary stations, likewise affords to the surrounding heathen an opportunity of acquiring knowledge and skill, which may materially assist them in gaining a livelihood for

⁵⁹ Oppert, "Pettquotting Diary," p. 10.

⁶⁰ Spangenberg, *An Account*, p. 102.

⁶¹ Hark, "Annals of Village," p. 134.

⁶² "Goshen Diary," p. 15.

themselves and their families. This object should be especially kept in view, in the conduct of such businesses, and every facility afforded to the converts for learning them.⁶³

The Moravians realized that the basis for any success they achieved was their ability to raise the standard of living of their people. Therefore they concentrated on two forms of education, academic and economic. Their approach recognized the academic areas as prerequisite to moral and literary advancement, but they also educated the Indian in the areas of agriculture and trade, to make him self-sufficient. The Moravian missionary was an educator who was at home in the classroom, the field, and the shop.

THE MORAVIANS AND THE PEACE CORPS

Two general conclusions might be drawn from the material that has been presented thus far. First: the Moravians exhibited an approach to missionary work that was enlightened and modern for the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although other religious groups occasionally showed the same insight into the problems of conversion, it was the Moravians who evolved a systematic and functional method which could be practically applied.

Second: In the use of this systematic and functional method, the Moravian missionary program resembled, in many of its methods, our twentieth-century Peace Corps.

The following quotation, describing the method employed by a Peace Corps Volunteer, might easily be a page from the Moravian instructions for missionaries in the field:

First, the volunteer is a stranger. He must get to know the people—gain their confidence. He must seek out the local leaders, learn the needs of the community. This may, and often does, take months. Different routes are used in getting to know the people; some volunteers just talk and visit. Most volunteers, though, find that they are more effective if they become active in community affairs. . . . Patience, initiative and ingenuity are key qualities a volunteer must develop. Patience because the work is slow and often frustrating. Initiative and ingenuity because he has only a few months to gain the confidence

⁶³ *Instructions*, pp. 57-58.

of the community, lead the citizens into an awareness of their needs, and guide them toward a solution.⁶⁴

We have seen that the Moravian missionary was a man of action who came to his task prepared to serve in any way to achieve his goal of conversion. Like the Peace Corps, the Moravians wished to "provide 'doers' as distinct from advisors and consultants."⁶⁵ The Moravians hoped to restore the self-respect of a people who were constantly being threatened by the westward push of the white man. They believed that education and economic assistance were important tools to aid in regaining that self-respect. To overcome the distrust and fear of the white man harbored by the Indians, the Moravians showed, by personal example, that the ways of civilization could be adapted to the Indian culture. The Peace Corps faces much the same situation today. Volunteers are "teaching, by example, a resourcefulness attributed to long-ago pioneering ancestors."⁶⁶

Like the Moravians, the Peace Corps works from within the native culture. Sargent Sliver, in a speech at the University of Liberia, stated: "We come simply to contribute our skills, under your leadership, in your efforts to develop your country in your own way."⁶⁷ The Peace Corps approach parallels that of the Moravians in many ways. A Peace Corps directive states that the volunteer is given "training to achieve readiness, physically and psychologically, for the conditions under which the Peace Corps personnel will live."⁶⁸ This same readiness was developed by the Moravian training school for missionaries.

Peace Corps workers are "required to have effective use of the foreign language for the situations anticipated."⁶⁹ Volunteers realize that "knowledge of a foreign language opens the door to its speakers and their culture."⁷⁰ This is considered a modern viewpoint, but it was applied by the Unitas Fratrum two hundred

⁶⁴ *Community Development in the Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1963), p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Educational Institutions and the Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1962), p. 3.

⁶⁶ *The Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1963), p. 17.

⁶⁷ *The Peace Corps Volunteer* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1963), p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Educational Institutions and the Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1962), p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Learning Languages in The Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1963), p. 2.

years ago. The Moravians realized then that the Indians "preferred to have their teachers speak with them in their own language."⁷¹

The Peace Corps concentrates upon education and economic aid as the most important means to develop a struggling people. In 1963, forty-seven percent of the total number of volunteers were involved in formal classroom teaching. But the corps also stresses a "tremendous need for skilled craftsmen of all types, who don't have college degrees."⁷² Volunteers are expected to utilize "not only . . . their professional skills, but their imagination and ingenuity as well."⁷³ All of these statements parallel the Moravian attitude toward the work of the missionary. As we have seen, he too combined the practical with the theoretical. He too was a teacher in the formal, the practical, and the vocational sense.

The Moravian missionary worked "shoulder to shoulder with the people, . . . toward the solution of its problems and the raising of its standard of living."⁷⁴ Like the Peace Corps volunteer of the twentieth century, he came to work with a high degree of dedication and practical skill. He attempted to "create an atmosphere of self-confidence and self-respect . . . to show the people that they [could] do something positive about their condition."⁷⁵ The ultimate goal of the Moravian mission program was the conversion of the Indian to a Christian life. The Peace Corps goal has no religious focus. Although the goals differ, the methods are surprisingly similar. We think of our Peace Corps as an organization utilizing the most modern and perceptive concepts of interpersonal relations. This paper has tried to show that the Church of the Unitas Fratrum, two hundred years ago, could well be called an "early American Peace Corps."

The Moravian mission effort ultimately failed. But that failure was not caused by internal strife, or lack of men to meet the challenge of mission life. The failure was brought on by outside influences that eventually swept the Indian farther and farther

⁷¹ *The Moravian Indian Mission on White River—Dairies and Letters* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1938), p. 114.

⁷² *Peace Corps Act Amendment, February 24, 1964, 88th Congress* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 19.

⁷³ *Social Workers and the Peace Corps* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1962), p. 6.

⁷⁴ *Peace Corps Congressional Presentation of 1963* (Washington: The Peace Corps, 1963), p. 26.

⁷⁵ *Social Workers in Peace Corps*, p. 1.

to the west, away from his natural home. But while it lasted, the Moravian experiment was one of the bright pages in Indian-white relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The approach was surprisingly far-sighted and modern for the times; it was based upon respect and faith in the basic goodness of the Indian; it outstripped all other denominational groups active in the missionary field in its approach to human relations. For these reasons, the comparison between our Peace Corps and the Moravian mission seems to be an apt one. The Moravian missionary of this early American Peace Corps was a man of hard skill who tackled a task full of frustration, despair, and hardship. But he was supported by two important aids: his own religious faith, and the respect of the Indian, who recognized in him a true pioneer in human relations.