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Herrnhutters in Pennsylvania: Confrontations between Pietism and Evangelicalism in Colonial America

Introduction

In 1743 the evangelical Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent noted in an appendix to *The Necessity of holding fast the Truth* that he had become “tired with relating” the “Abominations” of the Moravian Brethren.¹ A prominent figure in the movement that has been subsequently described as the “First Great Awakening,” Tennent discussed the Moravians as being “directly contrary to Scripture, Reason, Experience, Antiquity, the Writings of the ablest and best Divines of the Protestant Churches, to the Harmony of their Confessions of Faith, and to the Work of God.”² Tennent’s language in his condemnation is curious. Indeed, the First Great Awakening has been traditionally characterized as a tension between evangelical “New Lights,” who argued for the necessity of emotional conversion, over-against established “Old Light” ministers that favored Enlightenment rationalism and empirical signs of salvation.³ Yet, Tennent’s argument that the Moravians were contrary to “Reason” and “Experience” echoes the language of Baconian empiricism favored by established “Old Lights”, a synthesis suggesting the need for a more nuanced assessment of evangelicalism in British North America.⁴ What should we make of

¹ Gilbert Tennent, “Some Account of the Principles of the Moravians” in *The Necessity of holding fast the Truth* (London: 1743), 48.

² Ibid.

³ See Daniel Gullotta “The Great Awakening and the American Revolution,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, August 10, 2016, accessed August 10, 2020 <https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/08/great-awakening-american-revolution/>.

⁴ Although it would be inaccurate to describe the evangelical reactions to the Moravian Brethren as firmly “Baconian” in their use of empiricism, evangelicals like Whitfield and Tennent do reflect a pattern of Baconian reasoning. Tennent, particularly in his criticism of the lack of “reason” in Moravian conversion, echoes the move toward “methodical, systematic thought...experience [and] observation” that Paulo Rossi describes in the

the experience of the Moravian Brethren who, despite holding similar theological principles as the purportedly radical New Lights of the Great Awakening, were rejected by so many evangelicals and viewed with such suspicion by colonists for their refusal to swear allegiance to the King of England?⁵

A sect of German Pietism revived under Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf in the eighteenth century, the Moravians had a significant presence in Pennsylvania after 1741. Despite being an evangelical variety of Protestantism, the Moravians were denied a place in the revivals of the Great Awakening, suffering public condemnations at the hands of evangelical leaders like Tennent and George Whitfield.⁶ The Moravian experience in British North America complicates traditional narratives of evangelicalism, and further reveals fundamental tensions at the heart of the evangelical revivals. Characterizations of radicalism in the Great Awakening conceal an institutionally conservative movement that, as evidenced by the treatment of the Moravians, organized its evangelicalism only within a specific British context.

Evangelicalism in North America emerged from within an English understanding of the right to religious toleration, which had developed through the eighteenth century and taken on intensified meaning following the Glorious Revolution and the 1707 Act of Union.⁷ Emigrating from the German-speaking lands in the eighteenth century and refusing to “bear true allegiance to his present majesty King George the Second, and his successors, Kings of Britain,” the

development of empiricism in the writings of Francis Bacon. See Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 35. For connections between Puritanism and Baconian empiricism, see Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

⁵ See Craig D. Atwood, “‘The Hallensians are Pietists; aren’t you a Hallensian?’: Mühlenberg’s Conflict with the Moravians in America” in *Journal of Moravian History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 47-92, accessed October 12, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.5325/jmorahist.12.1.0047> 67.

⁶ Milton J. Coalter, “The Radical Pietism of Nicolaus Zinzendorf as a Conservative Influence on the Awakener, Gilbert Tennent” in *Church History* 49, no. 1, (March 1980): 35-46 accessed October 23, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3164638> 35-36.

⁷ Evan Haefeli, “Toleration and Empire: The Origins of American Religious Pluralism” in *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Steven Foster, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128.

Moravian Brethren marked themselves as fundamentally separate from British identity and understandings of English rights.⁸ In this respect, the Moravian Brethren in Pennsylvania offer perspective on how the British context for evangelicalism produced a rejection that was both theological *and* ethnic. William Penn’s “Holy Experiment,” Pennsylvania made acceptable such a wide array of Protestant religions and ethnicities that by the eighteenth century, only 35% of its population was ethnically English.⁹ As an examination of the evangelical rejection of the Moravians will demonstrate, the diversity of acceptable religious thought in the Middle colonies led to notions of ethnicity—like the “Germanness (*Deutschtum*)” of the Moravians—being derived from, and intertwined with, religious identity.

Recent treatments of religious pluralism in the Middle Colonies have shed light on the ways in which religious differences between various European Protestants came to mark ethnic identities. Ned Landsman argues that the overreach of Anglican authority in seventeenth-century New York led much of the Dutch population to “retreat into consolidated ethnic and religious enclaves,” and in so doing provides an example of how colonial identities solidified as “ethno-religious.”¹⁰ On Pennsylvania, Sally Schwartz notes that German Lutherans connected more strongly with theologically-similar German Reformed than with non-Germans, or even other varieties of German theology, furthering the notion of ethnicity and connectedness deriving from religion.¹¹ As a part of the ethnic German enclaves that formed and remained distinctly German

⁸ Ralph Strassburger, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers: A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia from 1727-1803*, vol 1 ed. William John Hinke, (Norristown: Pennsylvania German Society, 1954), 3. Strassburger provides here a reproduction of the original Oath of Allegiance presented to immigrants arriving in Pennsylvania.

⁹ Sally Schwartz, *A Mixed Multitude: The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1987), 1.

¹⁰ Ned C. Landsman, “Roots, Routes, and Rootedness: Diversity, Migration, and Toleration in Mid-Atlantic Pluralism” in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 267-309, accessed November 15, 2020 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546493>, 306.

¹¹ Schwartz, 147-149.

in Pennsylvania, the rejection of the Moravians may be understood as a result of British ethnic identity and contexts for British evangelicalism coming to occlude an earlier shared influence of European Pietism.

In recognizing that the pluralism of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania had solidified religion as a marker of belonging to a distinct ethnicity, reassessing the Great Awakening as a product of British evangelicalism provides a new dimension by which to understand the Moravian experience in British North America. Indeed, to what extent did the Germanness of the Moravian Brethren influence their reception by the evangelical movement and other colonists? As Schwartz has noted, “the Pennsylvania elite...were wary [of the Moravians],” as during the process of immigration they refused to swear an Oath of Allegiance to the British Empire.¹² The distinctiveness of British evangelicalism over-against broader currents of trans-Atlantic Pietism becomes apparent through using the Moravian Brethren as a case-study of the ethno-religious and theological limits of Great Awakening radicalism.

The confrontation between the German Moravians and British evangelicals reflects not only an ethnic tension in North America, but a wider interaction between Pietism and British evangelicalism. To expand, the ecumenical theologies of the Great Awakening found their origins in a tension between evangelical “religions of the heart” and rationalist theology. In a theological context, Gavin Hymen explains that rationalism was the consequence of an epistemological shift in Christianity that saw human reason elevated from a tool *granted* by God, with which humans could understand the world, to an innate feature of humans that could be used to describe and quantify God.¹³ A counter to rationalism, “heart religions”—like those of

¹² Schwartz, 132.

¹³ Gavin Hymen, *A Short History of Atheism* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 19-22.

the Pietists, evangelicals, and the Moravians under Zinzendorf—championed a more personal, intense conversion experience that relied less on reason.

In teasing out what made British approaches to evangelicalism distinct, David Bebbington argues for a quadrilateral definition, highlighting “conversionism” (the necessity of personal conversion), “activism” (actions that spread the gospel, such as missionary work), “biblicism” (emphasizing the bible as authority), and “cruciocentrism” which centered the death of Christ in theology.¹⁴ However, as Michael Haykin argues, this definition is too rigid in its attempt to separate evangelicalism from its antecedents and does not accurately describe the evangelical movement.¹⁵ Further, European Pietists like the Moravians seem to echo these concerns that Bebbington marks as distinctly evangelical. How then do we understand the origins of the evangelical revivals? This paper suggests that the evangelicalism of the First Great Awakening was in actual fact a trans-British phenomenon, and the specific British contexts that gave way to evangelicalism came to occlude and even repudiate earlier Pietist influences.

It is significant that although Bebbington’s markers for evangelicalism reflect Pietist concerns, they most often have been confined to British contexts. This discrepancy is perhaps more tied to eighteenth century evangelicals like Jonathan Edwards recasting history to find antecedents to evangelicalism within earlier revival movements, and therefore obscuring their connection to Pietism, than genuine theological differences. A turn toward religious renewal that began within Calvinist critiques of Reformation theology in the late sixteenth century German-

¹⁴ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 50-70.

¹⁵ In particular, Haykin argues that the Puritans did not lack missionary efforts as Bebbington assumes, and missionary efforts of evangelicals did not extend beyond Protestants until the late eighteenth century. Michael A. G. Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 37-60, 48-55.

speaking lands, Pietism is best understood as a broad term for Protestant criticisms of the Reformation.¹⁶

Pietists, such as Philipp Jacob Spener, argued that the Protestant Reformation had not gone far enough, and that further reform with an emphasis on regeneration was necessary.¹⁷ Douglas Shantz has described “personal renewal and rebirth,” “ecumenical cooperation,” and “a worldwide mission” as fundamental characteristics of Pietism, all of which found varying levels of purchase in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and came to define concerns of British evangelicals in North America.¹⁸ Shantz notes further that “there was no single Pietist systematic theology,” nor was there a “clear line separating Church Pietists... from radicals,” suggesting that notwithstanding their later rejection, the Moravian Brethren were not so easily disentangled from broader Protestant critiques.¹⁹ Tellingly, the English Puritan dissent from the Anglican establishment in the seventeenth century was structured along a similar line. Scholars are also beginning to suggest the ways in which evangelical theologians like Johnathan Edwards sought to locate their origins within the Congregationalist Puritans as they came to define their own movement.²⁰

To the seventeenth-century Puritans, the Reformation in England had stopped short as well. Troubled by their view of “Proto-Catholicism” within Anglicanism under Archbishop William Laud, the Puritans established a colony of dissenters from the English intertwining of Church and State in New England.²¹ Believing he lived at a stage of great revivals just prior to

¹⁶ Douglas H Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 5.

¹⁷ William Caldwell Prout, “Spener and the Theology of Pietism” in *Journal of Bible and Religion* 15, no. 1 (January 1947): 46-49, accessed November 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1457267>, 49.

¹⁸ Shantz, 7.

¹⁹ Shantz, 5-7

²⁰ Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 37-43.

²¹ Haefeli, 110-111.

the Christian millennium, Edwards read the history of these Puritans typologically, viewing them as antecedents to the eighteenth-century revivals.²² Indeed, an Edwardsian reading of the Puritans suggests that they sought to create both temporal and spatial separation from the original Reformation, following a model of *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*—“the church reformed, and always reforming.”²³ Such a teleological view of the revivals obscures the connection between evangelicalism and broader trends of European revivalism. By examining the rejection of the Moravian Brethren, it is possible to see how Anglo-centric understandings of evangelicalism came to displace its broader European origins.

Milton Coalter Jr. notes that English Puritanism, Edwardsian views notwithstanding, shared with Pietism a want to create “dynamic spiritual renewal among the lay people.”²⁴ Echoing Edwards, Thomas Kidd has drawn connections between the evangelical movement of the eighteenth century and potential antecedents in the seventeenth century rooted in English Puritanism.²⁵ The associations of evangelicals of the eighteenth century with earlier religious

²² Ibid., 55.

²³ Jonathan Edwards, *Some thoughts concerning the present revival of religion in New-England, and the way in which it ought to be acknowledged and promoted, humbly offered to the publik, in a treatise on that subject*, (1742: Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, accessed October 27, 2020 <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N04004.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>), 40-53. Through part one of his treatise, Edwards elaborates on the ways in which the Reformation was subject to “mischievous Consequences” as “the Weakness of Human Nature[which] has always appeared in times of great Revival of religion” had a negative influence on the early Reform movement. Indeed, Edwards posits that continual revival, temporally and spatially removed from the problems of the Reformation, would “likely...be of excellent Benefit to [God’s] church.” Edwards notes further that in New England especially there had been “a vast Increase of Concern for the Salvation of the precious soul,” making clear that Edwards saw British North America as an arena for further revival. It is worth recognizing however, that the English Puritans were never monolithic. As Steven Matthews notes, “a single, coherent definition of what Puritans believed is difficult to establish,” Steven Matthews, *Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 7. In addition, Patrick Collinson argues that Puritanism in Elizabethan England was “loosely defined” and “widely dispersed,” suggesting again a Puritanism that is not so easily delineated, Patrick Collinson *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 29.

²⁴ Coalter, 35.

²⁵ Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Prayer for a Saving Issue’: Evangelical Development in New England before the Great Awakening” in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* eds. Michael A.G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 128-145, 131-140. In particular, the trial of Anne Hutchinson in the seventeenth century serves as an antecedent, as she challenged the value of Assurance over a “religion of the heart.” See *The Trial of Anne Hutchinson, 1637* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, accessed October 2, 2020

revivals suggests a shared intellectual heritage between British evangelicalism and the Pietist Moravian Brethren. Indeed, definitions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Pietism seem to reflect characteristics of evangelicalism described by Bebbington. In a wider sense as well, Pietism and British evangelicalism shared a critique of the Enlightenment's focus on rationalism. Pietist and evangelical revivals, which centered the experience of personal conversion and the all-powerful nature of God's grace, stood against the Enlightenment emphasis on human reason in discerning matters of faith.²⁶

Yet, the impulse towards worldwide ecumenicalism in Pietism appears to have been translated into a British ecumenicalism by the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the treatment of the Moravians. Ernst Benz, in his discussions of the interactions between Cotton Mather and August Franke, has emphasized that while "the relations between Puritanism and Pietism" were quite strong, "in the midst of discovering common interests and tasks, typically American... viewpoints [appeared] quite unconsciously."²⁷ What Benz describes here as an "American" viewpoint over-against ideals shared with Pietism is more accurately described as a distinct British context for religious toleration and evangelicalism coming to overshadow an original agreement with continental critiques. If denominational lines were blurred during the Great Awakening, it occurred between British Awakeners, not with German-speaking Moravians that showed no loyalty to the British crown.

http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/WebPub/history/mckayunderstanding1e/0312668872/Primary_Documents/US_History/Transcript%20of%20the%20Trial%20of%20Anne%20

²⁶ On Mysticism and the other intellectual currents that informed Pietism, see Shantz, 15-40. Further, the Enlightenment and its belief in human reason is in itself emblematic of a paradigm-shift in discussions of God that originated in Christianity itself. In particular, this shift elevated human reason to a tool that could "define God," as opposed to medieval understandings that viewed human reason as a tool granted by God that had a finite capacity. See Gavin Hymen, *A Short History of Atheism* (New York: IB Taurus & Co., 2010).

²⁷ Ernst Benz, "Ecumenical Relations between Boston Puritanism and German Pietism: Cotton Mather and August Hermann Francke" in *The Harvard Theological Review* 54, no. 3 (July 1961): 159-193, accessed November 1, 2020 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1508437>, 192.

Chiefly through itinerant preachers like George Whitfield, the evangelicalism of the Great Awakening has been understood to have crossed colonial boundaries, and through its radical critiques of established hierarchies, developed a more democratic form of piety that offered a means for intercolonial unity.²⁸ Scholars such as Alan Heimert have described this colonial tension as “Orthodox Calvinists” against “Enlightened Liberals,” and these religious fault-lines, coupled with assumptions of intercolonial unity fostered by itinerancy, have been marshalled to link the Great Awakening to the American Revolution.²⁹ However, understanding the religious revivals of the Great Awakening as a binary lacks nuance, and erases much of the

²⁸ Gullotta.

²⁹ Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). In the five decades since the publication of Alan Heimert’s work, the Great Awakening and its importance to the eighteenth-century colonial experience has been central for scholars of religious history and religion in the American colonies. Heimert’s argument, that Calvinist revivals in the 1740s had a far greater impact on the development of the American Revolution than had been previously recognized, has been corrected, furthered, and outright refuted by various scholars of the colonial era. Most notably, scholars since Jon Butler have questioned whether and how such a phenomenon as the “Great Awakening” can actually be discussed, given its sporadic and localized nature. See Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” in *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305-325, accessed October 23, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1893821>. Despite Butler’s criticisms, the model of the Great Awakening has not been abandoned, though the supposed connection to the American Revolution has been reduced. In particular, the work of Frank Lambert on George Whitfield’s self-promotion and immersion in “commercial culture” of the eighteenth century has offered a subtle resuscitation of Heimert’s concept of political subcultures. Moreover, Lambert hints at the need to understand the Great Awakening as a broader phenomenon, with special attention paid to communication networks of Protestants across the Atlantic. See Frank Lambert, “Peddler in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Great Awakening, 1737-1735,” in *The Journal of American History*, 77, no. 3 (December 1990): 812-837, accessed on October 23, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2078987>. On Protestant communication networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kathrine Carté Engel, “Connecting Protestant’s in Britain’s Eighteenth-Century Empire” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 75, no.1 (January 2018): 37-70, accessed August 25, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.75.1.0037>, and Rosalind J. Beiler, “Dissenting Religious Communication Networks and European Migration, 1670-1710” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents 1500-1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 210-236. Lisa Smith and her work on the newspaper coverage of the Great Awakening has also added to this revival, as her work demonstrates that the revivals had a broader popular reception than often understood. See Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012). John Howard Smith has put forth an argument for a “wider” Great Awakening, which addresses the problems of older, strict binaries between “Old Lights” and “New Lights.” See John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015). Aaron Spencer Fogelman’s work on the Moravian Brethren has raised the question of how varieties of revivalism were received in British North America, despite not dealing directly with the First Great Awakening. My own work owes a tremendous debt to Fogelman’s explanation of the Moravian Brethren as “challengers” to Protestant Orthodoxy. See Aaron Spencer Fogelman, *Jesus is Female: Moravians and Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

tension between various religious groups in the period.³⁰ Many narratives of the Great Awakening fail to consider the movement within the larger context of Pietist revivalism, and often neglect minority groups of evangelicals within the colonies.³¹ This lacuna is key. A case-study of the Moravian Brethren in Pennsylvania provides an avenue to explore a further tension during the Great Awakening: the tensions between the accepted varieties of evangelicalism, and those that were denied validity.

The Moravian Brethren: Regeneration and Theology under Zinzendorf

As Moravian Bishops Kenneth and J. Taylor Hamilton have noted, the Thirty Years War destroyed the vast majority of Moravian Brethren congregations in Moravia and Bohemia.³² Through the early eighteenth century, the Moravian Brethren existed in isolated pockets in the German-speaking lands until they were granted asylum on the estate of Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a count from Saxony, in 1722. Under Zinzendorf, the Moravian Brethren were rejuvenated. Through the rest of the eighteenth century, the Moravians not only received significant numbers of converts, but also began intensive missionary work that would lead them to establish colonies in British North America.³³ To understand this rebirth, and to further

³⁰ Despite the ubiquity of these categorizations, it is also worth considering how accurate it is to describe these revivals as broadly “Calvinist.” The religious diversity of the Atlantic world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries requires more nuance, particularly given that evangelicalism as an approach was not a strictly Calvinist movement. On more tenable views of English religion and varieties of Protestantism in the Atlantic world, see Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Steven Matthews, “Breaking with a Puritan Past,” in *Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), and John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).

³¹ As Allen Guezlo has argued, much of the literature on the Great Awakening has centered on Calvinist awakeners, and little work has been done on the other religious groups during the Awakening. See Allen Guelzo, “God’s Designs: The Literature of the Colonial Revival of Religion” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, eds. Harry S. Stout and D.G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 141-172, 155.

³² Kenneth and Taylor Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957* (Bethlehem, PA: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, 1967), 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 52-59, 82-92.

understand its relation to the evangelical revivals, the theology of Zinzendorf and the influences therein must be examined.

Zinzendorf was educated in religious thought by his grandmother, Henrietta Katharina von Gersdorf. Gersdorf had a close friendship with Philipp Spener, a significant figure in early German Pietism, and her own theological views placed her as “a mediator (*Vermittlerin*) between Pietism and Orthodox Lutheranism.”³⁴ During his formative years Zinzendorf was further exposed to Pietist strains of thought, as he attended the *Pädagogium* of August Hermann Francke at the (Pietist) University of Halle.³⁵ However, Zinzendorf’s guardian during his time at Halle expressed deep concern that he may become an “enthusiast,” and had Zinzendorf transferred to the University of Wittenberg.³⁶ At Wittenberg, Zinzendorf was in an environment that opposed all Pietistic impulses and aligned closely with principles of Orthodox Lutheranism. Zinzendorf’s theology then, and the theology of the renewed Brethren, has traditionally been described as a tension between Pietist criticism of the Reformation’s shortcomings and Orthodox Lutheranism.³⁷

³⁴ Heinz Renkewitz, *Im Gespräch mit Zinzendorfs Theologie: Vorträge aus dem Nachlaß* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1980), 2. Original: “Aufgewachsen in der Kindheit unter dem Schutz einer bedeutenden Frau, seiner Großmutter, der Landvögtin Henriette Katharina von Gersdorf, um deren Freundschaft sich auch die Theologen, ein Spener und Franke bemühten, lernte Zinzendorf an ihr, die eine Vermittlerin zwischen den Pietisten und Orthodoxen war, die ‚Kraftprinzipia de Orthodoxie‘ schätzen.“ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Hamilton and Hamilton, 19.

³⁷ Although the tendency in scholarship of the Moravian Brethren tends towards this notion of “dual-influence,” the category of “Orthodox Lutheranism” appears dubious. As Timothy Wengert has noted, it is difficult to talk of an “Orthodox Lutheranism” when so many categories associated with Martin Luther are historically untenable creations of later scholarship, such as the so-called “Priesthood of all Believers” or Luther’s “Nicaean marks of the Church.” Timothy Wengert, “The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths” (Lecture, Valparaiso University, January 1 2005): Accessed October 13, 2020, 1-2 https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/2/?utm_source=scholar.valpo.edu%2Fils_papers%2F2&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages. Moreover, Zinzendorf’s tendency toward a view of “universal Christianity” seems to contradict Orthodox Lutheranism directly. In contrast to Zinzendorf, who saw glimpses of true Christianity in all denominations, Robert Preus notes that Orthodox Lutherans in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries held a “remarkable doctrinal unity... achieved by a very conscious and deliberate Biblical and confessional faithfulness.” Zinzendorf’s more fluid understanding of acceptable doctrine appears incompatible with an assertion of “Orthodox Lutheranism.” Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena*, vol 1 (Saint Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 31.

1727 saw Herrnhut, the Moravian community established on Zinzendorf's estate (and the origin of the Brethren being known as "Herrnhutters"), transition from a place of considerable theological diversity to a homogenous sect as the result of an intense conversion experience.³⁸ Zinzendorf, the feudal head and bishop (although ordained as a Lutheran), helped develop a number of theological principles that would guide the Brethren through the eighteenth century.³⁹ As Heinz Renkewitz has noted, Zinzendorf placed himself as the "opponent (*Gegner*) of deism and rationalism," arguing instead that "religion should not be a thing of the head (*Kopfes*), but of the heart (*Herzen*)."⁴⁰ The poetry of Zinzendorf reflects his tendency toward pietist religions of the heart, as one poem asserts that "those who grow the love of God in their hearts, those who believe, become free."⁴¹ In this respect, Moravian theology echoes the heart religions of the eighteenth-century evangelicals in their arguments against the over-rationalization of religion.

Further, Zinzendorf argued for the necessity of rebirth for true conversion. For the Moravians, "the savior was the redeemer (*Heiland*)," and redemption came through being "reborn" as "new beings."⁴² Once again, Moravian theology reflects a Pietist undercurrent shared with the evangelical revivals, advocating for a religious rebirth and a turn toward emotional religion. Moravian theology also shared with the evangelicals an emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ. Similar to Bebbington's description of "cruciocentrism," the Moravian Brethren (and particularly Zinzendorf) placed the death and sacrifice of Christ at the center of their theology.⁴³

³⁸ Hamilton and Hamilton, 33-34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁰ Renkewitz, 5, original: „daß Religion nicht eine Sache des Kopfes sondern des „Herzens“ sei.“ 90, original: „Er machte sich hier die Deisten und die rationalistisch geprägten Theologen zu seinen Gegnern.“

⁴¹ Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, "Vollendung einer fünfjährig-fortgewährten Betrachtung Gottes" in *Ergänzungsbände zu den Hauptschriften*, vol. 2 (Hildesheim: 1964), 58-64, original: „Wenn seine Lieb im Herzen grünet, wer glaubt; wird aller Sorgen frey.“

⁴² Zinzendorf, "Mein Schöpfer ist mein Heiland," in Renke, 90.

⁴³ Heinz Renkewitz, "Die Bedeutung des Kreuzes Christi innerhalb der Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus in der Theologie Zinzendorfs" in *Im Gespräch mit Zinzendorfs Theologie: Vorträge aus dem Nachlaß* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1980), 19-33.

Indeed, Christ himself became the “chief elder” of the Moravian church following an intense religious experience among the Moravian electors in September 1741.⁴⁴

Turning again to Bebbington’s quadrilateral of evangelicalism, the Moravian Brethren also share evangelicalism’s impulse toward conversion and ecumenicism. Through the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Moravians took on significant missionary efforts in Greenland, Algeria, and British North America.⁴⁵ The Moravians did not only seek to make converts of Christians—in the American colonies, they often evangelized to enslaved populations and to native peoples.⁴⁶ The trend towards missionary work in the Moravians and other evangelicals reflects again a Pietist influence, given that Spener himself had called for the establishment of a “united” Christianity.⁴⁷ Finally, the Moravians under Zinzendorf shared the belief that the Reformation had not gone far enough, with Zinzendorf himself believing that he was the “continuation of the work begun by Martin Luther.”⁴⁸ By approaching the phenomenon of the religious revivals through a lens of Pietism, the theology of the Moravian Brethren appears strikingly similar to the New Light evangelicals. With contexts for British evangelicalism and the overlap between Pietism and the Great Awakening established, the rejection of the Moravian Brethren can now be properly assessed.

The Moravian Brethren in Pennsylvania

Despite making several trans-Atlantic voyages in the 1730s, it was not until Zinzendorf’s second journey to British North America in 1741 that the Moravian Brethren became a

⁴⁴ Hamilton and Hamilton, 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-59.

⁴⁶ Fogelman, 5.

⁴⁷ Prout, 48-49.

⁴⁸ Renkewitz, 13, original: “Zinzendorf fühlte sich hier als Fortsetzer des Werkes, das Luther begonnen hat.”

significant factor in the religious battleground of Pennsylvania.⁴⁹ True to their belief in ecumenicism, the Moravians began extensive missionary efforts in Pennsylvania directed at Native American populations. Zinzendorf himself notes that in the area surrounding Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Moravians had at least four active missionary groups in the 1740s.⁵⁰

The Moravian outreaches were focused first on providing education in things of the faith, as opposed to immediate conversion. Zinzendorf explained this tendency in an address to the “Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel” in February of 1743, arguing that, “if therefore have we, in the Conversion of the Heathen, entirely rejected the Method of teaching them such Matters as they can keep in their head... a heathen... shall not be able to so much as to talk when he has not the Matter in his heart.”⁵¹ For Zinzendorf, conversion was a matter of intense emotion—if conversion was not supported by emotion and spirit of the heart, or if it was approached too quickly and systematically, it was “the work of the Devil.”⁵² In their efforts to convert native populations, the Moravians demonstrated their commitment to emotional conversions to heart religions, and showcase a strong impulse towards evangelism. Beyond their missionary activities, the Moravian Brethren also quickly became involved with other Protestant churches as part of a “Pennsylvania Synod” movement.

The influences of Pietism and ecumenicism, combined with the pluralistic nature of Pennsylvania, resulted in a series of seven “Pan-Protestant” synods intended to highlight the theological overlap between various churches.⁵³ As Peter Vogt notes, the inclusion of the

⁴⁹ Peter Vogt, “Zinzendorf und die Pennsylvanischen Synoden 1742“ in *Unitas Fratrum: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Gegenwartsfragen der Brüdergemeine*“ 36, (1994), 6-62, 18.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Die Heiden Collegia*, 1742 Zinzendorf Papers, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

⁵¹ Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Zinzendorf's Account of his Work among the American Indians*, February 25, 1743, London, Zinzendorf Papers, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem PA.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Vogt, 20-28.

Quakers in the Synods made clear that the ultimate goal of these synods was “peaceableness (*Freidfertigkeit*) and agreement” between varieties of Protestants.⁵⁴ The first of these meetings, held in the home of Theobald Endt in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on January 11, 1742, was a relative success—issues such as worship on the Sabbath were discussed, and doctrinal differences appeared manageable.⁵⁵

By the fifth conference in April of 1742, the situation in Pennsylvania had deteriorated. Zinzendorf and the Moravians had come to dominate the meetings, and many Protestant groups were no longer represented.⁵⁶ The final conference, attended by only fifty-six individuals, restructured the goal of the conferences entirely.⁵⁷ Under the leadership of Zinzendorf the conferences turned towards ecumenicism, becoming the “Congregation of God in the Spirit,” a polarizing action that resulted in significant animosity towards the Moravians from other German-speaking Protestants.⁵⁸ Although the German reaction to the Moravians in Pennsylvania was significant, it was not only German Protestants that responded to the Moravians negatively.

Arriving at the peak of the evangelical revivals, the Moravians suffered significant backlash from leaders of the evangelical movement. Through the years of revival, evangelicals often attacked the Moravians as “Enthusiasts,” or significantly, as “Papists,” furthering the notion that the Moravians were denied because of a context of British evangelicalism confronting Germanness. Milton Coalter, in studying the confrontation between Zinzendorf and Gilbert Tennent, has suggested that Zinzendorf’s Pietism forced Tennent to reassess his own views of evangelicalism.⁵⁹ However, a close analysis of anti-Moravian polemics published in the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁵ *Diary of the Bethlehem Congregation*, Volume 1, Bethlehem Congregation Collection, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA, 1742, and Vogt, 28-30.

⁵⁶ Vogt, 38.

⁵⁷ *Diary of the Bethlehem Congregation*, June 11-14, 1742.

⁵⁸ Vogt, 50-51. Original: “Gemeine Gottes im Geist.”

⁵⁹ Coalter, 40-43.

mid-eighteenth century demonstrates that what Coalter terms as “conservatism” within evangelicals like Tennent should be more accurately understood as a *British* rejection of the Moravians.

Anti-Moravian Sentiment Among Evangelicals

Evangelical opposition to the Moravian Brethren is significant not only for its theological element, but also because it reveals a tension in the formation of British identity. A Scottish Presbyterian, Gilbert Tennent’s rejection of the Brethren both excluded the Moravians from being part of a British identity while also affirming his own British identity over-against German-speaking Europeans.⁶⁰ The question of British identity being formed against Germanness was not unique to Tennent. Benjamin Franklin, writing in 1751, exemplified the ethnic tensions at work in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania.

Reflecting on the condition of Pennsylvania, Franklin questioned “why should Pennsylvania, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of Aliens...[who will] Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or customs any more than they can acquire our Complexion.”⁶¹ Franklin understood Pennsylvania as being over-run by German-speakers, separate from British identity in all manners of custom and language. Taking his defense of British identity further, Franklin argued for a construction of “whiteness” that

⁶⁰ Gideon Mailer notes that Presbyterianism had a peculiar relationship with what I have defined here as British evangelicalism. Mailer describes that “a number of early modern Presbyterians had been distinctly concerned with extraterritorial pietism since at least the 1660s,” and further, that “the Westminster divines incorporated a global outlook ...[which shows] a degree of continuity between their seventeenth-century activities and the international evangelical networks that grew during the 1740s.” As a Presbyterian, Tennent had a unique view on ecumenicism and British identity, given that Presbyterian endorsement of the 1707 Act of Union was dependent on “the retention of the Church of Scotland’s independence and its continued ability to promote Presbyterian piety in the New British Empire.” In his writing against the Moravians, Tennent faced a tension between promoting the ecumenicalism of the evangelical movement while also asserting his British identity. See Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon’s American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 78-95.

⁶¹ Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, 1751, in *Founder’s Online National Archives*, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080>.

excluded all Germans. Highlighting the “swarthy complexion” of Pennsylvania Germans, Franklin concluded that it was only “the English [who] make the principle Body of White People on the Face of the Earth,” eliminating any possibility of an ethnic identification between Germans and the “English.”⁶² Franklin demonstrates that for the Middle Colonies, ethnicity was being defined in the eighteenth century through a shared understanding of British identity that rejected those (like the Moravians) who were deemed ethnically different. It is from such a context of anti-Germanness that the Scottish Presbyterian Tennent sought to establish his British identity through rejecting the Moravian Brethren.

In late 1741, Tennent arranged a meeting with Zinzendorf, wanting to understand the Moravian Brethren on their own terms. Reflecting on his interactions with the Moravian Brethren, Tennent argued that the evangelicals taking part in the revival movement had a duty “[to] diligently and impartially... acquaint themselves with [the Moravians’] Principles and Practices,” so as to neither “neglect any Appearance of God,” nor accept those “who might be engaged in the Introduction of Error and Confusion among us.”⁶³ Tennent argued that the necessity of an “impartial Examination” of an “uncommon Appearance...in some parts of Germany” of “experimental religion” would be clear to those who held “the Interest of true Religion in their Hearts.”⁶⁴ Although Tennent structured his criticisms in *Some Account of the Principles of the Moravians* around preserving true “heart religions,” it is significant to see his emphasis on empirical verification. Indeed, Tennent held that the legitimacy of such an “experimental religion” as that of the Moravians could only be verified through “impartial examination,” echoing the “dull reason” of enlightened Old Light theologians. Through his

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Tennent, iii.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

condemnation of the Moravian Brethren, Tennent again and again returns to this synthesis of empiricism and evangelicalism.

Some Account begins with a description of twenty principles, built from Tennent's meeting with Zinzendorf, that he understood as "pernicious."⁶⁵ Of particular note, Tennent takes issue with Zinzendorf's assertion that, "the exercising of reason...was not necessary to Conversion."⁶⁶ Although evangelicalism has been characterized as intense emotion over-against reason and empiricism, it is the very lack of reason within the Moravian Brethren that Tennent holds against Zinzendorf. Indeed, conversions during the revivals were often depicted in an emotional fashion, divorced from reason and empiricism. A Connecticut farmer who converted after hearing George Whitfield preach in Middletown, Nathan Cole described his conversion experience as a "glorious sight," an intense moment in which he seemed to "really [see] the gate of heaven by an Eye of Faith... [and that] what I saw here [was] unspeakable."⁶⁷ Cole provides an example of evangelical conversion devoid of empirical verification, but it is this same emotional conversion that Tennent critiques in his discussion of the Moravians. Confronted with a German-speaking evangelical, the head of the Moravian sect that had refused to swear allegiance to the English king, Tennent retreated into the language of dull reason to separate his British evangelicalism from the Moravian Brethren.

Further, Tennent describes his interaction with the Moravian bishop, August Spangenberg, who "sowed the Seed of their [the Moravians'] dreadful doctrine in New York."⁶⁸ Once again, Tennent is critical of a perceived "lack of reason" within Moravian theology.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11-13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁷ Nathan Cole, "A Farmer Hears Whitfield Preach," in *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* eds. Thomas S. Kidd (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 60-64.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 37.

Spangenberg, according to Tennent, appeared to “run down human reason, as if it were useless in Religion.”⁶⁹ Against such understandings, Tennent described the Moravian teachings as “mysterious Gibberish,” rife with “Nonsense [and] Contradictions.”⁷⁰ Tennent’s understanding that the Moravians deemphasized, or even rejected human reason in faith, was grounds for rejecting Moravian theology—although such a rejection of reason would seem to align with traditional understandings of the evangelical revivals, indicating that his rejection was rooted more in questions of ethnicity.

Some Account makes clear that the absence of reason from Moravian principles separates them from British evangelicalism. In his final summary, Tennent worked to create even further separation between Moravians and the evangelical revivals. Tennent wrote, “when [the Moravians] assert gross Contradictions, they tell us that we must believe simply; that is, we must quit our reason, and turn real Fools: we must believe through thick and thin, Absurdities and Nonsense, and to turn Papists.”⁷¹ It is not only significant that Tennent describes an abandonment of reason as a deplorable part of Moravian theology, but further, he equates the Moravians with Papists. In so doing, Tennent cements the separation of the Moravians from British evangelicalism.

Despite being Protestants led by an ordained Lutheran who believed he was continuing the work of Martin Luther, the Moravians were so alien to Tennent that they appeared as Catholics. This identification is telling. The circumstances that had given evangelicalism its distinct British character, such as the legacy of the Glorious Revolution and the 1707 Act of Union, had organized British identity within a specific Pan-Protestant context. The Moravians, in

⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

their refusal to take on British identity, could be understood as theologically and *ethnically* separate. The Moravians could be described as Catholic by evangelicals like the Scottish Gilbert Tennent, regardless of their theology, because the Germanness of the Moravians prevented an identification between them and British evangelicals or British Protestantism.

Despite Tennent's writings, Milton Coalter notes that Zinzendorf's reaction was minimal. As Coalter states, "Zinzendorf believed that the meeting with Tennent was inconsequential since a language barrier prevented any serious discussion."⁷² In a letter written to Bishop Peter Boehler, Zinzendorf's response was a turn towards an apology for Moravian theology. Zinzendorf wrote to Boehler that "in accordance with the General Plan for our congregation...[he] must begin the next meeting... with this announcement: you have heard that a certain pastor (*Pfarrer*) has begun to speak against our Doctrine (*Lehre*)," and a proper explanation of Moravian doctrine was necessary.⁷³ Yet, apologetics did not make the Moravians more acceptable to British evangelicals. George Whitfield, who had a significant role in attracting the Moravians to Pennsylvania originally, came to also condemn Zinzendorf and the Moravians.⁷⁴

Written after the revivals began to wane, George Whitfield's condemnation of the Moravian Brethren further demonstrates the ethnic nature of this theological conflict. Whitfield noted that since the Moravians had arrived in British North America, he had been "an impartial observer of [their] Progress, both in England and America."⁷⁵ However, Whitfield wrote, "such

⁷² Coalter, 42.

⁷³ Nicholoas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *A Letter written to Peter Bohler*, Zinzendorf Papers, Moravian Archives, PA. Original: „Nach die General Plan unsere Gemeine...du sollst fangen... mit diesem Anzeigen an: du hörest von einem Pfarrer angriffen... unsere Lehre.“

⁷⁴ Schwartz, 127-130.

⁷⁵ George Whitfield, *An expostulatory letter addressed to Nicholas Lewis, Count Zinzendorff, and lord advocate of the Unitas Fratrum*, 1753, (Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, accessed on November 22, 2020

shocking things have been lately brought to our Ears,” that “real regard for my King, my Country...will not suffer me to be silent any longer.”⁷⁶ Already Whitfield made clear that his concern was rooted in his British identity, and the rest of his letter only bolsters this notion.

In his attack of the Moravians, Whitfield argues that, “you [Zinzendorf], together with some of your leading brethren, have been unhappily instrumental in misguiding real, simple, honest-hearted Christians... and introducing a whole Farrago of superstitious, not to say idolatrous Fopperies into the English Nation.”⁷⁷ Whitfield echoes the same ethnic concerns that Tennent had shown just a few years before. It was not simply theological disagreement that prompted Whitfield to condemn the Moravians, but rather, it was that ethnically-different Germans had begun to spread “superstitious” theology among British evangelicals. Whitfield, accused of enthusiasm by Harvard college during the height of the evangelical revivals, attacks the Moravians for holding superstitious theology, despite the significant overlap between evangelicalism and Moravian theology.⁷⁸ Like Tennent, Whitfield’s theological critiques of the Moravian Brethren originate from a broader ethnic tension, as the British character of the evangelical arrivals overtook shared influences between evangelicalism and the Moravians.

Conclusion

The writings of Tennent and Whitfield elucidate a tension between varieties of evangelical Protestants based on ethnic identity. For Tennent, his commitment to evangelical “religions of the heart” was overshadowed by the language of empiricism when confronted with

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ George Whitfield, *A Letter to the Rev. The President, And Professors, Tutors, and Hebrew Instructors, of Harvard-College in Cambridge; In Answer to a Testimony Published by them, against the Reverend George Whitfield, and his Conduct*, 1745.

German-speaking “Papists” who appeared to abandon reason in conversion. Whitfield, a passive observer of the Moravians and a symbol of evangelicalism and itinerancy, defined his rejection of Moravian theology by showing that it originated from his duty as a subject to the English crown.

Yet, the theology of the Moravian Brethren seemed to overlap significantly with British evangelicals. As comparisons between Moravian theology and traditional markers of evangelicalism have demonstrated, the Moravians under Zinzendorf shared with evangelicalism an emphasis on conversion, ecumenicism, and the sacrifice of Christ. Doctrinal conflicts between Moravians and evangelicals were exacerbated by the alien nature of the Brethren; from the time they arrived in Pennsylvania, the Moravian Brethren marked themselves as both ethnically and theologically separate from British evangelicalism.

In using the Moravian Brethren as a case-study in the limits of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, it is possible to discern new dimensions with which to analyze the evangelical revivals. In stepping away from a monolithic view of evangelicalism and reexamining trans-Atlantic revivalist dynamics as they came to be transplanted in North America, the British character of evangelicalism comes into focus. Although the Moravian Brethren and evangelicalism both belonged to a broader trend of continental revivalism, the formation of British identity in the eighteenth century allowed for an evangelicalism that could eventually reject Pietism on both ethnic and theological grounds.

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