
Craig Atwood’s long-awaited volume on the intersection of Moravian faith and history in the eighteenth century could not be timelier for the growing numbers of scholars interested in the history, theology, and practices of the Pietist group in North America. Recent scholarship on the Moravians has focused on notions of race, gender, and the Atlantic world and most have concentrated on the Moravian settlement in North Carolina (perhaps because of the more readily available archival materials in Salem, North Carolina). Atwood’s volume provides a much needed balance to the historical account of the Moravian Church in North America with its exclusive focus on the radical theology behind the founding and organization of the congregation in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

In what will become the standard work on the theology and practices of the Moravian settlement in Pennsylvania, Atwood draws on extant published work in Germany and the United States and, perhaps more importantly, original archival sources from both the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and the Unity Archives in Herrnhut, Germany, as well as from historical printed sources from the eighteenth century to provide the modern reader with a fascinating, accessible, authoritative, and theoretically nuanced investigation of the sometimes quite astonishing thought of the founder of the Moravian Church, Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–60).

Whereas other scholars have drawn primarily on the historical records available in the aforementioned archives and the work of earlier historians, Atwood’s unique contribution to the current swell of critical interest in the religious group is his elucidation and presentation of the theology behind the praxis found in the works of Zinzendorf. Atwood’s work provides the American reader with access to both manuscript and printed German sources that have not been available to anyone without the requisite paleographical and linguistic skills to decipher the archaic German of the eighteenth-century count. Of special importance in this work are Atwood’s translations of litanies used in Bethlehem during the founding period of the community, included in the appendices to this volume. It is perhaps only through these litanies that the modern reader can hope to enter into the radically different worldview of the Moravians in Bethlehem at this time and counter some modern constructions of the town’s inhabitants as stereotypically industrious German settlers who brought Christmas to Pennsylvania.

Through Atwood’s work, the reader is taken into a world where these litanies...
make up the lives of Bethlehem’s inhabitants, lives punctuated by the worship of a Christ of the Passion, a Christ who is the Eternal Bridegroom, a Christ whose blood and body are celebrated in verse, song, art, and service. After reading Atwood’s work, the picture of the Moravians of Bethlehem must be fundamentally changed into one that is informed by the best kind of research in the field of church history.

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The heart of Lester C. Olson’s well-researched study of Benjamin Franklin’s imagery is a study of Franklin’s four best-known pictorial creations: the “JOIN, or DIE” snake cartoon (1754); the engraved image of the dismembered Britannia, “MAGNA Britannia: her Colonies REDUC’d,” (late 1765 or early 1766); the thirteen interlinked chains of “WE ARE ONE,” on the paper currency (1776); and the Libertas Americana medal (1782–83). Besides an introduction to emblems and symbols, Olson includes a chapter on “Franklin’s Earliest Commentary Envisioning Colony Union” and two concluding chapters, one on “Franklin’s Verbal Images Representing British America” and another on “National Character and the Great Seal of the United States.”

Writing on the snake cartoon, the most famous cartoon in American political history, Olson breaks new ground in the section “British Audiences for ‘JOIN, or DIE,’ 1754” (pp. 46–53), where he proves that British officials in London read references to the snake cartoon in dispatches from America and that some saw the cartoon in one or more colonial newspapers. The next section, “JOIN, or DIE’ during the Stamp Act Controversy, 1765–66” (pp. 53–68) is also ground-breaking and thorough.

I do not fault Olson for not citing an earlier work by an authority on the symbols of America, E. McClung Fleming’s “Seeing Snakes in the American Arts,” for it appeared in an obscure place (*Delaware Antiques Show Catalogue 1969*, pp. 75–85 [odd pages only]), but it contains useful information supplementing Olson, and therefore I mention it. I admire Olson’s research and scholarship in the chapter devoted to the Libertas Americana medal, especially the three sections on its distribution in France, the United States, and its use in international