

# Communal Ideals, Worldly Concerns, and the Moravians of North Carolina, 1753-1772

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HISTORIANS HAVE LONG interpreted the survival of sectarian communities in America as a function of their withdrawal from the world.<sup>1</sup> According to this interpretation, the "successful" communities have been those that turned their backs on the world to live in a self-imposed isolation, as far away as possible from the sin and corruption of the larger society. They took flight from the world, and sought to "escape to Utopia."<sup>2</sup> By refusing to have truck with the world, such communities managed to keep their ideals alive and their values untainted for a long period of time. Thus the Amish in Pennsylvania, although not strictly speaking a communitarian group, continue to wear plain clothes and drive horses and buggies. A number of Hutterite communities in rural areas of Canada and the northwestern United States similarly thrive while being surrounded by the products and values of a mass society. On the other hand, communities that consented to do business on the world's terms, this same interpretation holds, subtly absorbed the very values they had initially opposed, and ultimately succumbed to the ways of the world. Thus the downfall of the early Puritan communities in New England has often been linked to the growth of trade and mercantile interests.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See, for example, Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1910); Elmer Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1949); and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). For a dissenting view, see Yaacov Oved, "Communes and the Outside World: Seclusion and Involvement," *Communal Societies* 3 (1983): 83-92.

2. Everett Webber, *Escape To Utopia: The Communal Movement in America* (New York: Hastings House, 1959).

3. See Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-49* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); and Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964).

The history of the Moravian communities in North Carolina raises some serious questions about the assumed relationship between reclusiveness and communal longevity. By almost any measure, the Moravians were among the most successful communitarian groups in America. From the establishment of the first Moravian settlement in North Carolina in 1753 until shortly before the Civil War, the Moravians maintained exclusive religious communities in which only Moravians could live. During their first two decades in North Carolina, moreover, the Moravians experimented with a communal economy in which there was no private property. Only a handful of other sectarian communities in American history have lasted as long as this experiment in Christian socialism.<sup>4</sup>

Yet from almost the moment they took up residence in North Carolina, the Moravians, far from disdaining trade with their neighbors and other settlers in the Carolina backcountry, actively pursued it. In the Moravians' estimation, a lively trade in their pottery and other wares would help ensure the continued existence of their settlements. Nor did the Moravians shun all political involvement. They took inordinate care to cultivate the good will of North Carolina's royal governors, and kept a close eye on the legislation passed by the colony's General Assembly. By making their presence known and by keeping abreast of politics, the Moravians believed they could avoid misunderstandings and threats to their communal existence.<sup>5</sup>

4. The average life-span of the ninety-one communal ventures in America between 1780 and 1860 to leave historical records of their existence was four years. This number does not include the hundreds of such ventures that vanished largely without a trace. Of the ninety-one communities Kanter unearthed, less than a dozen lasted as long as sixteen years. *Community and Commitment*, p. 63.

5. The history of the Moravians in North Carolina (and Pennsylvania) is perhaps as well documented as that of any communitarian group in the United States. The Moravians were meticulous record keepers. The Moravian Archives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, houses a wealth of materials. Even though eleven volumes running to more than 6,000 pages of the archives' holdings have been published, they represent only a small fraction of the archives' collections. See Adelaide L. Fries, ed., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 7 vols. (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-47); and Adelaide L. Fries, et al., eds., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 4 vols. (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1954-69). This essay relies principally on the published *Records*. On the history of the Moravians in North Carolina, see Edward M. Holder, "Community Life in Wachovia, 1752-80" (M. A. thesis, The University of North Carolina, 1929); Edward M. Holder, "Social Life of the Early Moravians in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 11 (1934): 167-84; Hunter James, *The Quid People of the Land: A Study of the North Carolina Moravians During Revolutionary Times* (Chapel Hill: Old Salem, Inc., 1976); Norma Taylor Mitchell, "Freedom and Authority in the Moravian Community of North Carolina, 1753-1837" (M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1962); Levin T. Reichel, *The Moravians in North Carolina: An Authentic History* (Salem, N.C.: O. A. Keehn, 1857); Jerry Lee Surratt, "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church and Secularized Community: A Study of the Moravians

This is not to say that the Moravians welcomed the world on its own terms. The Moravians did draw a sharp line between their communities and the outside world. Only Moravians were allowed to live in their congregation towns, first at Bethabara, and later at Salem. At that, the Moravian Church owned all the land in these settlements, leasing land and buildings for one-year periods. The lease system prevented outsiders from living within the confines of the Moravian community, and provided safeguards that individual Moravians would abide by the community's rules. The lease system meant that the Moravians could expel anyone who persistently failed to live up to their expectations of proper Moravian conduct. A host of other arrangements and institutions served to separate the life the Moravians had chosen for themselves from what they called "the foolish and sinful ways of the world."<sup>6</sup> No Moravian could marry a non-Moravian and remain within the fold of the community, just as visitors to Bethabara and Salem were met by an official greeter who guided them through these villages—and insulated the rest of the community from the presence of visitors.<sup>7</sup>

That the Moravians saw themselves living apart from "the world" should be clear. But it should equally clear that they did not shut themselves off from the world. They realized that although the world was corrupt and doomed, it could also corrupt and doom them. It could corrupt them if they allowed worldly ways to become part of the fabric of Moravian life, and it could doom them if they failed to protect themselves from the dangers the world posed to a sectarian community. The real question for the Moravians, then, was not whether they should retreat from the world, but how they should balance their desire to live in an exclusive religious community with their need to pay attention to worldly affairs. The Moravians themselves were acutely conscious of the tensions inherent in their desire to live separately and in their recognition that they must also accommodate the world outside their settlements.

In this essay, I have analyzed how the Moravians sought to come to grips with the dilemma all communitarian groups face—that of

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in Salem, North Carolina, 1772-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1968); and Jerry Lee Surratt, "The Role of Dissent in Community Evolution Among Moravians in Salem, 1772-1860," *North Carolina Historical Review* 52 (1975): 235-55. Surratt argues that the success of the Moravians' commercial ventures in Salem undermined community. See "The Role of Dissent," p. 242.

6. The phrase is that of August Gottlieb Spangenberg, the leader of the early Moravian Church in North America. August Gottlieb Spangenberg, "Plans for Settlement in North Carolina," January 17, 1754, in Moravian Archives, Salem, N.C.

7. On the communal arrangements the Moravians employed to keep the world at bay, see Holder, "Community life in Wachovia," and Surratt, "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church."

maintaining their communal ideals in the face of an alternatively indifferent, beguiling, and hostile world. The essay's primary focus is on the Moravian settlements in North Carolina from their founding until 1772, when the Moravians there abandoned the communal economy in favor of arrangements in which individuals could again work for their personal gain. In examining the relationship between communal cohesiveness and involvement in worldly affairs, however, I have also looked at the history of other Moravian communities and at the subsequent development of the Moravian settlements in North Carolina. Only by looking at the history of Moravian communities as a whole can the fate of community among the North Carolina Moravians be understood.

The Moravians, or as they called themselves, the Unity of the Brethren, can with considerable justification claim to be the world's oldest Protestant church. Followers of the martyr Jan Hus, they seceded from the Church of Rome in 1467. After the Protestant Reformation, the Moravians constituted the majority of Protestants in Moravia, Bohemia, and parts of Poland. The name by which these Protestants came to be known in the English-speaking world reflects their principal origins.<sup>8</sup>

The Counter-Reformation of the early seventeenth century nearly spelled the ruin of the Moravian Church. In 1620, central European Catholics routed the combined Protestant forces of Moravia. This disastrous defeat forced the Moravian Church to disband, and many of its members into exile. Persecuted and hounded, the church survived only as a community of secret believers for better than a century. The church was kept alive largely through the efforts of Comenius (1592-1672), a Moravian bishop who publicized their history and took up collections for "the hidden seed," as the remaining faithful became known. The military defeat had one other important consequence: it led the surviving Moravians to adopt a stance of pacifism.<sup>9</sup>

A chance encounter in 1722 between a Moravian refugee and a German count led to the renewal of the Moravian Church. The count, Nickolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, was sympathetic to the plight of this

8. On Moravian history, see Gillian Lindt Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study in Changing Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Joseph Mortimer Levering, *A History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1741-1892, With Some Account of Its Founders and Their Early Activity in America* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Times Publishing Company, 1903); J. Taylor Hamilton, *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church or the Unitas Fratrum or the Unity of the Brethren During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Times Publishing Company, 1900); J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Interprovincial Board of Education, Moravian Church in America, 1967); Helmuth Erbe, *Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: Eine Herrnhuter-Kolonie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Herrnhut: Gustav Winter, 1929); and John Jacob Sessler, *Communal Pietism Among the Early American Moravians* (New York: Holt, 1933).

9. Levering, *A History of Bethlehem*, pp. 17-22; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 4-5.

refugee and that of his fellow sufferers across the mountains in Moravia. He offered asylum on his Saxony estate to all who wished to escape persecution. Word of the Count's offer soon brought scores of Moravians to Herrnhut, the settlement built on his estate to house the refugees.<sup>10</sup>

Absorbed by his duties at court, Zinzendorf was at first largely oblivious to the Moravians and other Protestants who flocked to Herrnhut seeking a haven. When acrimonious disputes broke out among the village's residents over whether to reinstitute the Moravian Church or to follow the practices that prevailed within Lutheran Saxony, however, Zinzendorf was forced to pay attention to domestic affairs. His intervention in this dispute in 1727 led to the renewal of the Moravian Church, and was to shape it until long after his death in 1760. Although Zinzendorf was nominally to remain a Lutheran for the rest of his life, this encounter with the Moravians also led to his "conversion" to Moravianism.<sup>11</sup>

Zinzendorf himself had been a Pietist. As a Pietist, he shared the belief common among many Lutherans of his day that the church had become moribund, and religious practice hollow. Two centuries earlier, Luther had relieved his agonizing doubt by discovering that faith alone was sufficient for a Christian, but many of his followers in the early eighteenth century could not assure themselves that genuine Christianity demanded no more than the passive assent of the believer. The Pietists assuaged their doubts by placing piety, the practice of faith, above what they perceived to be the sterile theological hair-splitting of contemporary Lutheranism.<sup>12</sup>

Zinzendorf discovered at first hand from the Moravian refugees and through the writings of Comenius that the Moravians similarly emphasized a religion of the heart. The Moravians, however, differed from the Pietists on two points. First, unlike the Pietists, who believed an intense personal struggle was necessary to attain salvation, the Moravians held that salvation came to anyone who loved God. Love rather than the fear of God was the hallmark of Moravian theology and religious practice. The Moravians' second point of departure from the Pietists reflected these contrasting views of salvation. The Moravians celebrated the social

10. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 5.

11. Zinzendorf nominally remained a Lutheran long after his personal "conversion." He was reluctant to break his ties with Lutheranism in part because he feared difficulties with the political authorities in Saxony. See Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, pp. 12-14. Zinzendorf also retained his Lutheran affiliations because he hoped to reunite branches of Protestantism by focusing on broad areas of agreement among them. He travelled to Pennsylvania in 1741 to promote this ecumenical vision among the German sects and the Quakers. For an account of this unfruitful mission, see Sessler, pp. 20-71, and Arthur J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962).

12. On the origins of Pietism, see F. Ernst Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1965).

rather than the individual side of religion. Zinzendorf's final understanding of this point is encapsulated by his pronouncement, "I decree there can be no Christianity without community."<sup>13</sup>

Once he had reached this understanding, Zinzendorf sought to fashion a community out of the quarrelsome settlers on his estate. After rooting out the intransigents who seemed incapable of putting their differences aside, he had the remaining settlers sign what was called a "Brotherly Agreement." The agreement amounted to a set of rules for conduct. It stipulated that members of the community were to support the established church and state while avoiding all political involvement. Those who signed the agreement were to attend all Moravian services faithfully, to accept reproof in a spirit of meekness, and to take their grievances to the leaders of the community rather than go to court. Finally, the signatory affirmed that he would leave the community if judged guilty of repeatedly failing to live up to the norms set out in the agreement.<sup>14</sup>

The Brotherly Agreement of 1727 was to become the basis for all subsequent Moravian communities. In it, we can see how Zinzendorf sought to solve the problem of how to live in the world and at the same time to live in a community dedicated to emulating the earliest Christians. Part of the answer was outward conformity. Aware that religious enthusiasm outside the bounds of the state-supported church was still an anathema in Saxony, Zinzendorf sought to forestall criticism and possible retribution by having the members of the Herrnhut community pay the obeisance that was due to Caesar.

Within the bounds of the community, however, a different set of rules would apply. Zinzendorf devised a number of institutions that were to characterize life in Herrnhut and other subsequent Moravian communities. The Moravian choirs, for example, came out of his efforts to promote harmony by holding prayer meetings with small groups of residents. The choirs had little to do with music. Rather, they corresponded to groupings based on age, sex, and marital status. Separate choirs existed for boys and girls between the ages of six and twelve, for the older Single Brothers and Single Sisters, for married couples, and for widows and widowers. Whenever possible, members of a choir shared their meals and lived under the same roof. The choirs gradually supplanted the family as the basic social unit of Moravian communal life. Once infants were weaned, they were placed under the care of the nursery. More than a generation of Moravians grew up in the choirs

13. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 7-16; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, pp. 138-55; and Hamilton, *History of the Church*, p. 190.

14. Levering, *History of Bethlehem*, p. 24; Lewis, *Zinzendorf*, pp. 53-58.

having little or no contact with their parents. The Moravians were even buried according to their choir status.<sup>15</sup>

Although the choirs' original purpose may have been to foster spiritual growth, they rapidly acquired other functions as well. The choirs were the principal instrument by which the Moravians maintained and enforced a system of rigid sexual segregation, particularly among the unmarried. Fearful that "the emotionalism associated with a religious awakening could be directed toward sexual rather than religious objects,"<sup>16</sup> Zinzendorf forbade even the casual association of unmarried men and women, and devised the choir system with that end in mind. That the Single Brothers' and Single Sisters' choirs appeared far earlier than the other choirs is revelatory of the dual functions the choirs were to serve.

One can also see in the choir system a mechanism to promote group solidarity at the expense of other loyalties, such as those to family. The choirs broke down or de-emphasized exclusive attachments—between children and parents, and even husband and wife—by elevating ties within a primary group, the choir—and those which bound all Moravians together—the community. The entire community took the place of family. All Moravians, as they addressed each other, were "brothers" and "sisters." At the same time, the choirs served to heighten the distinction between the way of life in a Moravian community and the ways of the world.<sup>17</sup>

The clearest sign of the Moravians' religious and communal aspirations, however, was the lot. The lot refers to the practice of drawing yes or no ballots blindly from a box in an effort to ascertain God's will. All major communal decisions were subject to ratification by the lot. Even marriage fell under its purview. If the lot "negatived" a prospective marriage, the marriage did not take place. The names of the couple could, however, be submitted to the lot again at a later date.<sup>18</sup> Beyond that, marriage was firmly wedded to the notions of community that developed at Herrnhut. The elders of the community proposed the names of couples for marriage, not the couples themselves or their parents.<sup>19</sup>

15. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 67-89; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, pp. 93-105.

16. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 69.

17. Many of the longer-lived intentional communities of nineteenth-century America similarly emphasized ties within the community over family. The Shakers practiced celibacy, as did the Rappites for most of their communal existence. At the other extreme was the Oneida community. But at both extremes communal practices functioned to prevent family ties from interfering with attachments to the community. At Oneida, for example, sexual intimacy between a large number of partners was sanctioned, but exclusive attachments between a couple were discouraged. See Kanter, *Community and Commitment*, pp. 9-18, 75-138.

18. For a discussion of the lot, see Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 53-58; and Fries, *Records*, 1 (1922): 298, n.3.

19. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 110-27; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, pp. 175-76, 198-99.

The lot, the choir system, and marriage practices reflected the Moravians' belief that in a Christian community the will of God and the interests of the community should prevail over individual desire and preference. For the Moravians, the will of God and the interests of the community were the same thing. The Moravians accordingly had few hesitations about radically reordering the familiar institutions of the world. The choir system, extending from cradle to grave, was a far more important principle of Christian life than the family.

Perhaps understandably, the Moravians believed they had discovered the true form of Christian living at Herrnhut. That did not mean, however, that they sealed themselves off from the world in hermetic fashion. For one thing, the fervency of their new-found faith could not be confined within the bounds of Herrnhut. Beginning in the early 1730s, individual Moravians began setting off for distant lands, often with little more than a change of clothing in their luggage. They won converts particularly in Denmark and England, and from there found their way to the colonial possessions of these countries. These "true knights of Christ" eventually brought the gospel to the Eskimo of Greenland, the slaves of the Danish West Indies, and the Indians of North America. These missionary endeavors hardly accord with the image of reclusiveness in which sectarian communities have been portrayed.<sup>20</sup>

Second, political developments in Saxony precluded a total withdrawal from the world. In 1733, the Saxony government rescinded its protection from the Schwenkfelders, a sect that followed the teachings of a sixteenth-century German mystic. Fearing a similar fate might befall them, the Moravians decided to plant a colony in North America that would double as an escape hatch and as a base for missionary work among the Indians. In 1735, the Moravians established such a colony at Savannah, Georgia. Their timing was propitious. A year later, the Saxony government banished Zinzendorf from his estate. Although the authorities in Saxony never interfered with the community at Herrnhut, the threat that they might hung over the settlement for better than a decade.<sup>21</sup>

The Moravians' choice of Savannah, however, was not so propitious. The colony was plagued with problems from its inception. Disease took a heavy toll among the colonists. The pacifistic Moravians were also disturbed by the constant rumors of war with the Spanish in nearby

20. Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, pp. 15-17; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 5-6; Levering, *A History of Bethlehem*, pp. 16-18.

21. Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, p. 16; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 5.



Florida—and the disfavor into which they fell with Savannah's other settlers for refusing to perform military duties.<sup>22</sup> In 1740, the Moravians abandoned Savannah, and found a haven near the forks of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. There, in 1741, they began building the town of Bethlehem, which Zinzendorf himself was on hand to christen on Christmas Eve of the same year. In Bethlehem, the Moravians hoped to live at peace with the world and themselves. That the town was then located on the Pennsylvania frontier reflected not the Moravians' impulse to escape from the world, but rather their desire to undertake extensive missionary work among the nearby Indians.<sup>23</sup>

When it came to establishing a Moravian colony in North Carolina some ten years later, in 1753, a similar desire informed the Moravians' selection of land. The 100,000-acre tract of land they purchased in the central part of the state—in what is now Forsyth County—was also located on the frontier. This colony was to provide missionaries for the Catawba and Cherokee Indians.<sup>24</sup>

The Moravians' attention had been drawn to North Carolina by Lord Granville, the last of the proprietors of the Carolinas. Aware of the Moravians' reputation for honesty and industriousness, Granville had approached representatives of the Unity in England early in the 1750's to see whether they might be interested in purchasing land from him. Parliament's passage in 1749 of an act recognizing the United Brethren as an "antient Protestant Episcopal Church," following the requests of well-placed English Moravians, paved Granville's way. The 1749 act enabled the Moravians to establish an independent church alongside existing Anglican churches, or to set up separate parishes in royal colonies such as North Carolina. It also exempted the Moravians from swearing oaths and performing militia duty, both of which ran counter to their convictions. As a sect subject to persecution and harassment, the Moravians regarded the provisions of the 1749 act as sufficient safeguards for establishing a settlement in a colony where there was an established church. At any rate, Granville's proposal won Zinzendorf's approval. Early in 1752, the Count's agents purchased 100,000 acres of land in the Granville district of North Carolina.<sup>25</sup>

That fall, a small party of Moravians led by Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg, the leader of the Moravians in North America, explored the North Carolina back country to select the Moravians' land.

22. For a history of the Moravian colony in Georgia, see Adelaide L. Fries, *The Moravians in Georgia* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1905).

23. Levering, *A History of Bethlehem*, pp. 41-79.

24. Fries, *Records*, 1:15, 26-27.

25. Fries, *Records*, 1:14-15, 22. For a copy of the act, see Fries, *Records*, 1: 23-25.

Spangenberg was obviously concerned about finding land that was well-watered, contained good soil and meadows, and had adequate supplies of timber and building stone. The instructions he carried with him from the European leadership were an additional consideration. Spangenberg was advised to lay out the tract the Moravians had purchased in a square, through the center of which should run a river. Along this river, at the center of the tract, the future inhabitants would build their *Otis Gemeine*, or congregation town. Agricultural villages would then be established in a ring around the central town. This arrangement, the European leadership wrote, would ensure that "the inhabitants of the farthest limits of that Land would not be above two Hours moderate walk, and one Hours moderate ride, from the Orts Gemeine." Community, in other words, could best be maintained if the future settlers could gather together easily.<sup>26</sup>

After selecting a site for the future settlement, Spangenberg sent back a lengthy report to the Moravian leadership in Germany. His report reflected the hard-won wisdom that the Moravians could only ignore the world at their own peril. The failure of the Savannah colony and the banishment of Zinzendorf had made the Moravians even more sensitive to the dangers of consciously and conspicuously living apart from the ways of the world. Spangenberg accordingly sought to learn all he could about North Carolina's laws, political structure, and office-holders. He noted the times when taxes were due, the laws regarding marriages, slaves, ferries, and "many rules and laws of which our Brethren would not think." The Moravians should scrupulously follow all these laws, he advised: "Here, as in all English countries, there are good laws that are not kept, but the Brethren can not act in that way." Spangenberg fully appreciated the paradox that the Moravians would have to devote their attention to worldly affairs if they were to practice their communal ideals. "We don't want extraordinary priviledges," he concluded the report, "if only we can live together as Brethren, without interfearing with others, and without being disturbed by them, and if only we can keep our Children from being hurt by wicked Examples, and our young People from following the foolish and sinful Ways of the world."<sup>27</sup>

Planning and forethought were essential if Spangenberg's hopes for the North Carolina colony were to be realized. Bethlehem's prosperity and relative stability made the leisurely development of Wachovia possible. By 1753, when the first settlers were sent south, Bethlehem had assumed a substantial appearance. The major work of erecting buildings

26. Spangenberg's account of his journey appears in Fries, *Records*, 1:30-64. On his instructions, see Fries, *Records*, 2 (1925): 516-17.

27. Fries, *Records*, 1: 31-34; Spangenberg, "Plans for Settlement."

and clearing fields had been completed, allowing the Moravians to build their settlement in Wachovia by stages. For example, the eleven Single Brothers who took shelter in an abandoned hunter's cabin in the north-west corner of the tract late in 1753 had been selected as Wachovia's pioneers for the various skills they possessed. (They appropriately called their temporary refuge "Bethabara," a Hebrew word meaning "House of Passage.") Only after these men had cleared fields and erected other shelter around the cabin was the first contingent of married settlers sent to join them in 1755. At that, these couples left their children behind in the Bethlehem nursery. Not until 1766 were groups of older boys and girls—those who had turned thirteen—sent to Bethabara. Presumably, by that time Bethabara was well enough established for adults to supervise the training and spiritual growth of adolescents. As the staged arrival of these groups indicates, Bethabara grew by the addition of choirs, not families or individuals.<sup>28</sup>

The Moravians carried with them to Wachovia the communal arrangements devised at Herrnhut and Bethlehem. One such arrangement, however, was peculiar to American soil—the General Oeconomie. The General Oeconomie was first adopted at Savannah. Under it, the fruits of individual labor were pooled in a common fund, which was then used to purchase building materials, food, clothing, and a host of other items. The Oeconomie did not abolish private property, but while it operated, no Moravian could acquire personal possessions beyond those he already had. All personal needs were met by placing a request through the *Vorsteher*, the business manager of the Oeconomie. Worldly goods as well as the land on which the American Moravian settlements were built belonged to the church as a whole, not to individual Moravians. Here again the Moravians did not hesitate to make radical innovations that would speed the construction of their settlements and bind them together. There was Biblical justification for communal sharing—And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." (Acts 11:44-45)—but there were other considerations as well, as a Moravian minister explained when the Oeconomie was introduced at Savannah:

In our gathering we read Acts n, and spoke of the Gemeinschaft [the community], for we are planning to work, to sow and reap, and to suffer with one another. This will be very useful, for many a man who has not understood or exerted himself, will by this means see himself and be led to improve. Others will also see from it that we love each other, and will glorify the Father in Heaven.

28. Fries, *Records*, 1: 73-73, 203-04. See also Holder, "Social Life of the Early Moravians," p. 168.

It was not only the Moravians' religious beliefs that set them apart from their neighbors.<sup>29</sup>

The daily routine at Bethabara, punctuated by numerous religious gatherings, helped reinforce this sense of distinctiveness. The Moravians' day began with collective morning prayers. These were followed at noon by a liturgy. And in the evening, before retiring, the Moravians held a Singstunde during which they sang the favorite hymns of the Unity.<sup>30</sup>

On the Sabbath, celebrated on Saturday, the routine was different. Usually the Brethren worked half a day Saturday, holding services in the afternoon. Sunday was put aside as a day of rest. It was also a day when immediate preoccupations were laid aside and the bonds of fellowship with Moravians across the world renewed. Following morning prayers and a sermon, the Brethren spent Sunday writing letters to friends, or if a package of letters had arrived from Bethlehem, reading these aloud. The Moravians also reserved Sunday afternoons for holding house conferences, where tasks and duties for the coming week were assigned.<sup>31</sup>

The Moravians held Communion every fourth Sabbath. Unlike other services where visitors were welcome, Communion was an exclusively Moravian affair. If visitors were present, the Moravians postponed the service until it could be held privately. The Moravians' observance of Communion demonstrates not only the exclusive nature of their community, but the stress they laid on internal harmony. Before the Communion service, the minister conferred privately with each member of the congregation to ensure that all who participated in the service would do so with a pure and untroubled heart. The minister advised those who appeared angry or bitter to forego Communion until such time as their spirit was in keeping with the humility and contrition befitting a communicant.<sup>32</sup>

The Bethabara Moravians observed the usual church holidays such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. But they also celebrated many holidays unique to the Unity. They commemorated the anniversary of Hus' martyrdom and that of the renewal of the Moravian Church in 1727. Likewise in later years the Moravians in Wachovia honored the anniversary of the Single Brethren's arrival in Wachovia.<sup>33</sup> Each choir, moreover,

29. Because the Moravian Church was not incorporated, the actual ownership of Wachovia rested with shareholders in the *Nord Carolina Land und Colonie Etablissement*, a land company closely affiliated with the Moravian Church. Only one of these shareholders ever laid claim to his title rights. Fries, *Records*, 1: 65-69. On the General Oeconomie, see Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 131-47.

30. Holder, "Community Life in Wachovia," pp. 33-34.

31. Holder, "Community Life in Wachovia," pp. 31, 34-35; Fries, *Records*, 1: 84-85, 90-91.

32. Holder, "Community Life in Wachovia," p. 31; Fries, *Records*, 1: 89-90.

33. Adelaide L. Fries and J. Kenneth Pfohl, *The Moravian Church, Yesterday and Today* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1926), pp. 38-39, 115-17.

had its special day. Through the round of daily routine and calendar of holidays, the Moravians sought to bring a pervasive consciousness of their history to bear upon life at Bethabara. In working, praying, and living together, they tried to capture the sacred character of all human endeavor. Only in the context of community, to paraphrase Zinzendorf, could true Christianity exist.<sup>34</sup>

Quite naturally, the Moravians felt themselves to be different from the settlers who were streaming into the North Carolina back country and becoming their neighbors. As members of what must have seemed a mysterious Protestant sect, the Moravians initially huddled together to face what at times was a hostile and threatening world. Their sense of being distinctive and alien constituted an important source of group solidarity. Even if the Moravians believed they had discovered the true form of Christian living, they had no desire to have others join them at Bethabara. For the most part, those who asked to join the Moravian community were quietly but insistently told to go elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

The language of the congregational diaries kept by the minister illustrates the distance the Moravians placed between themselves and outsiders. Whereas the Moravians addressed each other as "brother" and "sister," the diarist initially referred to all non-Moravians as "*Fremden*"—that is, strangers. Only after several years had passed did the diarist begin making distinctions among these strangers.<sup>36</sup>

As one of the few settlements on the North Carolina frontier that could pass for a town, Bethabara could not avoid contact with such strangers. Within three months after their arrival in Wachovia, the Moravians found it necessary to erect a separate cabin for their frequent overnight visitors. The Moravians tried to isolate and confine contact with outsiders as much as possible. One of the first official duties assigned at Bethabara was that of the *Fremden Diener*, or greeter of strangers. His task was to look after visitors, to make them comfortable, and to make sure that they did not intrude on the life of the community. The location of the Moravians' tavern several hundred yards away from Bethabara proper similarly speaks of their desire to meet the world on their own terms.<sup>37</sup>

34. Fries, *Records*, 1:106, n.12,369,496; Holder, "Community Life in Wachovia," p. 35. As Gollin observes, the Moravians' rituals "served not only to keep alive the individual's awareness of the sacred but also to provide a strong basis for the social cohesion and integration of the group." *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 21.

35. The Moravians adopted this policy of exclusion at a synod held in 1743. Mitchell, "Freedom and Authority," p. 19.

36. Fries, *Records*, 1:129, n.6,164,168,187, 203, 209, 250, 283.

37. Fries, *Records*, 1: 94,133, 495.

That the Moravians had no intentions of retreating from the world, however, is evidenced by the role congregation towns such as Bethabara played. Although agricultural pursuits were integral to the Moravians' communal economy, the chief economic function of Bethabara and Bethlehem was to serve as centers of Moravian craftsmanship and artisanry. Bethabara was to be the home of potters, weavers, tanners, carpenters, gunsmiths, tinsmiths, tailors, and other tradesmen. The Moravian's cultivation of simplicity in their dress, manners, and theology did not lead them to extol the virtues of agrarian life. They fashioned their congregational towns after the life they had known in Europe.<sup>38</sup>

The Moravians saw no contradiction between the success of their collective business enterprises and the health of their community. They welcomed trade with their neighbors and other settlers. So desirous were they of fostering good trading relations that they began English classes for the Single Brethren in 1756.<sup>39</sup> When Spangenberg visited Bethabara in 1759, his only lament was the lack of adequate trading connections. He thought the congregation life at Bethabara "fine." As his comments make clear, the Moravians did not seek to live in isolation; they only sought to live apart.<sup>40</sup>

It was not easy to achieve this desire. When the French and Indian War spread to the southern colonies in 1756, the Moravians found themselves forced to defend Bethabara against the very Indians they had hoped to proselytize. They also found themselves hosting upwards of 100 refugees who flocked to the palisades built around Bethabara. For five years, rumors and reports of Cherokee raids drove settlers periodically to the protection Bethabara afforded.<sup>41</sup>

Faced with a common danger and forced to live in proximity for extended periods of time, the Moravians and the refugees gradually gained an appreciation and understanding of each other. The distinction between Moravian and non-Moravian lessened in the eyes of the Moravians, and the boundaries of their community became less sharply defined. Spangenberg's 1759 visit in this respect proved a timely one. When spokesmen for a number of Moravian and refugee families approached him about living together in a separate village, he readily gave his consent. Later that year the village of Bethania was laid out, three miles northwest of Bethabara. Its population consisted of 16 families, half of them Moravian. The Moravian "society" at Bethania marked the creation of an

38. On the growth of crafts and trade at Bethabara, see Fries, *Records*, 1:110,133,148,273, 2: 531-32.

39. Fries, *Records*, 1: 133,173.

40. Fries, *Records*, 2: 540.

41. Fries, *Records*, 1:158-61,169,181,188,190,192, 206, 227-32.

intermediate status between Moravian and non-Moravian. If the refugee families at Bethania proved themselves capable of following the narrow path prescribed by the Moravians, then they would in time be accepted as full members of the church.<sup>42</sup>

Spangenberg's decision is significant not only for what it says about the Moravians' perception of themselves and others. It also put an end to the first dissension within the Moravian community. All the Moravian couples desirous of founding a separate community had expressed dissatisfaction with their living arrangements under the communal economy. These couples preferred to live in private dwellings, rather than the crowded temporary apartments into which one of the larger buildings in Bethabara had been divided. In Bethania, there would be private residences, and no communal economy.<sup>43</sup>

Spangenberg's decision was probably a wise one. Sensing that the issue of private housekeeping was one that would not go away, he allowed couples unhappy with their living quarters to go their own way. As a result, Bethabara and Bethania enjoyed amicable relations for many years thereafter.

What he did not foresee was that discontent with the communal economy was not confined to the couples who had moved to Bethania and to the issue of private housekeeping. A number of Moravians at Bethabara, like their Brethren at Bethania, began to desire to work for themselves.<sup>44</sup>

The European leadership's willingness to allow the Moravians at Bethlehem to abandon the General Oeconomie in 1762 fueled this desire. When Bethabara subsequently asked the leadership to permit them to do the same thing, however, the leadership denied their request—at least temporarily. Only after the long-planned congregation town at the center of the Wachovia tract had been built would the leadership consent to allow the communal economy at Bethabara to be dismantled. In their opinion, the chance location of Bethabara in the northwest corner of Wachovia rendered it unsatisfactory as a congregation town.<sup>45</sup>

This decision did not sit well with the Moravians at Bethabara. Bethabara served their needs adequately. The extensive Moravian

42. Spangenberg visited Wachovia from July of 1759 to April of 1760. Fries, *Records*, 1: 206-07, 227.

43. Reichel, *The Moravians in North Carolina*, p. 45; Fries, *Records*, 1:139,147-48,154,211,2:539.

44. When the first colony of European Moravians bound directly for Wachovia set sail in 1765, they were instructed not to enter into discussions of the communal economy with their Brethren at Bethabara, as the subject was a sore one there. By 1765 the European leadership had already denied Bethabara's request to abandon the communal economy. Fries, *Records*, 2: 595, 1: 293, 298.

45. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 199; Fries, *Records*, 1: 292-93.

homestead envisioned at the time of Wachovia's purchase had failed to materialize. Instead of a flood of Moravians to Wachovia, there had been a trickle. Bethabara numbered perhaps 100 residents as of 1765. As for the numerous outlying agricultural villages anticipated when the tract was purchased, only Bethania had become a reality. The Moravians at Bethabara saw no reason to abandon their labor of a decade and to start anew some six miles to the southeast at Salem, as the new town was to be called. They would have to cut new roads, clear new fields, and build all over.<sup>46</sup>

When Friedrich von Marschall arrived in Bethabara from Europe in 1765 to assume his position as the business manager of the Oeconomie, he was immediately confronted by those unhappy with the communal economy. Despite von Marschall's reiteration of the European leadership's position, several Moravians continued to clamor for change. One, August Schubert, declared he would leave Bethabara "unless he could have his wife for his own service instead of giving her part to the farm, and unless they could have what clothing they wished without asking for it." To this demand, von Marschall responded, "The door is open."<sup>47</sup>

The Schuberts left Bethabara several days later. But their departure did not put an end to the matter. Sympathizers of the Schuberts vented their bitterness publicly, prompting the elder's conference to omit Communion for the entire congregation that month. The elders barred the Schuberts' supporters from Communion for the remainder of the year.<sup>48</sup>

Von Marschall's authoritative handling of the Schubert affair did put an end to open rankling over the communal economy. It also spurred the building of Salem, upon which work was begun the following year, 1766. As the Moravian diarist put it, "We had faintheartedly made a small beginning there, but now in faith and hope we took up the work."<sup>49</sup>

Yet the building of Salem was not to be a communal affair. No doubt to speed construction, the Moravians hired outsiders to do much of the work at Salem. Moravian master builders supervised a small party of Single Brothers and a larger contingent of day laborers. Meanwhile, the Moravian artisans and craftsmen plied their trades back in Bethabara. The community of effort that had marked Bethabara's construction faded from sight.<sup>50</sup>

The Moravians themselves sensed that something had gone wrong with their communal life. Initially, they attributed their troubles to the

46. Fries, *Records*, 1: 297-99.

47. Fries, *Records*, 1: 302.

48. Fries, *Records*, 1: 302-03.

49. Fries, *Records*, 1: 319-20.

50. Fries, *Records*, 1: 326-27.



refugees they had housed. In June of 1762 they had to dismiss a Single Brother, their brewer, for yielding to carnal desires, and in the language of the diarist, for "falling into all kinds of sin and shame." The diarist pointed to "the foolish and sinful ways of the world" as the source of the brewer's folly, concluding that "the refugees have done us much harm."<sup>51</sup>

The leaders of Wachovia could not wholly convince themselves, however, that their troubles lay outside the Moravian community. A month after the brewer's forced departure, they organized a committee of arbitrators to handle disputes and quarrels that had previously been handled informally through counseling and persuasion.<sup>52</sup> Echoing the Hebrew psalmist, the Moravian minister exhorted his congregation to "behold how good and pleasant it is for the Brethren to dwell together in unity." His exhortations, however, could not return an errant people to the path of righteousness. In addition to the Schuberts, half a dozen other Moravians either voluntarily left or were expelled from Bethabara in the decade after the brewer's downfall.<sup>53</sup>

Other signs of trouble that had been conspicuously absent during Bethabara's first decade also appeared. A number of Moravians, contrary to the expectation that they would attend all services faithfully, voluntarily absented themselves from Communion for long periods of time. Others were not allowed to partake of Communion for behavior unbecoming a Moravian. The spirit of disaffection and rebellion extended to the younger generation of Moravians. Early in 1769, two boys ran away from Bethabara. After they were caught at the farm of a neighbor, an investigation revealed that several other boys had likewise planned to run away. A committee of five Brethren confronted the runaways with their wrongdoing, deprived them of the privilege of attending services, and ordered them to spend all their free time at the bakery, where they would be closely supervised. The committee's admonitions did not prove sufficient, for shortly thereafter the same two boys were "insolent." One of the runaways went so far as to fire a gun into a keg of oil. Both were whipped. More importantly, however, the incident led the Moravians to institute a system of legal apprenticeship. "Hitherto," the diarist commented, "the Masters had stood *an Elternstatt [in loco parentis]*, which was just as binding, but less easily understood by the boys."<sup>54</sup>

Had the brewer's dalliance and the runaway episode been isolated instances, the Moravians might well have dismissed them as matters of

51. Fries, *Records*, 1: 243, 247.

52. Fries, *Records*, 1: 241, 248, 250.

53. Fries, *Records*, 1: 248, 350, 357, 433. One Single Brother even became secretly engaged to a non-Moravian; he later made known his intention to quit the congregation, and asked to be dismissed in peace.

54. Fries, *Records*, 1: 254, 283, 386-87.

no grave concern. The Moravians did not expect perfection of themselves, recognizing that the temptation to sin existed even in the most devout of their number.<sup>55</sup> The discipline of the church and of the community was structured in accord with this recognition. An errant member could be refused Communion or the privilege of attending services, and in this way be made to reflect on his demeanor. Readmission to church services demanded humility and contrition, but it also meant acceptance back into the fold of community life. More serious breaches of Moravian discipline of course meant expulsion from the community. Expulsion, however, ensured that those who remained would see for themselves that they were living in a community that set itself apart from the world. Expulsions, then, did not necessarily mean that the community had failed, but rather, that not everyone was suited for life in a Moravian community.<sup>56</sup>

The forced departures and the acrimony over the continuation of the General Oeconomie in Bethabara during the 1760's, however, were read in a different light. They caused the Moravian minister to fill the congregational diary with lamentations for his flock. After chronicling the brewer's shame, the year-end *Memorabilia* for 1762 went on to note "the many points in which we fell short of the aims of Jesus and the Unity."<sup>57</sup> The *Memorabilia* for the ensuing decade are similarly full of remorse. The *Memorabilia* sent from Europe at the end of 1771, the diarist recorded, "induced deep sorrow, and caused many penitent tears to flow, but our dear Lord comforted His Children with the certain hope that He would heal the backslidings of His People, and restore to them singleness of purpose, and establish them according to His will."<sup>58</sup>

The move to Salem, begun in 1770 and completed in 1772, held much promise to restore this singleness of purpose. It removed the single most divisive issue from the community—that of the communal economy. There would be separate houses for married couples at Salem. And with the exception of five enterprises over which the church retained control, individual Moravians would be able to work for themselves.<sup>59</sup>

55. As Spangenberg wrote, "God does neither change any one so suddenly, nor in such a manner, as to make him incapable of sinning: when he is converted, he is indeed made free from the dominion of sin . . . ,neither can Satan any longer exercise the power which he had formerly over him; for he is set free from the chains which Satan had formerly bound him with . . . . Yet he must, as long as he lives, by the grace of God, be always upon his guard, and stand firm against every thing that is not conformable to the mind of Christ." Spangenberg, *An Exposition of Christian Doctrine as Taught in the Protestant Church of the United Brethren, or Unitas Fratrum* (Bath, England: S. Hazard, 1796), p. 255.

56. On communal discipline, see Taylor, "Freedom and Authority," pp. 6-12, and Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 69-70, 80-89, 114-21.

57. Fries, *Records*, 1: 320.

58. Fries, *Records*, 1: 431.

59. On the move to Salem, see Fries, *Records*, 1:384,404. Surratt describes the new economic arrangements in "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church."

But the desire and the ability to "dwell together and live in unity" were not so easily rekindled and revived. All five of the enterprises run on a stewardship basis floundered within ten years. When they were sold to individual Moravians, usually the former steward, their balance sheets improved dramatically. Even in the realm of religious affairs there were indications that the Moravians had lost sight of their reasons for living together in an exclusive community. On one occasion in the 1780's, the Moravian minister had to cancel Saturday evening services because most of his congregation was out listening to a Methodist preacher.<sup>60</sup>

This is not to say that the religious institutions around which Moravian communal life revolved suddenly collapsed with the move to Salem. The choir system and the lot were not abandoned until after the turn of the century, although both were retained largely at the insistence of the Moravian leadership in Europe. It was not until 1856 that Salem abandoned the lease system, thereby allowing non-Moravians to live in the town. Five years later, her sons marched off to fight for the Confederacy. Thus it took over a century for the Moravians in Wachovia to discard their communal and pacifist ideals totally.<sup>61</sup>

The move to Salem, however, did mark the end of an era. The dismantling of the communal economy sanctioned the growth of individual interests, and implicitly acknowledged the passing of the communal effort that had characterized Bethabara's early years. The end of the communal economy also effectively restored the family as the central institution of Moravian life. The choir system lingered on, primarily in the form of the choirs for Single Sisters and widows, but it no longer embodied the faith and hopes of the Moravians who called Salem their earthly home in 1772. These Moravians were drawing the last breaths of the spirit that had infused the communal pietism of the founding Brethren; they were more inclined toward a pietism of a more individualistic bent. Their individualistic learnings were kept in check only by the European leadership's policy of "enforced exclusivism."<sup>62</sup>

The decline of community among the North Carolina Moravians—and the American Moravians generally—has been attributed to the

60. Surratt, "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church," p. 293. Also see his article, "The Role of Dissent," p. 240. On the attractions of Methodism, see Fries, *Records*, 4 (1930): 1805, 1852-53.

61. See Surratt, "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church."

62. Surratt in his dissertation and article places less emphasis on the end of the General Oeconomie than I do. He maintains that there were few signs of community disintegration and little dissent in Wachovia until 1780. See particularly "From Theocracy to Voluntary Church," p. 112. The Moravians' dissatisfaction with the communal economy, I would argue, signified a sharp if not definitive break in their willingness "to work, to sow and reap, and to suffer with one another." On the policy of enforced exclusivism, see Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 45-49.

success of their business enterprises.<sup>63</sup> To follow this line of thought, the Moravians' success in worldly affairs led them to look outward and to lose sight of their communal ideals. As Wachovia's craftsmen came to devote nearly all their working days to their trade, they lost sight of the collective effort that had been required to clear fields, plant crops, erect buildings and perform all the other tasks necessary to plant a settlement in the wilderness. Instead, they slowly developed an identification with and an interest in their artisanry that led them to chafe at the restraints imposed on them by the communal economy. They desired to work for themselves, and to enjoy the fruits of their own labor. The failure of the church-owned enterprises at Salem would certainly suggest this.

Spangenberg's pragmatic leadership of the American Moravian settlements, to follow the implications of this argument, steadily undermined communal ideals by encouraging the Moravians to engage in worldly affairs. It was Spangenberg, after all, who had envisioned the Moravians' congregational towns as centers of crafts and trade. Spangenberg apparently gave little thought to the dangers that such a role for the Moravian towns would entail. Nor did he apparently recognize the dangers a devotion to crafts held for the Moravians who practiced them—that they would become more interested in the making and selling of goods than they would in being Moravians. Spangenberg in effect led the Moravians down the path toward the bourgeois world. Even the Moravian leadership in Europe sensed the dangers of Spangenberg's approach. By the 1750's, it was complaining that the American Moravians had become "too worldly."<sup>64</sup>

A consideration of the long-term dynamics of Moravian settlement and leadership, however, indicates that the decline of community among the North Carolina Moravians cannot be solely attributed to the success of their business enterprises. Such a consideration would suggest that agitation for the abolition of the communal economy was symptomatic of a waning sense of community, and not the cause of it.

The Moravians had come to the New World, it will be recalled, with the conviction that they had discovered the true principles of Christian living. Although they entertained no visions of an imminent millenium, they nevertheless held fervent hopes of somehow transforming the

63. Surratt, "The Role of Dissent," p. 242. Gollin does not place the decline of community at Bethlehem exclusively on the Moravians' commercial success. She does argue, however, that the contrasting fates of the Moravian communities at Herrnhut and Bethlehem can only be understood in reference to the entrepreneurial values that came to predominate in Bethlehem. Herrnhut remained a religious community into the twentieth century, whereas Bethlehem had become part of the mainstream of American life by the mid-nineteenth century. *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 217-26.

64. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 41-46.

world. They themselves had already been so transformed. Here the Moravians resemble the early New England Puritans, who hoped through the power of their moral example to make England a truly Christian nation. When their fellow Puritans gained control in England, their example became meaningless, and their expectations dashed.<sup>65</sup> No such decisive series of events as the English Civil War overtook the Moravians in America. They were overwhelmed by the indifference of the world as much as anything else. In a huge continent teeming with other sects and wandering evangelical preachers, the Moravians' message largely fell on deaf ears. In turn, the American Moravians' lost sight of the message they had come to bear.

The clearest evidence for this assertion comes from the Moravians' missionary work among the Indians. Bethabara never became the outpost for missionary work that the Moravians had hoped it would be. Not until near the turn of the nineteenth century did the Moravians send missionaries from Wachovia to work among the Cherokee, and these were professionals, not the craftsmen, farmers, and other laymen who had been Bethlehem's first missionaries in the 1740's. The Moravians in Wachovia largely forgot about the heathen they had come to save, except as "wild men" who had threatened their lives for a period of time. The crusading missionary spirit characteristic of Bethlehem's first decade never appeared in Wachovia. The problem was one of commitment.<sup>66</sup>

This problem was greatest among the Moravian children born in the New World. The Moravians who left Germany had been caught up in the fervor of religious enthusiasm. They had made a radical commitment and were willing to brave any weather and endure any hardship in behalf of their new found faith. We can catch glimpses of this faith from those who accompanied the Moravians to Georgia. While others despaired of their lives during a storm that threatened to sink the ship, John Wesley observed, the Moravians walked about serenely, seemingly oblivious to their peril. When Wesley asked about this later, the Moravians told him that they simply put their fate in God's hands. If it was time to "go home"—that is, to go to heaven—then they would do so willingly, and rejoice. Otherwise, they would continue their earthly mission.<sup>67</sup>

No such unshakeable convictions anchored the generation of Moravians born on American soil. They did not have to make the radical

65. See Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), especially pp. 1-15.

66. Adelaide L. Fries, "The Moravian Contribution to North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 7 (1930): 8. In 1747, some fifty Moravians out of Bethlehem's population of 400 were away from the town performing missionary work. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, p. 157.

67. John Pudney, *John Wesley and His World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), pp. 45-46.

commitment their parents had made. They were born into the Moravian community; their choice had been made for them. That many of this generation would find the "narrow way" too confining is understandable. So did the children of the Puritans who first landed in New England. Unlike their parents, these children found it difficult to experience the conversion that the Puritans believed was a sign of God's election. The Halfway Covenant of 1662, which allowed the grandchildren of "saints" to be baptized, offers ample testimony of the Puritans' waning sense of mission.<sup>68</sup> Because of the Moravians' doctrine of salvation, no crisis such as that the Puritans witnessed during the second generation unfolded within the Moravian communities: one did not have to undergo a conversion experience to be considered a full-fledged member of the Moravian church. But it was no accident that the Moravian communities in the American colonies began witnessing signs of dissension in the late 1750's and 1760's, when the first generation of American Moravians was coming of age. The institution of legal apprenticeship in Bethabara in 1769 should be seen in this light.

Zinzendorf's death in 1760 compounded the problem of commitment that was surfacing at about the same time. Since 1727, the year of the renewal of the Moravian church, Zinzendorf had been the unquestioned leader of Moravian affairs. He was, in fact, the epitome of an autocrat. Nonetheless, he was also a charismatic leader whose decrees the American Moravians were willing to follow. Zinzendorf's death left a vacuum. He did not name his successor, nor was there anyone of comparable stature to replace him. The central board of the Unity abrogated for itself the powers Zinzendorf had exercised, and by 1762 had become known as "the Inner Conference." Although the Inner Conference presumably represented Moravians from all over the world, it became virtually synonymous with the government of Herrnhut, where it met. The Inner Conference consolidated its authority by appointing its representatives to take control of affairs in other Moravian communities. Time and distance made American representation on the conference meaningless. The Inner Conference's representatives proved far more responsive to the instructions they received from Europe than they did to the wishes of the American Moravians. The ironic upshot of the end of Zinzendorf's autocratic rule was the tighter regulation of the American Moravian communities.<sup>69</sup>

The pivotal figure in this transfer of power was Spangenberg. Like Zinzendorf, Spangenberg was a man of considerable charm and personal power. Unlike the count, however, he had no interest in accumulating

68. See John Murrin, Review Essay, *History and Theory* 11 (1972): 226-75.

69. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 45-49.

power for himself. His genius lay in delegating authority, and in using his prestige only when he had to. Under his direction, the American Moravian communities enjoyed considerable autonomy. Cherished by the American Moravians as "Brother Joseph," Spangenberg was willing to listen to what his fellow Brethren had to say, as is evidenced by his decision to allow the formation of Bethania. One Moravian minister at Bethlehem judged Spangenberg's genial presence so indispensable that he doubted whether the General Oeconomie could ever have succeeded without Spangenberg.<sup>70</sup>

Zinzendorf came to much the same conclusion about Spangenberg. Concerned about the worldly drift of the American Moravians that has been alluded to above, Zinzendorf in 1749 replaced Spangenberg with someone he believed would bring the American Moravians back into conformity with the values practiced at Herrnhut. Herrnhut was then going through what the Moravians later called the "Sifting Period." During the Sifting Period, Zinzendorf led the circle of aristocratic followers who had been attracted to Moravianism further and further into mysticism. It is little wonder that the count, who spent his days contemplating and visualizing Jesus' wounds, found the American Moravians too worldly. Zinzendorf, however, soon discovered the error of recalling Spangenberg from Bethlehem. In Spangenberg's absence, matters there had quickly deteriorated. In 1751, Zinzendorf sent Spangenberg back to Bethlehem.<sup>71</sup>

With Zinzendorf's death in 1760, however, Spangenberg's leadership was deemed necessary in Europe, and he was recalled to Herrnhut. For reasons that are unclear, Spangenberg's voice did not prevail within the Inner Conference when it came to matters affecting the American Moravian colonies. He was apparently too busy with the affairs of the Unity as a whole to pay attention to Bethlehem's.<sup>72</sup>

The consequences of Zinzendorf's death and Spangenberg's removal from the American scene were readily apparent. Within two years, the Moravians in Wachovia were agitating to discontinue the communal economy. In subsequent years the Moravians there and in Bethlehem were to grow increasingly restive over the European leadership's regulation of their affairs. The leadership insisted that Salem be built, insisted that the lot continue to be used in selecting marriage partners, and in general insisted that the Moravians in America conform to practices in Herrnhut. By showing little inclination to oblige the wishes of their Brethren across the sea, the European leadership undermined the sense of cohesion that is the basis of all community. Had the leadership in

70. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 38-42.

71. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 11-16, 42.

72. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, pp. 45-49.

Herrnhut allowed the American Moravian congregations to chart their own course, they might well have remained distinctively Moravian communities for a much longer period of time.

The North Carolina Moravians' slow drift toward the ways of the world after 1760 is undeniable. The reasons for this secular drift, however, are more readily understandable in terms of a waning sense of mission than in terms of being corrupted by the world. Once their original sense of purpose had been lost, the American Moravians quite simply no longer saw the world in the same way. They began incorporating the values of the society around them, rather than defining themselves in opposition to those values. Thus the Moravians in North Carolina saw nothing inherently wrong with slavery, and ultimately would fight on the Confederate side.<sup>73</sup>

That the Moravians in North Carolina experienced a loss of community should not be at all surprising. Community is elusive, as anyone who has ever consulted the sociological definitions of community can attest: even attempts to define community are precarious enterprises.<sup>74</sup> Community is ultimately elusive, however, because it can be idealized far more easily than it can be realized. Community embodies the ideals of perfect unity and perfect harmony. The very name by which the Moravians called themselves—the Unity of the Brethren—suggests this. The Moravians' radical reordering of familiar institutions through the adoption of the choir system and the General Oeconomie are similarly the hallmarks of perfectionist aspirations.<sup>75</sup>

Aspirations of perfect unity and harmony explain the continuing allure of community. But they also suggest why community is unattainable, at least over long periods of time. As Glenn Tinder observes,<sup>76</sup> community is a static ideal, and for this reason, a tragic one. All communities and the ideals they represent exist in space and time.

73. In 1769, the Moravians for the first time bought a slave—a black who had been working for some time in Bethabara. The slave was received as a full member of the congregation two years later. Fries, *Records*, 1: 385, 446.

74. George A. Hillery, Jr., unearthed nearly 100 definitions of community when he surveyed the literature on the subject in 1955. See his "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement," *Rural Sociology* 20 (1955): 118. The only area of agreement he could find among these definitions was that they all referred to people. On the difficulty of defining community, also see Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 4-11.

75. The beliefs of Utopian communities, Rosabeth Moss Kanter writes, "stem from an idealization of social life, which holds that it is possible for people to live together in harmony, brotherhood, and peace. Utopian thought idealizes social unity, maintaining that only in intimate, collective life do people fully realize their human-ness." *Commitment and Community*, p. 32.

76. Glenn Tinder, *Community: Reflections on a Tragic Ideal* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1980).



They are subject to war, disease, and death—in short, to history. It is no wonder that the Moravians of North Carolina could not, to use their language, "dwell together in unity" in perpetuity. The wonder is that they managed to hold this ideal before themselves and realize it for as long as they did.