

Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820

KATHERINE M. FAULL (TRANSLATOR)

Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press (Women and Gender in North American Religions). 1997. List of illustrations, preface, introduction, notes, glossary, works cited, index. 166 pp. ISBN 0-8156-0397-5 (\$17.95 pb)

Eighteenth century Moravians had a tradition of writing individual memoirs (*Lebenslauf*) to be shared with their congregations after their deaths. It is our good fortune that scholar Katherine M. Faull has selected and translated thirty of these life stories for a new book in the Women and Gender in North American Religions series from Syracuse University Press. According to Faull, whose felicitous translations from the archaic German script have made these varieties of religious experience available to a wider public, each life story related the "author's spiritual and secular path through life." Faull chose to publish women's memoirs because they are much rarer than men's and because they offer an extraordinary look into the intersection of the public and private lives of women, based on what they chose to include in their accounts.

The North American Moravian church had its pre-Reformation origins in the Unity of Brethren founded by followers of Jan Hus (1373-1415) in the present-day Czech Republic. Because of religious persecution the denomination almost died out, but was revitalized by Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) of Upper Saxony who devoted his considerable leadership abilities and his landed estate to denominational activities. From this European base missionary efforts were launched into North America, South Africa, Greenland, and the Caribbean. Many humble and middling Europeans, mostly Germans, joined the European congregations and found themselves transported to the forests of

Pennsylvania where they continued their individual spiritual journeys and their strong communal worship. Modeling themselves after the apostolic church, the Moravians practiced a Christ-centered theology. For the first 21 years of settlement in Bethlehem, Pa., 1742-1762, they lived and worked communally. All of the memoirs in this collection are from women who lived in the Bethlehem settlement during at least some portion of the General Economy period. Their memoirs became an integral part of their discourse of faith, and, for contemporary scholars, provide a rich, previously untapped primary source.

Following Zinzendorf's belief that spiritual experiences were shaped by age, gender and marital status, the communal Moravians in Bethlehem formed themselves into peer groups called choirs: e.g., Children's House; Greater Girls Group (adolescents); Single Sisters Choir; Married Women's Choir; and Widow's Choir. Men had correspondent group structures. Within these choirs believers lived together, developed work assignments and emotional support networks, and attended to each other's health and spiritual needs. Each choir also worshiped and took communion together, and had its own festival days.

Faull's book follows the organizational structure of the communal Moravians, dividing the memoirs into the three main peer groups of adult sisters: Single, Married and Widow's Choirs. She introduces each individual's memoir with contextual background information; each lifestory also has emendations written shortly after the sister's death, describing the blessed circumstances of her "going home" and her contributions to the church.

This collection makes a significant contribution to many academic disciplines and to cross-disciplinary scholarship. For those interested in intentional communities there is much suggestive material. Like the (later) American Shakers, the Moravians separated the sexes in dormitory living; many work assignments, e.g. nursing the sick, were sex-specific. This sex-segregation necessitated parallel leadership structures, male and female. Women held important religious offices in their choirs: Eldress, Choir Helper, Deaconness, Choir Labouress, Acolyte, and Servant. In addition, at least 14 women were ordained priests during Zinzendorf's life, although none were after his death. Each choir was in a sense self-governing, although it is impossible to learn from Faull's book whether female leaders exercised real decision-making with their parallel male leaders concerning the spiritual and temporal business of the society. For example, in suggesting marriage matches, beginning a new economic enterprise, or starting a new congregation on the frontier. The memoirs make clear that women performed a wide variety of jobs, including cook, laundress, maid, seamstress, gardener, nurse, children's teachers and caretakers,

administrators, spiritual counselors, and missionaries to native Americans (Indians).

In some important aspects, Moravian women's experiences differed from their mainstream American counterparts. During the General Economy period, they lived communally and their children were raised in the Children's House. Moravian women married later and had significantly fewer children than their contemporaries. A few of the female leaders had unusual opportunities to travel among the congregations in Europe, North America and the Caribbean, to do ministry, and to learn new languages and cultures.

This book introduces readers to the treasure-trove of memoirs in the Moravian archives; let us hope that these will be further developed. Professor Faull and Syracuse University Press are to be commended for giving us this volume of high quality and unusual content, which is sure to delight readers from many different academic disciplines and perspectives.

MARLYN MCGARY KLEE
Adelphi University