



*This “rends in Pieces all the  
Barriers between Virtue and Vice”:  
Tennentists, Moravians, and the  
Antinomian Threat in the  
Delaware Valley*

IN THE SUMMER OF 1745, Gilbert Tennent, one of the middle colonies’ leading revivalist preachers, was preparing a sermon in his Philadelphia study during a fierce thunderstorm, when a bolt of lightning struck the house and sent a surge of electricity through his body, blowing out the soles of his shoes and melting the buckles.<sup>1</sup> Although Tennent would later explain this frightening experience as a random act

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Tennent (1703–1764) was arguably the most significant revivalist in the mid-Atlantic colonies. He was instrumental in creating a temporary split with “Old Side” Presbyterians in 1741 and best known for his controversial 1739 sermon, “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.”

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of God, Moravians in Philadelphia interpreted the lightning bolt as a specific demonstration of divine “warning” thrown down on one of their most vocal “enemies.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, according to a Reformed opponent of the Moravians, the leader of the whole Moravian enterprise, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, had predicted as much three years earlier.<sup>3</sup> Although coming after the fires of the Great Awakening had cooled, the Moravian interpretation of Tennent’s encounter with a bolt of lightning is testament to debates that surged to the fore during the Great Awakening and that revolved around Moravian activity in the Delaware Valley.<sup>4</sup>

The Moravians of the eighteenth century were the theological descendants of the *Unitas Fratrum* or “United Brethren.” As a remnant of the followers of Jan Hus, the “Unity” faced legal prosecution under Catholic authority and fled north from the region of Moravia. Finding safety in Saxony on the estate of Zinzendorf, a nobleman with a pietist orientation, the tradition was revived there in 1727 in a community they called “Herrnhut.” Moravians began visiting Pennsylvania in 1736 and established the administrative center of Bethlehem, along the Lehigh River, in 1742. These pietists, most of whom were German speaking, faced opposition on a number of fronts. This essay focuses on the Moravians’ contentious interaction with Presbyterian evangelicals who, during the Great

<sup>2</sup> On the lightning strike incident, see the entry for July 14, 1745, in the congregational diary of First Moravian Church, Philadelphia, PA, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA. Also consult Milton J. Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder: A Case Study of Continental Pietism’s Impact on the First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (New York, 1986), 126.

<sup>3</sup> According to Johann Philip Böhm, Zinzendorf once claimed in a sermon, “Thunder and lightning will strike all ministers who hinder souls from following the Lamb.” William J. Hinke, ed., *Life and Letters of the Rev. John Philip Boehm: Founder of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania 1683–1749* (Philadelphia, 1916), 381. Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) was the patron nobleman of the “renewed” Moravian Brethren or “Brüdergemeine” as it became known in Europe. Zinzendorf was heavily influenced by German pietism and, although he did not work from a systemized theological framework, was responsible for much of Moravian teachings during this period.

<sup>4</sup> The definitive work, thus far, on the Great Awakening is Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT, 2007). On the Great Awakening in the mid-Atlantic colonies specifically, see Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*; Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis, IN, 1967); Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago, 1920); Sally Schwartz, “A Mixed Multitude”: *The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York, 1987); John B. Frantz, “The Awakening of Religion among the German Settlers in the Middle Colonies,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976): 266–88; and John Fea, “Rural Religion: Protestant Community and the Moral Improvement of the South Jersey Countryside, 1676–1800” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1999).

Awakening, were sometimes labeled “Tennentists” after Gilbert Tennent, their leading spokesman.<sup>5</sup>

Although traditionally studies of the Great Awakening have focused heavily on manifestations of evangelical piety in New England and therefore neglected important transatlantic currents, in recent decades, historians have become more attuned to the convergence of Continental and Anglo streams within what W. R. Ward has called the “Protestant Evangelical Awakening.”<sup>6</sup> This essay seeks to contribute to these ongoing historiographical trends. First, the controversy between Moravians and Tennentists enhances our understanding of the extent of Moravian influence as it moved beyond circles of German-speaking pietists and engaged the broader Anglo-American world. Second, this controversy demonstrates the significance of competing interpretations of sin, salvation, and the moral law for colonial awakeners. Specifically, Anglo-evangelicals believed that Moravians promoted an alternative conception of revival piety and conversion that included a virulent strain of antinomianism, which consisted in a tendency to deemphasize the role of God’s moral law in convincing the unconverted of their need for salvation as well as its importance for prodding the converted toward a holy life. While this controversy was rooted in theology, it also points to larger issues regarding religion and its place in colonial society. More than theological error, antinomianism was often associated with the breakdown of order, and

<sup>5</sup> The pietist tradition was diverse and debates continue regarding definitions. In general, pietism, which originated in German and English Protestant circles in the seventeenth century, emphasized experiential “heart-religion” as opposed to the formal religiosity of more orthodox Protestants. Always composed of a loose network of like-minded individuals and societies, pietism had moderate manifestations, which resisted separatist tendencies as well as radical manifestations that challenged the theology and practice of the established churches. Pietism and evangelicalism had many of the same characteristics and in a generic sense, were synonymous (as per W. R. Ward). But where pietism is usually understood as having a distinctly European origin, evangelicalism can be understood as an Anglo-American movement that shares its roots with the pietist tradition. The Great Awakening in North America was composed of various streams, both pietist and evangelical, and represented Anglo and Continental influences. Those who promoted the Great Awakening were known as “New Lights,” and the Moravians used this term as others did during the eighteenth century. However, in order to avoid the oversimplification that often accompanies the labels of “New Lights” and “Old Lights,” I follow the lead of Thomas Kidd, Douglas Winiarski, and others in using “evangelicals” to refer to those who supported the revivals, both in their moderate and more radical manifestations. Evangelicals, as defined by David Bebbington, emphasized conversion, or the “New Birth”; were Biblicists; promoted a “crucicentrist” theology; and were committed to living out their gospel convictions in society. For more on defining evangelicalism in the context of the Great Awakening, see Kidd, *Great Awakening*, xiii–xix, and David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London and Boston, 1989), 1–19.

<sup>6</sup> See W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992), and W. R. Ward, *Faith and Faction* (London, 2003).

this essay suggests that the Tennentist defense of the “Barriers between Virtue and Vice” included concerns for both theological orthodoxy and the preservation of social and public order. Such concerns even prompted Gilbert Tennent to declare that he would rather “part with the last drop of blood out of his veins” than compromise his views on the necessity of the moral law.<sup>7</sup>

*Moravians at the Intersection of Anglo and Continental Efforts  
for Awakening*

Within the transatlantic context of the Great Awakening, Anglo and Continental streams of pietism converged within various religious movements such as among the Philadelphian Society in England and at Moravian centers in Germany including those in Marienborn and Herrnhut.<sup>8</sup> Personal interaction also reflected this intersection as New England minister Cotton Mather, for example, corresponded with the moderate Halle pietist August Hermann Francke, and William Penn exchanged letters with the radical pietist Johanna Eleonora Merlau (Petersen). In North America, the middle colonies were especially representative of this broader religious context, bearing the marks of both Anglo and Continental pietism. In the Raritan Valley, Dutch pietist Theodorus Frelinghuysen served as a significant influence on English-speaking Presbyterians, including Gilbert Tennent. Radical pietists founded new settlements, mingling with the larger English-speaking population, and Swedish pietists traveled the same itinerant paths as other awakeners. George Whitefield even joined with prominent Moravian Peter Böhler to conduct a bilingual revival outside of Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> These lines are taken from Gilbert Tennent’s published sermon against the Moravians, *The Necessity of Holding Fast the Truth Represented in Three Sermons . . .* (Boston, 1743), 6, 19. The entire sentence on virtue and vice is, “This, this, oversets the very Foundations of Religion, and rends in Pieces all the Barriers between Virtue and Vice, this leaves us without a Rule of Action, and so exposes us as an easy Prey to the Wiles of enthusiastical Delusion.”

<sup>8</sup> The Philadelphian Society for the Advancement of Piety and Diving Philosophy was a group of English mystics that emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century. This small band of pietists, who also had strong millenarian views, took its name from the biblical church of Philadelphia in the book of Revelation. The visions of Jane Leade, a well-known leader of the society, became important sources of revelation and influenced other pietists, including Zinzendorf.

<sup>9</sup> The best discussion of this convergence remains Ward, *Evangelical Awakening*, throughout. For a general discussion, see also Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 24–31. A more extensive examination can be found as well in the insightful essays in F. Ernest Stoeffler, ed., *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1976). On the Penn-Merlau exchange, which is not mentioned in those works cited above, see Lucinda Martin, “Female Reformers as the Gatekeepers of

The Moravians were among the most significant groups within these transatlantic currents, establishing centers of awakened piety throughout the Atlantic world from Greenland to the Caribbean. As such, their influence extended far beyond circles of German pietism. However, this fact has at times been muted by denominational historians whose work has marginalized the Moravians. Most notable was the Reformed historian William Hinke, who, writing in the 1920s, was one of the earliest non-Moravians to look seriously at itinerant diaries in Moravian archives and to examine the response of Reformed leaders, such as Johann Philip Böhm, to Moravian activity.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Charles Glatfelter has written on Moravian itinerants and their work among both German Reformed and German Lutheran congregations.<sup>11</sup>

In explaining the controversies that erupted between Moravian itinerants and other German-speaking Protestants, Hinke and Glatfelter have emphasized the interconfessional nature of the Moravian enterprise, that is, the Moravian penchant to work among churches of various confessions besides their own. This work, the interpretation goes, was perceived particularly as a “threat” to German Reformed and Lutheran pastors who were attempting to construct strong confessional boundaries in the face of Pennsylvania’s religious “babble.” For Hinke, the Moravians represented a “union movement” for which Pennsylvania’s colonial Germans were unprepared.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Glatfelter has emphasized that, like George Whitefield’s efforts among English speakers, Zinzendorf’s activities among Pennsylvania Germans were designed to reach across confessional lines. Although Zinzendorf’s experiment failed, Moravian ecumenism, according to Glatfelter, remained a significant source for much of the religious tensions in the region.<sup>13</sup>

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Pietism: The Example of Johanna Eleonora Merlau and William Penn,” *Monatshefte für deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur* 95 (2003): 33–58. Other general studies include the chapters in Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York, 1994), and Stephen O’Malley, ed., *Early German-American Evangelicalism: Pietist Sources on Discipleship and Sanctification* (Lanham, MD, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> William J. Hinke, ed., *Life and Letters*, and Hinke, *Diaries of Missionary Travels among the German Settlers in the American Colonies, 1743–1748* ([Norristown, PA], 1929).

<sup>11</sup> Charles H. Glatfelter, *Pastors and People: German Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the Pennsylvania Field, 1717–1793*, vol. 1, *Pastors and Congregations*, and vol. 2, *The History* (Breinigsville, PA, 1980, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Hinke, *Life and Letters*, 82–83.

<sup>13</sup> Glatfelter, *Pastors and People*, 2:81.

More recent studies have given the Moravians a more central emphasis while placing their role in the Great Awakening within a much broader and transatlantic context. Aaron Fogleman, for example, argues that the controversies between the Moravians and their opponents, which included episodes of violence, were not only a result of confessional issues and struggles over ecclesiastical authority, but were rooted more directly in a radical threat to traditional gender and sex norms.<sup>14</sup> More than simply challenging the rigid confessional boundaries of those around them, Moravians, he argues, feminized the members of the Trinity, created space for female participation and leadership in the community, eroticized worship through a “blood and wounds” theology, and fostered a culture of sacred sex among married members. To make the situation even more volatile, popular rumor, a multitude of anti-Moravian polemical literature, and fears that Moravian practice constituted a slippery slope to the most bizarre behavior added fuel to the fire. “This was pietism, Moravian style, and it both attracted and frightened the transatlantic community,” Fogleman argues, and the Moravians’ “strange views about gender” were a particular threat in colonial North America, where institutional authority was weak.<sup>15</sup>

Working from a different but not contradictory approach, Katherine Carté Engel, in her recent monograph, has also emphasized the way the Moravian enterprise was integrated within broad circles of transatlantic commerce. By defining Christian ideals as compatible with a free-market economy, the Moravians contributed to what historians have called a consumer “revolution” in early America and were engaged in a network of commerce that extended beyond colonial concentrations of German speakers to include several prominent Anglo-American merchants and businessmen.<sup>16</sup>

Within the diversity of Pennsylvania religion, Moravians were key players in the Great Awakening. During the 1740s and later, they established important centers in places such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Philadelphia, and Lititz, as well as a host of smaller outposts throughout

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2007). Fogleman's work is based on the most thorough examination to date of the numerous itinerant diaries among the materials in the archives at Bethlehem, Herrnhut, and various regional archives, going beyond the work of Hinke and Glatfelter. See also a related piece, Craig Atwood, “Little Side Holes: Moravian Devotional Cards of the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Moravian History* 6 (2009): 61–76.

<sup>15</sup> Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2009).

the Delaware Valley. Due to their views of Christian mission and a thriving network of itinerants, Moravians embodied the transient and multicultural ethos of the Atlantic world, serving as figurative, and in some cases literal, “negotiators” among disparate groups in a variety of geographic contexts.<sup>17</sup>

The nerve center of the Moravian enterprise was Bethlehem, established along the Lehigh River in July 1742 when a group known to insiders as the first “Sea Congregation” made its way across the Atlantic and settled on a tract strategically located between New York and Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> Zinzendorf, the primary architect of the “renewed” Moravian Church, or *Brüdergemeine*, had arrived six months earlier, and under his leadership the first of many Moravian itinerants fanned outward from Bethlehem, establishing preaching stations, filling pulpits, forming congregations, and starting schools.<sup>19</sup>

While the Moravians defined their efforts as primarily intended for other German speakers, their communities reflected the multicultural flavor of their work, which quickly came to include significant points of convergence between the Moravians and the Anglo-American world in which they were now situated. This convergence was enhanced by the fact that the Sea Congregation included a group of sixteen English Moravians for whom Zinzendorf had made plans to establish an *Englische Stadt* (English Town) even before their arrival.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On Moravians as figurative and literal negotiators, see James Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 2000). On the sense of colonial transience and mobility, consult Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, NC, 1994). For a wonderful discussion of the way Moravians embodied the multicultural ethos of the Atlantic world, see Jon Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> For background on the first Sea Congregation see Levin Reichel, *The Early History of the Church of the United Brethren (Unitas Fratrum), Commonly Called Moravians, in North America, A.D. 1734–1748* (Nazareth, PA, 1888), 109–10; Paul Peucker, “Heerendijk—Link in the Moravian Network: Moravian Colonists Destined for Pennsylvania,” *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 30 (1998): 9–21; William N. Schwarze and Samuel H. Gapp, trans., *A History of the Beginnings of the Moravian Work in America, being a translation of Georg Neisser's Manuscript* (Bethlehem, PA, 1955), 57–59.

<sup>19</sup> On Moravian itinerancy, see Harry Emilius Stocker, *A Home Mission History of the Moravian Church in the United States and Canada* (Bethlehem, PA, 1924); Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*; and Mabel Haller, *Early Moravian Education in Pennsylvania* (Nazareth, PA, 1953).

<sup>20</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, “Brief von Zinzendorf an ‘innig geliebtes Geschwister’ betr. Siene Reise nach Amerika, Philadelphia 31. Dez. 1741 (n.s.),” R.14.A13.6, Unity Archives, Herrnhut, Germany. By 1742, the Moravians had established several thriving societies and congregations in England, including the vibrant congregations at Fetter Lane in London and in Bedfordshire. Most of the Anglo-Moravians who traveled to North America were sent from these

While the majority of Moravian itinerants preached and conversed in German, representatives from among the English Moravians began visiting their English-speaking neighbors within a few months of the founding of Bethlehem. David Bruce was the first Anglo-Moravian to carry out such efforts, working among the Irish settlers who lived on the other side of the Lehigh River from Bethlehem. Bruce would later work among Scots-Irish Presbyterians whose settlements were located around Donegal, Pennsylvania, just west of Lancaster. For the next decade or so, other Anglo-Moravians would join Bruce in working to promote spiritual awakening among the English settlers in the middle colonies.<sup>21</sup>

Within a year of the founding of Bethlehem, the first “English Congregation” was created from the initial group of English Moravians and was settled in Nazareth and later in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia congregation maintained both German and English services for many years. Some Moravian preachers, such as the prominent Peter Böhler, were fluent in both German and English when they arrived. Other German speakers had to improvise their English once they got to North America. Johann Christoph Pylaeus, for example, carried a personal notebook with a variety of bits of information, including bilingual notes that seem to indicate he was working on his English language skills. It includes numerous line-by-line translations, from English to German, of biographical information about George Whitefield, probably taken from his published journals.<sup>22</sup>

In New York, the Moravian congregation catered to New Yorkers of English and Dutch descent under the supervision of Anglo-Moravian preachers Jacob Rogers, Thomas Yarrell, and James Greening.<sup>23</sup> Rogers,

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congregations. See Jared S. Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners: Anglo-Moravians, Religious Competition, and Evangelical Identity in the Mid-Atlantic Colonies” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2007), 103–5, 122–59. While no history of English-speaking Moravians in North America exists, much has been written about Moravians in Britain. The standard text is Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728–1760* (Oxford, 1998). See also Edward Langton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Story of the First International Protestant Church* (London, 1956), and Geoffrey Stead and Margaret Stead, *The Exotic Plant: A History of the Moravian Church in Great Britain 1742–2000* (Werrington, UK, 2003). Additionally, consult Clifford W. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist: Relationships and Influences in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1957). The names of the original English members of the Sea Congregation are: Owen and Elizabeth Rice, Thomas and Anna Yarrell, Robert and Martha Hussey, John and Elisabeth Turner, Samuel and Martha Powell, Joseph and Martha Powell, Joseph Shaw, Hector Gambold, John Okely, and William Okely.

<sup>21</sup> Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners,” 122–59.

<sup>22</sup> Pylaeus’s notebook can be found in the Unity Archives, R.27.375.

<sup>23</sup> See the congregational diary for First Moravian Church, New York, NY, which is at times in English and at other times in German, Moravian Archives.



who was one of the most prominent Moravian preachers in England before his arrival in North America, itinerated through the Pennsylvania backcountry as late as the 1760s before traveling to North Carolina where another English Moravian, Joseph Powell, had been instrumental in establishing Hope Moravian Church—another Anglo-German experiment.<sup>24</sup> Surviving Moravian records in both Bethlehem and Herrnhut also reflect the multilingual nature of the Moravian enterprise. Congregational diaries, itinerant journals, official reports, and correspondence with colonial authorities were often translated and circulated in both German and English.

The reach of the Moravian presence, therefore, extended beyond the German subculture in the Delaware Valley. Moravians preached to the same audiences as other awakeners and Moravian itinerants crisscrossed the same paths that Baptist and Presbyterian “New Lights” used. Moravian literature was sold in the same bookstores as other religious materials, and several Moravian tracts and books were translated for English readers. News of Moravian activity, and controversy, also played out in local newspapers, entering the public sphere for both English and German speakers.

### *The Tennentist-Moravian Encounter*

Most colonists did not know what to make of this band of pietist communitarians. In New England, some heard impressive reports from those in Europe that the Moravians seemed to embody a “revival of PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.”<sup>25</sup> Other reports were more sinister. One popular rumor purported that the Moravians were in league with Spanish Catholics, waiting to commit crimes of treachery against the English empire.<sup>26</sup> Others believed the Moravians brainwashed naive youths and held them against the will of their parents.<sup>27</sup> The response among Anglo-

<sup>24</sup> On Rogers in North Carolina, see C. Daniel Crews and Richard W. Starbuck, *With Courage for the Future: The Story of the Moravian Church, Southern Province* (Winston-Salem, NC, 2002). On Powell and the Hope congregation, consult S. Scott Rohrer, *Hope's Promise: Religion and Acculturation in the Southern Backcountry* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> “Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Scotland to his friend in New England, dated Edinburgh, March 31, 1740,” *Boston Newsletter*, Sept. 18–25, 1740.

<sup>26</sup> See Lindford D. Fisher, “‘I Believe They Are Papists!’ Natives, Moravians, and the Politics of Conversion in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut,” *New England Quarterly* 81 (2008): 410–37.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Ritter, *History of the Moravian Church in Philadelphia, from Its Foundation in 1742 to the Present Time* (Philadelphia, 1857), 22–24.

evangelicals was mixed. In Philadelphia, for example, where Whitefield's supporters had constructed an auditorium for revival preachers, leading evangelicals were divided in their estimation of the Moravians. While some welcomed Moravian preachers into the pulpit, others sought to bar them from the platform.<sup>28</sup>

Among the Moravians' greatest opponents were prorevivalist Presbyterians whose evangelical zeal began well before the awakening of the 1740s and can largely be attributed to the Tennent family. Born to a family of Scots-Irish Presbyterians in 1703, Gilbert Tennent's early life was shaped by his religious upbringing. As a teenager, he experienced a period of spiritual angst, which began in 1717, the same year his family immigrated to North America. Tennent struggled to find conversion during what he would later call his period of "law work," a chapter in his life that was no doubt significant for his later views on the moral law.<sup>29</sup> Living in this state of anxiety for several years, Tennent finally experienced conversion in 1723 and soon after enrolled in the divinity program at Yale College. Finishing in 1725, Tennent took up his first preaching appointment in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the following year. As mentioned above, Tennent was heavily influenced by Theodorus Frelinghuysen, a pietist of Dutch descent who had been preaching in the Raritan River Valley since 1720. Frelinghuysen's theology reflected the pietism of other moderate pietists on the European continent and included a strong emphasis on a period of spiritual distress during which an individual would struggle under the weight of the moral law. Known as *Bußkampf* among many continental pietists, this period was viewed as a preparatory time, after which the repentant individual would experience the release of new birth.<sup>30</sup>

Tennent's father, William, was also a prominent minister in the region and had established a Presbyterian congregation along the Neshaminy Creek in 1726. The following year William began a school in which he

<sup>28</sup> See Adele Cecelia Moore, "Franklin's Academy: The University's Foundation," in *A Pennsylvania Album: Undergraduate Essays on the 250th Anniversary of the University of Pennsylvania*, ed. Richard Slator Dunn and Mark Frazier Lloyd (Philadelphia, 1990), 1–4. On the divisions among the building's trustees regarding the Moravians, consult Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 108–12.

<sup>29</sup> Presbyterians, as well as others in the Reformed tradition, spoke frequently of "law." Within the context of Christianity, the moral law referred to God's expectations for humans to live lives in conformity with the moral standards of the Bible and the ecclesiastical community. The moral law was defined in distinction from the ceremonial law of the Torah and the civil law which governed society. On Tennent's early life, see Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 9–10.

<sup>30</sup> See Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 12–22.

educated Gilbert's younger brothers along with a handful of local boys. William Tennent's congregation and the accompanying school became one of the most important centers of evangelical Presbyterianism outside of Philadelphia. Centrally located along the primary road between Philadelphia and New York, the school was responsible for training a small army of evangelical preachers who subscribed to the revivalist evangelicalism of its founder. Their opponents sarcastically dubbed the crudely constructed one-room school at Neshaminy "The College." But despite its rustic nature, preachers fanned out from the college, itinerating throughout the Delaware Valley and filling pulpits in the surrounding regions.

George Whitefield gave the school greater visibility by preaching to nearly three thousand people on its grounds in 1739 and 1740 and endorsing its graduates in his published journals. This training ground for evangelically minded Presbyterians became the stuff of legend in the nineteenth century when the well-known Princetonian Archibald Alexander published a history of what by then had become known as the "Log College" along with biographical sketches of its most notable students.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the college, all three of Gilbert Tennent's brothers entered the ministry along with other prominent preachers—among them Samuel Finley as well as Samuel Blair and his brother John. Finley and Samuel Blair both established their own schools for training evangelical preachers.<sup>32</sup>

By 1741, when colonial Presbyterians split into factions over the legitimacy of the Great Awakening, Gilbert Tennent had already become a vocal proponent of the revivals and solidified a working alliance with George Whitefield. In 1739, in Nottingham, Pennsylvania, he condemned the "carnal" ministers who opposed the Great Awakening, in what would become perhaps his best known sermon: "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry." Those trained at the Log College also sided with the prorevival faction and joined with Tennent in a battle against their more orthodox opponents.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> On the Tennent family's involvement in the Great Awakening, consult Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 55–67, and Archibald Alexander, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College, Together with an Account of the Revivals of Religion under Their Ministry* (Princeton, NJ, 1845).

<sup>32</sup> For biographical vignettes on prominent Tennentists along with a selection of sermons, see Archibald Alexander, *Sermons and Essays by the Tennents and Their Contemporaries* (Philadelphia, 1855).

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the Presbyterian split and Gilbert Tennent's role in this, see Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 55–89.

Regarding the Moravians, Tennentists were certainly worried about Moravian influence among the German and Dutch Reformed. But what concerned them more specifically was the growing activity of English-speaking Moravians who, working among English colonists, competed with them most directly for awakening the hearts and minds of individuals in the region. They kept the Moravians on the defensive with the debates that ensued, and Zinzendorf was right when he declared in 1742 that it was not the Moravians who had instigated the controversy—rather, Tennentists represented the primary aggressor.<sup>34</sup> The controversy played out both in the public arena and in the local parish. Newspapers carried news of the controversy, as did pamphlets in Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup> Tennentists preached against the Moravians in their pulpits and afterward published the sermons at local print shops along with other popular religious materials.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Peter Böhler complained that Tennent himself preached “daily” against the Moravians and wrote to Zinzendorf for advice on what to do about it.<sup>37</sup> There is also evidence that the debates were felt even in rural parishes and households. Moravian itinerant diaries, for example, frequently described the way ordinary people were affected by the debates—itinerants claimed that people were, more often than not, swayed against them by such anti-Moravian propaganda.<sup>38</sup> Tennentist propaganda directed at the Moravians illustrates several ways Moravian theology conflicted with evangelical doctrine.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Anmerkungen*; the English edition is titled: *The Remarks, Which the Author of the Compendious Extract, &c. in the Preface to His Book, Has Friendly Desired of the Rev. of Thurenstein, for the Time Pastor of the Lutheran Congregation of J.C. in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1742), 8.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the account of the personal disagreement between Zinzendorf and Gilbert Tennent in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* during May and June 1743: “Answers of the Illustrious Count of Zinzendorff . . .,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 19, 1743, and Gilbert Tennent to “Mr. Franklin,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 30, 1743. See also Joseph Crellius, *Compendious Extract Containing the Chiefest Articles of Doctrine and Most Remarkable Transactions of Count Lewis of Zinzendorff and the Moravians. Together with the Most Material Objections of Some of Their Antagonists. Collected from the German. Intended for a Summary of That Controversy, which at Present is a matter of Universal Speculation, in This Part of America* (Philadelphia, 1742).

<sup>36</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, and Samuel Finley, *Satan Strip'd of His Angelick Robe, Being the Substance of Several Sermons Preach'd at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1743). Finley's sermons were largely analogous to those of Tennent.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Böhler to Zinzendorf, Philadelphia, June 13/24, 1742, Personal Papers of Albert F. Jordan, box 1. See also “N. Lewis's Letter to Br. Boehler in Philadelphia, when Mr. Gilbert Tennent was preaching very severely against the Brethren, A. 1742,” Personal Papers of Zinzendorf, box A (NZ IV 6), both Moravian Archives.

<sup>38</sup> For a good example, consult the diaries of John Okely, Aug. 1742 (JD II 1) and May–June 1743 (JD II 1b), Moravian Archives.

In general, Tennentists failed to appreciate the sense of paradox, mystery, and emotion that Moravians maintained within their Christocentric heart-religion. Indeed, they routinely complained that the Moravians were deliberately evasive and when challenged with reasonable arguments, appealed to sentimental piety and clever “shifts.” Tennentists also argued that the Moravian emphasis on Christ inordinately elevated the second person of the Trinity, overshadowing the role of the Father. The Moravian catechism, Tennentists argued, disseminated this skewed version of Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>39</sup>

The overarching source of contention, however, was an antinomian threat that Tennent believed he perceived after his first interaction with Moravian representatives. Sometime prior to 1741, Tennent conversed with August Spangenberg, which was probably his first encounter with a representative of the Moravians.<sup>40</sup> Spangenberg had arrived in Pennsylvania in April 1736 after the failed Moravian experiment in Georgia.<sup>41</sup> Tennent reported that he debated theology with Spangenberg, and his suspicions about the Moravians were raised when Spangenberg apparently denied the doctrine of original sin and eternal punishment of the nonelect.<sup>42</sup> Tennent remained suspicious as Zinzendorf arrived in New York in late November 1741. Crossing the Atlantic from Europe, Zinzendorf traveled with a small entourage through New Brunswick on his way to Philadelphia, stopping at the home of Derick Schuyler, where Tennent and his assistant, Heinrich Visser, paid him a visit.<sup>43</sup>

The meeting did not go well. Zinzendorf was hesitant to hold a formal discussion with the two revivalists, “being convinced by long experience, that he must not discourse with any Presbyterian Reprobant [*sic*]” unless it was in favorable circumstances.<sup>44</sup> Zinzendorf agreed to the meeting,

<sup>39</sup> See Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners,” 170–71.

<sup>40</sup> August Spangenberg (1704–1792) was, next to Zinzendorf, probably the most important leader for the Moravians during the eighteenth century. He was largely responsible for facilitating the Moravian presence in America and creating the culture of Bethlehem. On Spangenberg, consult Craig D. Atwood, “Spangenberg: A Radical Pietist in Colonial America” *Journal of Moravian History* 4 (2008): 7–27.

<sup>41</sup> Reichel, *Early History*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 98–99.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 98; Reichel, *Early History*, 95–96.

<sup>44</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, “Büdingische Sammlung,” in *Ergänzungsbände zu den Hauptschriften*, ed. Erich Beyreuther and Gerhard Meyer (Hildesheim, Ger., 1966), 3:308–09. Zinzendorf’s usage of “Reprobant” is not a means of condemning Tennent as a “reprobate.” It is more likely that Zinzendorf is using the term to refer to Tennent as an adherent of the ultra-Calvinist doctrine of “double predestination,” which, on another occasion, Zinzendorf referred to as the “reprobation scheme.” See Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners,” 68.

however, but there is some indication he may have imposed the condition that he speak with Tennent and Visser separately.<sup>45</sup> Even after the meetings were arranged, the language barrier proved a problem. Tennent did not know German and Zinzendorf's English was not adequate, making Latin the only possible language in which the two could converse.<sup>46</sup>

What is more, Tennent quickly turned the conversation into an interrogation of sorts. Suspecting antinomianism, he proceeded to drill the German nobleman about his positions on law and grace, asking Zinzendorf if the law is "a rule of life to a believer" and if it was necessary "to preach the law under the gospel dispensation?" Tennent continued the barrage asking if the "unconverted" were "under the law" and if the law belonged "only to the Jews?" Further details of the debate have not survived, but shortly thereafter, Zinzendorf met with Tennent's colleague New Side Presbyterian Samuel Finley in Philadelphia.<sup>47</sup> This time, Zinzendorf refused to hold the discussion in Latin and the two communicated through an interpreter. Like Tennent, Finley grilled Zinzendorf on theological matters and the discussion continued late into the evening.<sup>48</sup>

In remembering their meeting, Tennent and Zinzendorf had very different opinions about how it went. Zinzendorf was frustrated, remembering mostly that the two had difficulty understanding each other's Latin. He therefore refused to recognize the meeting as a formal conference.<sup>49</sup> He was, however, struck by Tennent's tone, declaring that he felt like

<sup>45</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to assess Zinzendorf's abilities in English. Coalter states that Zinzendorf knew no English due to his disregard for Peter Böhler's advice, in the months preceding his voyage to the colonies, to "learn English." See Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 101; see also Peter Böhler in Herrndyck to Zinzendorf, Mar. 25, 1741, Personal Papers of Albert F. Jordan, box 1, Moravian Archives. It is likely, however, that Zinzendorf did in fact take Böhler's advice to heart. While Zinzendorf may not have been fluent by the time he arrived in America, he had made several visits to London by this time and was probably in the process of learning the language. This likelihood is further evidenced by a number of English-language documents in the Unity Archives in Herrnhut, dating between 1744 and 1747 that bear Zinzendorf's signature and seem to have been written in his hand. Zinzendorf's English would have improved further during several years in which he lived in London between 1748 and 1750 and then again between 1751 and 1755. On this, consult Podmore, *Moravian Church in England*, 24–28, 52–54, 230–33, 265–83. Examples of English documents at Herrnhut and attributed to Zinzendorf include R.14.11.18, R.14.11.48, and R.14.11.50.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Finley (1715–1766) was a graduate of William Tennent's "Log College" and a revivalist preacher. In 1744, he established his own log school, modeled after the Tennent model, in West Nottingham, Maryland.

<sup>48</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 76–77.

<sup>49</sup> Zinzendorf, "Budingische Sammlung," 3:308–9.

Tennent was trying to trip him up just as the Pharisees had tried to trap Jesus in his own words.<sup>50</sup> Tennent, on the other hand, believed the two had communicated quite effectively and that Zinzendorf had also been satisfied. And most importantly for him, Tennent believed his suspicions about Moravian antinomianism were confirmed. The law did not play a role in Moravian sanctification, Tennent declared; neither did it play a role in convicting the unconverted nor was it to be used to incite “terrors” as a part of evangelical preaching.<sup>51</sup>

After their private meetings with Zinzendorf, Tennent and Finley prepared ammunition for a public attack. Tennent was first, using a series of sermons, preached in New York in April 1742, to denounce Moravian teachings and their ongoing activity. Nine months later, Finley preached a similar series from his Maryland pulpit. With public endorsement from leading evangelicals in New England, both sets of sermons were printed in 1743.

Predictably, Tennent declared early in his printed sermons that the role of the law was absolutely necessary. The “Doctrine of Conviction by the Law of God” was the means by which “the Sinner is made sensible of his Sin and Misery” and this was the only way to “obtain converting Grace.” He continued, “if we let this precious Truth go with the Moravians; or in Compliance to a noted Person among them [Zinzendorf], (who asserted in New Brunswick, that Conviction is not necessary to Conversion, but hurtful; and that the Presbyterian Doctrine, respecting preaching of the Law is false) . . . I see no Ground of Hope, that ever a secure World will be alarm’d.”<sup>52</sup>

### *Antinomianism as a Threat to Orthodoxy*

The debates between eighteenth-century Tennentists and Moravians concerning the role and importance of the moral law took place within the broader context of the Great Awakening as well as ongoing and significant debates over law and grace that existed on both sides of the Atlantic. These controversies began well before Tennent and his coreligionists set up their defenses against Moravian encroachment. Indeed, Calvinist and Lutheran attempts to define this theological relationship

<sup>50</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, “Answers of the Illustrious Count of Zinzendorff . . .,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 19, 1743.

<sup>51</sup> Gilbert Tennent to “Mr. Franklin,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 30, 1743.

<sup>52</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 4.

and the ensuing debates between their respective theological camps date to the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup> In England, fissures erupted among Puritans between “precisianists” and antinomians.<sup>54</sup> In New England, these fissures persisted and culminated, in 1638, with the trial of Anne Hutchinson, one of New England’s most famous heretics, who, her opponents charged, had fallen deeply into antinomianism.<sup>55</sup> Moravians themselves were all too familiar with such theological controversy. They encountered strong opposition in Europe, especially from Dutch Calvinists, who printed polemics against the Moravians. Even in their own communities Moravians sometimes attempted to head off disputes between their Lutheran and Calvinist constituents.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of the mid-Atlantic colonies, Tennentists and Moravians approached the issue of the moral law from significantly different starting points. For Calvinist awakeners such as the Tennentists, the whole evangelical program for religious awakening hinged on the role of the law. The moral law, conceived as divine expectations for holiness, was not rendered obsolete by the New Covenant. Rather it continued to serve two vital purposes. First, feeling the weight of responsibility to the law prepared sinners through a period of struggle and brought them to a necessary awareness of their damned estate. As mentioned above, Tennent himself had experienced just such an episode in his childhood. And second, the law served to prod the converted to strive toward greater degrees of holiness. Those in the English Protestant tradition, especially evangelicals, believed it was necessary to consistently emphasize the law as a safeguard to moral license and the disintegration of orderly society. Feeling the weight of the law convicted the unconverted and converted alike of their sin. Revivalist preachers crafted their sermons around the requirements of the law and the “terrors” it was meant to incite in their listeners. The law “represents the State of Sinners” and “opens the Aggravations of Sin,” which in consequence turns “our indignation against it.”<sup>57</sup> As Tennent’s biographer has stated, “The harsh reality of sin’s consequences had to alarm the sinner before the soothing balsam of

<sup>53</sup> Consult Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT, 1980), 279, 367, 377.

<sup>54</sup> See especially Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–305.

<sup>56</sup> On anti-Moravian polemics circulating in Europe, see Dietrich Meyer, ed., *Bibliographisches Handbuch zur Zinzendorf-Forschung* (Düsseldorf, Ger., 1987), 267–79, and Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*, 136–55.



gospel promises could properly be applied to calm the convicted and to strengthen the unconverted.”<sup>58</sup>

Moravians, whose theology was guided by the teachings of Zinzendorf, viewed the role of the law differently. In 1738, Zinzendorf had addressed many of the primary issues regarding the law, atonement and conversion in his *Berlinische Reden*—a series of sixteen sermons on the second half of the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>59</sup> Translated into English in 1740 and published in London as *Sixteen Discourses on Jesus Christ Our Lord*, this text became a central source for much of Tennent’s understanding of Moravian theology. In the *Berlinische Reden*, Zinzendorf taught that the law had been appropriate under the Old Covenant, during which it was necessary to impose morality on people’s hearts with “force” (*Gewalt*). Under the New Covenant, however, in the wake of Christ’s universal atonement, the suffering and blood of Christ served as a more effective source of conviction, which “melted” (*zerschmelzt*) the heart, providing a keen sense of the “wounded redeemer” (*verwundeten Erlöser*).<sup>60</sup> Thus it was counterproductive to attempt, as Tennentists did, to convince people through the preaching of terrors and constant reminders of the law that they were condemned to hell. Rather than paint graphic word pictures of hell and encourage their listeners to struggle for salvation, preachers should try to evince mental images of Christ’s suffering, which might immediately make people realize the sweetness of their redeemed state and bring them quietly into the fold. People need not strive after salvation—only look in faith to Christ’s suffering.<sup>61</sup>

This passivity flew in the face of Tennentist notions of conversion. It also ran counter to their notions of the Christian life. For Tennentists, the law was also emphasized in order to provide motivation for holy living. Yet Moravians taught that people were not to strive against sin, rather to grow better acquainted with Jesus who could provide “counsel and help, where neither human counsel nor help would be sufficient” (*raten und helfen, wo sonst kein menschlicher rat noch kraft hinlanget*).<sup>62</sup> Moravians

<sup>57</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Des Ordinarii Fratrum Berlinische Reden, nach dem vollständigen und von ihm selbst eigenhändig revidirten Exemplar . . .*, in Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf: *Hauptschriften*, vol. 1, *Schriften des Jüngeren Zinzendorf*, ed. Erich Beyreuther and Gerhard Meyer (Hildesheim, Ger., 1962), esp. 12–13, 21–32, 41–44, 58–62, 82–84, 90–103.

<sup>60</sup> Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 93–94.

<sup>61</sup> See Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners,” 79–81, and consult Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 58, 74–77, 82.

were pietists, after all, and the core of their relationship with the divine was an emotional attachment to Jesus that was thought to transcend their desire for sin and lead to a passive dependence on the power of Jesus. Such “quietism” was prominent in some Moravian circles and was in fact one of the primary reasons for the schism between English Moravians at Fetter Lane in London and John Wesley. It proved to be controversial in North America as well, where Tennentists attributed Moravian quietism to antinomian views of sin.

Zinzendorf’s view of the law was also framed by his teachings on atonement and, by extension, conversion. A proponent of the “ransom theory” of atonement, Zinzendorf believed that the “ransom” (*Lösegeld*) of Christ was applied universally to all people and liberated humans from original sin (*Erb-Sünde*) by, according to Arthur Freeman, “restoring the world to its potential.”<sup>63</sup> Zinzendorf declared that the effects of the fall were entirely “erased from the record” (*ausgestrichen*). It is important to note, however, that this did not mean that experiencing the psychological weight of sin had no importance for Zinzendorf’s theology, as some have maintained.<sup>64</sup> Zinzendorf taught that people would continue to be plagued with “actual sin” (*wirkliche Sünde*), for which they would be condemned to hell and, although Zinzendorf rejected the more mainstream pietist notion of *Bußkampf*, he maintained that people must admit they are “lost and damned” (*verloren und verdammt*) and that “sorrow and anxiety” (*Kummer und Sorge*) are the “first thoughts” (*erste gedanke*) of a repentant soul.<sup>65</sup> In this regard, the differences were not as stark as it may have seemed. Though he was careful not to advocate a prescribed pattern of struggle, Zinzendorf’s language could at times be remarkably similar to that of the Tennentists.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 44, 103. See also Arthur J. Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Bethlehem, PA, 1998), 45.

<sup>64</sup> Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Neun Öffentliche Reden über wichtige in die Religion einschlagende Materien, Gehalten zu London in Fetterlane—Capelle, Anno 1746*, in *Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf: Hauptschriften*, vol. 6, *Verschiedene Schriften*, ed. Erich Beyreuther and Gerhard Meyer (Hildesheim, Ger., 1962), 121.

<sup>65</sup> Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 91.

<sup>66</sup> See Zinzenforf, *Neun Öffentliche Reden*, 63. Compare Zinzendorf’s use of the German phrase *Seelen-Not* (Soul-Distress) with the language of “soul-concern” and “distress of the soul” that can be found in Tennentist sermons such as those of Samuel Blair. Consult Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative, Of the late Remarakable [sic] Revival of Religion In the Congregation of New-Londonderry, and other Parts of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1744), 16.

Zinzendorf also taught that the atonement was universal in scope—that Christ’s atonement was applied indiscriminately to all people.<sup>67</sup> The Tennentists were especially critical of this notion—an idea that Tennent labeled “eternal Justification” or “universal Redemption.” This Moravian teaching flew in the face of what Presbyterian Calvinists called “particular atonement.” Tennent declared that “eternal Justification” was the “*proton pseudo*, the first and fertile Falsehood of all the Antinomian Abominations, the fatal Fountain from which those poisonous streams do flow” and that it subverted the foundations of God’s “grand Design” of holiness.<sup>68</sup> What is more, it also smacked of apocatastasis, an eschatological belief among several radical pietists and members of the Philadelphian Society that the world would be restored to a state of original purity and all its inhabitants would eventually be granted salvation.<sup>69</sup> Such “Papist” notions were a “Fancy” that was “turning Hell into a Purgatory.”<sup>70</sup> But while Zinzendorf believed the atonement was universal, he seems to have stopped short of apocatastasis. According to Arthur Freeman, rather than theorize about eschatology, Zinzendorf chose to focus “on the present realization of the relationship with the Savior and heaven, while trusting the future to Christ and refusing to speculate on it.”<sup>71</sup> There is, however, evidence that some Moravians did endorse the belief in apocatastasis. Peter Böhler, for example, argued for a final restoration of all things in correspondence with George Whitefield.<sup>72</sup> Tennent and Finley also claimed that certain Moravian preachers taught the doctrine and asserted that even Spangenberg had once declared that hell was temporary and that eventually even the unconverted would be allowed to escape into heaven.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Zinzendorf, *Berlinische Reden*, 41, 103. See also Burkholder, “Disenfranchised Awakeners,” 64–67.

<sup>68</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> The English mystic Jane Leade, as well as a number of pietists, including Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, and Johanna Eleonora Petersen, held to the doctrine of universal restoration as well. See Ruth Albrecht, *Johanna Eleonora Peteren: Theologische Schriftstellerin des frühen Pietismus* (Göttingen, Ger., 2005), 271–301. Alexander Mack, the founder of the Schwarzenau Brethren also adhered to this doctrine for a time. Most agree that Zinzendorf was influenced by Leade at least and may also have been influenced by Johanna Eleonora Petersen. For a treatment of this doctrine among pietists and Brethren, consult Marcus Meier, “Early Brethren Eschatology: A Contribution to Brethren Beginnings,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 46 (2001): 17–28.

<sup>70</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Freeman, *Theology of the Heart*, 50–51.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Böhler to George Whitefield, Forks, July 1740, in box “Peter Böhler,” folder “Controversies on Religious Questions,” shelf 252D, Moravian Archives.

<sup>73</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 99.

Tennentists believed that Zinzendorf's notion of universal atonement was tied directly to Moravian antinomianism. If redemption was secure, then sin no longer remained a real threat. Moravians, Tennent claimed, therefore "presumed" to have absolute certainty that their sins were forgiven—a notion that minimized the necessity for the law. It might also lead to claims of moral perfection, which also undercut the role of the law. Indeed, Tennent claimed that in New Brunswick two of Zinzendorf's companions, namely Benigna (Zinzendorf's daughter) and Rosina Nitschmann, claimed to have gone without sin for several years.<sup>74</sup>

Beyond the theological controversies described above, the geographical breadth of Moravian itinerant activity proved alarming to Tennentist leaders as well. Conversing with Moravian preachers, Tennent and Samuel Finley concluded that Zinzendorf's antinomian teachings were indeed being disseminated among English speakers throughout the region. According to Finley, Moravian itinerants were teaching that once they had "given their Hearts to their Saviour," they were "not much concern'd with whether they sinned or not."<sup>75</sup> Finley also reported hearing statements from members of the English congregation, such as Thomas Yarrell, that smacked of quietism.<sup>76</sup> People should not struggle with sin, Yarrell taught, or keep themselves "under [the] Trouble" of condemnation since this would obstruct divine assistances. Rather, they needed to realize that "the Saviour" would never "leave them" to sin, or fail to "comfort his People."<sup>77</sup>

Moravian itinerants themselves confirmed that matters of the law were important sticking points wherever they went. Their listeners, even lay people, whom they encountered in churches, fields, and homes, repeatedly challenged them on the issue. English-speaking Moravian itinerants, fully aware of their evangelical detractors, consistently complained to their superiors about the detrimental effects of Tennentist efforts.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> But, according to Arthur Freeman, Zinzendorf did not advocate perfectionism. One need only reference Zinzendorf's disagreement with John Wesley to realize this point. A transcript of this encounter can be found in Freeman, *Theology of the Heart*, 188–89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>76</sup> Quietism referred to an approach to sanctification in which the believer adopted a purely passive attitude about personal holiness. To those who favored this approach, it expressed a deep faith in divine power and assistance, but to those who rejected it, quietism represented an apathetic attitude to the importance of moral living.

<sup>77</sup> Finley, *Satan Strip'd*, 33.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, the diaries of John Okely, Aug. 1742 (JD II 1) and May–June 1743 (JD II 1b), Moravian Archives.

*Antinomianism as a Threat to Public Order*

When the Moravians began their efforts in the Delaware Valley, the Great Awakening was, by 1741, already a scene of public division and competition that directly influenced the way evangelicals responded to Moravian activity. These divisions are well documented.<sup>79</sup> In New England, for example, some radicals vocally condemned established congregations and created separatist gatherings. Others endorsed controversial manifestations of the divine spirit, including visions, trances, and ecstatic bodily reactions. They marched in protest to traditional New England religion and even disrupted the religious gathering of their opponents. As radical evangelicals such as James Davenport began espousing a more subversive brand of revivalism, traditionalists seized the opportunity to discredit the whole awakening, especially the use of itinerancy, which they believed threatened to upset social structure and public order.

In defending themselves, most evangelicals repudiated the likes of Davenport and embarked on a campaign to distance themselves from anything that smacked of radicalism and define themselves in a moderate light, even resorting to rhetoric that resembled that of their detractors. In distancing themselves from the radicals in their midst, evangelicals codified a narrow and standardized definition of authentic revival that was skeptical of such disorder. It had a specific order of experience at the individual level, specific methods, predictable patterns at the corporate level, and was perpetuated through revival narratives and a network of communications. They effectively “invented,” to use Frank Lambert’s word, a moderate construction of revival piety.<sup>80</sup> Such patterns existed not only in New England, but in the middle colonies as well. On a very foundational level, as described above, these divisions continued to be theological in nature and revolved around the strong desire to stamp out heresy, preserve

<sup>79</sup> See especially Kidd, *Great Awakening*, as well as Frank Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton, NJ, 1999); Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England’s Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (Oxford, 1991); Hall, *Contested Boundaries*; and Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680–1760* (New York, 1997), 92–122.

<sup>80</sup> On radical evangelicals specifically, see Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening,”* as well as Hall, *Contested Boundaries*. On Davenport and the situation in New London specifically, consult Peter Onuf, “New Lights in New London: A Group Portrait of the Separatists,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1980): 627–43, as well as Harry Stout and Peter Onuf, “James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London,” *Journal of American History* 70 (1983): 556–78.

ecclesiastical order, promote moral living, and engender correct doctrine among the faithful.

On another level, however, the controversies also involved a fear of public and social disorder. For Tennentists, efforts to preserve a strong emphasis on the law as a safeguard against social disorder seems not to have focused on issues of gender and sexuality to the degree that Fogleman argues it did within the Lutheran and Reformed context. And Tennentist criticism stopped short of the excessive slander that characterized the polemics that were circulating throughout Europe. However, there is evidence that Tennent's concerns were likely linked to similar fears that disregarding the law would result not only in private sin, but begin to unravel society as a whole.

Antinomianism was no routine heresy. According to Tennent, "the moral Law is grounded upon the unalterable Natures, Relations, and the Reason of Things." In short, it was part and parcel of the divine order. Emphatic about antinomianism's danger for the human sphere, Tennent declared, "if there is no Law, there is no Transgression," making "the vilest Wickedness" no sin at all. To give up the necessity of the law would upset the "very foundations of Religion" and, as noted previously, "rend in pieces all the Barriers between Virtue and Vice."<sup>81</sup>

Tennent was well aware of the kind of public chaos that could result if the divide between "Virtue and Vice" was compromised. Radicals like James Davenport created such disorder when they marched through New England streets or when he and his supporters threw all manner of "vanities" into their protest fires. New England separatists were known to disrupt the Sunday services of their opponents and attracted people away from established congregations by appealing to personal revelations, visions, and trances.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned above, antinomianism had, by the eighteenth century, a devilish reputation for producing dangerous heresy, immorality, and grave disorder. It is difficult to know exactly how much of this disorder Tennent had in mind when lambasting the Moravians, but he clearly lumped the Moravians in the same category of dangerous sects who subverted the public order in secret. Tennent compared the "enthusiastical talk" of the Moravians to that of the Labadists, the seventeenth-century communarians who followed the teachings of Jean de Labadie. The Labadists,

<sup>81</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 18–19.

<sup>82</sup> On Davenport, consult Stout and Onuf, "James Davenport."

Tennent claimed, spoke with “bewitching Charms” and “few who conversed much with them escaped the Infection.” By convincing their listeners to “drink in” the “damnable Errors,” the Labadists enticed others to become “Partakers with them in their Wickedness.” Tennent implied that the Moravians had similar powers over the “affections” and counseled his listeners to steer clear of such “seducers” and “erroneous Strangers.”<sup>83</sup>

Tennent, like many of his associates, seems especially to have had a fear of such exotic heresies—those personified corporately, by one essayist, as a “Wandering Spirit,” which roamed the countryside spreading antinomian, Anabaptist, and enthusiastical errors. This ghostly figure, it was said, “hates Rules and good Order” and encouraged “Contortions of the Body and vocal Energy, Faintings and Crying, delusive Voices and frantic Visions.” This spirit of disorder was linked with the radical pietist Jakob Böhme, and according to the essayist, “does now haunt Moravia.”<sup>84</sup> Tennent no doubt was aware of radical strains of pietism in Europe and would also have been familiar with pietist sects in the Philadelphia region, such as the Rosicrucian community along the Wissahickon Creek and the German Baptist Brethren at Ephrata.<sup>85</sup>

Tennent, along with Samuel Finley, also complained about Moravian methods of itinerant preaching and visitation, which added to public disorder. Ironically, the Tennentists themselves endorsed and practiced itinerancy quite frequently—something for which they themselves were condemned by antirevivalists.<sup>86</sup> Tennent, however, attempted to distance himself from the Moravians by charging that the Moravians, unlike him,

<sup>83</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 52, 54.

<sup>84</sup> “A True and Genuine Account of a Wonderful Wandering Spirit . . .,” *General Magazine and Historical Chronicle for All the British Plantations in America*, Feb. 1741, 120–22.

<sup>85</sup> While Tennentists seem to have had a general knowledge of such radicalism, they gave little evidence that they were familiar with the details of some of the more controversial components of Moravian spirituality, including the veneration of the wounds of Christ, erotic devotional language, and the glorification of sexuality among married members. On these elements of Moravian spirituality, consult Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*, 73–104, as well as Craig Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park, PA, 2004), 173–222. While this has been traditionally understood as part of the “Sifting Time,” Atwood has demonstrated that much of it, especially the Blood and Wounds theology, was quite normative. This squares with Paul Peucker, who has argued that the Sifting Time likely referred to other religious expression and practices, which may have included homoeroticism, that were of a more localized nature and centered around the Moravian settlement at Herrnhut. See Peucker, “Blut auf unsre grünen Bändchen: Die Sichtungszeit in der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine,” *Unitas Fratrum* 49–50 (2002): 41–94, and Peucker, “Inspired by Flames of Love: Homosexuality, Mysticism, and the Moravian Brothers around 1750,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15 (2006): 30–64.

<sup>86</sup> On Tennent and itinerancy, see Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 47–48.

wandered the countryside without permission from local clergy or civil authorities. While in New England, Tennent prided himself on having the endorsement of local pastors. But the Moravians, he charged, were subversive and looked to take advantage of the unsuspecting. They were sneaking about, entering the homes of the unwary, and spreading heresy to “young Persons, Females, and ignorant People.”<sup>87</sup> Tennent even went so far as to describe the proliferation of error and enthusiasm as a “public” disease of “epidemical” proportions.

Forasmuch as the Church of Christ is begirt with numerous Enemies, of various Forms; Enemies open and secret, who Labour almost incessantly, either by Force or Fraud, to corrupt her in her principles, it is of the last Necessity, to be constantly upon our Guard, and especially in a Time of publick and epidemical Infection; lest we be betrayed into the Labyrinths of Error and mistake, by the plausible Pretences of Seducers.<sup>88</sup>

In all of this, an emphasis on the moral law was of utmost importance in preserving pure and orderly religion. Moravian antinomianism, with its accompanying notion of universal redemption, Tennent believed, removed a strong sense of personal sinfulness and the fear of judgment that served as “one of the principle Barriers against Vice and Incentives to Religion and Virtue.” Indeed, such doctrines even threatened to “disband the World, and open the Flood-Gates to all Immorality and Anarchy.”<sup>89</sup>

The fear of such radical and disorderly trends created an environment in which it was inevitably difficult for a movement such as the Moravians whose teachings clearly offered an alternative version of awakening piety, to come onto the scene and fit into the mold defined by mainstream evangelicals. Moravians were, by default, being “defined out” of the evangelical camp even as they arrived.

Anti-Moravian polemics, such as those by the Tennentists, therefore, should be understood as efforts not only to defend the polemicists’ version of orthodoxy, but to legitimize their own revival measures by discrediting those of others. Opponents of evangelical activity recognized this immediately. Orthodox Presbyterian John Hancock, for example, attacked Tennent after his anti-Moravian sermons, claiming convincingly that Tennent was guilty of exactly the same subversive and disorderly methods

<sup>87</sup> Tennent, *Necessity*, 65–68, 106.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



and doctrines for which Tennent had accused the Moravians.<sup>90</sup> Peter Böhler was right when he told Zinzendorf that Hancock had taken Tennent's arrows, which were intended for the Moravians, and turned them back on Tennent himself.<sup>91</sup> Tennent was thus forced to defend himself and clarify even more starkly the differences between his own identity, as a moderate, and the Moravians, whom Tennent branded as enthusiasts who stood outside the circle of authentic revival.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Samuel Finley explicitly acknowledged that Tennentists advocated a centrist position between Old Lights on one hand and the Moravians on the other. Authentic revival existed only in this narrowly defined center, and the Moravians, Tennentists made sure, would remain on the outside.<sup>93</sup>

But like all polemical literature, Tennentist propaganda against the Moravians exaggerated the case. The Moravians were just as concerned about moral living as were other proponents of awakening, and Moravians' views did not lead them to discard virtue in favor of licentiousness. On the contrary, rather than loosening the boundaries of vice, Moravians actually fostered a strict culture of moral regulation within their highly structured religious communities.<sup>94</sup> And while Tennentists worried about the breakdown of public order, Moravian itinerants usually reported that they avoided theological disputes, sought to obtain the necessary permission for their activity, and preferred to announce their coming to local residents (rather than operate clandestinely as they were accused of doing).<sup>95</sup>

What is more, Moravians did not endorse revivalist "enthusiasm" any more than moderate evangelicals did. In fact, when they encountered it, they spoke against it. In the New London region of Connecticut, for example, Anglo-Moravian itinerants Owen Rice and James Burnside visited with several prominent separatists in 1745 and a radical Baptist who advocated bodily "fitts" and enthusiasm. Rice and Burnside could not endorse the radicalism in New London, even though it meant parting on

<sup>90</sup> John Hancock, *The Examiner; or, Gilbert against Tennent* (Boston, 1743).

<sup>91</sup> Coalter, *Son of Thunder*, 113–36.

<sup>92</sup> Tennent did this in his pamphlet *The Examiner Examined, or Gilbert Tennent, Harmonious* (Philadelphia, 1743).

<sup>93</sup> See Finley, *Satan Strip'd*, iv–vi.

<sup>94</sup> On the regulatory component within Moravian Bethlehem, see Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 174–200.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Jasper Payne and Christoph Fröhlich's itinerant journal, "Br. Jasp. Paynes u. Christ. Fröhlichs Nachricht von ihrer Reise nach Maryland, 28 Oct–27 Nov, 1747" (JD III 1), Moravian Archives.

unfriendly terms and being condemned as “opposers” to genuine evangelical faith.<sup>96</sup>

Likewise, Moravian itinerant Richard Utley encountered radicalism among the Narragansett Indians near Charlestown, Rhode Island. The Narragansett “carried on in a very strange, confused and extravagant manner,” Utley reported, and the meeting was filled with loud wails. Sam Niles, the Narragansett minister and a well-known radical, proceeded to preach about his ecstatic experiences and transports into the “third heaven.” When given a chance to address the crowd, Utley, who had confided in his report to Spangenberg that the Narragansett were like the “prophets of Baal,” used the opportunity to condemn the enthusiasm he witnessed and urged his audience to embrace the wounds of the Savior, which would “preserve us from running into extravagancies.”<sup>97</sup>

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As the Great Awakening diminished in the 1750s and political issues came increasingly to the fore, the Tennentists mended the divisions within the Presbyterian ranks and rejoined their “Old Side” opponents.<sup>98</sup> So too did their tirades against the Moravians cool, becoming less frequent and less intense. To be sure, the emotional intensity remained intact for years, as is evidenced by the Moravians’ harsh interpretation of Tennent’s harrowing encounter with lightning described in the opening of this essay. Similarly, evangelical Presbyterians remained resentful of the Moravians as well. Charles Beatty, who succeeded William Tennent at Neshaminy, appealed to the Moravian threat as late as 1760 as he raised financial support for colonial Presbyterians while on a tour of England.<sup>99</sup> But in the aftermath of the Great Awakening, Tennentists no longer felt the need to make strong renunciations of their radical opponents.

Perhaps the relatively short duration of the Tennentist-Moravian controversy partly explains why it has not received more attention by historians of colonial religion. Yet this skirmish remains important for the way it furthers our understanding of the diverse nature, especially in the

<sup>96</sup> See the Burnside/Rice diary, Sept. 24–Nov. 4, 1745 (JA I 11) Moravian Archives.

<sup>97</sup> See “Von Utley an Spangenberg: An Account of his Visit at New London and among the Narragansett Indians, März 12. 1759–Jan 10 1760” (JF II 1a), Moravian Archives.

<sup>98</sup> “New Side” Presbyterians rejoined their “Old Side” coreligionists in 1758.

<sup>99</sup> See Helen H. Gemmill, *History of Neshaminy-Warwick Presbyterian Church, 1726–1976* (Philadelphia, 1976), 14.

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middle colonies, of the Great Awakening, which reflected the broad and transatlantic currents of the period. It demonstrates the fact that within the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of the Great Awakening, the spirit of competition was not limited to Anglo currents of religious awakening, but included groups like the Moravians whose sphere of influence extended beyond the German subculture and reached into Anglo-American circles. The Tennentist-Moravian controversy also highlights the theological diversity that existed among those who promoted religious awakening and the fact that they sometimes brought divergent theological assumptions to the evangelical enterprise. In this case, amid numerous theological differences, Tennentist awakeners fixated most acutely on the role and function of the moral law and concluded that Moravians were dangerous antinomians. More than a theological controversy, however, this conflict also highlights the way antinomianism was perceived as a threat not only to orthodoxy but to the order and decency of colonial society.

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