

The Labadists of Colonial Maryland (1683-1722)

ERNEST J. GREEN

IN OCTOBER OF 1679 two men entered what is now the state of Maryland on an extraordinary mission. Traveling under aliases to obscure their true connection with a European religious sect called the Labadists, Peter Sluyter and Jasper Danckaerts had been sent to America to secure land for colonization.¹ Their efforts were eventually successful and led to the founding of the first significant European communal Utopian society in the New World.² A portion of land was purchased from a much larger manorial grant known as Bohemia Manor, located between the Elk and Sassafras Rivers in present-day Cecil County, Maryland. By 1683 the colony had been established. Though never numbering more than one hundred and meeting with little success in proselytizing, the community survived until at least 1722 as a distinct religious sect. The ascetic life-style of the Labadists reappeared in other mid-Atlantic communal

Ernest J. Green is professor of sociology at Prince George's Community College in Maryland. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the National Historic Communal Societies Association, Bishop Hill, Illinois, October 1987.

1. The two emissaries kept a journal of the trip. In 1864 the journal was discovered in an old book store in Amsterdam by a member of the Long Island Historical Society, who translated and published the manuscript. The book, Jasper Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter, *Journal of a Voyage to New York and a Tour in Several of the American Colonies* (Brooklyn: Long Island Historical Society, 1867), is a valuable record of life in colonial America as well as an insight into the personalities of the two writers. Various spellings of the two names exist in print, and are herein spelled as they appear in most recent works on the Labadists.
2. Lists of early communal experiments compiled in Arthur Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias* (2nd ed.) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), and E.G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), have Plockhoy's Commonwealth in Hoorn Kill, Delaware first. The life of the Dutch settlement was short, however, because after the establishment of the settlement in 1663 the English conquered New Netherlands the following year and destroyed Hoorn Kill. In one year the society had little time to work out problems of social organization and seems to have had little or no influence on the communitarian movement in this country.

experiments of the Colonial period before giving way to countervailing forces as communitarianism moved in other directions. Eventually the ideas and even the name of Labadism fell into obscurity, but three-hundred years ago it aroused the same passions and provoked the same antipathy characteristic of many other dynamic post-Reformation religious movements.

A Brief History of Labadism

The story of the Labadists in Maryland begins with the birth of Jean de Labadie near Bordeaux, France, in 1610.³ From an early age Labadie believed that he had been chosen by God to lead a special mission on earth. He was educated as a Jesuit and during his novitiate showed several characteristics which foretold a non-traditional career and an individualized view of the meaning of religion. He emerged from his training as a scholar and an eloquent speaker and already was demonstrating an ability to enchant others with a mystical vision. In 1638, Labadie was ordained as a priest after only two of the usual four years of training, and at the ordination service claimed to have seen the Lord himself laying hands upon him, thereby implying a direct ordination from God. Later the same year, claiming to be physically weakened, Labadie asked for dismissal from the Jesuit order. Afterwards, he wore the habit of a secular priest and by age 30 had fame and a following.

A portrait of de Labadie, a copper engraving by Hieronymous Sweerts, hangs in the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam. The portrait, dating from about 1669, depicts a man wearing a well-made cape and clerical collar, in three-quarter profile. The face is unusually triangular, with a prominent beaked nose and a small mouth with thin lips. The eyes dominate the portrait. They are large and arresting, giving the impression of a penetrating power of insight. Underneath the portrait is the inscription:

This is the portrait of Labadie,
the man of whom everyone speaks,
Tenderly loved by many, much hated by more,
of whom many write to praise and more to libel
Yet his work is from God and it will remain.⁴

The qualities which both inspired devotion and evoked hatred followed de Labadie throughout his life and seemed to continue with his successors, although with less intensity.

3. Donald M. Dozer, *Portrait of the Free State: A History of Maryland* (Cambridge, Md: Tidewater Publishers, 1976), pp. 117-120, contains a concise account of de Labadie's career in Europe.

4. The engraving is the frontispiece to Jasper Danckaert's *Diary of Our Second Trip from Holland to New Netherland, 1681* Kenneth Scott (ed.) (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1969).

By 1639, Jean de Labadie had left the provinces and had begun delivering his message to a larger audience in Paris. Soon his views about the Jesuits changed and ties to them were severed. The Jansenists welcomed de Labadie into full communion, and while preaching under their auspices he began declaring openly that he was divinely inspired.⁵ In 1650, de Labadie denounced his faith in the Catholic Church entirely and announced that God had inspired him to become a reformer. After studying for two years he was ordained a minister in the Protestant Church and during the next 16 years functioned in that capacity at Orange and then Geneva. In 1666 de Labadie was called to take charge of the Walloon church in Zeeland, and the period of relative quiet in his life was over. He was now fifty-seven years old and felt that it was time for the churches of Christ to be collected together. His popularity in Holland was immense, and as he began to denounce practices in the Dutch Church, a series of ministerial suspensions, denunciations, negotiations and compromises began and continued for seven years. Labadism was in its most intense and vital period. Wealthy and influential converts flocked to the Labadist communities, and the followers were herded from one city to another in search of religious freedom and a permanent home. The believers moved to Middleburg in Zeeland, then to Veere, and by 1669 were in Amsterdam. Between 1670 and 1672 they were centered in Hereford. In 1672 the Labadists moved to Altona, in Denmark, and in 1674 de Labadie died there, apparently satisfied that the one true church had been established and his life's mission accomplished.⁶ Pierre Yvon, a follower for almost twenty-five years, succeeded to the position of Father and soon afterward moved the Labadists once again, to Wieuwerd in Friesland.

At Wieuwerd the Labadists had use of a castle inherited by three sisters who had joined the believers. The Synod of Friesland, after an investigation, found that Labadist practices and creed were in conformity with the Reformed Church. Thereafter, physically separated from the world and freed from most persecution from the civil and religious authorities, Labadism enjoyed a period of repose in which to work out problems of theology, social structure and economic support.

The success at Wieuwerd led to an expansion of membership, and eventually a policy evolved to relieve overcrowding at the central colony. The Labadists were involved in a number of crafts and agricultural pursuits, but resources from all industries were apparently sufficient for only a subsistence-level existence.⁷ Also, as the experiment in communal

5. Murphy, Henry C, "Introduction" to Danckaerts and Sluyter, 1867, p. xiv.

6. Ibid, p. xxvii.

7. Ibid., p. xxx.

living matured, the realization may have occurred that as the group reached several hundred in number, avoidance of factions and sub-groups would become difficult. Much as the modern-day Hutterites subdivide when a communal farm reaches the size of one-hundred fifty, the Labadists began to look toward the establishment of "daughter" churches elsewhere.

Outside the Netherlands, Surinam was the only New World possession belonging to the Dutch by the 1670's. Attempts were made by the Labadists to colonize the coastal country in South America, and although hopes were initially high, the project failed. Many in the first expedition died of malaria, and the need to import all supplies because of unfavorable agricultural conditions led to abandonment of the project.⁸

Attention then turned to North America. The aforementioned trip of Sluyter and Danckaerts to the New World eventually led to the founding of a colony in Maryland in 1683, and Labadism continued to be practiced there until 1722. At Wieuwerd, a resolution to divide property was passed and in 1692 the communal way of living was abandoned. By 1702, a community of 300 had shrunk to 30 and in 1707 Pierre Yvon died. A final disbanding took place in 1729, and in 1744 the last Labadist speaking brother died in Wieuwerd.⁹

The Maryland Colony

The fate of the Maryland colony hinged on the lives and deaths of two men, Augustine Herrman and Peter Sluyter. The former was born in Prague in 1605. As a young man he worked as a surveyor, saw active military service in Sweden, and came to America in the employ of the Dutch West India Company. Herrman used his skills as a cartographer to draw the first map of Maryland and Virginia, for which he was awarded a large manorial grant. The property, called Bohemia Manor, was eventually extended to about 20,000 acres in what is now Maryland and Delaware.¹⁰

Sluyter and Augustine Herrman apparently met only once, but though brief, their meeting was fateful. When Sluyter and Danckaerts made their scouting mission to the colonies in 1679-80, they met Herrman's oldest son Ephraim in New York and converted him to Labadism. That fortuitous meeting plus the reputation of Maryland as a place of tolerance for religious sects, led the pair of missionaries to

8. See Trevor C. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem: Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610-1744* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987). Chapter 12, "Disaster in The Jungle," contains a thorough account of the Surinam colonization attempt.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 313-336.

10. Dozer, *Portrait of the Free State*, pp. 117-119.

Maryland and Delaware in December, 1679. Holding a letter of introduction from Ephraim, they arrived at Bohemia Manor to meet the elder Herrman on Sunday, December 3rd. The meeting seems to have been amicable enough, though the elderly Herrman was gravely ill, and the pair remained overnight. Their *Journal* for that day contains a strange entry about Herrman, however:

His plantation was going much into decay, as well as his body for want of attention. There was not a Christian man, as they term it, to serve him; nobody but negroes. All this was increased by a miserable, doubly miserable wife, but so miserable that I will not relate it here. He spoke to us of his land and said he would never sell or hire it to Englishmen, but would sell it to us cheap, if we were inclined to buy.¹¹

No record exists of Augustine Herrman marrying a second time. His wife had died some years previously, and there is no evidence that he ever took a mistress. Apparently, however, Herrman did make a commitment to sell 3,750 acres of prime land on Bohemia Manor. After trying unsuccessfully for twenty years to establish a village on Bohemia Manor, he must have seen the Labadists as a promise of bringing civilization to the still sparsely settled frontier.¹²

By 1683, Sluyter and Danckaerts had returned from Europe with the nucleus of a colony. Although much has been written about Herrman's change of heart and refusal to convey the land to the Labadists, this occurred after the Labadists' return rather than before. There is no evidence of a legal battle before the land was conveyed on August 11, 1684. In fact, the elder Herrman's will of September 27, 1684 indicates no hostility toward Ephraim, who was still a devout Labadist. Soon after conveying the land, known as the Labadie Tract, Herrman must have had a change of heart, perhaps becoming suspicious that the Labadists would attempt to control all his lands through their influence on Ephraim. A codicil to the will was filed a few months later and appointed Herrman's

11. Danckaerts and Sluyter, *Journal*, p. 195. Later in the *Journal* (p. 230) Herrman's second wife is identified as "an English woman, who is the most artful and despicable creature that can be found." However, within two weeks Ephraim's sister Margaret had been dispatched from Delaware to care for her infirm father, which seems inconsistent with the presence of a wife in Herrman's household. Most writers believe the Labadists fabricated the wife. See, e.g., Earl L.W. Heck, *Augustine Herrman* (Englewood, Ohio, published by the author, 1941), p. 17, and George Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland and the Early Settlements Around the Head of Chesapeake Bay and On the Delaware Plain with Sketches of Some of the Old Families* (Elkton, Md; Published by the author, 1881), p. 88. The latter writes that the Labadists were "depraved enough to lie about Herrman having a second wife." He recovered from the illness, lived until 1686, and no claims were made against the estate by a second wife.

12. Charles P. Mallory, "Ancient Families of Bohemia Manor, Their Homes and Their Graves," *Papers, Historical Society of Delaware*, (1886) pp. 30-31.

neighbors, rather than Ephraim, as executors. Tradition has it that Augustine cursed his son and predicted that he would be dead within two years if he did not renounce Labadism. Ephraim left the sect before two years, but became mentally ill and died anyway.¹³

Peter Sluyter was a complex mixture of religious dedication and mercenary ambition. His selection for the mission to America to scout the area for colonization was made on the basis of demonstrated ability, and proved to be a wise choice. The trip was perilous and together with Danckaerts, he faced many dangers with confidence and grace. Danckaerts, the primary author of the *Journal*, had been prominently involved in the short-lived colony in Surinam. In 1684, he became a naturalized Maryland citizen, but shortly thereafter returned to Wieuwerd and had little impact on the Maryland colony. He died at Middleburg between 1702 and 1704¹⁴

Sluyter assumed the title of Bishop and functioned in that role until 1698. He quickly became sole proprietor of the land, and along with his wife who functioned as an abbess over the women, as director of the church. Once ensconced as Bishop in Maryland, Sluyter operated independently. When Yvon asked him to return to Wieuwerd to assume a leadership position there, he refused. He was reported to be a harsh and demanding taskmaster, but kept the community together until his death. The nonspiritual side of his personality could be exploitative, as shown by shifts away from Labadist policy. Sluyter's policies were originally consistent with the prohibition of both tobacco and slavery. Indeed, the Labadists were the first organized group to officially oppose slavery in the colonies. However, once their profitability was realized, both were practiced by the Labadists.¹⁵

On first seeing Bohemia Manor, Danckaerts and Sluyter commented:

It is a noble piece of land, indeed the best we have seen in all our journey south, having large, thick and high trees, much black walnut and chestnut, as tall and straight as a reed.¹⁶

Even today the former Labadie tract is largely unspoiled by urban development. Large horse farms take up much of the acreage, and their close cropped fields and meadows are ringed by dense stands of timber. The rivers and streams are narrower and more shallow now than three

13. The property sale was recorded in Baltimore County Land Records on August 11, 1684. Herrman's will is available in "Baltimore County Land Records," Book I.S., No. I.K.

14. A biographical sketch of Danckaerts is available in Robert S. Fogarty, *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 28-29.

15. The beginning point for research on the Maryland colony was Bartlett B. James, *The Labadist Colony in Maryland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1899).

16. Danckaerts and Sluyter, *Journal*, p. 194.

hundred years ago, but the original boundaries follow water channels still in the same position, and the cart roads have become paved highways (See Figure 1). A canal, first proposed by Augustine Herrman but not built until the early 19th century, now connects the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays, crossing the former Bohemia Manor property a few miles north of the Labadie Tract.

Lacking a direct waterway to the Delaware Bay, the Labadists were forced to cart their goods across land to Appoquinimink Creek, or to use the longer, thus less profitable trade route down the rivers to the Chesapeake to Virginia and then back up the coast. The rich soil yielded corn, hemp and flax. Orchards provided fruit and the streams were a plentiful source of fish and waterfowl. Yet the area was not Eden for the Labadists. While there is no evidence that they suffered severe economic hardships, conditions were sufficiently marginal to produce the major policy shifts involving the growing of tobacco and dealing in slaves.¹⁷

Although few written details about the physical layout of the Labadists' housing remain, incidental comments make some conjectures possible.¹⁸ Sluyter and his wife lived apart from their followers. The location of their home is unknown but was located on the third neck of land on the Labadie Tract, which is labeled on the map Providence, a name which echoes the failed community in Surinam, called La Providence. Sluyter's ownership of this section of the Tract is established by the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century rent rolls.¹⁹

The community sisters and brothers probably occupied the large dwelling called The Great House and adjoining buildings, living in separate quarters for women and men, and also taking their meals apart. Other married couples lived apart in their own homes and worshipped with the congregation.

A separate place of worship was used by the Labadists. In 1692 a church called "Mannour Chapel" was established by the Maryland Assembly as the Bohemia Manor Chapel of Ease. The church, later called St. Augustine's, formed a connecting boundary point on the Labadie Tract but was probably never used by the Labadists because of their strained relations with the Manor. The original structure, along with all the parish records, has been destroyed.²⁰ Available evidence does not allow the

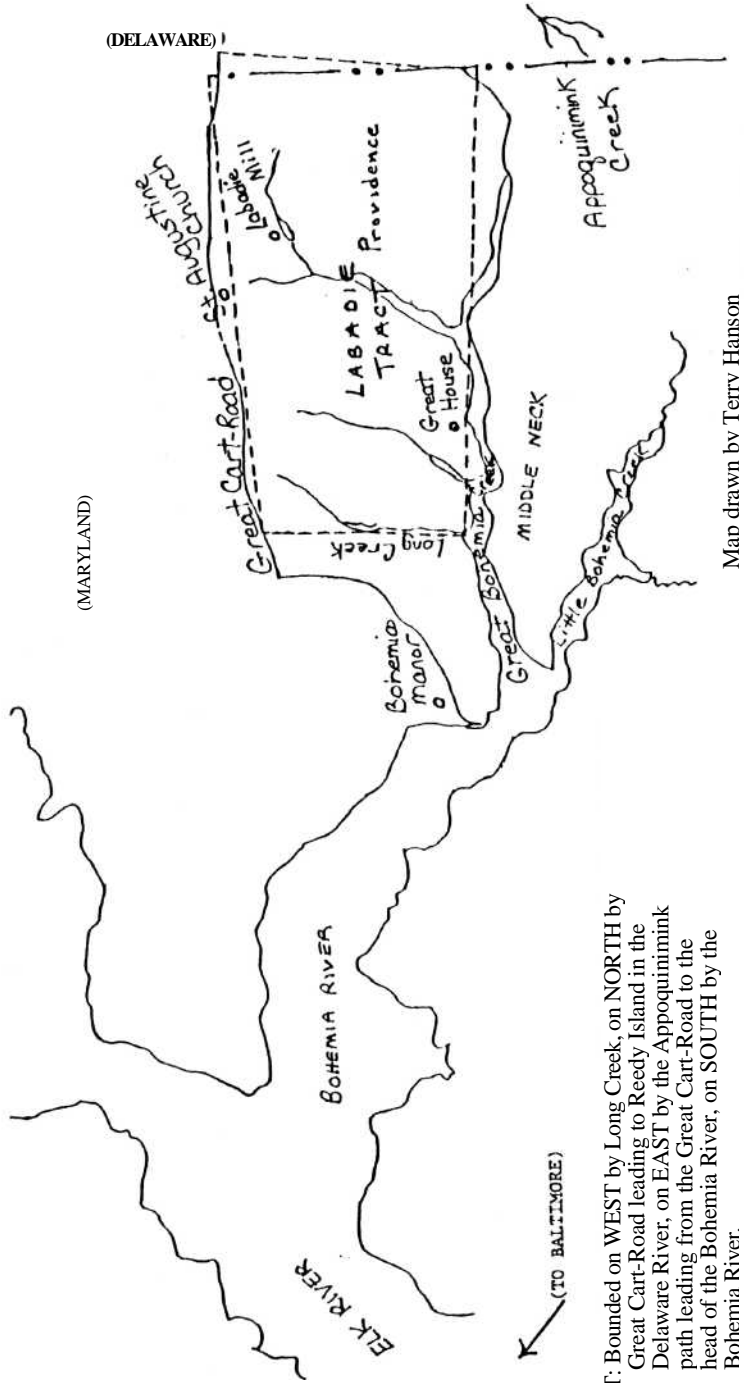
17. James, *The Labadist Colony*, p. 39.

18. Two contemporaneous accounts of the Maryland colony have survived in print. Peter Dittleback, *Verval en Val Labadisten* (Amsterdam, 1692) was by a Labadist defector whose objectivity was questionable. The second was by the Quaker Samuel Bownas, *An Account of the Life, Travels and Christian Experiences in the Work of the Ministry of Samuel Bownas* (London: William Dunlap, 1759), whose impressions were based upon a one-day visit.

19. Annie W. Walker, Index Cecil County Rent Roll 1658-1724 (undated typescript). Providence is entered on pages 144, 148, and 156.

20. George A. Leakin, "A Visit to Bohemia Manor," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 2 (1907) p. 146.

Figure 1. Map of the Labadie Tract, Circa 1704



LABADIE TRACT: Bounded on WEST by Long Creek, on NORTH by Great Cart-Road leading to Reedy Island in the Delaware River, on EAST by the Appoquinimink path leading from the Great Cart-Road to the head of the Bohemia River, on SOUTH by the Bohemia River.

Labadists' place of worship to be pinpointed, and, since they did not believe in the formality of regular Sunday worship, may have been several places.

The Labadists were successful in maintaining a secluded existence, and remaining accounts of visitors are few. Labadist involvement in politics was absent, though a few former Labadist names have continued prominently in Cecil County to the present. Ironically, the present owner of Bohemia Manor Farm is a descendant of Peter Bayard, one of the original Labadists in Maryland.

The Social Organization of the Labadists

A religious communal movement evolves from the spiritual to the social structural level. The prophet first develops a spiritual vision of the ideal life, and then faces the problem of translating that vision into the everyday rules, values, beliefs and symbols which render the vision practicable. Jean de Labadie spent most of his life's work and energy in formulating the religious doctrine, and was involved much less in forging the actual guidelines for an ideal society. Theologically, Labadism was born in the spirit of the Protestant Reformation and, more specifically, in Calvinism. As James noted, "Its theology was not distinctive enough to differentiate it from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, of which it was an offshoot."²¹ Yet Labadism combined a communal approach with enough individual quirks to channel the practitioners into an original and distinctive lifestyle.

The two principles which were especially important as guidelines for conduct were asceticism and communalism. De Labadie advocated a pure form of asceticism. The soul, he believed, could be released from bondage to the flesh if an austere form of life were embraced. This freedom from needs of the flesh would then allow an inner illumination, and eventually mental prayer could produce a condition so removed from the world that the touch of another could not be felt.²² Communal living was dictated by elements of the Labadie theology and directly by Biblical injunction.²³ A doctrine of separation of believer from unbeliever was strictly followed. Married converts had to separate if the spouse was not of the Labadist Church.²⁴ Running through the daily routine was the

21. James, *The Labadist Colony*, p. xiv.

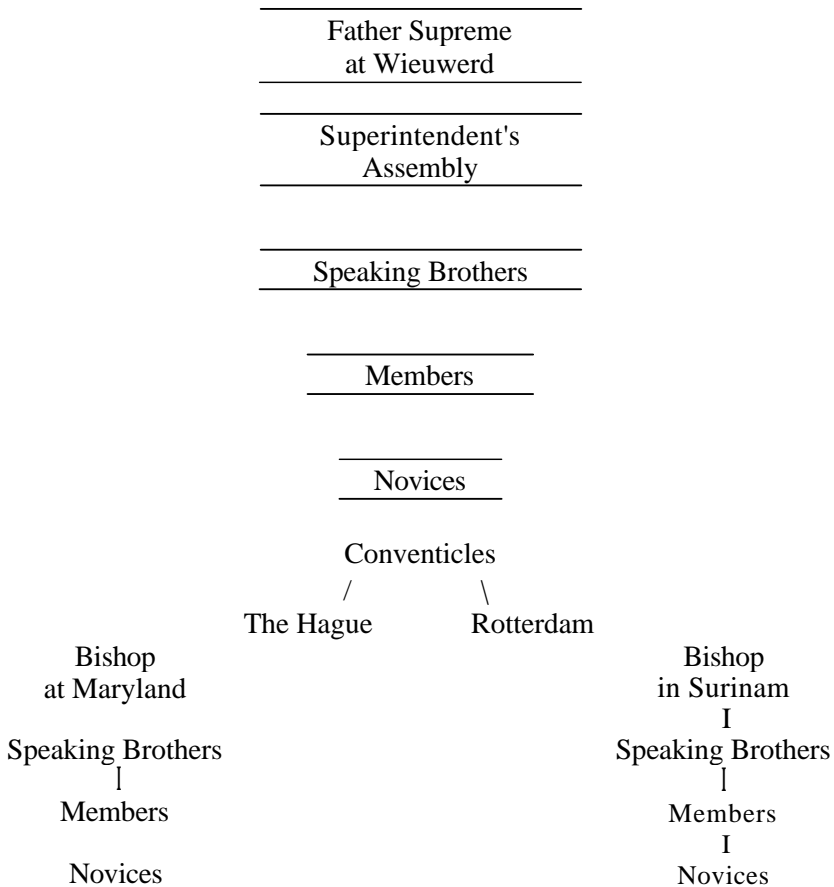
22. Murphy, "Introduction," to Danckaerts and Sluyter, *The Journal*, p. xiv.

23. At first, Labadie merely invited followers to live with him in his several homes. See Trevor B. Saxby, *Pilgrims of a Common Life* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987) p. 123. Later it became a principle of the church, though exceptions were made.

24. Ephraim Herrman left his wife to live with the secluded Labadists in Maryland, but soon realized that he had made a mistake and returned to her. Peter Bayard, an influential

Labadists' intention to restore a primitive Christianity. They were suspicious of the hierarchy in the established church, yet evolved a complex structure of authority of their own (see Figure 2). The group's primitivism was more effectively realized in reducing to a minimum those material items necessary to sustain life. The austere lifestyle may have had as much to do with their marginal economy as with theology, however, especially at Wieuwerd.

Figure 2. *Formal Structure of the Evangelical Church*



member of the Maryland Labadists, converted and left his wife in New York when the colony was founded in 1683. He also became disillusioned and left the colony in 1688. See Heck, *Augustine Herrman*, and Murphy, "Introduction," to Danckaerts and Sluyter, *The Journal*, p. xxxiv, for two separately researched accounts of the above cases.

The social organization of the Labadists reached its most developed form at Wieuwerd, although the colony at Maryland altered certain practices. In authority structure, the mother church at Wieuwerd (de Labadie formally called his church the Evangelical) directed all mission communities. Once the Netherlands formally sanctioned the Evangelical Church, they were allowed to perform marriages, ring the bells, conduct baptisms and generally exercise ecclesiastical authority. Internally, the Labadists used the image of a large family. Yvon was the Father, having assumed that title after Jean de Labadie's death. The Mother, Anna Maria van Schurman, was an influential member who had contributed her substantial wealth and had helped the besieged Labadists in Amsterdam find temporary solace at Hereford. The others were brothers and sisters, probably numbering, before New World colonization began, about four hundred living in and around the castle.

The familial structure had Yvon as Supreme Head of the Church, and under him an assembly of superintendents who met to transact important business. The superintendents were composed of speaking brothers and the more important women. Superintendents, or governors, were assigned roles of preaching and teaching, and were in charge of the education of the young. Collectively, the superintendents provided an advisory council to Yvon, and passed upon all recommendations for promotion of novices to the full (or speaking) brotherhood. The two colonies in Surinam and Maryland were under direct control of the mother church at Wieuwerd, including the elevation of members through various classes from novice to full brother or sister. Labadist-led conventicles were regularly held in Rotterdam and The Hague to attract followers to Wieuwerd. At times a General Assembly was held of all members above the rank of novice.²⁵

Economic communism was part of the Labadist movement by 1669. After leaving Veere, de Labadie and his converts arrived in Amsterdam in August 1669. Obtaining a large hall where all the followers met morning and evening, the practice of taking meals together as one family began. Soon the communalism had progressed to all "temporal goods" as converts were required to sell their property and join their fortunes with de Labadie.²⁶ Samuel Bownas, a Quaker who visited the Labadist colony in Maryland, was told that they lived by

... having all things in common respecting their household affairs, that none could claim any more right than another to any part of their stock, whether in trade or husbandry; and if any had a mind to join with them, whether rich or poor, they

25. See Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem*, for a thoroughly researched account of Labadist policies and their evolution in Europe.

26. Murphy, "Introduction" to Danckaerts and Sluyter, *The Journal*, p. xxiv.

must put what they had in the common stock, and afterwards if they had a mind to leave the society, they must likewise leave what they had brought, and go out empty-handed?²⁷

Labadism was formally recognized as a religion in the Netherlands, but financially was never incorporated with all members holding shares. Many exceptions to the holding of all things in common existed. The castle of Thetinga-State, used for a half-century by the Labadists, remained under control of its legal owners, the three sisters Sommelsdyk, and when they died it was passed down to other family members rather than to the Labadists.²⁸ Also, in Maryland the Labadie tract was initially deeded to Peter Sluyter and four other prominent Labadists. Eventually Sluyter gained sole legal control of the 3,750 acre tract but in 1698, as the Wieuwerd community disintegrated, relinquished much of the land to prominent Labadists. He reserved a portion for himself, however, and became a very wealthy man.²⁹

The Labadists did not practice celibacy,³⁰ and permitted monogamous marriage with certain conditions. The strictest rule prohibited marriage between believers and non-believers. Some flexibility even on this requirement seems to have been exercised, however. One convert in Maryland had been induced to leave his wife, but after residing with the Labadists for awhile, he was considered sufficiently committed to the faith and was permitted to return to his wife and still attend the Labadists' meetings. His situation is known mainly because of a tragedy which occurred. On the way to a religious meeting the man picked up a stray horse, intending to return it to the owner. Peter Sluyter was impressed with the animal and after the service asked the man to try the horse's speed. The rider struck his head against a tree limb and was killed.³¹

Apparently the authoritarian rule of the Labadist leaders, at least in Maryland, extended to the right to separate husband and wife. Petrus Dittelbach, a member at Wieuwerd who later left the group and wrote a report condemning Labadist marital practices, repeated a story told by "A friend of mine, arriving from Sluyter's community, in New Netherland ..." who argued with the Sluyters over marital relations. Dittelbach

27. Bownas, *An Account of the Life*, pp. E3 and E4.

28. The last of the three sisters died in 1725 and Thetinga-State reverted to a non-Labadist. By 1861 the building no longer existed. Murphy, "Introduction," p. xiv.

29. James, *The Labadist Colony*, p. 40.

30. The Labadists have been erroneously included on lists of celibate communities, for example Delburn Carpenter, *The Radical Pietists* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), p. 32. Apparently the Labadists had been celibate in theory at one time, but in 1671 Pierre Yvon impregnated a young woman out of wedlock, and they were married. Peter Sluyter had two wives, as previously mentioned. Even de Labadie married when he was sixty-one years of age. See Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem*, pp. 212-213.

31. Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland*, p. 94.

continues: "The wife, fearful lest they would take her husband away from her, of which there had been at [the Labadist colony in Maryland] in more than one instance..."³² The same man, before returning to Wieuwerd, was reportedly offered a compromise because he was unable to separate from his wife. He could remain a Labadist in the communal sense, but could not hold the position of speaking brother.³³ Though these stories emanate from one known to be hostile to Labadism, the tension between commitment to one's spouse and to the larger cause undoubtedly remained a problem throughout the Labadists' history.

No special rules concerning reproduction seem to have existed for the Labadists. Child-rearing was a joint parent-community responsibility. Mothers were discouraged from showing excessive physical affection to their children, probably because this violated ascetic principles prohibiting pleasures of the flesh. Religious education was in the hands of the speaking brothers, as was such secular education as the children received. Infant baptism was not practiced, but a ceremony was conducted in which the child was brought before the Church and blessed.³⁴

The lack of a more extensive policy regarding children is not surprising. In the seventeenth century, childhood in the western world had not yet gained recognition as a unique developmental stage.³⁵ Not only among the Labadists but in Western society at large, religious orders such as the Jesuits were beginning to take a major role as teachers of the young. Eventually the concept of childhood as a separate category would become entrenched, but the Labadists simply expected adults and children to follow the same rules.

Rules for daily living among the Labadists were consistent with the philosophy of asceticism. New converts held the position of novice, or probationer, until they had gone through a number of "mortification" experiences. Persons of formerly high station were made to perform the most humble tasks, such as tending cattle or washing clothes. To conquer desires of the flesh rooms were simply furnished, dress was plain, jewelry and possessions which were purely decorative were forbidden. Rooms were unheated, even in the winter, and were always open to the Father

32. Quoted in Murphy, "Introduction," to Danckaerts and Sluyter, *The Journal*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

33. Ibid.

34. The rejection of infant baptism shows the influence of the Anabaptists. Danckaerts and Sluyter mention "Mennonists" respectfully in their writings and they are the only religious group for which the Labadists seem to have had any tolerance. In 1704 a group of Mennonists from Germantown, Pennsylvania, joined the Labadists in Maryland because their community was becoming too "worldly." (Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune*, p. 32.)

35. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Random House, 1962) pp. 412-413.

for inspection. Meals were eaten in silence, and men and women ate separately. At Wieuwerd the custom had been to begin meals with a chant, but in Maryland this was replaced with a silent prayer, which was inspired by some "inward motion" and could consume up to a half hour between sitting down and commencing to eat.³⁶

Sanctions for violation of these rules included public humiliation, making confessions of evil thoughts in open meeting, a reduction in clothing, being placed farther down the meal table, and, finally, expulsion from the society. While some members *were* undoubtedly banished during the history of the sect, the usual dissociation was initiated by the member. Never a large group and requiring the industriousness of each participant for economic subsistence, expulsion was probably infrequent.

The positive side of Labadism, for those who practiced it, must have provided ample rewards. The *Journal* of Danckaerts and Sluyter contains an extreme and continual religious ethnocentrism. The Labadists felt little anxiety about the future, for they were convinced that theirs was the one true religion. Converts originally attracted by Jean de Labadie's charisma also found an extended family of like-minded, supportive brothers and sisters. Danckaerts and Sluyter remark on the warmth and intimacy of the group upon returning to Wieuwerd from America thusly:

... about ten o'clock [we] reached our house, where all arms and hearts were open to receive us, which they did with affection and tenderness.. ?³⁷

Although the level of outside attack was lessened at Wieuwerd, it persisted both there and in the relatively tolerant environment in Maryland. The Labadists drew together in group cohesion, even rejecting a choice piece of land in Maryland because it was too near a road traveled by those "miserable Quakers."³⁸

In addition to the benefits of participation in a vital movement, the Labadists were one of the first groups to provide social security. Women who lost their husbands had economic support and child-rearing assistance. Furthermore, the long hours and material deprivation were little more than most would have endured outside the community. The society, while authoritarian at the top, was an opportunity for active participation and socioeconomic equality present in few institutions of the time.

Sluyter's will indicates a never-swerving faith in the Labadist way. He divided his property and directed: "And for my body, I leave it to be buried after our own humble way, in the garden of the so-called Great House, where several of my brethren... are expecting the general resurrection of the dead...." This passage in his will has been interpreted to

36. Bownas, *An Account of the Life*, pp. 58-59.

37. Danckaerts and Sluyter, *Journal*, p. 428.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

mean that Sluyter wanted to be buried at Wieuwerd at the castle.³⁹ This seems unlikely, however, since he had refused to return to Wieuwerd at Yvon's request, and the Labadists there had scattered before his death. Also, the house in Maryland prominently involved in Labadist life was called the Great House. He was probably buried behind this home next to Great Bohemia Creek, although the exact spot is unmarked and unknown.⁴⁰

Sluyter's property was divided between his brother, Johannes, who received his books and papers, and his cousin, Hendrick Sluyter, who inherited the land.⁴¹ Neither were Labadists, and within four years the community had dispersed.⁴²

The Labadist Legacy

An historical marker now points toward the border of the old Labadie Tract and furnishes a terse description of Maryland's only historical communal society. Place names such as Labadie Mill Road and Great House Farm still attest to the group's one-time presence, but no commemorative ceremonies, "Labadist Days" celebrations, nor even a printed pamphlet exist to keep alive the sect's memory. The influence of the group on communal history may belie these omissions, however, even if its main themes were eventually played out.

In 1693 a sectarian group led by Johann Kelpius of Bavaria set out for America to found a community based upon mystical doctrines. The group probably first visited the Labadists at Bohemia Manor and although they moved on north to Pennsylvania, must have found much in common with the mystical and ascetic practices of the Labadists.⁴³ Kelpius

39. George Leakin, "Labadists of Bohemia Manor," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 1, (1906), p. 343.

40. The surviving relatives of Peter Sluyter are buried in a family graveyard at the confluence of Labadie Mill Creek and Great Bohemia Creek about three-quarters of a mile upstream from the Great House. A kinsman, Hendrick Sluyter, who died in 1722, the same year as Peter, has the earliest tombstone there. This would support the belief that Peter Sluyter's wishes to be buried next to the Great House were carried out.

41. Mallory, "Ancient Families of Bohemia Manor," p. 35.

42. The best source for a definite end to the community is the Quaker Bownas, who had first visited the Labadists in 1702. He later wrote, "But at my last going there, these people were all scattered and gone, and nothing of them remaining in a religious colony in that shape." Bownas, *An Account of the Life*, p. E4. He had gone to England and returned to America, traveling through Maryland again in 1726.

43. A record of Kelpius' group stopping at Bohemia Manor Landing (actually called Niedy's Warf at that time) on June 19, 1694 exists, but no direct account of contact with the Labadists was recorded. As Carpenter points out, however, in *The Radical Pietists*, p. 33, Kelpius would have had other opportunities to learn of the sect through contacts in Europe and Germantown (Philadelphia).

founded the Society of the Woman in the Wilderness in 1694 outside Philadelphia, where in addition to its mystical ideas they lived "an extremely abstemious lifestyle."⁴⁴

The longest-lived Utopian commune in the colonies, Conrad Beissel's Ephrata, also received inspiration from the Labadists. In 1721 Beissel and another man walked from Conestoga, Pennsylvania (now Lancaster County) to northeastern Maryland. Beissel had not yet begun to attract the followers who would eventually comprise Ephrata, but what he observed of the Labadist lifestyle was later to be reflected in his own community. As Alderfer notes

In spite of the decay of the (Labadist) society, Beissel's imagination must have been stirred by the practice of holy poverty and simplicity; by the spiritual unity; by the rigorous internal discipline, which was by then habitual; and by the Labadist literature, both printed and manuscript, which the aged Sluyter allegedly passed on to him.⁴⁵

The lifestyle at Ephrata evolved from many influences, but the austere living conditions at the site, which has been physically preserved, and the mystical practices and beliefs are suggestive of Labadist doctrine.

The Radical Pietists of seventeenth-century America were basically involved in a movement within the established churches.⁴⁶ While Labadism went much further in opposition to church orthodoxy, it served to influence Pietism both in America and Europe. In 1659, while preaching in Geneva, de Labadie had as a listener Phillip Jacob Spener, "who later became one of the foremost leaders of Pietism in the German Lutheran Church."⁴⁷ A late account of the last Labadist speaking brother, Conrad Bosman, indicates that around 1731 he came into contact with the Pietist mystic Gerhard Tersteegen and that the "... latter was well disposed to Labadie...."⁴⁸ Indeed the influence of Labadism on the Pietists was so strong that it may account for post-1744 reports of Labadists who were actually Pietists knowing of Labadist doctrine.⁴⁹

44. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune*, p. 29.

45. Ibid, p. 33.

46. James Tanis, "Reformed Pietism in Colonial America," in F. Ernest Stoeffler (ed.) *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 41.

47. Carpenter, *The Radical Pietists*, p. 10.

48. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem*, p. 330.

49. A recent example occurs in Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune*, p. 134-135, who contends that a group of Labadists arrived in Germantown in 1755, and after some contact with Conrad Beissel at Ephrata, soon disbanded. This conclusion may have been influenced by the remark of a previous biographer of Conrad Beissel, Walter C. Klein, *Johann Conrad Beissel: Mystic and Martinet (1690-1768)* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1972), who wrote about the same group, "A clergyman named Ludovic, animated by an impulse much like de Labadie's,

Actually, the last Labadist had died before the American Revolution, and as the mainstream society began the work of building a fledgling nation new groups of sectarians poured into the country with their own versions of Utopia. After a few generations passed, the memory of the strange sect faded and could, except for luck, have been lost forever.

The written record of the Maryland colony has probably now been exhausted, although the Labadists in Europe are the subject of a recent book and our knowledge of the Mother Church has been extended considerably.⁵⁰ Historical archaeology could still reveal more about the Labadist lifestyle, as enough remains to provide physical evidence for examination.

In the summer of 1882 Reverend George Armistead Leakin made a visual inspection of the Labadist sites.⁵¹ One hundred five years later many of the same remains can still be seen.⁵² The original Bohemia Manor house of Augustine Herrman was destroyed by fire and a new mansion now stands farther up the hill, commanding a fine view of the Bohemia River. The site of the original house remains identifiable, as it was when Leakin visited, but is now only a scattering of bricks. Herrman's tomb, which was in three pieces when Leakin saw it, has been repaired. While the slab of oolite serves as a memorial, the actual place of Herrman's interment is elsewhere and is now unknown.

Leakin's directions are imprecise, but he reports visiting the original Labadist house higher up on Bohemia River. The house he saw was presumably the central farmhouse on what is now Great House Farm. The east end of the house, a smaller two-story frame, brick and stone building with its own single story addition dates from 1650 or earlier.⁵³ While the main building, a large two-and-one-half-story brick structure, was not built until after 1752, it was apparently built over an earlier mansion. This former structure has been described as "... a building of considerable proportions and pretensions....,"⁵⁴ and together with outlying frame buildings could have housed a community of one hundred. Peter Bayard, one

brought a company of followers to Pennsylvania" (p. 175). The only contemporary source, by Brothers Lameck and Agrippa, *Chronican Ephratense; A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, Pa.: S.H. Zahn and Company, 1889) identifies the group as "awakened people from Altona" (pp. 237-241).

50. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem*.

51. Leakin, "A Visit to Bohemia Manor."

52. I wish to thank Dr. William Wright, Mrs. Richard Dupont, Jr., and Mrs. James Bailey for giving me permission to inspect Labadist sites on their properties, and for their willingness to supply information about the history of Maryland families.

53. Nancy C. Sawin and Esther R. Perkins, *Backroadng through Cecil County, Maryland* (Hockessin, Delaware: P.O. Box 306, 1977), contains sketches of the various sections of the house.

54. Mallory, "Ancient Families of Bohemia Manor," p. 41.

of the original five Labadists who were deeded the Labadie Tract, was an early owner of Great House.

In 1703 Sluyter purchased a mill for use of the community on a creek about two miles from the Great House. Leakin found the once swift and wide stream much receded and "the foliage of bushes and rushes is so thick that you cannot define the foundation of the once busy mill. We found, however, a millstone through which a considerable tree was growing. The miller's house shared a similar ruin..."⁵⁵

The mill had continued in operation until at least 1771. The mill site, at the end of Labadie Mill Road, is still visible. Though filled in and densely overgrown, the mill pond lies behind a low earthen dam and the dry mill race runs past a scattered pile of bricks and stone just above the flood plain. The location of the remains suggests the site of the mill rather than the miller's house. The millstone mentioned by Leakin is no longer visible; it has either been moved or, more likely, covered with silt.

Leakin's last stop was the site of the St. Augustine church, which he found in ruin. A new church of pine board structure, "which does little credit to the architect...",⁵⁶ had been built next to the original. The wooden church is still standing today, although no longer in use for services. Time has given the wooden structure a weathered and interesting appearance, and its architecture would warrant a kinder appraisal today.

Here both the written and visible records of the Labadist colony in Maryland end. The reclusive nature of the sect and their apparent failure to produce a written record of their experiences still leave much of their lifestyle hidden and shadowy. Their religious self-righteousness produced antagonism from neighbors, then exaggeration, and finally a few legends, and eventually even the legends died away. The Labadists remain an elusive subject, but one of established importance as the original link in the truncated chain of America's colonial Utopian experiments.

55. Leakin, "A Visit to Bohemia Manor," p. 146.

56. Ibid.