

Behold the Lamb

The Story of the Moravian Church

Peter Hoover



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by Peter Hoover



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1

A Song In The Wilderness

Veronika Löhans struggled to understand an Afro-Caribbean man speaking to the crowd. Far back, under a palm thatch roof without walls, she watched the light of a lantern on his face. The man spoke eagerly, in short syllables. He was tall and strong and moved his arms quickly. Veronika smiled to herself in the dark. Even though she did not understand everything he said, she did not fear him like she would have as a child. She loved him, a brother in the Saviour's *Gemeine* (church community), and to see how he spoke to the people filled her with happy thoughts.

Mosquitos moved about. Like the other women at the meeting, Veronika slapped her legs and waved them from her ears. She wondered how the men, mostly without shirts, could ignore them so well. But, glancing behind her, she saw that something of far greater urgency than night-flying bugs held the attention of the crowd.

Faces kept emerging from the darkness under low-hanging coconut palms. More and more—perhaps over five hundred faces—surrounded the light and kept drawing closer to hear what was said. In spite of the humidity and bugs, in spite of the ever tightening crowd, Veronika felt deeply thankful for having come to St. Thomas in the West Indies. The Saviour was here, and with the seekers around her, she found joy in becoming little, like a worm, before him.

Veronika was young—only married a few months—but the road behind her was already long. A peasant girl from the backwoods of Moravia, she had lain a year in prison for having attended secret meetings of believers. On her release she had escaped through the mountains of Silesia to Germany. There she had joined the congregation of believers at Herrnhut in Upper Lusatia. Immediately after her marriage to Valentin Löhans in 1738, they had sent them overland to Rotterdam from where they sailed to the New World.

Now she sat among believers on the Posaunenberg (Mountain of Trumpets) where on a twenty-seven acre lot the brothers had built houses among flowering jasmine and lemon trees. In the crowd gathered there to worship she saw few white faces—until a sudden commotion turned all heads at once.

Rough men with swords and whips tumbled in on the multitude. Roars and

shouts drowned out the screams of terrified children. “Kill them! Shoot them! Beat them! Stab them!” Veronika distinguished the voices at once from musical West Indian patois. They were crude white men’s voices and struck terror to her soul.

Benches rolled over as terrified mothers around her snatched their children to flee. Swinging cutlasses, heavy booted men smelling of cane liquor charged into the circle of light beneath the lantern. They caught the one who had spoken—a brother baptised “Abraham”—and began to beat him wildly. One white man hit the helper¹ Petrus’s wife over the head. She clutched her newborn child tighter while another cracked a bull whip around her. Georg Weber’s wife Elisabeth, a European sister, got a stab wound through her breast and a cutlass sunk deep into Veronika’s shoulder.

Within minutes the multitude had vanished into surrounding darkness, the intruders had galloped off on horseback, and only the most injured lay groaning among patches of blood on the hard packed earth. Then the sugar cane rustled and a few of the brothers, looking cautiously this way and that, returned.

At the scene of violence they knelt, undismayed, to pray for their white Protestant persecutors. Some prayed in West Indian patois and some in the languages of central Europe. Abraham, the strong young man who did not fight back when the drunks beat him, prayed with tears for their “awakening.”

Within three weeks of the attack, the Saviour’s Gemeine on St. Thomas (consisting almost entirely of black slaves owned by white “Christian” masters) sent out sixteen pilgrims² to speak to the lost about their souls. They reached every plantation on the island and the number of believers increased so rapidly that landowners threatened the governor they would leave unless he crushed the movement at once.

What, on St. Thomas, had taken place?

What exposed the landowners’ wickedness so clearly (to their unbounded rage) and led thousands of slaves into new life and joy? What brought a great company of Africans and Europeans into previously unheard of unity? What inspired young peasant women to cross the ocean and brave life in strange tropical lands where all predicted they would die? What turned wild drunkards and thieves into believers noble enough to return good for evil— while the rest of “Christendom” languished in hypocrisy and sin?

Reinhard Ronner, a German brother walking the white trails of St. Thomas in the 1740s, came upon the answer where he did not expect. A distance from any village or plantation house, down where the road crossed a thicket of tropical vegetation, he heard a song.

At first he thought he must be imagining things. Then he stopped short and listened. *“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit, das ist mein Schmuck und Ehrenkleid. . . .”* Out of the underbrush the hymn came in majestic strength, the voice of a young man singing with all his heart. *“Damit will ich vor Gott bestehn, wenn ich zum Himmel werd eingehn!”*

Reinhard could wait no longer. He had to see where it came from, and scurried down into the dimly lit space beneath the leaves. There he saw him, a boy—obviously a slave from an island plantation—clearing land with a cutlass, alone. He had has back turned and Reinhard stood still as the song (given here in translation) poured from the depths of his being:

¹ lay leader

² evangelists sent out by the Moravian church

The blood of Christ and his righteousness, is my adornment and robe of praise. With it I shall stand before God when I enter heaven.

I see the holy innocent Lamb, my Lord and Christ—the Lamb that died on the rough cross for me. I see the value of his blood, treasure beyond price, eternally reckoned in heaven.

This blood alone is my confidence and hope. Though all else should fail, my confidence remains. Sure as rock it stands.

As long as I continue here below, this shall be my goal: I will testify with a glad spirit of grace in Jesus’ blood.

Praise to you, Jesus Christ! Praise for becoming a man! Praise for buying my freedom and that of the whole world! King of honour, Jesus Christ, the Father’s only son, have mercy on the world, and bless those who stay with you!

When the song ended, Reinhard hesitated to make himself known. But the young man turned in his work and saw him. Startled, he drew back, speechless. “Do not fear,” Reinhard told him. “I am a brother!”

At once the joy of having his sins forgiven shone from the young man's face and Reinhard found him "inwardly small and tender to the Lamb" before leaving him, unspeakably encouraged, to continue on his way.

The road between St. Thomas cane fields seemed transformed. Dark nights of storm and violence seemed like a distant dream. Never had Reinhard Ronner noticed a more heavenly sunlight glistening on rolling expanses of emerald green above the sea.

Men and women had seen the Lamb. "*Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!*" And yes—in Europe, in the West Indies and abroad, during the mideighteenth century—saints had overcome evil with his blood!

2

Bethlehem's Fountain

Two hundred and fifty years after Reinhard Ronner's work in St. Thomas I drove east toward Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. Frost lay bright on the fields, at sunup, in the beginning of Advent season.

East over the Tulpehocken Creek where Nicholas Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf stayed with Conrad Weiser on his way to Indian territory. East past the Indiantown Gap into the valley of the Lehigh I found my way into the heart of old Bethlehem, looking just as I had remembered it. Stone buildings with many floors, levels, and curious additions looked through small-paned windows onto its streets and squares under spreading walnut trees. Beneath a weather-vane in the shape of a lamb, nestled what had been its central meeting house, communal residences, and dining hall. But on this visit to Bethlehem I did not stop at its steep-roofed *Gemeinhaus*³ built of logs in 1741. I did not watch the current film at the Moravian visitors' centre, or drink a mug of hot cinnamon tea with milk at the Sun Inn. Today I was "on to something." I parked my car at the Monocacy Creek below the Single Brothers' House and set off walking briskly uptown.

Much water had flowed under the Lehigh bridge since I first came to know the Moravian Church and their former communal settlements in eastern Pennsylvania. In fact, now that I was back in Bethlehem, I could not help but rehearse the story in my mind. It began at an auction sale in my home town of Kitchener, Ontario. The sun was about to set on a snowy, winter afternoon. The auctioneer had become anxious to quit and bargains began to move, right and left. My mother bid two shillings on a box of books and got them. She also got a kitchen table, a mattress, and several chairs. A German immigrant hauled them home for us (we were "horse and buggy Mennonites" and could not easily take things out of the city) and I dug through the box of books to see what I could find. My first discovery was the story of the Moravian Church, told in a book about Pennsylvania.⁴ It spoke to my soul and stayed with me.

In fact the Moravians, through their witness and writings, took me to where I as a thirteen-year-old could not have dreamed—even though my family knew both, centuries before my time.

³ Community house, where the "pilgrim brothers" lived and where believers met in its second story Saal.

⁴ Klees, Fredric, *The Pennsylvania Dutch*, MacMillan, New York, 1951

In 1748 a Moravian pilgrim, Brother Hautzach, stopped for the night in Pennsylvania's Conestoga River settlement. After putting up and feeding his horse, Brother Hautzach's hosts, Christian Martin and his son David (my Mennonite great-grandfather, five generations removed) took him in for supper and to visit. The Martins, like Brother Hautzach, had come from Germany and felt kindly disposed toward him. Much more, they felt spiritual kinship in their dedication to Christ and in the nonresistant, nonconformed lifestyle they shared. Christian had spent a long time in jail for what he believed (like the Moravians he refused to do military service and swear oaths). David's wife had died and he buried her at sea on the voyage to William Penn's colony where—like the Moravians—he had come in search of religious freedom.⁵

But the pleasant conversation and spirit of unity ended when Christian's son Heinrich (also my ancestor) came over. Heinrich Martin, Brother Hautzach reports in his journal, was not "tender toward the Lamb's wounds" like his father and brother. Rather, he was in a quarrelsome mood and contradicted everything the Moravian pilgrim had to say.

For many years I felt uncertain about the attitude we Mennonites had taken toward the Moravians. On one hand I deeply appreciated the Moravians' conviction, in the eighteenth century, to live by the Sermon on the Mount. I saw that like the early Anabaptists, they gave everything up to follow Christ. Their communal settlements—their "Pilger" and "Hausgemeine" (pilgrim and home congregations)—fascinated me, along with their witness for peace, their evangelism "by the wheel," and the First Fruits story (the incredible account of their world missions, made the subject of a 20'th century film).

Nevertheless, I continued to have my doubts. Only too well could I imagine what my great-uncle, six generations removed, would have found to contradict.

The Moravians were "plain," in some ways more so than Mennonites in the eighteenth century. But along with their "plainness" they had a flair for celebration—great feasts with decorated halls and music by their church orchestra. Intellectuals among them, university professors, artists, composers, even nobility, set for them a remarkably different tone than that of other non-conformed groups. I could see how this would have given my Mennonite family a problem. But there were other, even more serious, differences. . . .

My great-grandfather Heinrich would have had a hard time with the Moravians' view of the sacraments, especially baptism. Certain expressions

in their worship he would have found baffling, or more likely, offensive. And as a climax of differences, he no doubt rejected totally the renewed Moravians' concept of becoming "*ganz klein und sündlerisch*" (altogether tiny and sinner-like) before the Lamb. I did too, until a long series of events—Moravian influences among them—brought me to make a difficult adjustment to my Anabaptist understanding of what it is to be a Christian.

⁵ In North America the Moravians first settled in Georgia. But Georgia's colonial government compelled them to bear arms and they moved to Pennsylvania rather than comply.

Where my Anabaptist ancestors focused on obedience to Christ, the Moravians focused on recognition of their guilt and trust in Jesus' blood. Both groups believed in both teachings, but their clear contrast in emphases led to cases like that of Peter Haller and Jakob Lischy in 1745.

Peter Haller, like my Martin ancestors, was a Mennonite settler in Pennsylvania. He liked the Moravians and began to attend their *Sing* and *Gebetsstunden* (song and prayer meetings) until a neighbour who also attended the meetings fell in temptation and got drunk. Then Peter had a problem. "Why didn't you take action against that man?" he asked the Moravian pilgrim, Jakob Lischy, after the next meeting. "The Bible says no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God, and we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but must rather reprove them. Also, we are to separate ourselves from sinners and come out from among them."

Peter Haller felt confused and upset. He could not understand pilgrim Lischy's calm acceptance of the man's continued participation in the meetings. Even less could he understand what Jakob meant by saying, "Now I love him [the brother who had sinned] even more than before."

Then things went wrong for Peter. He "looked too deep into the cider barrel" himself and on top of that, got into a fight.

The day afterward he returned, a changed man, to speak with Jakob Lischy. "God has punished me for judging my neighbour," he confessed. "Now I see that I sinned even more than he. I got drunk myself and fought like a devil. I have come to see what kind of man I am and my own holiness has fallen into the dirt."

Jakob Lischy neither condemned nor condoned him. Neither did he smile and say, "I told you so!" He simply wished him "*viel Glück mit der Sache*" (a good

outcome of the matter) and thanked the Saviour for doing his wonderful work in men.⁶ The Saviour keeps on working.

By the time I entered Bethlehem that frosty December morning I had a number of eventful years of Christian living behind me. My Anabaptist ideals of church purity and personal obedience to Christ had been tried out in more ways than I could have imagined. In mission congregations in Latin America, in teaching Bible School, and serving as a minister in a Mennonite church, I had made discoveries and observations—not all of them positive—and had more questions by now than answers, on how to do things.

⁶ From *Lischys und Rauchs Relation von ihrer Visitationsreise und Predigten in den Reformierten Gemeinden in Pennsylvanien, 1745*, Moravian Archives

Some of my questions involved the church. Did we Anabaptists know how to build a church like Christ had in mind? What about our constant struggle for unity in details, our bannings and shunnings, and our belief in the fellowship of the sanctified (*die Gemeinschaft der reingewaschene* we spoke of in my childhood) in the context of our appalling fragmentation? Without much humour I recalled an observation made by the Moravian, Georg Hantsch, in 1748: “May the dear Lamb bless our visit among the poor Mennonites who know nothing but fighting and struggling, and who consider our teachings dangerous because we direct them to the Gospel instead of to the law.”

Along with these questions I wondered about our ability (or lack of it) to “make disciples of all nations” and bring them to obey what the Lord commanded. Even though the Anabaptist movement began with a great wave of new converts, within one generation the wave became a trickle, and by the time of the renewing of the Moravian church in the eighteenth century, it had not only stopped flowing altogether, but reversed.

“What happened?” I asked myself. While non-conformed non-resistant Moravians preached the Gospel to millions around the world and started communities in the most inhospitable places on every continent except Antarctica, non-resistant nonconformed Anabaptists became tiny enclaves, fortified with tradition and ethnic peculiarities against a hostile world. What did the one have that the other lacked? Even today it is rare for seekers “from the outside” to successfully become part of plain Anabaptist communities. Did this mean we have downplayed personal “experience” so far, and focused on submission to the

brotherhood so long, I wondered, that we have become stunted and weak? Or was something worse the matter with us?

Above all else, I had come to have questions about myself. After years of preaching, writing, and teaching others, circumstances had forced me to a shocking recognition of my own imperfection. Whether I liked it or not, honesty before God forced me to see I was still a sinner by nature, and far too often a sinner (a “short-comer”) in thought and deed as well. In fact, it plainly seemed the older I got, the more sinful I looked to myself.

That, for one who had long believed the sinful nature dies at conversion to be replaced by a new and utterly transformed “Christian” nature, was difficult. More difficult, perhaps, than anything else in my life.

Could I, after so many years of claiming “assurance of salvation” and holiness in Christ, sit down and admit I was still a sinner? A sinner *by nature*? Could I beat my chest and pray like my students at mass (in Costa Rica I taught at a Catholic school), “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner”?

The very idea seemed heretical. I had not called myself a sinner since my conversion years before. (We believed it was possible for a Christian to sin, but by accident, not by nature. Therefore Christians were no longer *sinners* but *saints*. “Don’t make the Church of Jesus Christ a hospital for sinners!” I remembered a Mennonite preacher thundering across the pulpit.) Yet now, the more I thought about it the more I felt like admitting exactly what I was— a great sinner—and live with the consequences. Living with the truth, for as terrible as it might be, looked suddenly more attractive than living with a lie.

With this change of perspective, it became easy to admit our shortcomings in the church as well. For the first time I felt ready to confess that neither I nor the church to which I belonged, was anything more than ordinary. But could I go on and say the rest?

“I am a sinner and my church is simply another cell in that vast assembly of sinners— wounded, imperfect, scattered across the ages and around the world—that together form the body of believers for which Christ died.”

That, for me, still seemed like a startling and unacceptable confession, totally unlike what I as an Anabaptist had learned, and it brought serious paradoxes to mind. How could one follow Christ and be a sinner at the same time? How could the Church, consisting of sinners, be spotless and without wrinkle? Wasn’t this where Martin Luther had gone wrong?

Toward the end of a difficult period of rethinking and adjustment, these questions took me to Bethlehem in Pennsylvania—down to the lower story of the library at Moravian College, back through carpeted spaces into the beautiful Moravian Studies room. Beautiful, that is, not for its pleasing modern design but for what I found among leatherbound, carefully printed German books—several thousand of them from the eighteenth century—on its shelves and in special collections.

Holding in my hands the very books they carried to the West Indies in the 1700s and reading their letters for myself, the inner workings of the renewed Moravian church began to come clear. I began to understand their *ganz klein und sündlerisch* attitude, not as a license to keep on sinning (as my Mennonite ancestors may have supposed), but as the lowly position—the only position, in fact—from which one can see the Lamb.

“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!”

In previously unknown *Sünderhaftigkeit* (recognition of human sinner-ness) I began to feel, with the young slave on St. Thomas, the unspeakable worth of Jesus’ blood and wounds. Thousands of Moravian hymns suddenly became my hymns. Their struggle to put to words what they felt, became my struggle, and their vision to bring the world to unity and peace under the conquering Lamb, became my vision. Then the story of Saul and David came home to me.

God chose Saul, the tallest and most handsome man in Israel, to be that nation’s first king. Samuel anointed him. God helped him win spectacular victories. But Saul did not stay “little in his own eyes” and God gave his work to a shepherd boy from Bethlehem.

He always does. It takes little people—like his son, born into that shepherd boy’s family, in a barn—to change the world.

Back on the street I hurried past the Sun Inn. Down to the family and widows’ houses above the Monocacy Creek I hurried past the area where the mill, the dairy, and the water works hummed with activity in community days. And there, close to the stable in which the first settlers lived and the settlement got its name from a carol on Christmas eve, 1742, I passed a fountain. Every time I saw it earlier, its whimsical inscription had cheered me: “Drink Pilgrim here; and if thy heart be innocent, here too shalt thou refresh thy spirit.”

Only on this cold day at the beginning of Advent, it no longer seemed so whimsical. If our hearts were innocent, to “drink from the fountain in Bethlehem” might change what we believe and how we live, forever.

3

Goats And Sheep

The story of the Moravian church begins, one may say, at Bethlehem. Not Bethlehem in Pennsylvania but *Bayt Lahm*, Jesus' birthplace in Israel. From the night of Jesus' birth in a stable to a believers' community on the heights above the Lehigh River an unbroken story of faith continues. It is a story other Christian groups have often wished to invent for themselves, but with little success.

The Moravians, without invention, are an "Apostolic" church (a church that has kept its succession of leadership unbroken from the apostles' times to now). More than that, they survived as a movement keeping its place in the love of Christ with far greater faithfulness than most, through two thousand years. Yet their story, like the story of all faith communities, involves struggle, confusion at times, and trials that obscured its way. It is not as simple as some have been led to believe.

"As a church we descend from the movement of John Huss, burned at the stake in 1415," say tour guides at Moravian museums. At first I took what they said at face value. But the more I learned of the facts behind that statement, the more I saw how potentially misleading it could be. The *Unitas Fratrum* (the Brotherly Unity or Moravian church) "descends" from John Huss in the same way, perhaps, as the Anabaptists from Martin Luther, or the Quakers from Oliver Cromwell. Certainly, there was a connection, but to speak of spiritual "descent" implies more than there really was.

The "renewed Moravians" (the *Unitas Fratrum* after 1722) were not Czech-speaking people of Moravian background. True, they came across the mountains from Moravia—the "hidden seed"—but their ancestors were German Waldenses who in their turn had fled there for refuge. In Moravia their ancestors had linked arms with the *Unitas Fratrum*, a Czech renewal movement. But even it had stood in sharpest opposition to John Huss's reformation from the beginning, and far from representing him now, bore the marks of brutal suppression suffered under the rule of his followers for centuries.

To get the story straight we need to go back—far back beyond Moravia, the Hussites and Waldenses, to early Christian communities in Asia. . . .

Soon after the apostle John died in Ephesus, terrible persecutions drove many who loved Christ from Asia Minor through Greece and Italy, to Gaul. Persecution followed them. For every natural disaster, flood, drought, or plague, pagans found Christians to blame. A hundred years after John's death Christian refugees in Gaul wrote back to their relatives and friends:

The servants of Christ at Vienna [Vienne] and Lugdunum [Lyon] in Gaul to our brothers in Asia and Phrygia who have the same faith and hope of redemption as we: peace, grace, and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. . . .

The severity of our trials here, the unbridled fury of the heathen against God's people, the untold sufferings of the blessed martyrs, we are incapable of describing in detail: indeed no pen could do them justice. The adversary swooped on us with all his might. . . .⁷

After describing how Sanctus the deacon at Vienna on the Rhone, Maturus a new convert, Attalus an immigrant from Pergamum, the old brother Pothinus (in his nineties), Alexander a doctor, Blandina (roasted alive and thrown to bulls), and a fifteen-year-old believer, Ponticus, died under torture rather than deny Christ, the letter ends triumphantly:

This was the greatest war they fought against him [the Beast]. . . . Shedding many tears in supplication to the Father, they asked for life and he gave it to them. This they shared with their neighbours when they departed victorious to God. Peace they had ever loved; peace they commended to our care; and with peace they went to God, leaving no sorrow to their mother [the church], no strife or warfare to their brothers, but joy, peace, concord, and love.

Inner peace in the heart of raging persecution, nothing could have laid a better foundation for the church in southern France than the testimony of the martyrs at Lyon in AD 177. One wave of persecution followed another. With the passing of time, persecution under Roman pagans became persecution under Roman "Christians," but the believers of Gaul never forgot how the first among them lived and died.

That memory, as century after century passed, became ever more precious—and costly.

The Flower of Faith in Languedoc

As usually happens in migrations of the church, only the most dedicated Christians moved from Asia Minor to the Roman frontier. A few, like Alexander the doctor from Phrygia, came with an education. But most who followed him were illiterate brothers and sisters that settled with their children in villages along the Rhone. From there, frequently driven by persecution, they spread north into Lugdunensis (Lyon) and Germania, east into the snow-crowned Alps, and west across the Cevennes into green valleys sheltering the Gallic cities of Albi and Tolosa (Toulouse).

Unlike sophisticated “Christians” in Greek cities and Rome, many Gallic believers kept to a simple, practical faith. Feeling their own guilt and helplessness before Christ, they responded to him with open hearts and ever increasing love for his mercy on them. This, demonstrated by how they lived, led to the conversion of hundreds, and eventually thousands, of Gauls.

⁷ From a letter recorded by Eusebius (AD 263-339) in his history of the Church.

Convinced Asian believers and converted Gauls, now the church in western Europe had potential to note! The Gauls (Celts, first galled *Galli* by the Romans) had long distinguished themselves, not for their organisation but for resistance under attack. Even though the Romans conquered them, they never became Roman at heart. Neither did they become French in AD 486 when the last Roman troops retreated from Gaul and the region fell to the Franks.

They stayed Christian.

Like all who lived in French territories along the Mediterranean Sea, these Christians kept the *Languedoc* (language where one says “oc” instead of “oui” as in French) and prepared to stand for what they believed.

Roman military rule, under Clovis, chief of the Franks, ended. But because he had converted to Roman Catholicism, domination from Rome only increased. Clovis set out to bring all Christians by force into the Roman church and began, for the believers who worked the farms and vineyards of the Languedoc region, a trial of faith that would far surpass anything they had known.

Thankfully, they did not stand alone. Visiting brothers and sisters from the east kept them in touch with other believers, especially those of Bosnia and Dalmatia.

What were those believers like?

A thousand years after Roman Catholic persecutors destroyed their writings and left little but slanderous accounts of their own, it is not easy to know the truth. That some of them, commonly known as *Cathari* (pure ones) or in south Slavic countries as *Bogomili* (those under the Lord's mercy), misunderstood Scriptures and taught certain things wrong seems likely. Speculation about the origin of matter and spirit caused confusion in their time and led some into unbalanced asceticism. But from a description of the church in Bosnia we read:

They had no priests, or rather the priesthood of all believers was acknowledged. The churches were guided by elders chosen by lot, several in each congregation, an overseer (called grandfather), and ministering brothers called leaders and elders. Meetings could be held in any house and the regular meeting-places were quite plain, no bells, no altar, only a table, on which might be a white cloth and a copy of the Gospels. A part of the earnings of the brethren was set aside for the relief of sick believers, for the poor, and for the support of those who travelled to preach the Gospel among the unconverted.⁸

Nowhere did this “preaching to the unconverted” bear more fruit, in spite of persecution, than in southern France. From sunny olive groves in Provence, through the Rhone Delta to Lyon and Toulouse—the entire Languedoc region—the movement grew by the eleventh century to include thousands of people. Many villages consisted exclusively of non-Roman-Catholic believers, and in Albi on the Tarn (a tributary of the Garonne) they became so numerous their enemies eventually identified the whole movement as that of the *Albigenses*.

⁸ From *Short History of Bosnian Bogomils*, Mediaeval Cathares History

Faith Growing

Unlike the leaders of the state church whom the Christians of Languedoc criticised for their great wealth and immorality, their own leaders were simple, frugal men. Even their enemies knew them as men of their word, modest in dress and habits, and unusually ready to give their lives for what they believed. One of the first of them about whom we have many details was Pierre, a brother from the village of Bruys.

At the end of the tenth century, Pierre (who had been a priest but left Roman Catholicism after his conversion) began to visit the homes of seekers in the

mountainous region east of the Rhone. From Die and Gap to Embrun, at the foot of the Massif de Champsaur he travelled on foot, encouraging believers and holding meetings wherever he could. “Why have church buildings,” he asked the people, “if the Church of Christ consists not in walls, but in the community of the faithful? If we may as well pray to God in a barn, and be heard, if worthy, in a stable as before an altar?”⁹

Like the first Christians, Pierre taught the people that faith and repentance must accompany baptism for it to be valid sign. Therefore he saw no use for the baptism of infants. He also rejected Roman Catholic teaching about the bread and wine. “Jesus gave himself once for all,” he told the people. “We do not need to offer him up again. We need no priests or sacrifice.”¹⁰

Wherever he travelled, throughout the Languedoc countryside, Pierre found ready listeners. What he said confirmed what a large number already believed, and brought others to think seriously. But his teaching enraged Roman Catholic authorities. Even more than his rejection of church buildings and ritual was his feeling about crosses. “The cross,” he said, “was the instrument of Christ’s death. Why venerate it or keep it on continual display? Much rather, we should be ashamed of the cross!”

As a result of Pierre’s teaching, mountain people may have burned wayside crosses. In communities where everyone got converted, they may have torn down “idolatrous churches” like Pierre said they should. But what can clearly be proven is that Roman Catholic authorities, instigated by priests threatened with losing their jobs, burned Pierre alive at St. Gilles, near the old Gallic city of Nimes.

After Pierre de Bruys’s death the bishops of Embrun and Arles, with the fervent support of the Abbot of Cluny, led a campaign against the believers in eastern Languedoc, only to have them become—in the west, around Albi and Toulouse, and along the Mediterranean coast—more numerous than ever.

⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia: *Petrobrusians* ¹⁰ *ibid.*

Under pressure from Rome the city of Toulouse finally passed a law, in AD 1119, that all babies of the region had to be baptised. But believers paid scant attention to it and Henri, a converted monk from Lausanne, became active as an evangelist in Pierre’s place.

The Fruit of Faith

When arrested and brought to trial for their actions, the early Albigensian believers of Languedoc surprised their accusers. Even though many could not read and were simple farmers or craftsmen, they knew the Scriptures well. Especially from the Gospels they could quote long portions—entire chapters or even the Gospels themselves. This had to do with what they believed. The Albigenses believed God is all around and in creation, but that we cannot see him or speak directly with him. They believed the Word of God became flesh in Christ. Christ is an expression of God and as humans we may relate to him. In third place, they believed the Spirit is subject to Christ and lives in us, showing us what is true and false.

Because they expected to relate directly and only to Christ, his words became of utmost importance. The early Albigenses set their hope in his favour and took his example for their guide in life.

Following Christ they refused to swear oaths in any form. They did not take interest on money. They returned good for evil and suffered violence rather than take up arms in self-defence.

Simple faith in Christ brought them to confess their faults to him and to one another, rather than seek the services of a “mediatorial church.”

Members One of Another

Not only did the Albigenses confess their faults among themselves. They believed like Paul that we are “members one of another”¹¹ and did what they could to encourage whoever belonged to the body of Christ.

Within the Albigensian congregation *credentes* (believing members) and *perfecti* (complete members) lived in remarkable unity. Everyone—the mature and the immature, the fully committed and those still finding their way—discovered the place best for them. But no one could join an Albigensian congregation before passing through a novitiate. Questions asked of them during that time included the following:

Do you pray before mounting a horse, boarding a vessel, entering a town, or walking across a log bridge?

When you see something lying on the road that is not yours, do you pick it up?

Do you pray before and after meals?

Do you visit the sick and show concern for the spiritual welfare of others? Do you pay your debts?

¹¹ Ephesians 4:25

On their acceptance as believing members men and women promised to hold their heart and goods, both present and future, at the disposal of the Lord and his community. If later on they desired complete membership they received, on top of this, the *consolamentum* (the comforting of the Holy Ghost). This, according to a sermon on baptism given in Languedoc during the thirteenth century, was to take place as follows:

The Bonne Homme [presiding elder] in charge shall admonish him [the applicant] and teach him with words appropriate for his consolamentum, saying: “Pierre, you wish to receive the baptism through which the Holy Spirit is given to the church of God with the holy pronouncement and the laying on of hands. Of this baptism our Lord speaks in Matthew 28:19-20, and other places. He set the pattern for this laying on of hands himself (Mark 16:18, etc.) and afterwards Paul and Barnabas practised it in several places. Through it the Holy Spirit comes to the church and this custom has been kept from the apostles’ time until now, passed on from Bonne Homme to Bonne Homme, and will be passed on to the end of the world.

You must understand that power is given to the church of God to bind and loose, to forgive and retain sin, as Christ said (John 20:21, etc.). If you wish to receive this power, you must also keep the commandments of Christ and the New Testament to the best of your ability. He commands us not to commit adultery or murder, not to lie or swear oaths, and to keep from stealing. On the contrary, we are to pardon and love our enemies, pray for those who speak against us, if one strikes us on one cheek we are to turn to him the other as well. We are to hate the world and the things that are in the world (1 John 2:16-17, etc.)¹²

If the applicant committed himself to this way of life in Christ, the Bonnes Hommes placed a copy of the New Testament on his head, laid hands on him, and prayed. Then they received him as a complete member with the kiss of peace.

Albigensian brothers greeted one another like this and sisters did the same, among themselves. Complete members (always single) greeted those of the opposite sex only by touching elbows and never sat beside them on a bench, no matter how long it was.

The Trust of Membership

To be a complete member of the Albigensian community was no light or easy matter. One promised to remain single, to renounce all material possession, and to spend one's life in voluntary service for others. Complete members could not work for wages or commit themselves to a trade. They lived entirely at the mercy, and in the service, of the believing members' community.

¹² From a sermon preserved in a hand-written copy of a Provençal New Testament at the St. Pierre palace library in Lyon.

Among the complete members the *sandaliati* (sandalled ones) spent much time teaching the *novellani* (novices). Together they memorised and copied Scriptures, visited seekers, and made long trips on foot to spread the good news of the peace of Christ. All leaders of the Albigensian church, conjointly known as Bonnes Hommes but holding the offices of deacons, elders, and overseers, were complete members. Of these, the congregation chose none to leadership before they turned twenty, and then only if they had proven themselves for at least six years of complete membership.

Communion

An account from the twelfth century lets us know how the Albigenses celebrated communion:

When the congregation comes together, both brothers and sisters, they spread a table or bench with a clean cloth and set a cup of good pure wine and an unleavened cake or loaf upon it. Then the brother in charge says: "Let us ask God to forgive our sins for his mercy's sake, and to fill us, for his mercy's sake, with everything for which we rightfully ask. Then let us pray the Lord's prayer seven times to the honour of God and the Holy Trinity."

On their knees the congregation follows these instructions. Then the brother takes a white cloth and hangs it over his left shoulder. With his bare right hand he wraps the loaf or cake in the cloth and holds it to his breast. Standing like this he repeats the words our Lord used at the Last Supper. Then he makes the sign [of the cross] over the bread and wine, and breaks the bread. While he does this, the congregation stands, but when he finishes they seat themselves at the table, every member in proper order [from the oldest to the youngest]. As every one receives

the bread and wine from the brother in charge he says, “*Benedicite, Senher*” (bless me Lord). The brother in charge replies, “*Deus vos benedicat*” (God will bless you). Then their service is over and they believe this to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ.”¹³

Not only at formal meetings, but day after day in their homes the Albigenses enjoyed quiet times of communion together. Before every meal they stood in silence for twenty to thirty minutes. Then, in an audible voice, everyone said together: “Lord have mercy on us! Christ have mercy on us! Lord have mercy on us!” The oldest one present asked for the blessing: “May the Lord, who blessed the five loaves and two fishes in the wilderness, bless this table with everything on it—and everything yet to come—in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” Then they all sat down.

After eating, everyone held and lifted their hands in a circle. They turned their faces toward heaven and the oldest one would say: “May God reward and give food to all who benefit and bless us. May God who gives us earthly food bless us with spiritual food as well. May God be with us and we with him forever.”

The meal ended when all said “Amen.” After the evening meal in Albigensian homes someone passed a hand-written copy of a Gospel or another Scripture around for everyone to read from. Those who could not read, or who had no copies of Scripture, quoted by memory. Then the older ones among them—parents, grandparents, or visiting perfecti—shared an instructive message.

¹³ From the records of the Inquisition in Languedoc, early 1300s.

Family Life

Even though the perfecti—complete members—did not marry in imitation of Christ, believing members of the Albigensian church lived and worked in exemplary family settings. Children learned the way of truth at an early age and considered hard work a virtue. Women occupied an important place in the congregation, as well as the men, but never in teaching or leadership positions. Those who remained single could (and usually did) become complete members. The Albigenses’ Roman Catholic enemies accused them of Manichaeism (the belief that matter is evil and spirit is good). No doubt they had reasons for their charge. Some of the Albigenses’ practices appear to fall in line with this oriental, third century, teaching. But the very accusations of state church inquisitors shed more light on the matter.

Roman Catholics accused Albigensian believers of forbidding to eat meat. At the same time they accused them of eating meat on holy days. They also accused Albigenses of forbidding to marry. Yet they blamed them for forcing priests and monks to take wives.

The truth, no doubt, lies somewhere in between. Many Albigenses, perhaps all complete members, lived as vegetarians. To live as lightly “in the flesh” and as close to heavenly freedom as possible, already in this life, was their goal. The same feeling led them to prefer the unmarried state. Even Paul wrote of greater freedom for the unmarried. But where men and women could not live single lives productively, or if they developed affections for the opposite sex (as many priests or monks had), the Albigenses definitely preferred marriage above living in hypocrisy or sin.

Pierre Valdes

While Albigenses multiplied among the vineyards of Languedoc and Provence, others sought Christ in the east, in lands north of the Alps, and in the great cultural centres of Italy itself. In Milan a deacon named Arialdo began to gather with his friends in the *pataria* (a low class sector of the city). People called them *patarini*. Disgusted with the priests' low living, Rome's wealth and greed, and above all with the pope himself, they turned to Christ's teaching for direction.

Through Switzerland and the Rhein valley, itinerant weavers carried the convictions of the *patarini* to Alsace, Belgium, and beyond—growing in witness and reputation until the words *tisserand* (weaver) and *heretic* became interchangeable. By the 1180s their work had produced such widespread results in the Netherlands that fierce persecution broke out against them.

Far to the south in Gascony (the land of the Basques) between France and Spain, another movement of believers emerged. Like the Albigenses they did not baptise infants or believe the sacrament of communion took away sins. They loved Christ and followed him in simplicity, poverty, and chastity. In

1160 a group of these believers, thirty men and women travelling together, appeared at Oxford in England. The English stripped them to the waist and drove them from town in mid-winter, to freeze.

In 1191, in Corazzo on the island of Sicily, a Cistercian abbot suddenly renounced his position and turned to the mountains. His name was Gioacchino. Surrounded by friends in the wilderness, he saw the ages of the Father (the Old Testament period) and of the Son (the time of the institutional church) as nearly over, and the

age of the Spirit about to begin. Gioacchino envisioned this final period in God's plan to be one of great peace between heaven and earth, and community among men. But the only ones to take part in it, he believed, would be those who followed Christ and completely denied the world.

During Gioacchino's time¹⁴ the fun-loving son of a rich merchant in the mountain town of Assisi, north of Rome, also renounced his wealth and began to pray. His name was Francis. A group of friends joined him to become the order of *friars minor* (lesser brothers).

All these men, the women who followed them, and the movements that took shape around them, deeply affected the search for Christ in mediaeval Europe. But none, perhaps, affected it more than a new voice from France.

"In 1173, at Lyon in France," begins an anonymous account written forty-five years later, "there lived a man, Pierre Valdés by name, who had made himself a fortune by wicked usury. On a certain Lord's Day he joined a crowd gathered to hear the words of an itinerant preacher. He was smitten by what the preacher said. He took him to his house and heard more. The next morning he hurried to the priests' school to ask what he should do for his soul. The priests told him many things. Finally he asked their teacher what the most safe and certain way was to God. The teacher told him, 'If you want to be perfect, go sell everything you have and give your things to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven.'"

The old chronicle describes what happened afterward:

Pierre Valdés went to talk with his wife, at once. He gave her the choice of staying with him or of staying with his possessions he had decided to abandon: his ponds, orchards, fields, houses, rents, vineyards, mills, and fishing rights. She was much displeased at having to make this choice, but decided to keep the real estate.

With some of his money Pierre made restitution to everyone he had treated unjustly. He gave another part of it to his little daughters he placed in the care of the sisters of Font Everard. But the greatest part of his money he gave to the poor. A very great famine oppressed France and Germany at that time. Pierre Valdés gave bread, vegetables and meat to every one who came to him. He did this three days a week, every week from Pentecost to the feast of St. Peter's bonds.

¹⁴ Gioacchino entered English histories as Joachim of Fiore.

On the day of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin, while Pierre was in the middle of town throwing money to the poor, he cried, “No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Some men of the town came running up to take him, thinking he had lost his mind. But stepping up to where all could hear him he said, “Fellow-citizens and friends, I am not insane, as you think. I am only avenging myself on my enemies—money and created things—who kept me their slave this long. All this time I have been more concerned about money than God. All this time I have served created things instead of the Creator. Now I know that many of you will accuse me for doing this openly. But I do it for my own good and for yours. I do it so any who see me have money in the future may accuse me with reason of being crazy. I do it so you may learn to put your hope in God and not in riches.”¹⁵

Another writer of the early thirteenth century, Pierre de Pilichdorf (a man not in sympathy with Pierre’s decision), described what happened when Pierre followed Christ:

A wealthy citizen [Pierre de Valdés] of the southern frontier of France heard how the Lord said to a youth, “If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give it to the poor.” He also heard the Lord’s words to the youth (who went away sad, because he was rich and had many possessions): “It is nearly impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. . . . It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Then he heard of Peter who told Christ, “Look, we have left all things and followed you.”

When he heard these Scriptures, Pierre de Valdés, concluded that no one on earth followed Christ anymore. But he resolved to do so. He sold everything he had and gave it to the poor. Then he lived in poverty himself. Some who saw what he did were touched in their hearts, and did the same. . . . After a time of living in poverty, these people remembered that Christ’s disciples were not only poor. They also preached. So, in like manner, they began to go among the people and preach the Word of God. When this was reported to the Lord Bishop [Bishop Jean de Lyon] he commanded them to stop, because ignorant and uneducated people have no right to preaching of the Word of God. But they refused to obey and thought the bishop and his court were only jealous

of their success. Then the [Roman Catholic] church excommunicated them. But they persisted in their activities and earned for themselves official condemnation.

¹⁵ From a translation by J. H. Robinson, in *Readings in European History Readings in European History* 383

The Poor

The Spirit of Christ—never as powerful as when unleashed among the poor — found an open door to Europe in the 1100s. Poor people everywhere, in crowded urban misery, on feudal estates, serving corrupt churchmen that oppressed and abused them, turned in amazing numbers to the Gospel.

They could understand the Gospel of Christ—especially in southern France.

After Pierre’s conversion a great number of Albigensian believers of the region (many of whose own leaders had become lukewarm and careless) identified with him at once. But Roman Catholic authorities became furious. “What might the church come to,” they stormed, “if unlearned men throw the Scriptures before the masses in their own language? Why, any farmer or housewife will do with them what they want!”

Called the *pauperes de Lugdunum* (the poor of Lyon) Pierre de Valdés and his friends went out to tell the world what they had found. An English theologian, Walter Map, who came to know them on a trip to Italy, wrote in 1179:

These people have no fixed residence. They go around two by two, barefooted and dressed in woollen tunics. They own nothing. Whatever they use they hold in common, after the manner of the apostles. Naked, they follow a naked Christ. As of now their impact is still negligible, because their following is small. But if we were to leave them alone, I do not doubt they might yet be the ruin of us all.¹⁶

An inquisitor, sent by Roman Catholic authorities to suppress the Poor remarked. “Not one of them, old or young, man or woman, by day or by night ever stops learning and teaching others.” He also quoted one of the Poor brought before him: “In our homes, women teach as well as men, and one who has been a student for a week teaches another.”¹⁷

Unlike Gioacchino’s movement in the mountains of southern Italy, the Poor of Lyon lived in the city. Giorgio Tourn, a Waldensian historian, writes:

They wished to be part and parcel of the life of the city. They were not hermits seeking the solitude of the desert. Their calling was to be present in churches,

public squares and homes where their message could be heard. They were and wished to remain citizens of Lyon, one of the great cities of western Europe, on the route of the crusades where St. Bernard had preached, where a great cathedral, St. John's, was under construction. This urban environment was their world. To it belonged the promise of transformation. Here they chose to live out their discipleship.¹⁸

¹⁶ From *De nugis curialium* quoted in *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*

¹⁷ Tourn, Giorgio, and Associates, *You Are My Witnesses: The Waldensians across 800 Years*, Claudiana Editrice, Torino, 1989

¹⁸ *ibid.*

The Poor in Lombardy

Across the Cottian Alps, in the city of Milan and plains of Lombardy around it, messengers from Lyon found prepared soil. The Patarini still met in Milan. Among them—as among others who prayed to Christ—their teaching took root and grew into a healthy plant of its own. In fact, it grew into an expression of Christian living unlike anything the Poor had known. Giorgio Tourn writes:

The witness given by the Poor in Lombardy very soon became independent of the Lyonese pattern. The Lombards tended to see the apostolic calling as one rooted in community (*societas*), and not necessarily implying itinerant preaching. They felt that to travel across the countryside preaching was one way of living “like the apostles,” but not the only way. Another was to share commitment unselfishly with one's sisters and brothers in the faith. In other words, the Lombard Poor reflected the emphasis recorded in Acts 1-4 on Christian community, while their counterparts from Lyon honed in on the missionary message of the Jesus they found in Matthew 10.

It was not by accident that the main point of discussion between the two groups was on the way they should regard work. According to the Lyonese, labour was an impediment to witness and a temptation to accumulate wealth. For the Lombards one's daily task was an instrument of service, the opportunity for concrete witness. The Poor of Lyon tended to be pilgrim preachers, bards of conversion not greatly dissimilar from the wandering minstrels of the time. The central figure for the Lombard Poor, on the other hand, was the artisan, the woolcarder in a textile shop, the labourer, the worker.

A deep sense of social solidarity was found among the Lombard Poor. They possessed considerable organizing ability. Their life and witness were well structured, and not, as in Lyon, somewhat euphoric and spontaneous.

Domingo

Whether settled in Christian communities or out on the road preaching, all the Poor drew the clouds of Europe's wrath down on them, sooner or later. A hundred years before Pierre Valdes's time, European authorities already burned non-Roman-Catholics at the stake—fourteen at Orleans in 1022, more at Aachen in Germany, and after 1100 a great many Albigenses in Arles, Toulouse and Narbonne (cities of the Languedoc region) and neighbouring Gascony. But the storm did not break loose until a young man from Spain, Domingo de Guzmán, appeared.

After his mother died, Domingo's wealthy father sent to him to study in southern France. There, at his uncle's home, he came to know the Albigenses (still strong in numbers even though fallen, somewhat, from their early principles). He observed the Waldensian movement rapidly growing out of it. He learned of the Patarini, the Tisserands, and "poor" Christians like them that captured the imagination of Europe, and felt discouraged. "What shall become of our mother, the Catholic church," he wondered, "if all this goes to seed?"

Sitting outside the Languedoc village of Fanjeaux on the summer evening of July 22, 1206 (the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene) the solution suddenly came to Domingo de Guzmán. The poor, it dawned on him, must be conquered by the poor!

The "heretical" Poor multiplied so rapidly, Domingo reasoned, because they saw nothing but wealth and corruption in the state church. But if Roman Catholics—even just a few— would turn to living in simplicity, poverty, and chastity like Christ, what would they have to say? With an option for real Christian living *within* the Catholic church, wouldn't many seekers prefer it and not "go astray"?

Looking out across the wide and fertile plains of Languedoc, where the steeples of Carcassonne, Castelnaudary, and Montreal stood in the glow of sunset among ripening grain, Domingo sat lost in thought. Then, scarcely believing his eyes, he jumped to his feet. What was it! The heavens opened, not once, but three times, for a burning orb to appear and descend on an abandoned church at Prouille, a village between Fanjeaux and Montréal in the very heart of the Albigensian region.

Domingo could wait no longer. He took the vision as a sign of God's approval on his idea and asked the Bishop of Toulouse for the abandoned church. With the friends who joined him there—all devout Catholics—he shed his wealth and comfort to begin living like Pierre Valdes. He put on rough clothes and sandals, and walked with his friends from village to village preaching the message of Christ—and more.

Unlike the “heretics” Domingo and his friends (who became the “Dominican” order) swore a solemn oath to remain true to the “holy Roman church.” They taught people to follow Christ where it suited, but that no one could hope for salvation outside of going to mass, confessing to a priest, and belonging to the state church.

By the time they had worked ten years in southern France and abroad, the pope recognised the Dominicans as “Christ's invincible athletes” and a wealthy nobleman, Simon de Montfort, gave them the feudal estate of Casseneuil for their headquarters.

Blood and Smoke

Less than a year after Domingo's vision the pope (who supported him) sent a letter “to all prelates, counts, and barons and to all people in the kingdom of France” calling on them to “avenge the insult of the Crucified One” by cleansing the land of heresy. To whoever would take part in this “crusade” he promised forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Domingo de Guzmán found himself surrounded with loyal supporters at once. The Bishop of Toulouse (monk, songwriter, and professional clown) took it upon himself to make the crusade even more attractive. “Not only will your sins be forgiven,” he promised the people. “If you lose your lives in this campaign you will die as martyrs and bypass Purgatory!”

From all over France and other European countries the “crusaders” came. Responding to pleas of the Abbot of Citeaux, the Duke of Narbonne, and the Archbishops of Reims, Sens, and Rouen, counts and noblemen came with around twenty thousand knights on horseback and two hundred thousand foot soldiers, followed by innumerable priests and common people. Religious fanatics, highwaymen, thieves, or simple peasants looking for adventure—all found their way to southern France. The pope put their families and the

homes they left behind under special protection. He absolved them from paying debts for the time being, and with the Bishop of Toulouse prayed blessings on their swords and spears.

The deluge of fire and blood began in Languedoc in 1208. After the Bishop, in full pontifical attire, had blessed the crusaders and told them, “Up to now you have fought for the earthly. Now you may fight for the eternal!” they fell on Chasseneuil (a town with a large percentage of Albigensian residents) and Béziers.

At Béziers the crusaders told city authorities to give up the “heretics” among them so the rest might be spared. But the authorities (even though Catholic) could not do so in good conscience and perhaps twenty thousand died as crusaders lit the city and put all who escaped to the sword. During the massacre—a deliberate attempt at terrorising other Languedoc towns—the Abbot of Citeaux encouraged crusaders confused as to who was a heretic or not: “Kill them all! The Lord will know his own!”

From here the crusaders swept like a tornado westward, burning one hundred and forty Albigenses at Minerve, hanging eighty at Lavaur, burning another four hundred at that place several months later, and eighty at Castres, between Albi and Carcassonne. Wherever they went on their wild and bloody rampage they left a trail of destruction behind—burnt buildings, homeless orphans, and entire villages in ruins. So outrageously did they treat their victims, violating the omen and mutilating men, gouging out eyes and slitting noses, that thousands who were not Albigenses resisted crusading troops and the region erupted in civil war.

Feudal lords of the region did what they could to protect the Albigenses but one after another their castles fell. New crusaders kept pouring in from Germany, Italy, and faraway Slavic lands until Languedoc lay devastated and attention shifted to the Poor. In 1221, Conrad, bishop of Portuis, founded the Military Order of the Faith of Jesus Christ. Three years later, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor, ordered the Poor of Lombardy rounded up, burned at the stake, and their property confiscated. This, within a short time, became standard procedure in Roman Catholic lands. Then, in 1231, Pope Gregory IX established the Holy Office of Inquisition.

Hounds of Heresy

In the late 1220s the crusaders left southern France and returned home. Of the Albigensian community they had nothing left to destroy. But what disappeared from sight by no means disappeared from memory or soul.

What believers in southern France had treasured for a thousand years—the joy of living with Christ, untrammelled by state church controls—could not be quickly extinguished. In fact, the crusade against the Albigenses did little else than confirm true seekers in their belief that the church of Rome was the “devil’s horde.” For every Albigensian believer that lost his life in southern France, three more joined movements of the Poor in other parts of Europe, and worried authorities scurried to find new tactics of suppression.

Once again Dominicans took the lead, followed closely by Francis of Assisi’s by now thoroughly catholicised and “orthodox” Friars Minor. *Fratres praedicatores* (preaching brothers) fast became *fratres persecutores* (persecuting brothers) as the mendicant orders became Rome’s hounds to sniff out the “heresies” of Europe. In nearly all important cities Dominicans took charge of the pope’s Holy Office.

Their technique was simple.

Dominican Inquisitors moved into an area. They proclaimed a period of grace during which “heretics” could voluntarily recant and receive pardon. Then, after a few weeks, they began to accept denunciations. All those accused, even anonymously, by two or more informers, they arrested and tried, often under torture.

A solemn oath to speak the truth, requested when Inquisition trials began, more often than not settled the case at once. Neither the Albigenses nor the Poor that followed them would swear. Therefore, accused men or women who refused the oath, invited Dominican suspicion and torture to extract more evidence. Believers had their toes and fingers pinched. Professional torturers pulled them up with ropes (often upside down), stretched their limbs on racks and wheels, burned them with coals, or poured boiling water down their throats. “*Ou non valsenhe agols, val bagols,*” (where kindness fails, sticks will succeed) the Inquisitors believed, and when “heretics” refused to recant they brought them before church and state officials to hear their sentence in an *auto-da-fé* (act of faith).

Following excommunication and the Roman church’s official curse, civil authorities led “heretics” promptly to the site of execution, usually a stake

where they burned them alive. All their property fell into the hands of their persecutors that used the money they got from it to build new churches and monasteries, equip more crusades, and make the life of the upper hierarchy ever more luxurious.

Under powerful and gifted men, the Holy Office of Inquisition became Rome's long shadow hanging over Europe.¹⁹ But the flower of faith, once blooming in Languedoc, had gone to seed and no amount of determined effort could exterminate it again.

The Witness Spreads

No matter how great the power of Roman Catholic armies and kings, no matter how glorious their churches, their music, or religious pageantry, those who sought rest for their souls kept looking elsewhere for direction. More often than not they looked to the Poor.

¹⁹ Nowhere did the Holy Office of Inquisition become a more dreaded and powerful force than in Spain and its colonies, where it monitored all of life until the nineteenth century. In 1908 the pope renamed it the "Congregation of the Holy Office," and in 1965 it became the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" with increasing emphasis on promoting Catholic doctrine and less on combating heresy. Its offices are in Vatican City.

Unlike wealthy churchmen and conniving monks, the Poor led godly lives. Love for Christ drew them out of worldly comforts to set an example of honesty and justice for all. For this reason it did not take long, after their dispersion from southern France and Lombardy, until new groups of seekers formed around them. From Lyon the Poor fled north through Toul and Metz into the Rhein valley. So numerous did they become in Toul by 1192 that the city published an edict against them. Nineteen years later, in 1211, authorities burned eighty in Strasbourg.

From Lombardy's Christian communes—*scholae* like those of Milan, Bergamo, Brescia, Como, and Pavia—messengers found their way north into Switzerland and beyond. So thoroughly did the witness of Lombardian brothers like Ugolo and Algosso, penetrate the region that by the mid-1200s one could travel from Florence in Italy to Cologne on the Rhein, lodging in believers' homes every night along the way. Refugees followed the messengers north and *scholae* sprang up far more rapidly than Inquisitors could keep track of them.

Wherever they met, the Poor—or Waldenses, as they became known—learned from handwritten copies of the Scriptures they passed from place to place. Young people memorised them and the Scriptures became a guide for their life together. As persecution increased it became impossible to preach on street corners and in public meetings, but the strength of the movement only grew. In the words of one historian:

It was a clandestine world throughout, one that made the most of night meetings in stables and back rooms of little shops. Each generation was careful to transmit the faith to the succeeding one, the young sitting at the feet of elders, who in turn had received instruction from their parents. . . .

The Poor were constrained to keep the faith alive within the walls of their homes—indeed within the recesses of their own hearts. Yet if the streets were closed to them, they still had their gatherings in the kitchen, at their washing places by the streams, and in their shops. The Lombard schola thus lived again in the Waldensian home, a secure place where teaching and mutual strengthening in the faith could be carried on.²⁰

Not only did brothers and sisters draw closer one to another in adversity, they drew closer to Christ, the living Word. An anonymous reporter from Passau on the Danube wrote in the thirteenth century:

All those men and women from Lyon, young and old, keep learning all the time, by day and by night. Tradesmen work by day and study by night. . . .

²⁰Tourn, Giorgio, *You are my Witnesses*

Newly converted ones, after a few days, are already drawing others into the sect.”²¹

Believers wrote instructive letters one to another and met when they could for encouragement. But nothing did more for them than personal hunger for truth. Studying the Scriptures themselves (an illegal act in France after 1229 and in other countries soon afterward), they discovered what to believe and why, making it possible for a Roman Catholic Inquisitor to report of a “heretic”:

With wonderful liberty he told the court that he would not swear oaths, he did not believe in auricular confession, in the infallibility of church councils, the ceremony of the mass, blind obedience to the church, university degrees and titles, the use of worldly force by church leaders, and worldly rule by Christians.

With such clarity, nothing could stop the witness of the Poor from exploding through German lands.

The Poor in German Lands

Nothing, of what is left today, testifies more powerfully to the Waldenses' activity in northern Europe than the records of the Inquisition itself. Dammbach in Austria, St. Michael am Bruckbach bei Seitenstetten, Rabenbühel, Derfl, Unterwölfen, Holzappelberg, Weistrach, Schwamming— village after village, Hof after Hof, produced its convinced believers, and more often than not, its martyrs.

Like the Albigenses, years earlier in southern France, these German believers were common people, most of them illiterate. They were busy wives in wimples with children clinging to their skirts, farmers threshing their wheat or making hay together, and young people anxious to please God. In fact, many of them were people on whom the Roman Catholic church had made slight impressions.

Long before arrival of the Poor, the rulers of German lands had accepted Christianity. Counts and nobles had ordered the people baptised and forced them to attend mass. But for many in rural areas the Christian religion remained a matter of state and high society. Beneath their "Christian" obligations (getting their children baptised and attending mass several times a year) rural Germans kept many beliefs of their pagan ancestors alive. They feared the dark. They feared the great forests around them (believing them inhabited by strange spirits) and lived in frequent violence and misery. Men mistreated women and children grew up to lead wild, unhappy lives. Then came the Poor, not only teaching, but living like Christ.

Was this the real church? Unlike what they had heard before, the Gospel taught by the Poor called for drastic changes from sinful to holy living and brought rich and poor, high and low, men and women, onto the same level in Christ. It separated the sincere from the light-hearted like Alpine farmers separated their sheep from the goats. And even the brothers that came with the message stood in sharpest contrast to black robed priests from Rome.

Like the people they spoke to they were tradesmen and farmers with common names: Ulrich a shoemaker from Hardeck, Johann a wool spinner from Dichartz, Hans, a smith from the valley of the Enns. . . .

²¹ *ibid.*

Because it spoke to their hearts, Germans from the Alps to the North Sea, and from the Netherlands to Austria, listened gladly to the message of the Poor and passed it on. Hermann, a brother from the Mistelgau, and a man named Johann travelled up the Danube valley and through Swabia. Nikolaus, a miller's son from Plauen, and Konrad, from Sachsen, carried it through Hessen, Thüringen, and the German lowlands past Hannover to Bremen. By the mid-1200s the Inquisition reported large concentrations of the Poor in Württemberg and Bavaria, in Sachsen and the Low Countries, and an estimate of eighty thousand in Austria—an alarming situation it could by no means leave unchallenged.

Already in the 1230s—while the crusade against the Albigenses in southern France tailed off—German princes organised massive *Ketzerjagde* (heretic hunts) with the help of the Dominican order. They burned Waldensian believers in Vienna, in Hamburg, in Bavaria, in Erfurt, and in towns of the Brandenburg region around Berlin. Four hundred died in Stettin (Szczecin) on the Baltic, and untold others in Flanders, the Alsatian region, and Switzerland.

Seeking a place to escape, some believers dug underground catacombs, earning for themselves the name of *Grubenheimer* (cave dwellers) or *turilupini* (those who live among wolves). Others fled east to Latvia and Russia. But none, perhaps, made a more significant decision than the Poor that fled, in the 1480s, to the Czech territories of Bohemia and Moravia.

4

The Lamb On The Throne

“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain. . . . After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. . . . These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7: 9-14).

Seized with a vision of God’s Lamb standing good for them in heaven, those who sought him in mediaeval Europe could do nothing other than fall at his feet and worship him. Every word he spoke, recorded in the Gospels, was for them a word from heaven. They took everything they knew of his earthly walk as their pattern, and lived on his promise of eternal life.

Eager for the words of Christ and the first Christians’ testimony about him, the Poor copied, read, and memorised the New Testament zealously. Paper and ink were scarce, but young believers with keen minds abounded. In the scholae they formed teams for scripture memorisation. By two and threes they learned alternate portions so that whenever they met they were sure to have the entire New Testament, and more, ready for recital on call.

The earliest hand written Scriptures used by the Poor followed Jerome’s Latin text, adjusted to the dialects of Italy and southern France. But as their witness spread north and east, they undertook translations of their own. Flemish, German, and Czech scriptures appeared, followed by others in Hungarian and Baltic languages. Already in the 1300s state authorities discovered a complete New Testament in German, along with a translation of Paul’s letter to the Laodiceans. Soon afterward Plattdeutsch scriptures came to light in the lower Rhein valley, Lübeck, and Halberstadt. Heinrich Eggstein, a Waldensian believer, printed a German Bible only eleven years after Johann Gutenberg, in 1466.

Most Waldensian translations were imperfect, often incomplete works, the product of teachers writing and studying on the run. But the Spirit brought their words to life and those who sought Christ understood his message clearly. “The rule and discipline we accept is to live in every way according to the teaching of the Gospels and to be diligent in keeping them,” a group of Albigensian leaders

had declared in AD 1025. “This teaching is to deny the world, to restrain the flesh and its desires, to work with one’s hands to support oneself, to cause no one harm, to care for the poor, and understanding these rules to put them into practice.”²²

Pierre de Valdés, writing one hundred and fifty years later, shared their conviction:

According to the Apostle James, faith without works is dead. For that reason we have renounced this world and have distributed to the poor all that we possessed, according to the will of God, and we have decided that we ourselves should be poor in such a way as not to be anxious for tomorrow, and as not to accept from anyone gold, silver, or anything else, with the exception of clothing and daily food. We have set before ourselves the objective of fulfilling the gospel purposes.

We believe also that anyone in this age who gives alms, does other good works with one’s own possessions and observes the Lord’s commandments will be saved. Brothers, we make this declaration in order that if anyone should come to you affirming to be one of us, you may know for certain that that person is not one of us if that person does not profess the same faith.²³

In no area did the Poor identify more clearly with the Lord Christ than in his teaching on economics. Even though they left little in writing on the subject, the testimony of their enemies is unanimous. Etienne de Borbonne, a Dominican from Burgundy wrote in the 1200s:

Among other errors, they condemn every person possessing earthly goods. . . . They are called the Poor of Lyons because they began to profess poverty there. They call themselves Poor of Spirit because our Lord said, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit.”

Pierre de Pilichdorff wrote in 1395:

They say that their sect has lasted from the time of Pope Sylvester, namely, when the church began to have possessions of her own. The heretics think that this is not lawful, as the Apostles of Christ were commanded to live without any possession of their own. “Take with you neither gold nor silver. . . .”²⁴

Free of the burden of earthly goods, messengers of the Poor travelled continually. Young brothers, after spending several years in silence and seclusion (an experience considered necessary to become spiritually mature) found their way

from village to village, usually in the company of an experienced messenger. Often they carried goods with them for sale, or practised common trades, to camouflage their work. But wherever they went, they brought the fragrance of Christ with them, and a continual stream of new believers asked for baptism at their hands.

²² From the acts of the synod of Arras, AD 1025.

²³ *Enchiridion Fontium Valdensium*, volume 1, Torre Pellice, 1958, G. Gonnet

²⁴ Petri de Pilichdorf *Sacrae Theologiae Professoris contra Haeresium Valdensium Tractatus*

Baptism was to the Poor a public declaration of one's decision to follow Christ. But they did not believe that water baptism, in itself, has saving power. In 1124 an informer told the Inquisitorial court:

Everyone that is to be baptised, must first believe and confess, and not until then be baptised into the death of Christ, and be buried with him by baptism in order to arise. . . . They (the teachers) can visibly administer water baptism, but they cannot give the Holy Spirit, in whom, nevertheless, all the virtue of baptism consists.²⁵

Two years later, Pierre, abbot of Cluny in southern France, wrote in a tract against the Poor:

They deny that infants who have not yet attained the years of understanding can be saved by the baptism of Christ and say that the faith of another cannot help those who cannot use their own faith. According to their view not the faith of another but each one's own faith saves with baptism, because the Lord says: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

The same abbot, writing against Henri of Toulouse, declared:

He teaches that children may not be baptised or saved through the faith of another, but they must be baptised and saved through their own faith, for baptism without individual faith saves no one. Children who have not yet reached the years of understanding cannot be saved by the baptism of Christ. Those who have been baptised in infancy must, when they become older, be rebaptised for this, he says, is not rebaptising but much rather, baptising right.

Even though it brought them outward trouble the Poor pursued the blessing of Christ through baptism into spiritual communion around bread and wine. One of them, when questioned about their practice described it like this:

After nine o'clock when the supper has been prepared, it is the leader who washes the feet of his companions and dries them with a towel that he wears like an apron. Having done this, the leader sits at the table with the others. Then taking bread, fish and wine, he blesses them, not as an offering or sacrifice, but as a remembrance of the first supper. While he does this he prays: "May Jesus Christ who blessed the five barley loaves and two fishes in the desert and who turned water into wine, bless, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this bread, this fish, and this wine. . ." After this he eats and drinks, then gives to all his companions, who in turn eat and drink.²⁶

²⁵ Rupert Tuiciensis, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*

The joy of fellowship in Christ and with one another prepared the Poor to face the host of Christ's opponents, gathered against them. In a writing called *A Treatise on the Antichrist*, probably of the late 1100s, one of them wrote: The Antichrist teaches men that spiritual new birth comes about through the dead outward act of baptism, that is, the baptism of children. . . . He tries to make unity, not through the Holy Spirit but through worldly power. For this reason he hates and persecutes the members of the body of Christ. He hunts them down, robs them and tries to destroy them. This he does, and many other things, to cover up his hypocrisy. But all idolatry comes from his false teaching on grace through the sacraments, from his abuse of authority, and from the idea of praying to saints rather than to God himself. . . . For a long time the Antichrist has already reigned in the church.

Seeing nothing but the Antichrist raging around them, and the Lord Christ smiling on them from above, the Poor came to hold a drastically "detached" outlook on life. What mediaeval Europeans held in high esteem lost, for them, its attraction. Pleasures of time and sense gave way to the higher pleasure of waiting in the presence of Christ. Another writing circulated among them, *La Nobla Leyczon*, puts this feeling to words:

We should always watch and pray because the world is coming to its end. For the same reason we should strive to do good works. . . . We must desire little, for we are at the very end. We see the signs of the end every day--the increase of evil and the decrease of good. These are the dangers to which the Gospels and the letters

of Paul refer. No one can know when the end will be. Therefore we should be the more vigilant, not knowing if death will seize us today or tomorrow.

When Jesus shall come on the day of judgement, all will receive payment in full, those who have done evil and those who have done good. The Scriptures tell us that all will go one of two ways: the good to glory and the wicked to torment. . . .

We must pray without ceasing that God give us strength against our enemies, to overcome them before our end--they are the world, the devil, and the flesh. God give us wisdom, along with goodness, so we may know the way of truth, keeping pure that spirit God has given us. . . .

After the apostles there were certain teachers who taught the way of Christ our Saviour, and who are found even to this day, known to very few, who would show the way of Jesus Christ. They are so persecuted that they are able to do but little. Many are the false Christians blinded with error who persecute and hate those who are good, and let those live quietly who are false deceivers. But by this we may know that they are not good pastors, for they love not the sheep, but only the wool. Scripture says, and we know it be to be true, that if anyone is good, loving Jesus Christ, that person will neither curse, nor swear, nor lie, will neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor steal, nor be avenged over the enemy. . . . One that is thus persecuted for the sake of the Lord takes courage in this, that the kingdom of heaven shall be inherited at death. . . .

²⁶ From the court testimony of Raymond de la Côte, 1320.

All the popes from Sylvester on, the cardinals, bishops, abbots, and the like, have no power to absolve or pardon any creature so much as one mortal sin. It is God alone who pardons, and no other. This is what pastors ought to do: preach to the people and pray with them, and feed them with teaching from on high.

A young man, helper to a Bonne Homme, said in 1451:

There are only two ways open to all and which determine whether one will be saved or condemned. The one who does good will go to paradise, and the one who does evil will go to hell and damnation. Purgatory does not exist. ²⁷

Such clarity, in the presence of God's Lamb that takes away the sin of the world led the Poor into marvellous unity.

²⁷ *Processo di un Valdese nell' anno 1451, Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*

5

Unity

For as much as they would have liked to, no Inquisitors in France ever caught Pierre Valdés. They chased him instead to Czech Bohemia where, according to reports, he died in 1218 at Klaster near Nová Bystřice, in the Czech territory of Jindřichův Hradec.

He brought something with him.

In a few years of Pierre's death, great numbers had joined the Poor in Czech Bohemia and Moravia. They threw out the images of Roman Catholic saints. They stopped swearing oaths, carrying arms in self-defence, and baptising infants. Here and there, in Plzeň (Pilsen), České Budějovice (Budweis), Prague, Bratislava, Ostrava, and Brno, they began to meet in Jesus' name and new messengers went out from among them to Hungary and Poland.

Czech Prophets

In the face of unrelenting persecution the Waldenses prospered in Czech lands through a hundred years. But what persecution could not accomplish happened eventually through spiritual decline. Zealous messengers died and none took their place. Waldensian congregations quieted down and stopped attracting new members as their desire to please Christ grew faint. Then new voices made themselves heard.

Suddenly, in the mid-1300s, old Prague, the capital city of Czech Bohemia, woke up. A new king, named Václav (Wenceslas) for his good ancestor, made the city wealthy, modern, and famous. But wickedness thrived on its back streets after dark and Tomáš, a believer from the Czech village of Štítný, began to speak boldly against it. Taking courage from his bold witness, Konrád Waldhauser and Jan Milíč of Kroměříž (Kremsier) in Moravia also took the Gospels and began to teach from them.

Thousands felt in their hearts what these Czech prophets said was right. Eagerly, week after week, they gathered to hear Christ's simple but revolutionary statements in the Sermon on the Mount. Along with this, they loved to hear from Paul, James, and the first Christians. So many crowded around Konrád, speaking in Prague, that no building could hold them, and he had to call meetings in the marketplace. A Moravian bishop described him:

His bearing was calm, his thoughts were set forth with great clearness, his language was plain but forcible and eloquent. With a boldness that came from God and feared neither man nor the devil he exposed the vices of the times and called sinners to repentance. The result was wonderful. Women who had been leaders of extravagant and immodest fashions laid aside their costly robes, glittering with gold and pearls, and devoted themselves to works of charity. Usurers fattening themselves on unrighteous gains made restitution. Notorious libertines set an example of holy living.²⁸

In particular, Konrad called on the mendicant friars (Dominicans and Franciscans) to repent and change their ways. “If the men who founded your orders would see the worldliness in which you live,” he said, “they would be horrified.” But the monks did not like Konrad’s challenge and threatened to kill him. They made fun of Jan Milıc for teaching the people in Moravia’s Czech dialect and resented his work among the poor in Prague.

Neither Konrad or Jan worried about the angry clergy. They put their teaching to practice and a whole block of city brothels closed down when hundreds of prostitutes, thanks to their efforts, found Christ. Jan wrote a book *De Antichristo*, and with the help of city believers founded “Jerusalem,” a home for wayward girls. Of all who listened to the capital city prophets, none, perhaps, let the words of Christ transform his life more drastically than a young man named Matej, the son of a Czech nobleman from Janov.

No one expected Matej to turn out different from his friends—riding horses, playing, dancing, and jousting on feast days. But after he discovered the joy of following Christ, nothing else attracted him anymore. Instead of seeking lively company, Matej spent long periods out on the fields, and in the woods, alone. He spoke continually with Christ, and when his former companions met him, he warned them earnestly to “turn from images to the real person.” Like Jan, his teacher, Matej spoke to the people in ordinary Czech. He believed Christians should take part in frequent (daily if possible) communion in bread and wine. He spoke against the exaltation of the clergy and identified the “many rules made by the church to take the place of Scripture” as the “chief cause of corruption” in mediaeval Europe.

In 1389 a meeting of bishops in Prague decided to stop Matej’s influence at all costs. They ordered him to stop preaching on pain of death and forbade him to attend religious meetings outside his hometown. Five years later, suffering continual harassment, he died. But the seeds he had sown, lived on.

Czech Rebel

In 1382, four years after King Václav (the Emperor Charles IV) died, his daughter married Richard, the fifteen-year-old king of England. With this, even more people found their way to Prague.

English and Czech nobility came to know one another. Conversing in Latin they shared information—and ideas. Among them, they shared the ideas of the famous English theologian, John Wyclif, then translating the Bible at Oxford University.

²⁸ De Schweinitz, *The History of the Church Known as the Unitas Fratrum*, pg. 21.

John Wyclif and his admirers questioned the authority of the Roman Catholic church. Even though they strongly believed in the right of “Christian” popes, kings, and nobles to order the lives of “commoners,” they believed no rule is of God unless it follows the Bible. They also believed that everyone, both rulers and commoners, should know what the Bible says. When the rector of the university at Prague, a man named Jan Hus, heard of this idea, it captivated him completely.

Besides the lectures he delivered at the university (to its approximately seven thousand students) Jan Hus also preached at a private Catholic church in the city, the Bethlehem Chapel. He held Bible studies in Czech and wrote articles. For criticising the pope, and Catholic veneration of relics— particularly the shrine at Vilsnac on the Elbe, where a supposedly blood-soaked wafer found in a ruined church drew pilgrims from as far away as Scandinavia and the Netherlands—Jan suffered excommunication in 1407.

Not much happened right away. But when two men with chests and drums appeared in Prague in 1412, selling “certificates of pardon” to the highest bidder (to raise money for the pope to fight his enemies) Jan Hus protested even more vehemently. A riot broke out on the streets of Prague. Three young men lost their lives and many dipped their fingers or handkerchiefs into their blood, promising revenge—and leading the pope to put the city under an interdict (forbidding others to trade with it). Then, when a great council of the Roman Catholic church met at Konstanz in 1414, the pope ordered Jan Hus to appear.

Setting out with thirty armed horsemen and three wagons, Jan Hus, agreed to meet the pope who swore not to injure him in any way. But he found the Council at Konstanz a hotbed of treachery and intrigue. Besides pope John XXIII—one of

three rival popes then struggling for control of the church—the Holy Roman Emperor, thirty cardinals, four patriarchs, thirty three archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, several hundred doctors of theology, four electors, twenty four princes and dukes, seventy eight counts, six hundred seventy-six barons, and a multitude of retainers, visitors, and related officials had converged on the city of Konstanz. Numbering around fifty thousand people, most of them had camped around the city.

Shortly after Jan Hus arrived, smooth talking officials lured him into the pope's quarters where they seized him and locked him into the dungeon of a Dominican monastery. There, after a stormy trial and a public burning of his books, they set a paper cap on his head with the words *Hic est Haeresiarcha* (This is the Chief of Heretics) and burned him too.

Czech Revolution

When the news of Jan Hus's execution drifted into Prague, the city burst out in violent revolution. Jan's followers drove out the Roman Catholic archbishop, chased the priests away, and under the leadership of a rebel clergyman, Jan Rokycana, began holding mass in the Czech language. Because they used both bread and wine *sub utraque specie* (the mass in both forms) many Europeans called the Hussite rebels "Utraquists." In the country around Prague yet much greater changes took place. Czech people everywhere celebrated their liberty from Rome. Some did so with wild and drunken feasting. Bands of armed men destroyed churches and monasteries, smashing altars and tearing religious paintings from their frames. Others saw their chance to reform the church and society according to what they believed. On a mountain near Bechyně, in southern Bohemia, great crowds began to meet for communion and fellowship meals under the open sky. They called the mountain "Tabor" and set up a "holy government" for themselves, loosely patterned after Old Testament Israel. Chaos ensued.

By July, 1419, more than forty thousand militant Hussites had gathered on "Mount Tabor" and riots broke out. King Václav IV, a heavy drinker (in spite of his initial support for Jan Hus), died in a fit of rage and King Zikmund, the Holy Roman Emperor who followed him, called a crusade to bring the situation under control. By fall Bohemia stood in blood. Roman Catholic troops fighting against the Hussites won great victories. At the battle of Kutná Hora so many Hussites fell captive the Catholics grew weary of cutting off their heads and threw 1600 of them—the living with the dead—into an empty silver mine. Then Jan

Žižka appeared.

Son of a poor Czech family, one-eyed Jan Žižka, in charge of a motley Hussite-Taborite army—peasants wielding iron tipped flails, clubs, and sickles—faced over one hundred thousand imperial troops at the Witkovberg, east of Prague, on July 14, 1420. Overwhelmed in numbers, but believing themselves on the Lord’s side, they fought like David against Goliath. They blocked the road with hay wagons and turned the Catholics back. Four other crusades against them failed. Joan of Arc’s dire prophecy—threatening them with divine punishment if they did not return to the Catholic church at once— did not come to pass, and after attacks on Austria, Silesia, Bavaria, Hungary, Franconia, and Saxony, the Czech Hussites stood established as the “terror of Europe.” But they fought among themselves.

When the Utraquists in Prague agreed on a cease-fire with Catholic forces in 1432 (after driving back another 130,000 crusaders under the Margrave of Brandenburg), the Taborites called them traitors. Fierce fighting broke out between them at once, Czechs killing Czechs, all defending Jan Hus’s movement, all fighting “in the name of Christ,” but leaving the rest of Europe to look on in horror as Bohemia became a devastated land. Under the leadership of a twenty-four-year-old nobleman, Jiří Poděbrady and their unordained archbishop, Jan Rokycana, the Utraquists finally overcame the Taborites and annihilated them by 1452.

Czech Revival

Unnoticed by the world, pushing up through the rubble of war in Bohemia’s dark and bloody Hussite Revolution, a seed planted by the Poor came back to life. In southern Bohemia, not far from Nová Bystřice in the territory of Jindřichův Hradec— where they said Pierre Valdes had died 170 years earlier—a little plant grew and a flower began to bloom again.

For generations, descendants of the Poor in southern Bohemia had lived in quiet obscurity. But when civil war broke out in their midst (“Mount Tabor” sits only a short distance north of Nová Bystřice) they had to get involved on one side or the other—or else take a totally different way.

Not only the Poor, but others in whom events of the time had awoken their consciences, returned to seeking the way of Christ. In a former Benedictine monastery in the south Bohemian town of Vilemov a group began to meet to

study the Bible. Vojtěch, the town priest, led their discussions and all made startling discoveries.

Christ's way was neither Hussite nor Catholic, neither Utraquist nor Taborite. It was the way of peace. Letting loose from the world for eternal gain. Through the Gospels, earnest seekers in southern Bohemia rediscovered their spiritual ancestors: the Poor in Lombardy and southern France, the Albigenses, the Bogomili, and the first Christian church in Asia. Then, in the midst of war and chaos, everything began to make sense! And Petr Chelčický joined them.

Hoof Doctor

For years Petr had pondered serious issues, at home on his farm near the village of Chelčice. Even though he spent his days working with cattle and hoeing turnips, his mind was not tied to common earthly things. He read much and listened to what people said. Books, all copied by hand in his day, were scarce. But he collected a considerable number and knew the Scriptures well.

Petr did not read to pass the time. He read eagerly, determined to find out what mattered and how things were for real. As he read he also drew conclusions.

In 1420, determined to find out for himself what was happening, he travelled to Prague and listened to the Hussites (the Utraquist group) defending their views in the Bethlehem chapel. What they said did not convince him. "You will not bring the kingdom of heaven to earth," he told them, "as long as the hell of hatred burns in your hearts."

Early in his encounter with Christ, Petr had become convinced that all bearing of arms (even arms for self-defence) was wrong. He believed soldiers guilty of "hideous murder" no matter what the war, and that worldly authorities could never be Christian. "Kings and Princes invade the church as wolves among a flock of sheep," he said, and utterly rejected John Wyclif's idea that God predestined men to three classes: rulers, clergy, and commoners.

The Hussites, whom Petr quickly identified as "raging locusts," and the new rulers of Prague about whom he wrote as "red faced, full bellied lords, sitting smugly in their castles" did not take kindly to his criticism. In fact, they soon made it dangerous for him to remain in the capital city and he returned to his south Bohemian farm—but not before a friend had given him a copy of Matěj of Janov's writings and the book of Dionysius. Convinced by now that the "learned

fools” of Prague had nothing to offer, and further strengthened in his beliefs by what Matěj wrote, Petr turned wholeheartedly to the new believers at Vilemov for fellowship and moral support. After Vojtěch, the converted priest, fell into Roman Catholic hands and was burned at the stake in Budějovice, he also became their leader.

Petr Chelčický did not take his responsibility lightly. As leader of the fellowship at Vilemov he spoke out against all use of force in the name of Christ. Working hard as a farmer, he condemned the laziness and wealth of the nobility, and called for justice for the poor. “One cannot improve society,” he believed, “without first destroying the foundations of the existing social order.”

Writing neatly on parchment, in thick black lines, Petr wrote what he believed in simple words. He wrote in Czech. Book after book appeared from his pen, and even though Hussites and Catholics joined in their condemnation, multitudes of common people begged to hear them read. Petr wrote like a common man. Largely self-taught, his spelling was not always correct, and when he used the word *kopyto* (“hoof” in Czech) instead of *kapitola* (chapter) his enemies did not miss their chance. “Doctor Kopytarum” (hoof doctor) they called him, and made fun of his largest and most significant work *The Net of Faith* he wrote between 1440 and 1443.

Community at Chelčice

After Petr’s writings became known through Czech lands, the community that formed around him and the brothers at Vilemov attracted many visitors. Peter Payne, a wandering Lollard from England seems to have spent time among them. So did Mikuláš of Pelhřimov, a Taborite bishop, and Martin Húska, leader of a bizarre Hussite cult. Waldensian believers appeared “out of the woodwork” together with other non-Roman Catholic believers. But no matter who came, or which way the winds of doctrine blew, the brothers resolutely continued with what they had begun.

Wearing long grey robes with cords tied around their waists, they shared their belongings and worshipped Christ in simple services around bread and wine. People called them Pikarts (heretics), but the witness of their lives far outshone the slander circulated about them, and even in Hussite Prague some became seriously interested in what they believed.

No one became more interested than Řehoř, son of a Czech nobleman and nephew to Rokycana, the Hussite archbishop.

Community at Litice

Řehoř, after leaving a monastery in disgust, had begun to meet with a circle of friends in Prague. Not content with the Hussites' reforms, they longed to go all the way with Christ. When they spoke to Rokycana about it he told them, "You appear to be of the mind of Petr Chelčický!" And to be sure, in the writings of the south Bohemian farmer they discovered a gateway to Christ. Step by step, as their understanding grew, Řehoř and his friends separated themselves from Prague's ungodliness to live like the first Christians. Řehoř wrote and spoke well. As the vision of a Christ-like community took shape in his mind, he discussed it with his friends and they searched ever more diligently for a way and a place to live it out. An unexpected door opened for them.

In the mountains of Moravia, south of the road from Hradec Králové (Königgrätz) to Breslau in Silesia, the Hussite general, Jiří Poděbrady, owned a large estate called Litice (Lititz). During the revolution it had suffered neglect. Most of the peasants who lived there moved away. Now Jiří looked for new people to work the estate, and when he learned what Řehoř and his friends looked for, he offered it to them. They arrived in 1457.

Under the shadow of the old Litice castle they found the peasant village of Kunvald almost deserted. But the few who lived there received them kindly, and the young men and women set to work with a will. On steep fields above the Orlice, roaring and foaming down the canyon, they began to plant crops. They cared for cows and tended bees. From forests high above them they brought wood to repair the houses and build more. Fruit trees in the village began to bear again, after careful pruning, and vegetables thrived in the fertile soil.

But the new settlers at Kunvald set their goal on far more than material prosperity. Slowly, peacefully, they returned to following Christ. One by one they dropped the superfluous ceremonies of the mediaeval church and worked out a brotherly agreement on how to worship. At first they called themselves *Fratres Legis Christi* (brothers in the law of Christ). But the Czech name *Jednota Bratrská* (meaning "unity of brothers," *Unitas Fratrum* in Latin) eventually became more common.

The believers at Kunvald did not intend to begin a “new group.” They believed the Lord wanted them to let their light shine within Christianity at large. But following the pattern of the community at Chelčice they agreed on a way of life that led to profound ethical separation.

In their “brotherly agreement” they decided not to testify in court, swear oaths, do civil service of any kind, manage inns, or get involved in buying or selling anything more than the bare necessities of life. They also decided that no one among them could hold worldly rank or privilege. No one should make dice, attend or work in a theatre, paint pictures or play music for a living, go to fairs or celebrations of feast days, take interest on money, or be involved with astrology, witchcraft, or alchemy. A very modest type of dress was agreed on, and all were expected to take part in daily prayers and the care of the sick.

Soon after their arrival in Kunvald the community chose twenty-eight men for its leaders. “At that time,” a member wrote, “friend longed for friend and brother for brother, so that more persons continually joined the group and their numbers increased.”²⁹ In 1459 a small group led by an ex-Taborite priest, Štěpánek, joined at Klatov in Moravia. Řehoř travelled continually, visiting interested seekers. Then the quiet Poor—descendants of Waldensian families in southern Bohemia and Moravia’s mountain regions—began to find their way into the new movement, and it grew rapidly to include several thousand members.

Brothers Unite

With the coming of the Waldensians, Řehoř and his friends at Kunvald, acquired a wealth of practical information on how to operate a Christian community. Even though they had languished for years in spiritual decline,³⁰ the Waldensians remembered how their forefathers had lived. They still treasured what they wrote, and here and there, functioning scholae survived. This led the believers at Kunvald to an idea.

Little by little, as their walk with Christ matured, their hopes of functioning as a spiritual “church within the church” faded. They saw less of a future all the time for the Czech Hussite movement and began to think seriously of doing things another way. (Up to this point, a Hussite priest had served them communion.)

In 1467, at a general meeting of the brothers near Rýchnov (Reichenau), a day’s journey west of Kunvald, everyone felt the time had come to elect their own

leaders and detach themselves from the Hussite church. After prayer and earnest exhortation, they chose their candidates. Then they put twelve slips of paper into a clay pot. Nine of the slips were blank. Three said *jest* (it is). A little boy pulled them out and gave them to the brothers.

²⁹ Jan Jaffet, in *Goliath's Schwerdt*.

³⁰ In southern Germany and Switzerland they had departed even more drastically from Christ's way than in Czech lands. Under Hussite influence during the 1400s, many of them returned to Italy to reclaim what had been their historic home. There they joined with others of their background in the Cottian Alps and resisted Catholic troops sent to subdue them. Fierce fighting, beginning in 1450, lasted off and on through the remainder of the century. By the 1530s, only a small number survived in fortified mountain strongholds. They made contact with Geneva's Calvinist Reformers and, in 1532, adopted a confession of faith stating Christians may swear oaths, take interest on money, own private property, hold civil office, and go to war, without sinning. They also accepted Calvinist teaching on predestination and the sovereignty of God. Conflict with the Catholic governments of Italy and France continued, however, until 1848 when they received full civil rights. In the latter part of the nineteenth century some Waldensians from Italy formed a colony in Uruguay. From there they spread to North Carolina and elsewhere. The Waldensian Church today, with headquarters at Torre Pellice in Italy, co-operates closely with other Protestant groups.

Matěj, a twenty-five-year-old farmer of Kunvald, Tůma Přeloučský, a book keeper, and Eliáš Chřenovický, a miller drew the *jest* slips. But who would lay hands on them and give them their charge? The brothers knew if anyone of them did it, the Hussites would accuse them fiercely. After considerable discussion they decided to send the three chosen brothers, along with a Waldensian as guide, to the south. There, just across the Austrian border from Nová Bystřice in the territory of Jindřichův Hradec, an old bishop of the Poor, a man named Stefan, ordained them for service in the Lord's church. Three cords, coming from Languedoc and Lombardy, from Chelčice, and from Hussite Prague (by way of Kunvald), united—and the test to see how much they would hold together came quickly.

Brothers Endure

When Rokycana, the Hussite archbishop, and Jiří Poděbrady, the landlord of Litice and Kunvald, heard of the ordinations at Nová Bystřice they were furious—both with the Waldensians and the Unity of Brothers.

In his earlier years Rokycana had spoken in favour of New Testament methods. He had shared many of Řehoř's concerns about the Hussites. But now that a vigorous new movement, in every way more Christ-like than his own, sprang up around him, he hated it. Preaching against the "new heretics" he stirred up the rulers of Bohemia and Moravia against them.

Old Stefan, the Waldensian bishop, fell into the hands of Roman Catholic authorities that burned him alive in Vienna, in 1467. In Bohemia, the Hussites tortured Jakob Hulava in front of his family and burned him, along with four peasants on the estate of the Baron Zdenek Kostka at Richenburg. Throughout other Czech regions they seized the brothers' possessions and drove them, with their families, from their homes. But none suffered more than the community at Kunvald itself.

Beginning with the arrest of some of its leaders, left to suffer in the Litice castle dungeons, the settlement built up with so much joy disintegrated in untold grief. Driven from their homes in the middle of winter, many perished in the fields from hunger and cold. Some whom the authorities captured had their hands cut off. Others they dragged along behind horses until they died, or burned at the stake. Hunted like deer, the brothers hid in mountain forests, daring to make fires only at night. When it snowed they moved from place to place in single file, the last one with a branch to obliterate their tracks.

Feeling sorry for them, but not daring to help, residents of the area called them *jamnici* (cave men). But the brothers did not lose heart. In the forests at night they read from precious Scriptures and prayed. Whenever possible they returned good for evil, and when invited, they even dared make trips to visit seekers in Czech towns.

On a secret trip, of this nature, to Prague, Řehoř finally walked into a trap laid for him by his enemies. Rokycana, determined to “convert” him, had him severely tortured and kept in jail. In response, the brothers wrote him a letter:

Have we deserved the persecutions you have brought upon us? Have we not been your disciples? Have we not followed your own words in refusing to remain in connection with the corrupt church? Is it right to invoke the civil power against us? Civil power is intended for the punishment of those who have broken the laws of society and must be coerced within proper bounds. But it belongs to the heathen world. It is absolutely wrong to use it in matters of faith. . . . Are you not of the world and bound to perish with the world?³¹

In 1471, within a short time of one another, Rokycana and Jiří Poděbrady died, and persecution let off. Then, cautiously reappearing out of the woods, the believers who survived returned to Kunvald.

More Brothers and Sisters

Not only did the survivors return. Nine years after Rokycana's death and the end of persecution under the Hussites, the Czech Unity of Brothers received a most significant group of new members. Arriving penniless—hungry children with big eyes, widows in rags, old men pulling carts or pushing wheel- barrows—they were German Waldenses from Königsberg (Chojna) and Angermünde in the province of Brandenburg. In Czech lands they settled in and around Lanškroun east of Litomyšl and around Fulneck on the lands of Jan of Zerotin, between Olomouc (Olmütz) and Moravska Ostrava (MährischOstrau).³²

Through these immigrants and the ordination under old Stefan, the Unity established its “apostolic succession.” Of much greater importance, two hundred and fifty years later, it was through their descendants (who never lost their German language and culture) that the Unity of Brothers survived to burst into magnificent bloom.

³¹ De Schweinitz, *op. cit.*

³² Since 1458 the Waldenses of Brandenburg had suffered heavy persecution. In 1479 they sent their leader, a brother named Peter, to establish contact with believers in Bohemia. The following year, four brothers of the Unitas Fratrum set out to visit them, in return. At Kladsko in Bohemia, Hussite officials detained them, but one, a German citizen named Tomáš, from the district of Lanškroun, was allowed to continue on his way. Through this contact the Waldenses of the Brandenburg lowlands decided to move to Czech lands.

6

Sheep Among Wolves

On his visit to Prague in 1420 Petr Chelický met the Hussite theologian, Jakoubek of Stříbro in a back room of the Bethlehem chapel. Their conversation, under Petr's direction, turned quickly to the Sermon on the Mount. They discussed what Jesus taught on wealth, on speaking the truth (without swearing), and on returning good for evil.

“Our faith compels us to bind wounds,” Petr explained, “not to make blood run.” With sharp but honest words, he rebuked the Hussites for using worldly power. He told them how war comes from a desire to own things, and how Christ sets us free from that desire.

Jakoubek did not accept Petr's rebuke. Like John Wyclif and Jan Hus he defended the use of the sword, saying war is necessary and Christians must fight against Turks and infidels, “but with great love toward God and with nothing other in mind than that God would be glorified.” For this reason, he explained, Christian soldiers must “avoid all brutality, excessive greediness, and other irregularities.”

Petr had no time for such talk. “How your master Jakoubek would rage against someone for eating a blood sausage on Friday,” he wrote to the archbishop Rokycana in a letter soon afterward. “Yet he does not make the shedding of blood a matter of conscience!” Pointing to more inconsistencies he continued:

You would not allow an individual to chase others and kill them. But if a nobleman gathers a great army of peasants and makes of them warriors who can kill others with the power of an army, you do not consider them murderers. Neither is it held against their conscience, but they boast and think of themselves as heroes for murdering the godless! This is the poison poured out among Christians by learned men who do not follow our meek Lord Jesus, but the counsel of the Great Whore of Babylon. And for this reason our land is filled with abominations and blood!

I do not want to make light of the preaching and good works done by men

like Jan Hus, Matěj, and Jakoubek, in the name of God. But I say that they too have drunk the wine of the Great Whore, with which she has besotted all nations and people. . . . They have written things that contradict God’s laws, especially where Master Hus has written about bearing the sword, swearing oaths, and venerating images.³³

That the Hussite, Catholic and Taborite “Christians” of Bohemia had lost sight of Christ, Petr Chelčický did not doubt. On another occasion he wrote:

³³ From a letter to Rokycana, written in the 1430s.

For over fifteen years one side has risen up against the other in wrath and savagery. What one side has proclaimed as truth, the other has condemned as error. And of them all, none has been able to put out the fires they have lit. Everywhere murder, destruction, and poverty have multiplied and great numbers have perished. Every town in the land has girded itself to battle. Every town has enclosed itself with walls and surrounded itself with moats. .

. . Everyone, at home or in the field, in the forest or on the mountains, stands in danger of getting imprisoned, robbed, or killed. Nowhere can one hide from the other. In towns and castles every man must be ready for battle. Nowhere may one find rest and peace. Labouring people are stripped of everything, downtrodden, oppressed, beaten, and robbed, so that many are driven by want and hunger from their homes. Some pay taxes to castles or towns three or even four times, now to one side, now to the other. And what is not taken from them like that, is eaten up by armies that prey on the land. . . .

In the midst of this, can it be said that Christians are any more honest, any more disciplined or patient, than the world? Not at all. In fact, nothing is more clear than that Christians have abandoned God. They have gone out into the world and become one with it. Whatever the world considers praiseworthy—vanity, comfort, wealth, fancy notions, blasphemies—all Christians praise with one accord, openly and without conscience or shame. It has become virtually impossible to find one in a thousand that does not conform himself to the world. . . .³⁴

The only way to escape the wicked world headed for destruction, Petr believed, is to follow Christ. “True God and true man, perfect and complete,” he wrote, “Christ taught us masterfully how to please God in everything. Not only did he give us a perfect example, he also makes it possible for us to follow it. We only

sin when we go after the things Christ condemned, or when we turn our backs on his way of life. His whole life on earth was an example and a lesson for us.”

Using Christ’s imagery of a net cast into the sea, Petr described what happened when two dreadful sharks, the pope and the Roman emperor, slipped into the church. Thrashing about in the net, they gobbled up the good fish and burst it. From their adulterous union sprang evils without number— above all, the evil of force in Christ’s name—until only a few strands of the net (Christ’s true church) remained. “Since that time,” Petr wrote,

all live in hypocrisy, from the least to the greatest, figuring out how to be Christian while doing everything their flesh desires. Everyone seeks the honour of the world and flatters it with pleasant talk. Everyone wants peace with the world to avoid suffering its persecution in any way—so to compare today’s Christianity with that of the early church is like comparing night to day.

³⁴ *Netz des Glaubens* (all citations from Petr Chelčický in this chapter, unless stated otherwise, are from this book)

Christ and Power

The church, both Petr Chelčický and the Unity of Brothers believed, loses sight of Christ when it confuses the Old with the New Testament way. In one of its earliest statements the Unity declared:

The Jews did right to follow the law in their day, as it was given, but when Christ came he brought a higher and better law than “eye for eye” and “tooth for tooth.” He brought the law of love that neither condemns to death nor forces anyone to obey its commandments. Rather, with loving patience, it calls for repentance, leaving the impenitent to the last judgement. Only false Christians cannot distinguish between these two revelations.³⁵

Nowhere does the mixing of Moses’ law and Christ’s Gospel cause more confusion than in the use of power. “Civil authorities,” Petr Chelčický wrote, “may not direct the life of obedience to God because they rely on cruel compulsion.” For this he gave an example:

Not all tools can be used for every trade, and every trade has tools of its own. A blacksmith cannot hold a horseshoe in the fire with a spindle and a woman cannot spin with a blacksmith’s tongs. Therefore, just as tongs pertain to the blacksmith and a spindle to the woman, civil authority is suitable for some things and religious authority for others.

Christ's rule is perfect. Therefore it is free of compulsion. The virtue he expects from every Christian springs from a free will. Everyone must choose for good or evil. Both these choices stand before men, the Lord Jesus calling us to the good, the devil and the world calling us to evil. Therefore choose joy or hell. The choice is in your hands.

Řehoř wrote about rulers and the sword:

God gave the kings of the earth a sword, but only to preserve order in the world according to his will, and to control those who would disturb the common good. . . . When, through the treachery of the priests, the rulers' sword is turned against people on account of their faith, they no longer use it for God. No earthly ruler can put faith into people's hearts without their assent, or bring them to faith by force.³⁶

With this teaching alive in their hearts, the believers at Kunvald, like those of Chelčice, could not take part in civil government. They could not serve as masters of guilds, judges, or town councillors because they felt those positions belonged to the god of this world, not to the Kingdom of Heaven. Řehoř wrote:

Christ sent his messengers into the world to preach the good news without the help of civil powers, magistrates, hangmen, and soldiers. . . . True Christians, like sheep among wolves, suffer unto death before calling pagan authorities to their defence.³⁷

³⁵ From the *Akty Jednoty bratrské*, a collection of Unity documents from the fifteenth century.

³⁶ From a letter to Vaňek Valečovský, 1461.

Christ and Money

In his life on earth, the Lord Christ showed us how to use money and goods. Regarding this, Petr Chelčický wrote:

The true word of God says, "The earth and everything in it is the Lord's, its mountains, its valleys, and its fields. God is the only rightful ruler of the earth. . . . Whoever does not belong to God has no right to possess or hold anything that belongs to him. If anyone claims ownership of earthly goods, he does so because he has taken possession of them illegally and through violence.

In disobedience to God's law, our fathers bought and established illegal

claims for us. . . . And this is what we have inherited from them: poverty, shame, death, and in the end, hell.

If you who are big, fat, and self-satisfied, say, “Our fathers bought these people and these manors for our inheritance,” then, indeed they engaged in evil business and made an expensive bargain! For who has the right to buy people, to enslave them, and to treat them with indignities as if they were cattle. . . . You prefer dogs to people whom you curse, despise, and beat— from whom you extort taxes and for whom you forge fetters, while you say to your dogs, “Here pup, come lie on this pillow!”

Petr Chel čický distrusted commerce in general, believing it “difficult to buy or sell without sin on account of excessive greed.” To take interest on money or to run a speculative business was for him the “mark of the beast,” and he counted the use of weights and measures, as well as boundary markers, a sign of the curse brought on man through Cain. He wrote:

The unbeliever fights to protect his rights and his property in court or on the battlefield. A Christian, on the other hand, conducts his life with love, patiently enduring injustice, for he knows his reward is eternal. He refuses involvement in commercial enterprises and with speculative business, for fear of harming his soul. But this is foolishness to the unbelieving world.

That only a few would find this narrow way to eternal life, Petr did not doubt. But even in that he saw proof that it was the right way:

Jesus is now very poor. He does not have multitudes following him. The few who stick with him are the outcast and unlearned, for the doctors of this age are too rich and too famous. They have engendered many servants of God with their swords—that is why all the world looks up to them.

³⁷ *Akty Jednoty bratrské*

When a people wise in this world see Christ—abandoned, dressed in the garb of poverty, and surrounded by danger—they turn away from him and follow after wealthy and popular men who serve God with great learning in cathedrals, in armies, with civil authority, with thumbscrews, city-halls, pillories and gallows. The whole wise world runs after them, but only “fools” dare follow Christ and suffer the ridicule of all.

Only fools perhaps, in the eyes of the world, but Czech believers saw the Lord’s table spread before them in the presence of their enemies. They saw the

unspeakable riches of Christ and set their hope on living eternally with him in new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Petr Chelčický wrote:

Oh how small and barren is the dominion of earthly kings compared with the dominion of Christ! Earthly rulers heap burdens and suffering on their subjects instead of freedom and consolation. By way of contrast, the kingdom of Christ is so powerful and perfect that if the whole world accepted him it would have peace and all things would work together for good. There would be no need of temporal rulers anymore, for all would live by grace and truth.

At Kunvald, many believers—in an attempt to live like Christ—renounced all private possession. Like the Waldensian *bonnes hommes* and the Albigensian *perfecti* they lived from a common purse and shared their goods. Others, scattered in towns and on feudal estates through Czech lands, kept on living as independent households but with a strong sense of economic (as well as spiritual) commitment one to another.

Those who lived with no personal possessions were encouraged by the Unity of Brothers to put no pressure on the rest. Neither did the believers force new converts to give up possessions against their will: “If anyone wishes to keep something for a good reason, to give it into safe keeping, or to bequeath it to someone after death, it may be done,” states an old community statute.

Unity in Christ

Loving Christ and committed to following him together, believers from Kunvald, from Southern Bohemia, and from towns and villages throughout other Czech regions, gathered in a great meeting near Rýchnov nad Kněž in 1464. Forced to secrecy, they gathered in the mountains under the open sky. But the document they prepared did not remain a secret. Neither did they want it to. Having found green pastures, following their Good Shepherd, they could not wait to share it with hungry souls. Among other things the Unity of Brothers agreed in the meeting near Rýchnov:

to maintain the bond of love among ourselves, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to set our hope in God. This we will demonstrate in what we say and how we help one another, in the spirit of love, to live honestly, humbly, quietly, meekly, soberly, and patiently. And through this—through our true love one for

another—we will show to others what we believe and in whom we place our hope. We agree to obey everything the Lord asks of us in Scripture. Along with this we agree to accept graciously the instructions, warnings, and reproof of our brothers and sisters. Doing this, we will keep the covenant we have made with God and his Holy Spirit through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will confess our faults and shortcomings. We will humble ourselves and be subject one to another. We will keep the fear of God before our eyes when others reprove us, seeking to change our ways for the better and to confess our sins before God and man. If any one of us does not keep the rules we have made, and proves unfaithful to the our covenant with God and our Christian fellowship, we must declare—even though with deep regret—that we cannot assure him of salvation. It may even become necessary for us to exclude him from our church fellowship. And if anyone is excluded from our communion on account of some grievous transgression or glaring mistake in doctrine we cannot re-admit him until he has entirely cleared himself and amply proven that he has changed his ways.

We agree that all of us should faithfully keep the apostles' instructions in all things. Our priests and teachers, in particular, should set a good example to others. They should walk humbly in word and deed, so that others may have no reason to accuse them. Those who give up personal estates for the church should keep to their decision and not reclaim estates, money, or property. Rather, they should follow the example of the first Christians, submitting with glad hearts to holding all things in common as it is written, "They had all things in common and distributed to everyone as needed." This is a praiseworthy and reasonable example for us, especially for those who become messengers of the churches, so that they may learn to be content with simple food and clothing, leaving the rest to the Lord who cares for them. They ought to abstain from extravagance and content themselves with the support the stewards of the common fund are able to give them.

Along with this, our priests and teachers should be freed from all care regarding their earthly needs, so they may devote themselves to spiritual duties. They must bear patiently what God allows to come upon them: distress, hunger, cold, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself—after the example of the first Christians who consecrated themselves to God. They must surrender themselves to Christ's rule, following him patiently, and forsaking the world.

Those of us who have of this world's things should remember the poor and

give freely to them, according to the word of God. At the same time we should work with our own hands what is good. Our trading should be only in heavenly goods and treasures, supplying our neighbours with the word of God, teaching them, and praying that the Lord would give them grace.

Our priests and teachers may, however, work around home if they have nothing else to do. Whatever they can spare, they should also share with the poor, but if they suffer need they should be supported, with the consent of all, from our general fund.

The same rule applies to brothers and sisters working in trades or hiring themselves out to earn a decent living. Whoever goes on errands or is employed to do a certain work, shall be paid fairly for his labour, unless he can and will do it for nothing to help the congregation.

Toward strangers and travellers we will show kind hospitality, in particular if they have left home to spread the Gospel. When we see any of our brothers or sisters in need we will follow the example of the apostles and those who have gone before us in the faith, sharing with them what the Lord in his mercy has given us.

If all Christians faithfully stood together in love, if everyone eagerly carried the other's burden, all of Christ's commandments would be fulfilled. Sympathising love is the perfection of Christian faith. It is what builds and keeps spirituality alive. It is the firmest and most enduring bond of human happiness. The one who does not love has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

With brotherly kindness we will receive penitent souls, gladly helping those who turn from the world to God to know the truth. No matter who comes to us, he shall find among us a joyful reception. We will speak with him in good faith, give him the advice the instructions, and whatever warnings he needs, so that he may walk right and grow spiritually.

We will not change our place of residence unless it becomes clear that we would be of greater usefulness to the church of God in another place.

We will take special care of the orphans, the widows, and the poor, receiving them in the name of Christ. What we give them will be done in the spirit of love.

We consider it our duty to care for those who are persecuted or driven into exile for what they believe. We will ask about them and help as much as we can.

Whenever money is paid out of the congregation's general fund to help the poor, the treasurer is to keep a faithful and correct account of it. He shall ask whoever

gets the money for a receipt. This is to prevent any suspicion and false report, and to preserve harmony in the congregation.

We will seek our rest in the Lord and guard against the dazzling seductions of the world. The tempting exterior of worldly-mindedness, the subtlety and secret malice of its wicked spirit continually try to overcome Christian simplicity of heart. The world's flattering delusions are dangerous rocks for the faithful. The world's spirit is one of selfishness, the pursuit of temporary pleasures that are often unattainable anyway, and it does nothing more than deceive. From such a spirit, may the Lord in his mercy save us! We consider it our responsibility to obey our earthly rulers in all humility, to show them loyalty in all things, and to pray to God for them.

We will seek peace in our congregations, and do all we can for common harmony and wellbeing. In this way our conscience will be at rest in God, and the grace of God will be with us at all times.³⁸

A Little Flock

Celebrating the Lord's supper in simple services throughout war-torn Bohemia and Moravia, the Unity of Brothers became a quiet but powerful movement. After the ordination of its leaders by Stefan, the Waldensian bishop, and the adoption of its own rules (like at the meeting near Rýchnov) it chose its own way. But those who belonged to the Unity never thought of themselves as the church of Christ in its entirety. In another general meeting, in 1486, the brothers decided: No one church, however numerous, constitutes the universal church embracing all believers. But wherever there is true faith, as described in the Scriptures, there is a part of the holy Catholic church. . . . We should thank God for all who serve him, but no one should lightly leave his own communion and commitment to join another.

For many years, Christ's little flock in Czech lands, with this belief and commitment, grew in the face of all opposition. But their peace in heavenly light would not last forever.

³⁸ From the Confession of the Brothers of Christ's Gospel, *Bratři zákona Kristrova*, 1464.

7 Eclipse

In 1473, two years after Jiří Poděbradý and Rokycana died in Prague, Řehoř himself, worn out from years of persecution and travel, died in the “underground” at Brandýs nad Orlicí (Brandeis am Adler) in Bohemia. One of the last things he told the believers gathered around his bed—Brother Matěj the bishop among them—was, “Beware of educated and learned persons who may come after me to corrupt the faith.”

His warning was prophetic. But for the time being, the Unity of Brothers could not comprehend it.

After they buried Řehoř in secret, in a wooded ravine on the Klopot mountain, a strange peace came to believers in Czech lands. The Hussite government, occupied in strife with Hungary, ignored them. A friendly baron, Jan Tovačovský of Mladá Boleslav (Jungbunzlau) gave them an abandoned monastery in which to live, and in its seclusion the Unity of Brothers thrived.

They called the old monastery “Mount Carmel.” In its chapel they met for simple meetings. In its scriptorium they set to copying and binding evangelical books.³⁹ They used one of its halls for a school, and many families moved into its cloistered wings, the surrounding outbuildings, and villages nearby. It did not take long for their witness to result in more congregations taking shape in the nearby town of Vinařice, in Lenešice near Louny, in Brandýs nad Labem (Brandeis an der Elbe), Rýchnov nad Kněž, Benatky, and Německý Brod.

Then another wealthy baron, Jan Kostka of Litomyšl (Leitomyšl), far to the southeast, near Lanškroun, provided the brothers with a refuge. This time they named it “Mount of Olives.”

In southern Bohemia the Unity grew rapidly in the old Waldensian areas of Nová Bystřice, Jindřichův Hradec, and around the village of Chelčice—while far to the east, in Moravia, they founded communities at Přerov, Hustopeče (Auspitz), Ivancice (Eibenschitz), Slavkov (Austerlitz), and elsewhere. At Fulnek in Moravia, the German Waldensian settlement—now also part of the Unity of Brothers—flourished, until all told, the movement numbered more than a hundred thousand members. But Hussite authorities, watching anxiously from Prague, could not let it go unchallenged.

³⁹ Along with works of an instructive nature (the writings of Petr Chelčický and Řehoř) the Brothers produced the first non-Catholic hymnal in Europe.

Tried by Fire

In 1487 a new law in Bohemia made it impossible for workers on feudal estates to move freely from place to place. The same law gave their masters the right to buy or sell their labour (as serfs) and to exercise complete authority, including capital punishment, over them. To make matters worse, Moravia fell under the power of Roman Catholic Hungary. A group of believers fled from there to Moldova in 1488, but many who could not escape had to suffer—like Ondřej, a brother from Kutná Hora,

Seeking escape from constant harassment, Ondřej found refuge at the “Mount of Olives” in Litomyšl. But his wife, a loyal Hussite, would not go with him. When he returned to see her she betrayed him and the authorities forced him to stay at Kutná Hora and attend Hussite services.

Ondřej consented, but not under the conditions imposed.

At his first meeting in the town church he called for silence and began to speak: “Dear friends, what are you doing? What so you worship? An idol made of bread! Oh worship the living God in heaven!”

The priest, outraged at the interruption, ordered the people to seize him. For some time no one moved, but a few rough characters finally grabbed him and smashed his head against a pillar. Then they dragged him to jail.

At his trial the next day, the authorities asked Ondřej, “Why did you act so shamefully? Who gave you the right to act like that?”

Ondřej responded with more questions: “Who told Abraham to leave his father’s idols and worship the living God? Who told Daniel to whom he should pray?”

Torture on the rack could not move Ondřej from his convictions and when they burned him at the stake he cried out, “Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me!”

“Now he calls on Jesus whose sacraments he despised!” his persecutors jeered. But those who knew Ondřej, Jan and Mikuláš Nadrzibka, Jan Herbek, Matěj Prokop, and others burned with them for what they believed, did not make fun. The witness of the Unity of Brothers struck them to the heart and many kept

joining the movement—in spite of persecution—until the evil one brought greater trials upon them.

Disunity

What sword and fire could not do, among the Czech believers, a lack of unity brought about by the late 1400s.

The trouble began with money—and prestige.

During their first years at Kunvald and in Southern Bohemia, whoever joined the Unity of Brothers left his fortune behind. Knights and nobles gave up their titles to become simple followers of Christ. Of these, the Baron Strachota of Orlice near Kyšperk, left a shining example. Not only did he give up his castle. He took up book keeping and began to work in mill. All who knew him respected him as a wise and godly man.

Jan Kostka and his wife, the owners of Litomyšl, also became converted and gave their property to Bohuš, their son. Then Bohuš wished to join the church too—and things became complicated.

A large number of Unity families lived at Litomyšl. By asking Bohuš Kostka to get rid of his estate they would have put themselves on the street. “Could this be fair?” they asked themselves. “What if all our barons should get converted? Would we all have to move all the time?”

A brother from Wotic, also named Řehoř, wrote a tract *On the Civil Power* that like Petr Chelčický’s books warned against any acceptance of government officials, knights, or barons, into the brotherhood. The bishop, Matěj of Kunvald stood with him. So did many more. But to follow Christ in a feudal society did not look easy to the families living and working in the town of Litomyšl itself.

Not only did the problem of Bohuš Kostka’s membership face them. Because nearly everyone in the town belonged to the church, they faced the question of who to elect for town councillors, judges, and policemen. Every feudal estate was responsible to keep its own order.

“Should we have a worldly and unconverted minority rule over all of us?” the people of Litomyšl asked. “Would it not be better to make responsible decisions ourselves?”

Bohuš Kostka, owner of the estate, pushed for Unity members to become its officials and could not understand what held them back. Neither could others. A prominent Hussite priest wrote in 1492:

There have been, and still are, people among us who refuse to accept office as town councillor or any other official position. They say they do not want to administer justice, basing their action on the command of Christ, “judge not that you be not judged” which they, of course, interpret in their own way. But if these brothers are indeed so much better than the rest of us, if they are indeed lovers of justice and truth, why should they not take positions of authority to deal out fair and Christian justice so that righteousness may be established among us, and what is wrong put down? . . . I think it is perverse of them to regard the rest of us as “unbelievers,” and that they should be punished for it. By trusting in themselves alone, they insult their neighbours and cut themselves off from other Christians devoted to God’s truth.⁴⁰

At Litomyšl, brothers of the Unity heard this criticism and felt bad. They felt they should do their part as responsible citizens. “But how could you be judges and councillors without exercising violence?” Bishop Matěj and those with him, asked. “How could you hold civil office and not swear oaths?”

⁴⁰ From a letter from Koranda to Bohuš Kostka.

The brothers at Litomyšl did not know. But when their bishop suggested they leave their trades in town and go back to living as shepherds and field workers, they protested. “We cannot all live in the country,” a soap maker answered. “Cows do not give soap, and even if they did, men who work with them get appointed as judges and councillors too!”

During the time these questions troubled the Unity of Brothers new faces appeared among them. By now, fifty or more years after his death, Petr Chelčický’s writings were well known. Scholars looked through them, and even though considered heretical, copies of them lay in important libraries. It was there, in the library of the university at Prague that Lukas, a young Hussite, discovered them in the 1470s.

Lukas not only read Petr Chelčický. He visited the brothers at Mount Carmel (Mladá Boleslav) to find out how they lived and believed. They impressed him, and with a circle of scholarly friends, he moved there to join them after his graduation. This brought more trouble.

The owner of Mladá Boleslav was a woman, the baroness Johanka Tovačovská z Krajku, who also admired the Unity. With the coming of Lukas and his friends she found the believers' community on her lands even more attractive. No longer did it only consist of simple farmers and tradesmen. With scholars and gifted educators among them, the baroness felt there might be room for her (with her title and fortune) as well. The brothers were not sure.

After many meetings, counsel, and prayer, they finally called leaders from the entire movement to Brandýs nad Orlicí in the early 1490s. Some nobles, interested in joining, came too. So did the scholar, Lukas, and his friends from Mladá Boleslav and Litomyšl. All troublesome issues came up for a vote in which Brother Matěj (unwilling to cause division) refused to take part, then the brothers drew up a statement of compromise. They recommended that no one should take government office of his own free will, that church members should not keep a tavern, go to war, judge others, or apply torture and capital punishment. But if the state, or their position in society demanded it, then no one would judge them for it. Every case should be evaluated on its own, much would be left to individual conscience, and there was to be no more "stirring up of trouble" about things of this nature.

The Unity of Brothers, by this time, was directed by an "Inner Council" elected to help Bishop Matěj. These men, with the approval of others gathered at Brandýs, passed a further resolution:

If anyone's conscience does not permit him to become a town councillor, a judge, or to hold another civil office, he should not feel pressured into doing it by the fact that the brotherhood allows it on certain conditions. Rather, if he holds to his conviction and wants to suffer for it, he shall have the liberty of doing so, only on the condition that he does not criticise those who feel and do otherwise. He should not consider himself any better than those who cooperate with the government and thereby avoid suffering.

The Inner Council dismissed the brothers at Brandýs with a solemn warning not to go home and talk about controversial issues among themselves. If anyone had a complaint, they said, he should come directly to them or to Brother Matěj, the bishop:

If, after thinking this over, or for any other reason, a brother should object to what we have decided he should neither speak or act, neither openly or in secret, against it. Rather he should bring his complaint in person, or writing. .

. . . Anyone who disregards this instruction should be admonished, and if he refuses to accept correction, and keeps causing a disturbance and division, he shall be held back from communion. If he still remains obstinate, and corrupts others with his point of view, he shall be expelled from his congregation, and if that does not turn him back from his wickedness, he shall be expelled from the Unity of Brothers itself. (Brock pg. 131)

Two men made their way home from the big meeting at Brandýs with heavy hearts. They were Amos Štěkenský, a collector of bee's wax from Vodňany close to Chelčice, and his co-worker, Jakub. Their hearts told them that the Unity of Brothers, in deciding to relax its position on civil office and to allow the wealthy and powerful to become part of it, had made a terrible mistake. No sooner did they come home to southern Bohemia—into the area where Pierre Valdés spent his last years, and where Petr Chelčický had taught—than they began to write, discuss the matter with their friends, and pray.

Amos wrote a tract, describing in simple Czech how Christ rejected Satan's offer of worldly power, and why his followers do the same. He explained why it was right for unbelieving authorities to use power in the world, but why it did not belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. The New Testament, Amos wrote, is the sole authority of Christ's followers, but the Old Testament is no an authority at all—the difference being that Christ has now established his Kingdom on earth.

Hundreds of believers in southern Bohemia and elsewhere stood with Amos and Jakub. For a time even Brother Matěj, the bishop, returned to the church's former position. He declared the compromise of Brandýs null and void, and dismissed the Inner Council. But it did not last. The brothers of Litomyšl and Mladá Boleslav—chief among them Lukas and his educated friends—criticised the old way. Řehoř and Petr Chelčický were good men, they said, but their teaching was off balance and impractical. It served a generation of farmers well, but it did not fit intellectuals and people in higher walks of life.

Within months, confusion and unrest overtook the Unity of Brothers as never before. Matěj and his conservative friends resigned their leadership, and a team of trained theologians (Lukas among them) took over. A new Inner Council, hostile to the old way, re-enforced the compromise of Brandýs. To that they added a decree stating that Řehoř and Petr Chelčický's writings (for teaching a "work's religion" and not leading the church "to trust in the cross of Christ") should no longer be considered authoritative. They allowed Matěj to keep his office, but

only as a figurehead. His duties, they restricted to officiating at ordinations and to serving as moderator in church meetings. During the Lent season of 1495, Matěj and Lukas made a final attempt to keep the south Bohemians in the Unity of Brothers. They met with Amos Štěkenský and those who agreed with him in Jakub's house, not far from the historic village of Chelčice. All day they discussed the way of Christ and the way of the world. It turned dark. The time for the evening meal came and went. But the men reached no agreement. Matěj had firmly decided to keep the church together at all costs. Lukas pushed for a more open and

“balanced” understanding (spending much time explaining what Christ meant when he forbade the swearing of oaths—that there are three kinds of oaths, the false, the careless, and the true, and that Christ only condemned the first two). But the south Bohemians would not be reconciled.

No matter how grandly Matěj and Lukas promised their views full toleration in the church, the *Menši strana* (the Little Group) had no desire to be “back in a net with the rich, the powerful, and those who defend their lives with the sword.” For this “insubordination” and “sowing of discord” the leaders of the church finally excommunicated Amos Štěkenský, Jakub, and all who supported them, and the Unity's disunity became final.

The Big Group

Once free of constant criticism by the Little Group, the *Větši strana*, the “Big Group,” as people called it, made bold and rapid moves toward society and the world. Lukas, with the support of the Unity's publishing house at Mladá Boleslav wrote voluminous works defending the oath and participation in war. He explained why “turning the other cheek” is only a spiritual, not a physical concept, and following his teaching that to hold possessions is “morally neutral,” members of the Unity began to see wealth and prestige as signs of the blessing of God.

Along with this, Lukas returned to Jan Hus and John Wyclif's teaching of a threefold society (rulers, clergy, and commoners). Christ did not come to restructure society, he said, but to correct its abuses. And the idea of correcting them by force did not bother him. “To kill and destroy the enemies of the Lord, providing it is done justly and without hatred, is not inconsistent with showing them love. . . . Moderation should of course be used, but I cannot say it is wrong to go about with daggers.”⁴¹

Matěj himself wrote in defense of what the Unity now practiced:

We do not forbid you to lead the rich toward voluntary poverty, to snatch them from civil offices that endanger their souls, and lead them toward a more perfect life and closer imitation of Christ. But that is not for all men. Christ said it is difficult, but not impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Some too who believed in Christ, such as the Roman Centurion, were men with authority.⁴²

⁴¹ From a writing of Lukas against the Little Group: *Odpověď na spis Kalencuo*.

Against the Little Group's accusation that higher learning and the study of theology had corrupted the church, a theologian in the Big Group wrote a book, *On the Learned Men*, and Lukas expressed disgust at the primitive writings and viewpoints of "unlearned innovators."

In another meeting of its leaders the Unity decided to tolerate tavern ownership and liquor brewing among them, providing its members did not drink to excess, and Lukas' statement on civil power became their own:

Civil power, with its laws and punishments, may be exercised in our Unity and in the holy church. A lord owning estates, castles, fortresses and towns may be accepted into our Unity without having to relinquish the sword, and may become a brother while continuing to order punishments and executions.

. . . It is not impossible to hang a man while having love towards him in one's heart.⁴³

After Matěj died and Lukas became bishop of the Unity, he reintroduced elaborate rituals, silver and gilt communion vessels, and embroidered robes for its priests. Financed by the baron, Bohuš Kostka (by now a member of the church), he and other delegates travelled to Greece, Asia Minor, and Europe to find like-minded people and support for their actions.⁴⁴ But they found none, and in a later historian's words,

Out of Bohemian puritans who followed Petr Chelčický rather than Jan Hus, who admired celibacy like Paul, who swore no oaths, who held no civil office, who indulged in no luxury, who tolerated no wealth, who charged no interest on money, who took no part whatsoever in war, had arisen well-to-do capitalists, honourable householders, very successful businessmen, respected town officials and sworn in, very active generals and statesmen.⁴⁵

The Little Group

Nothing, in the face of the Big Group's apostasy, surprised those of the Little Group more than the fact that it was so little.

Even though a vast number of brothers and sisters sympathised with them, only a few, at the last moment, sided with Amos, Jakub, and those who determined with them, to stick to the way of Christ at all costs. Perhaps they hesitated because of the Little Group's unconditional tone. "There is no middle way between carrying out the commands of Christ in every detail, and conforming to the world on the other," Amos wrote in a letter to Jakub. "Farmers take better care of their pigs," Jakub, in turn, wrote to Matěj, "than what you have taken care of the Lord's flock."

⁴² From a letter written by Matěj, presumably after his meeting at Jakub's house in Štěken.

⁴³ Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Brethren*, pg. 171⁴⁴ On this trip they visited the Waldenses in the Cottian Alps, by now far removed from their forefathers' beliefs, and witness the burning of Savonarola in Florence.

⁴⁵ Anton Gindely, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder II*, pg. 312

But here and there, in southern Bohemia and Moravia, in Klatov and Beroun, in Lanškroun, and even at the "Mount of Olives" in Litomyšl, congregations of the Little Group took shape. Matouš a weaver of Lanškroun, Ondřej a cobbler, Jan a miller from Sušice, Řiha a weaver from Votice, Havel a tailor from Litomyšl, Jiřík a cooper from Votice, and Pavel a convert from the extinct Taborites became active workers among them.

At the old monastery in Vilemov the brothers reprinted Petr Chelčický's *Net of Faith*, and circulated hand written tracts. They took a dim view of higher education and because they would not take oaths (required in larger businesses), they contented themselves with working as farmers or craftsmen.

For years after the division, those of the Big Group tried to win the Little Group back into their number, but without success. In a reply to them, Jakub wrote:

Now the Brothers say, "Let us open the gates of the fold to gather in more sheep. But when they open it up, the sheep already inside run out and the wolves tear them to pieces. . . . The gates of the fold are the commandments and prohibitions of Christ who is the strait path and the narrow door. Whoever tries to make this gate wider and says a brother may be a town

councillor or a judge, take oaths, or exercise the bloody rights of the sword, is a thief and a murderer trying to come in some other way. In the same tract, Jakub explained more beliefs of the Little Group:

From the beginning of the world good people have had to suffer. Those who have fallen away from the faith [referring here to Lukas and other leaders of the Big Group] have tried to prove that if a person suffers, being able to defend himself, his suffering is only like that of a donkey or another animal. But Christ did not take this view. He did not hesitate to lay his yoke upon his disciples and ask them, for the sake of the Kingdom, to renounce their property and families. Christ found his followers among the lowly and poor, among servants not rulers, for it is not the poor who rule the world, but the rich. Christianity is a religion that blesses the poor and promises nothing but misery to the rich.

During the early years of the Unity many renounced great estates, honour, fame, and a luxurious life. They suffered great trials, imprisonment, torture, and even death itself, with joy. Some of these, like the Šárovec and Sudoměř families and our Brother Votík lived afterwards on the same level as the simple Brothers. But now people with estates, the rich, the honoured, and those who are friends with the world are coming into the church just as they are.

Throughout the centuries the true Christian faith has been held by only a small minority of those who say they believe. Whenever the church grew very large the seed of true faith disappeared among them, but God preserves it among the faithful few. It is better to be on the right path with the chosen few than on the wrong path with the majority. It was to the small flock that Christ's words of comfort were directed, and when the great church fell away in the time of Constantine it was only a few—the Waldenses—who stayed with the Truth. But now even they have departed from their former teachings.

Every movement, even though God begins it, suffers decline and corruption with time, because of the enemy's wickedness. Now that is happening to the Unity of Brothers. Those looking on can see, by comparing the Unity to what it used to be, that what began in the Spirit is ending in the flesh. This is happening because the brothers wanted to avoid persecution and win large numbers of people into the church who were unwilling to make the sacrifices formerly demanded for entry into the brotherhood.

Every word of Christ means exactly what it says, and he will in the end accept only those who accept his teaching. Heaven and earth will pass away before the least of his words. This is true in the matter of the oath. When Christ says,

“Swear not at all,” he means every kind of oath, just as James in James 5:12. And when Christians begin to set this aside and break his rule, they soon break his command to love their enemies as well—along with the rest of his commands in the Sermon on the Mount. Any attempt to do away with this one command is an attack on all the rest.

There is no proof whatsoever that men exercising civil power have ever belonged to or had part in the holy church. To try and mix the two [the church with civil power] would be like mixing fire with water. Christian groups who do not listen to Christ’s commands in the Sermon on the Mount, and who allow their members to participate in the government are in fact the legions of damnation. You [of the Big Group] say you have not accepted the ways of the unbelieving world. But what else is it? Not only have you accepted them but with pious words you try to hide the fact that you have now given liberty for brothers to take office, swear and fight in wars, deliver thieves up to justice, to the rack and the scaffold and to return evil for evil.

Why have we broken away from you? In the first place it is because you oppress us by force. In second place because you set yourselves up to judge but are not in a position to do so. In third place because we cannot submit to your prostitution of doctrine through which you have corrupted what the Holy Scriptures teach.

In reality it is not we who have separated ourselves from you, but you from us. We are the ones who have stayed with what we formerly believed and you are the ones who have brought in new and unheard of changes. The doctrine we now hold, many among you—like Brother Matěj, for instance— held for years, and we are minded to hold to it until we die. It is the doctrine we believed for years under Brother Rehor and many brothers and sisters still hold it dear. But now you, Matěj, have of your own free will, as you say in a letter, deserted these teachings. Not only this, you have gone so far as to warn the congregations of the Unity against them.⁴⁶

Community at Letovice in Moravia

After the division of the Unity of Brothers darkness and danger settled on Czech lands. By this time, the crown of Bohemia had passed to a son of the King of Poland. He married a French Catholic princess and persecution increased. Here and there, believers who refused to conform, suffered

burning at the stake.

Among the believers of the Little Group, not everything went peacefully. When the time came to ordain new leaders, Amos and Jakub disagreed on how to go about it. Jakob returned to the Big Group and many others lost interest. Then a new face appeared among the faithful.

A knife grinder from Prague, a young man named Jan Kalenec, who had eagerly sought the way of Christ, first among the Hussites, then among the Lutherans, turned to the Unity of Brothers. Like Lukas, years earlier, he travelled to Mladá Boleslav and Brandýs, to see how they lived and what they believed.

Unlike Lukas (with whom he spoke at Mladá Boleslav) Jan saw with grief and displeasure the worldly ways of those who had joined the Unity. His thirst for the Truth gave him no rest until he discovered the Little Group, among whom he became a member with great joy around 1520.

So energetic was Jan Kalenec in his newfound brotherhood, that the congregation at Prague grew rapidly, and when old Amos died in 1522, he became the Little Group's leader. This alarmed the Hussite rulers of the city who branded him on his face, whipped him publicly, and expelled him from the city in 1524. Two sisters and a brother lost their lives by burning, and others got long jail sentences.

From Prague, Jan fled to a settlement of the Little Group at Letovice, far to the east, in Moravia. Other believers found their way there and it became the centre of the movement. From there, Jan carried on a lively correspondence, and studied the New Testament eagerly to discover even more about the way of Christ. Under his leadership, the Little Group returned to baptising only adults, on confession of faith. Their testimony against all forms of violence and swearing of oaths stood firm. And they chose to live, like Christ, in poverty. Like in early Christian times, and among the Waldenses and Albigenses before them, they practised community of goods, and many of them remained single.

No writing from the community at Letovice appeared in print. (Printing in those days was still a complicated and expensive procedure.) But from Jan's letters that survive, their strong feeling against all forms of "worldliness" become clear. To those of the Big Group Jan wrote:

⁴⁶ Condensed from *Akty Jednoty bratrské*.

You permit your members to carry on trades you did not formerly allow. Now they take interest on money. They buy things cheap and sell them for much more. Many of you who could exist on a single craft, freely pursue several trades. More than that, you add field to field, you continually make more gardens, meadows, and vineyards, and buy up house after house, even village after village. . . .

In earlier times, Brother Lukas warned those who dealt in clothing, those who dyed material, and tailors, to keep themselves from the vanity and wickedness of the world. But now you wear stylish clothes and live in luxurious houses. In the same way, your sisters, following your example, wear costly robes of velvet and lace. They put on fancily embroidered under clothing, and dresses decorated with silk and gold.⁴⁷

Sebastian Franck, a contemporary historian describing the Little Group in Moravia, wrote in 1531:

They agree altogether with the Anabaptists. Like them, they hold all things in common. They baptise no children and do not believe that the body of the Lord is present in the sacrament.

Indeed, the similarity between some Czech believers and their Anabaptist neighbours was too great to miss. But Sebastian Franck was not nearly the first, nor the only one, to notice it.

New Brothers in Czech Lands

Only a few years after Jan Kalenec fled from Prague to Moravia, he learned of a new group settling around Mikulov (Nikolsburg), Hustopeče (Auspitz), Slavkov u Brna (Austerlitz) and elsewhere on the lands of the Lords von Lichtenstejn. Like the Waldenses, coming to Moravia years before, they were refugees. And like the Waldenses they were German people. But they came from Switzerland and Austria, and they belonged to the new “Anabaptist” movement.

Even though communication was a problem, both the Little and Big Groups of the Unity of Brothers in Moravia hastened to meet their new neighbours and discover what they believed. The results were interesting, but did not lead to unity. On one hand, those of the Big Group, had become far too involved in commerce and government for the Anabaptists to feel at one with them. Instead of coming to terms in spiritual matters, they came to terms materially,

and at least eighteen Anabaptist “Bruderhöfe” (Brotherhood communities) flourished on estates of Big Group nobility.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Anabaptists did not live up to the ideals of the Little Group, patterned after centuries of careful and serious-minded following of Christ. Some Anabaptists—those in the city of Mikulov under Balthasar Hubmaier—did not hold a clear testimony against the use of the sword. Others, as reported by Jan Kalenec, tolerated “worldly and frivolous professions” like wood carving, painting, the cutting of jewels, and tavern keeping. Worst of all, even the most conservative group, those named for their leader, Jakob Hutter, had moral problems among them that they did not always take care of. In the Moravian town of Žadovice (Schadowitz) a group of Hutterite men, out for something to drink, stole several barrels of beer from the manorial brewery. In another incident, Hutterites were rightfully accused of stealing wood from a private forest. “And such men,” a Czech brother wrote, “claim that they have mortified their flesh and are born again!”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ From Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Brethren*, pp. 265, 268

⁴⁸ Among these were the lords von Žerotín, prominent members of the Unity of Brothers (Big Group), who protected the Anabaptists on many occasions, and granted them material concessions. Important Anabaptist communities on Big Group lands were

Jan Kalenec, after lamenting the Anabaptists’ spiritual pride and lack of love in condemning all who did not practice community just like them, praised them, however, for what he found good. “We rejoice in the fact that you have condemned infant baptism, baptising a second time in faith,” he wrote to them, “and also that you have attained the equality of the First Kingdom, that is, of the Church, where none may say: This is mine.” And when the Anabaptists faced persecution,⁵⁰ the Czech brothers stood ready to help where they could.

Community at Habrovany

Just as close to the centre of the Little Group at Letovice as the Anabaptists, and even closer to them in background and belief, stood the community at Habrovany, a short distance north of Slavkov u Brna.

The Habrovany Brothers shared with the Little Group the spiritual background of the Waldensians in southern Bohemia, the revivals under Petr

Chelčický and Řehoř, and the trial of persecution under Hussite and Catholic authorities. But they did not stand in direct association.

In 1528 a Moravian nobleman, Jan Dubčanský, decided to follow Christ. Unlike Bohuš Kostka, however, he did not try to be a Christian and live in luxury at the same time. He took the Sermon on the Mount as his guide and rejected violence and civil office at once. That brought him into contact with Václav of Lileč, the former rector of the monastery at Vilemov near Chelčice, and with Matěj, a *poustevník* (hermit) from Zatec (Saaz) in western Bohemia.

Long a refuge of the Waldenses, the Zatec area had a history of radical Christianity. On the German side of the mountains, at Zwickau, a group of prophets helped launch the Reformation. On the Czech side, Matěj, a trapper who spent long times in the forest alone, discovered peace in Christ and on his return to civilisation, began to preach on streets and squares, calling everyone to repent “for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” A year after Matěj began to preach, in 1520, a terrible plague struck Bohemia. Afraid to die, many, even in Prague, listened to his warnings and got converted. Others took deep offence.

Ročice (Rossitz), Pouzdrany (Pausram), Židlochovice (Seelowitz), and Breclav (Lundenburg).

⁴⁹ Reported in a letter copied at Kyjov in Moravia, on July 1, 1589.

⁵⁰ Among the first Anabaptists burned at the stake in Moravia, at Brno (Brunn) in May, 1528, was Jan Cizek, a former member of the Unity of Brothers.

Matěj spoke fearlessly against the corruption of wealth and power. In 1525 the Hussites threw him into prison. When they released him, a year later, they drove him from Prague and he went to live with Jan Dubčanský, the converted nobleman at Habrovany in Moravia. There Václav of Lileč joined them and in 1528 they established a new congregation along the lines of Petr Chelčický and Řehoř’s teaching, based on the Sermon on the Mount.

Like the Little Group of the Unity, the brothers at Habrovany took a clear stand against all types of violence, the swearing of oaths, and participation in civil government. The “outward sacraments” of baptism and communion however, were not as important to them, and believing in the priesthood of all believers, they had no ordained leaders. At Lulec in Moravia, they set up a print shop from where, after 1530, a steady stream of Czech books and tracts appeared.

Then, in 1537, the authorities imprisoned Jan Dubčanský and Czech believers fell on even harder times.

Trouble in Czech Lands

With three hundred thousand soldiers, the Turkish sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent, had stormed neighbouring Hungary (including Slovakia) in 1526. Not only had this set Czech lands in danger. It pitted Protestants against Roman Catholics in their defence and by the 1530s the Czechs found themselves in a struggle for survival.

While the Big Group made peace with the Hussites and joined forces with them in armed resistance to the Roman Catholics from Austria, the Little Group divided over the use of costly dress material and ornaments in their homes. Jan Dubčanský died and what was left of his followers at Habrovany joined the Anabaptists. Then, in 1546, Austrian troops crossed from Moravia into Bohemia. Prague fell into Roman Catholic hands. The Hussites “made peace with the pope” to avoid annihilation, and two years later the Holy Roman emperor banished the Unity of Brothers by royal decree.

Unwilling to face persecution as an “illegal church” thousands from the Big Group went over en masse to the Hussites. A minority that refused, about 1500 people, fled on foot and in refugee wagon trains through Silesia to Poland. The Anabaptists fled east, to Hungary, and the Little Group, with the brothers at Habrovany simply disappeared.

A Waning Light

Twenty five years after the Austrian take-over of Czech lands, a trickle of Big Group Unity members returned from Poland. Little by little they re-established their congregations, their schools, and publishing works. At Kralice in Moravia, they printed a beautiful Czech Bible in red and black ink with arabesque designs. At Ivančice (Eibenschitz) and on the vast Žerotín estates, they cooperated with the Anabaptists—also returned from Hungary—in large farming, ceramic, and wine-making enterprises. But very little of the Unity of Brothers’ love for Christ returned with their peace and prosperity. The difference between them and their Hussite or Catholic neighbours was primarily in name.

Then on March 28, 1592, Martin and Anna Komenský, a Big Group Unity couple of Nivnice in Moravia, had a little boy they named Jan Ámos. By the time he was twelve, they had both died, and after four miserable years, he found his way into the Unity of Brothers’ school at Přerov (Prerau). Jan Amos Komenský (John Amos Comenius), did more at school than play

games and socialise with the young people. He studied the Scriptures earnestly and discovered, to his dismay, how far his church had strayed from what it originally believed. He also made friends with the Anabaptists in surrounding communities and admired them for their inner order and discipline “by which they surpassed all other denominations.” Then, after his ordination he found his way to the old Waldensian refugee settlement at Fulnek in Moravia.

Living in a room alongside the meetinghouse at Fulnek, Jan Amos learned to know the descendants of these German believers—plain, industrious, minding their own business on little farms hidden in the valleys of Neutitschein, Zauchenthal, and Sehlen. The *Kühländl* (little land of the cows) the Germans called it, and in its quiet seclusion Jan Amos discovered a remnant of the faith he believed his church had lost. He worked among the German members of the Unity, at Fulnek, with great enthusiasm—until disaster struck.

Darkness

For many years after the Austrian take-over of Bohemia, the Hussites had lived in an uneasy peace with their Roman Catholic rulers. But when the Catholics, spurred on by Jesuits and the “Counter Reformation” put pressure on the Hussites in the early 1600s, they rebelled. In a hasty trial of officials accused of favouring the Catholics they threw two men from a window at the Hradčany castle in Prague and a popular revolution began. Austria closed in on Czech lands.

Coming in overwhelming numbers, Roman Catholic troops fought the united Hussite and Big Group Unity forces on November 8, 1620, at the Witkov (Weissenberg, White Mountain) just outside the city. The battle lasted one hour. Hussite and Unity forces disintegrated. Total Catholic rule began with the public decapitation of Hussite and Unity leaders in Prague, while Austrian troops on the rampage raped, murdered, and plundered the Czech people and devastated their land.

Industry collapsed. Hundreds of thousands fled. Entire towns stood empty and the population of Bohemia sank from over three to less than one million people. In Moravia both Hussites and Big Group Unity members became

Catholics by force, or fled. Given free reign, Catholic troops plundered and burned the Anabaptist Bruderhöfe on Žerotín lands. All non-Catholic books they could find, including Kralice Bibles, they burned.

Not even the peaceful Kūhländl, the area around Fulnek in Moravia, escaped. Catholic troops fell on Jan Amos Komenský's library and burned it on the town square. Jan Amos, with his family and other refugees fled to the mountains near Brandýs in Bohemia. There, in a hiding place in the woods, he wrote *The Labyrinth of The World and The Paradise of The Heart*. Then even this refuge was taken from him.

A Hidden Seed

After his wife and child died, and Jan Amos married again, mounting danger forced him to flee with his father-in-law (a bishop of the Big Group) and a few others across the border, through Silesia, to Poland.⁵¹ Leaving on a cold night, in January, 1628, the group of refugees halted on the last high pass from which they could look back over Bohemia, dark and silent beneath them. They sang a hymn of the Unity of Brothers. Then they knelt, and Jan Amos asked God to have mercy on the Czech people and preserve among them a seed of faith. God heard the prayer.

Almost a hundred years after the flight to Poland the Czech lands lay quiet and thoroughly “catholicised.” The Unity of Brothers had died out. The last Anabaptists, even though they still made pottery and lived in community of goods, had long forgotten their background and went to mass every week. Even the Hussites had forsaken what their founders stood for and as an organisation had ceased to exist. But a seed remained.

In the mountains around Fulnek in Moravia, in the villages settled by German Waldensian refugees—Landskron, Hermanitz, Rothwasser, Zauchenthal, Schönau, Seitendorf, and Sehlen—not everything stood as the Jesuits (leaders in the CounterReformation) supposed.

In the Martin Schneider home at Zauchenthal, meetings took place after dark. In the Kutschern home, an old grandmother, the daughter of a shepherd, told the children how their ancestors had lived in Christian community. In Mährisch-Kuhwald the Nitschmann family met in secret to read the Bible and pray—as did the Melchior Kunz, Johann and David Zeisberger, Andreas Beyer, and Matthäus Stach families in other villages. And old Georg Jäschke

lived at Neutitschein near Sehlen. . . .

⁵¹ In Poland the Czech refugees lived at Leszno (Lissa). After sixteen years the Russians, at war with Poland, passed through their settlement and destroyed it. Jan Amos saved some of his books by throwing them into a well. But Russian soldiers used the rest to start fires on which they roasted the immigrants' cattle. Not many years later, the Swedes attacked Poland, and in the struggle they suffered even more. Their meetinghouse, school, and almost all their homes burned down. The town of Leszno itself burned for three days and several hundred wagon loads of women and children fled. This time Jan Amos lost the only manuscript of a Czech dictionary he had worked on for forty years. But he did not lose heart and travelled to England and the Netherlands where his writings became well known.

Old Georg, as everyone knew among the German settlers, had not “bowed his knee to Baal.” A steadfast believer in Christ and his peaceable Kingdom, he taught his family from the Sermon on the Mount—even though he had to do it in utmost secrecy. His daughter, Judith, married Georg Neisser and they taught their five sons likewise.

After Georg's family had grown and left home, his wife died. But he still felt young and strong. He married again, and after turning 77 rejoiced in the birth of his youngest son, Michael.

Six years later his age caught up to him and he lay sick in bed. Judith and her family, along with others of the “secret church” came to visit him. His wife and little Michael stood beside his bed. Then Old George, still strong in spirit, looked over the group and said:

Our days of freedom are over. Many of our people have given way to a worldly spirit and the pope's religion devours them. It may seem as though the Unity of Brothers has come to an end. But listen to me, children: I believe you will see a great deliverance. A remnant will be saved! I do not know for sure whether deliverance will come in Moravia, or whether you will have to “go out of Babylon.” But I believe it will come in the not too distant future. I tend to think an exodus will take place and you will be offered a refuge where you may serve the Lord without fear.

When the time of your deliverance comes, be ready! Watch out that you do not get left behind.

After telling them of his hope and faith, old Georg Jäschke placed his hands on the heads of his son and each of his grandsons in turn. “Remember what I told you,” he said, “and that Michael belongs to Jesus. I commend him into your keeping. Take care of him, and when you depart from this place, take him with you by all means!”

A Light

Soon after Georg Jäschke died, a boy from Senfleben, at the foot of Mt. Radhost in far southeastern Moravia, found a job with a carpenter. His name was Christian David and his new boss, Michael Ranftler of Holeschau, came from a German family that had belonged to the Unity of Brothers.

Christian David could not read. He had spent his childhood herding goats on the mountains and knew little about God. His parents had taught him a prayer to Saint Anthony, but it did nothing to quiet the unrest in his heart. When he saw Michael Ranftler's eight-year-old son reading on winter evenings by the fire, he asked to learn the alphabet. Then, under the eaves in his attic bedroom, he found what would change his life: a little book published by the Unity in its better years.

Night after night Christian David read from the book. In it he learned the way of Christ and his Kingdom. Every word fell on fertile soil. Christian David could not contain his enthusiasm for what had come to him, but no one dared talk with him about it. "It is too dangerous," they said. "Be quiet or you will get a short haircut (you will get beheaded)!"

Desperate to find a place where believers could openly live for Christ, Christian David struck out on foot across the mountains to Protestant Slovakia. But the people there did not trust him and gave him a cold shoulder. Then he found his way through Silesia to southern Germany.

In Germany Christian David met disappointment. German Protestants, even though they spoke about Christ and correct doctrine, made fun of him for taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously. They laughed at his convictions and told him to go join the army.

For several years Christian David wandered about, disillusioned, confused, and wondering if anyone on earth still knew or loved Christ. Then the town of Görlitz in Oberlausitz burned. Four hundred houses lay in ruins and Christian David found work cleaning up and rebuilding.

Working at Görlitz Christian David met the first Germans in whom he discovered a joyful love for Christ. Some of them—under the influence of Philipp Jakob Spener and Jean de Labadie—met in homes to pray. They studied the Scriptures and sang songs. For the first time in his life Christian David could freely share his inner convictions. His gratefulness to God knew no bounds, especially after he found a wife—Anna Elisabeth Ludwig— among believers in the nearby village of Niederwiese.

Christian David's new-found happiness might have been complete, had not the thought of his friends in Moravia, languishing in darkness and fear, touched it with sorrow. Then he spoke with a converted nobleman, Nicholas Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf, who offered to settle what refugees Christian David might bring, on waste land at Grosz Hennersdorf, southwest of Görlitz on the road between Löbau and Zittau. Only three months after his marriage Christian David returned to Moravia on foot, crossing the mountains alone at risk of his life. (Moravian authorities caught and killed anyone they suspected of spreading "heresy.")

Christian David returned to German-speaking descendants of Unity families at Senftleben and from there to Fulnek and the villages of the Kühltändl. Here and there frightened people consented to talk with him, but only in secret, and when he spoke of fleeing to Germany they shook their heads. "We could not evade the police," they told him. "And even if we could, our wives and little ones would not survive the trip." Wherever Christian David went he met doubts and fears. No one dared leave Moravia, and even though some believers thanked him for the invitation, they told him he should be quiet and return quickly to Germany or else he would lose his head. Then he came to Neutitschein near Sehlen.

In a secret meeting in the home of Agustin Neisser (one of old Georg's grandsons) Christian David presented his daring plan. He begged the ones gathered with him to pack up in faith and join him to build a congregation for the Lord in Germany. "Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters, or father or mother or children or fields for Christ's sake," he told them, "will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

The Neissers looked at one another. They remembered, as clearly as if it would have happened the day before, old Georg's last instructions. Was this what he had seen? "Let us think and pray," they told Christian David.

A decision did not come easily. To leave Moravia meant forsaking everything but what they could carry on their backs. It meant leaving in utmost secrecy, at the risk of capture, imprisonment, and quite likely death. But when the little cluster of believers at Neutitschein remembered old Georg's challenge and what would happen to them if they stayed in Moravia (almost all of their friends had already renounced the faith and become Roman Catholic), they knew they could do only one thing. All that remained was to decide, who, when and how.

None of the neighbours dare notice a difference in activities. No packing or food preparation dare take place openly.

On the moonless night of Wednesday, May 27, 1722 Agustin and Martha Neisser, Martha's niece Susanna Dürlich, Jakob and Anna Neisser with their children Wenzel (6), Anna (3), twins Joseph and Juliana (13 weeks), and old Georg's son, Michael Jäschke (by now twenty-one) left Neutitschein, praying no dog would bark. Up through the woods into mountains along the Silesian border they found their way on silent trails. They carried bundles, and the little ones on their backs. And with them they carried a spark of hope that would end the long eclipse of the believers' church in Bohemia and Moravia.

8

Ludwig

For days the Neissers and young Michael Jäschke followed Christian David through the wilderness. Danger still surrounded them. Silesia, through which they had to pass, was also Roman Catholic. But weary, faint, and excited, they eventually arrived on the young landowner's estate at Berthelsdorf in Germany.

The sight that met their eyes left them speechless. The young landowner, Ludwig von Zinzendorf, was not home. The man who came to show them where to settle took them to a lowlying wilderness behind the village. Parts of the land stood in water. Dense brush and brambles covered the rest.

Martha Neisser sat down. "Where in this wilderness shall we find bread?" was all she could think to ask.

But even before she asked, the Lord had prepared bread for them—and more. The landowner's grandmother, the baroness Henriette Katherina von Gersdorf, sent them a cow. With great vigour, Christian David and the brothers from Moravia set to work felling trees, building shelters, and clearing land so the women could plant grain and vegetables. Then Ludwig came.

Just turned twenty-two, Nicholas Ludwig, the young count of Zinzendorf and Pottendorf could not have grown up in a setting more unlike that of the Moravian settlers on his land. Used to nothing but fine food and clothes, he lived in the manor house with his grandmother until she sent him to a "Pietist" boarding school in the German city of Halle.

As long as he could remember, Ludwig had known serious-minded Pietist brothers. At his grandmother's invitation (his father had died and his mother married a Prussian general when he was four) they had conducted prayer meetings in her manor house at Grosz Hennersdorf (not far from Berthelsdorf). From them he first heard Johann Arndt's simple lessons in godliness. He learned to sing with them the great Lutheran hymns, and above all he learned to pray.

As a very young child, Ludwig prayed earnestly to Christ. He wrote "letters to Jesus" and tossed them out the window of his upper storey room. During the Swedish invasion of 1706 when plundering soldiers burst into the manor house they stopped and turned back at the sight of Ludwig, a six-year-old, on his knees in prayer.

From his Pietist teachers, Ludwig learned to view contemporary Protestantism—to which he, as a German Lutheran, belonged—with deep mistrust. But he also learned not to go the way of the “sectarians.” The Pietists held the concept of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (little churches within the Church) as their ideal. They believed that through personal conversions, prayer meetings, and Bible study, they could build the “real church,” the mystical, spiritual body of Christ, far above the realm of institutional religion. All this had appealed to Ludwig, and he “thought like a Pietist” until the school at Halle left him deeply disillusioned. Its teachers, fanatical in their zeal for holiness, harassed the students to no end—while the students, all pious prayers and songs notwithstanding, were a mob of fiends. That is, most of them. A few, like Georg Wilhelm von Söhlenthal, Anton Heinrich Walbaum, Johannes von Jony, and a Swiss boy, Friedrich von Watteville met with Ludwig to read the Bible and pray. They formed a society, the “Order of a Grain of Mustard Seed,” and pledged themselves to serve Christ all their lives together.

In spite of his disappointment with the school, Ludwig learned well. By the time he turned sixteen he spoke Latin freely. Then his family transferred him to the University of Wittenberg, and his days under Pietist influence came to an end.

At first Ludwig felt strange in the “worldly” atmosphere of the university—deep in the study of law, with lessons in fencing, riding horses, and dancing. But as time passed, he began to view his strict Pietist childhood more critically. He began to wonder who was the holiest—the “regular” Lutherans at Wittenberg who trusted entirely in grace to save them, or the works-conscious Pietists at Halle, forever at odds one with another on how to be a little more sanctified.

Determined to find the truth of the matter, Ludwig spent an hour every morning and another one, every evening, in prayer. He studied the Bible carefully, from cover to cover, in Latin and now also in Greek. Then the time came for him to finish his studies abroad.

In France, Ludwig witnessed the work of Catholic religious orders among the poor. The thought of remaining celibate to serve Christ appealed to him. But when he met a godly and gracious young woman, Theodore von Castell, in southern Germany, and she returned his attention, he proposed marriage. Everyone, on both sides, gave their consent. Ludwig was happy. But shortly before the wedding, he made a discovery. On his way to see Theodore, his carriage broke down near the estate of one of his best friends, Heinrich von Reuss.

Stopping to make the necessary repairs, Ludwig learned that Heinrich had been interested in Theodore, but had given her up for his sake.

Ludwig felt terrible. “I will not take her away from you!” he declared. “Let us go and ask which one of us she prefers.”

It did not take long for Heinrich to get ready—nor for Ludwig to discern the truth. When he saw Theodore and Heinrich truly in love, he freely released her from the engagement. And even though it cost him an inner struggle, he served as best man and composed a song for the wedding.

This experience, and a visit to an art museum in the city of Düsseldorf on the Rhine, permanently changed Ludwig’s life. Even though he had “believed in Christ” for years, things did not fall into place for him until he stood before a painting showing Christ flogged, mocked, wearing a crown of thorns, and set by Pilate before the people. When Ludwig read the words underneath the picture, “I have done this for you. What have you done for me?” his heart broke.

Overwhelmed before the Saviour of the world, he repented of all things human and surrendered his life to him. Far beyond self-righteous Pietism, far beyond Lutheran presumptions of free (or cheap) grace, far beyond anything he had known or felt before, Ludwig felt his soul transported into the presence of Christ. And even though he did not know it yet, out of this experience, his life’s vocation was born.

For the time being, it resulted in a German poem:

Bridegroom of the soul, Lamb of God!

Prove my motives and discover where they begin. Is my will sincere?

Oh so let it be! Let me be crucified to self and sanctified to you.

Purify my inner ways.

If I go astray on dark paths, shine on me and guide me back!

If the cross and sorrow trouble me, give me patience.

Set my sights upon the goal.

After war, victory and peace will come.

The world holds little joy. Its pasture is dry.

Only in Zion shall we drink undiluted wine!

Jesus walk before me, on the way of life.

*I will hurry after you. Take me by the hand, to our Fatherland.
Order my steps, Beloved One, as long as I live.
If you lead me on rough trails, watch out for me.
At the end of the way, open
the door into what is yet to come!*⁵²

On September 7, 1722, Ludwig married Heinrich von Reuss's sister Erdmuth Dorothea. Three months later, on the way to Berthelsdorf to see a new house being built for them on the family estate, he noticed a strange settlement beside the road. "Who lives here?" he asked.

"The Moravian refugees you gave permission to settle on your land!" Before his surprised companions knew what was happening, Ludwig halted the carriage, found his way down the muddy trail and entered the first of the low shelters where women in simple peasant dress hastily picked up their babies and men came running to greet him.

Within minutes, all were kneeling on the floor to thank Christ for bringing them together.

⁵² *Gesangbuch der Evangelischen Brüder*, 415

9

The Place Of The Lord's Care

Standing tall above the refugee's cabins south-west of Berthelsdorf, the Hutberg (Watch Hill) greeted the first rays of the morning sun. Once reconciled to their new home, the Neissers, Michael Jäschke, and Susanne Dürlich found its familiar presence a constant reminder of Psalm 121:1—*Ich hebe meine Augen auf zu den Bergen, von welchen mir Hilfe kommt*—and in a play on the name, called their new settlement “Herrnhut” (the Lord's watch, or place of his care). How meaningful that name would become, they could not imagine.

Not long after the first group of refugees settled at Herrnhut and the men were nailing down a new cabin floor, Christian David suddenly felt the Lord calling him back to Moravia to invite others. The call came to him so forcefully he jumped up and ran, even forgetting his hat. A month later, in August 1723, he returned to Herrnhut with Judith Jäschke Neisser, her sons Georg, Johann, and Wenzel, with their wives Susanne, Rosine, and Marianne, two little boys Georg Jr. and Augustin Neisser, Judith Holaschke (a sister of Anna Neisser) and old Georg Jäschke's widow.

Word of their safe arrival spread. More and more “secret believers” in Moravia took courage and packed their bags to flee. In December Christian and Julianne Jäschke with their children Rosina, Nikolaus, Andreas, and Dorothea suddenly appeared, and told of yet more making plans to come.

Dreams Unite

Ludwig von Zinzendorf did not grasp the import of the Moravians' flight at once. He felt kindly disposed to them and certainly wished them the best. But his mind was elsewhere, full of dreams of his own. With Friedrich von Wattewille, Johann Andreas Rothe (Lutheran pastor at Berthelsdorf), and Melchior Schäffer of the cloister church in Görlitz, he entertained serious thoughts of founding a Christian community.

Ever since his surrender to Christ, Ludwig knew he could not live like the ordinary *Reichsgraf* (count of the Holy Roman Empire) he was. He had given his wealth, talents, and position to Christ, and expected Christ to use them. The first idea of how that might happen came after his marriage and return to Grosz Hennersdorf in 1721.

Seeing the needs of seekers throughout Germany and the rest of Europe, Ludwig and his friends planned a publishing and correspondence work, a school where young people of all walks of life could be trained in godly living, an orphanage, an itinerant evangelisation ministry, and a retreat for those seeking new life in the church—all in the context of a “home” or “base” community. To that end, Ludwig offered the estate of Berthelsdorf and proposed that Moravian refugees already living there could help with the building projects.

At first things went as expected. By 1723 the publishing house, under the direction of Abraham Gottlieb Ludwig, began to send out its first newsletters (although not from Berthelsdorf). The school opened its doors. The orphanage became a reality, and Ludwig—besides writing continually and visiting seekers here and there—translated the works of Johann Arndt to publish in French.

But the scene kept changing—fast. Instead of an idyllic “retreat” for the spiritually inclined, the estate of Berthelsdorf and surrounding area, lying as it did near the borders of Silesia and Bohemia, became a raw refugee camp. In 1724 thirty poor families converged on Görlitz from Silesia. They were Schwenkfelders, the little known remnant of a Reformation-era revival group in the east. A year later, the Nitschman, Hickel, Quitt, Weber, Fischer, and Berger families from Moravia arrived at Herrnhut, ninety people all told, of ancient Waldensian and Unity background. And the end, Ludwig and his friends suddenly realised, was nowhere in sight.

Not only did the settlers at Herrnhut report to Moravia how the Lord had blessed them in Germany. They, and exiles in other places, sent Bibles, forbidden writings of the Unity, and the works of Johann Arndt to seekers in Czech lands. Even though it might cost their lives, both ethnic Germans and Czechs snatched what came with the desperation of the spiritually starving. With tears, and stirrings of heart, they returned to Christ and the way their ancestors had lived suddenly became of greatest interest to them.

Not only at Fulnek and surrounding areas in Moravia, but at Kunvald and Lanškroun, even in the old “Mount of Olives” at Litomyšl in Bohemia, love for Christ sprang from the rubble of what had been the Unity of Brothers. Christian David risked a visit to Bohemia in 1726. Melchior Nitschmann followed two years later to discover faith in full bloom, and besides an approximate thousand three hundred refugees from Moravia, another six hundred fifty from Bohemia found their way safely to Herrnhut in the 1720s and 30s. This was not all.

Herrnhut, instead of continuing as a curious “sideline” to the planned Christian community at Berthelsdorf, fast became that community itself. Christian David’s dream of finding a refuge for the Moravians in Germany merged—by circumstance, not by choice—with Ludwig’s dream of founding a refuge for spiritual seekers. The two became ever more related until those looking on lost track which was which, and came to see the whole strange scene as one: a young count trying to follow Christ, a fast-growing settlement of foreigners in rude cabins among animals on the loose, muddy trails, brush to be cleared, new workshops of all descriptions, a school, an orphanage, an old German village (Berthelsdorf) with a Lutheran church, and an ever greater variety of visitors, eccentrics, sectarians, and adventurers.

Dreams Divide

Local authorities, watching what happened at Herrnhut, began to grow alarmed. Ludwig’s family and many former friends looked on in bewilderment, or dismay. But people kept coming—Moravian refugees, Schwenkfelders, Protestants of both persuasions (Lutheran and Reformed), Catholics, Anabaptists, Separatists, peasants and nobility, educated and ignorant, rich and poor—until the general *Durcheinander* (mixup), both in material and spiritual things, threatened to become the ruin of all. Some loved Ludwig and his friends and worked closely with them. Others grew disillusioned and made trouble.

No one could live at Herrnhut long without seeing that besides simple personality problems, major doctrinal rifts stood in the way of it becoming a functional community. Skilled defenders of every viewpoint abounded. Everyone had his own dreams for the future and his own set of aversions. Ludwig did what he could to keep peace—to the point of inviting all men in the settlement to his house for Bible study, twenty hours a day, three days in a row, to find out whether God predestined men to salvation or whether grace was free to all. They decided on free grace. But even with this contention cleared up, the people were not happy. From the least to the greatest, even prominent brothers among them like Christian David, plunged into fresh disputes with zeal.

One man went so far as to march up and down Herrnhut announcing to all that Ludwig von Zinzendorf was the beast of Revelation 13, and Johann Andreas Rothe the false prophet. Christian David, for a time, found life in Herrnhut so upsetting he built himself a hut outside the settlement and dug his own well, sitting to wait like Jonah for God’s judgement to fall.

In all this, however, Ludwig did not lose heart. Intent on seeking fellowship with Christ, he managed through thick and thin to pray for hours every day, and challenged others to the same. Out of this circle of prayer the question arose: “Why not turn from facing issues and one another, to face Jesus Christ? Will he not save us from confusion?”

Timidly at first, but with ever growing conviction, Ludwig and his friends stopped discussing religion to focus on Christ. To behold him, smitten in their hearts, worshipping him with indescribable silence and joy, they began to comprehend him as *Heiland* (the Healing One, the Saviour)—not only of individuals, but of Church and society, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

Fixing their eyes on him, their lives and outlook became reflections of what they saw.

Early in 1727 Ludwig and his young wife—like him of noble birth—moved from the manor house at Grosz Hennersdorf to live among the refugees at Herrnhut. Taking part at once in the refugees’ lives, Ludwig spent every day visiting families, praying with them and setting for them an example in serving others. Under Christ’s benign influence an air of goodwill began to move through the settlement again. Damaged relationships healed. Arguments died down, and the anticipation of blessings to come brought new life to Herrnhut.

From Dreams to Reality

Promptly, after moving to Herrnhut, Ludwig and his wife invited all the settlers to join “bands” for interpersonal responsibility, confession, and prayer. Several times a week, members of the bands—usually from three to half a dozen, voluntarily associated—met to tell each other what they thought. They shared their temptations, pointed out faults, and opened themselves up one to another in the presence of God. Miracles happened, but more were to come.

With the help of the settlers from Moravia, Ludwig drew up a plan of “brotherly agreement” in May, 1727. Following their ancient custom the people at Herrnhut then chose four men, Christian David, Georg and Melchior Nitschmann, and Christoph Hoffman, to be their overseers. All shook hands and promised to keep the rules in Christ’s peace.

Two months later, on July 16, a great young people's gathering on the Hutberg turned into an all-night prayer meeting. The next week a group of men—including Christian David, Melchior Nitschmann, Ludwig von Zinzendorf, Leonhard Dober (a potter who had come to Herrnhut from southern Germany) and others—gathered at the same place and their prayers turned into a joyful time of praise and commitment. The day following Ludwig left to visit an older relative. With him, he took a book from the nearby Zittauer library. It was a church order of the Unity of Brothers, the *Ratio Disciplinae*, written by Jan Ámos Komenský fifty years earlier.

The more he read of Jan Amos's work, the more excited Ludwig grew. "This sounds just like our Brotherly Agreement," he told himself, and could not wait to return to Herrnhut to read it, in German translation, to the rest.

Everyone, but in particular the Moravians, at Herrnhut rejoiced to hear what Jan Amos had written. Yes, they recognised this teaching! And deep within them, it stirred their longing to revive the Unity of Brothers and live in the way their grandparents—those of Jan Amos's generation—only dimly remembered.

Ludwig and his friends began to see the Moravians among them in a new light. Did they perhaps carry clues to an ancient, purer, Christian belief? Could their history and traditions become valuable for the present church? The possibility intrigued Ludwig as much as the refugees and together they began to study the Gospel of John in evening meetings.

The meeting on August 5 did not end when the women put the little ones to bed. Fifteen men sat on the lower slopes of the Hutberg discussing Christ and his Gospel until long after the fireflies came out and the day's heat gave way to a balmy summer night. As at other times, they prayed and sang. But instead of dwindling off into village homes as the night wore on, the group began to grow. More and more brothers, and eventually sisters, appeared. No one had to explain. The Lamb was there. Prayers, confessions, tears and songs continued until nearly the whole settlement, standing at the burial ground on the slopes of the Hutberg greeted the morning sun with David's words: "He is the sun of righteousness that arises with resplendant grace!"

Five days later, nearly the same thing happened at an evening service in the village church at Berthelsdorf, a kilometre away. Johann Andreas Rothe, who as a Lutheran pastor had quarrelled much with the Herrnhut settlers—at times standing on speaking terms with only two or three—suddenly beheld the Lamb. Regardless of his office, never mind his reputation or creed, he fell on his face before the

people and spoke to Christ as he never had before. So did the congregation. Amid tears and confessions and pledges to live in peace everyone continued in *herrliche Gemeinschaft* (glorious fellowship) until midnight.

Then came the communion service of August 13, 1727.

Walking in little groups from Herrnhut to Berthelsdorf, everyone felt humbled and “an awareness of personal sin, need, and helplessness brought them to think less of themselves and kindly of one another.” Johann Andreas Rothe introduced the communion service by pointing everyone, with a broken heart and conviction, to Christ. The congregation knelt. Ludwig von Zinzendorf led in a prayer of confession. Then someone began to sing, “*Hier legt mein Sinn sich vor dir Nieder, mein Geist sucht seinen Ursprung wieder.*

. . .” In translation:

Here I lay my will before you, my spirit seeks its source again. May your joyinspiring face, be turned toward me in my need. Look! I feel my sin, let me die with you! May my stubborn self, in your pain, be killed as well. Fill my motives with surrender [*meinen Willen mit der Gelassenheit erfüllen*]. Break nature’s power and set my inner longings free! I do not know what I should do. Human works mean nothing here, for who could wash his heart from sin? You must do it. Therefore take the worries of my soul and impress me deeply with the fact that I in you, am already blessed [*daß ich in dir schon selig bin*]!

Loud weeping and cries to heaven nearly drowned out the singing. The service did not end until, as Ludwig described it later, true *Herzensgemeinschaft* (communion of the heart) had descended upon them all. “Where they had been one body before, now they were one in spirit, the

Spirit of Christ. . . . Those who had seriously annoyed each other, now embraced and promised to serve one another in peace, so the whole congregation came back to Herrnhut as newborn children.”

A Transformed Community

During the summer and fall of 1727 Herrnhut became exactly what Ludwig had wanted his community to be: “a visible habitation of God among men.” It became, within the wider Church, a sign for Christ and his Kingdom. But far beyond the pietistic idea of “little churches within the church” Herrnhut, after its renewal, awoke to its spiritual heritage.

Numerous brothers at Herrnhut—among them Augustin Neisser, Martin Dober, David and Melchior Nitschmann, Johann Gottlob Klemm, and Martin Rohleder—began to exercise their teaching gifts. Not only that, they began in simplicity and freedom to teach from the New Testament as they understood it.

For the first time since the Little Group “disappeared” in Moravia, two hundred years earlier, the teachings of Christ they had stood for resurfaced. Řehoř and Petr Chelčický’s love of peace, their refusal to swear oaths or bear arms, their conviction to serve Christ in simplicity, all believers sharing their things as in a family—everything came back (to the alarm of their Protestant neighbours) and more!

Peace and order came to Herrnhut. Even though opposition to their activities mounted— not the least of which came from Johann Andreas Rothe who feared their “sectarianism”—the Moravian settlers went on to enjoy transformed . . .

Relationships

“David Nitschmann and Christian David sat at my table today,” Ludwig reported some time after the awakening in 1727. “We took stock of ourselves and told each other what still remained to mar the image of Christ in us. First I let them say what was the matter with me, then I said what was still the matter with them.”

“The new birth—the new man created in the image of God through the blood of Christ in perfect righteousness and holiness in thought and action—is often a mystery for a long time, between the Saviour and the soul,” reads a statement from a brother’s meeting at Herrnhut. “But in personal relationships, in the fellowship of believers, and in the everyday round of life it becomes totally obvious to all.”⁵³

Complete openness, along with the responsibility they felt for one another, led the believers at Herrnhut into a total restructuring of their community. It started with the young men in 1728. A good many of them lived with families other than their own, where the husband was not always around. To avoid suspicion, and at the same time to live in greater accountability among themselves, twenty-six of them moved into a wing of the orphanage with Christian David and Melchior Nitschmann as “choir leaders.” (Because they sang and practised music together, everyone knew them simply as the

“Young Brothers Choir.”) Every day they prayed and studied the Scriptures together. They planned and distributed their work among themselves and pooled their resources.

In 1730, under the leadership of Anna Nitschmann, a “Young Sister’s Choir” moved into another building at Herrnhut, and separate choirs for boys and girls, young married and older married couples, widows, and widowers followed. Children moved from their parents’ quarters into their respective choir houses at an early age, and from there into the single brothers and sisters choirs at maturity (around fourteen). This arrangement came from the belief that Christ looks different and means different things to various groups of people. Young men, for instance, see him as an example of endurance and model of wisdom, while older widows may value him as a friend and helper. Every group, the Moravians believed, gets the most out of fellowship with Christ if among others of their kind.

⁵³ *Barbyzche Sammlungen*, note from a *Dienerkonferenz* of 1753

Every choir house at Herrnhut came to have its own chapel, kitchen, and communal dining room. Choir leaders led in footwashing and communion services, and held joyful funerals for its members that “went home.” Only on the Sabbath and on the Lord’s day (the first and last days of the week) did all worship and, on occasion, eat together.

With time—after the church at Herrnhut branched out to other places in Europe—all members came to belong as well to a *Haus* or *Pilgergemeinde* (“home” or “pilgrim” congregations). Those of the Hausgemeinde took care of the children, the land, livestock, handcrafts, and trade. Those of the Pilgergemeinde travelled continually from place to place to tell others of Christ. But all separations of distance and “band” or “choir” groupings notwithstanding, the Moravians were a close knit and joyful fellowship in Christ. Young and old remembered one another’s special days with

Scriptures or words of greeting on carefully illuminated pieces of stiff paper—the source of today’s “greeting card” tradition. And in their prayers, they “remembered one another in name before the Lamb.”

Time

The awakening at Herrnhut in 1727 not only restructured its society. It revolutionised its members' use of time.

Two weeks after the memorable communion in Berthelsdorf another prayer meeting on the Hutberg lasted all night. In fact, it lasted and lasted. Those gathered pledged themselves to keep on praying by turns, twenty-four men and twenty-four women selecting their hours by lot, every day. From Herrnhut the custom passed to Moravian settlements around the world and for more than a hundred years following the brothers and sisters kept it, like the fire in the Lord's temple, aflame.

Mornings at Herrnhut began with devotions in the *Saal* (the meeting room) at five. Those not able to attend observed a quiet time and prayed elsewhere. Then, after breakfast came the *Viertelstunde*, a fifteen-minute prayer time during which someone read the *Losung* (the Scripture of the day, selected by lot, popularised later as the "Watchword"), and other devotions followed throughout the day. Evening meetings were either *Gebet* or *Singstunden* (prayer or song hours). Every Thursday evening the brothers met to discuss the community's general needs. Watchmen, on duty around the clock, announced the hours, and at night sang cheerful songs to mark the time for those who could not sleep.

When the question of keeping the Lord's Day or the Sabbath came up, the Moravians decided to keep both, but to be legalistic on neither. On either day, the believers' celebration was Christ.

After 1728 a *Gemeintag* (community day) became the custom at Herrnhut, one Saturday a month. Between choral selections, common meals they came to call love feasts, and the public reading of letters or trip reports, this became the day to celebrate weddings, receive new members, and dispatch pilgrims to all parts of the world. More often than not the *Gemeintag* ended with footwashing and communion—"festivals of the Lamb" that could continue well past midnight.

The Lord's Day began with a morning blessing at five and meetings in the choir houses at six. A children's meeting came at ten, followed by preaching in the *Saal*, for the whole congregation, at eleven. Those who spoke prepared nothing beforehand but shared as the Spirit led. In the afternoon special meetings focused on the needs of the aged and sick, and those visiting. A "blessed warriors' meal" (communion in bread and wine) sometimes preceded the preaching or song hour after supper and the Lord's day ended with an evening blessing at every choir

house. From beginning to end, every week at Herrnhut became a sweet adventure in Christ.

Work

With their time and fellowship revolving around Christ, the work of the Moravian settlers at Herrnhut naturally did the same. Soon after their awakening, they formed a general diaconate to oversee the land, buildings and industries of the community. Every able person among them became responsible to work and contribute to the welfare of all.

In the late 1720s, forty-five houses stood at Herrnhut. But as the community grew, its choir houses and adjoining buildings, around a sheltered “Hof” (central yard), needed constant enlargement. Its workshops multiplied and among its buildings the believers planted flowers and fruit trees. Everyone at Herrnhut learned a trade or practised what he already knew. Friedrich Kühnel set up a linen weaving shop. The Dober brothers, Martin and Leonhard, manufactured fine ceramics. Some of the Neissers made knives, and others hand crafted furniture, woollen blankets, shoes, saddles, or raised livestock. The community set everyone at liberty to work how they best could, and restricted nothing but wastefulness or greed. But no one could build at Herrnhut without permission. In 1727 the believers decided:

The one desiring to build a house shall first bring the matter before the brotherhood. He shall wait to begin until a place has been designated for him. Then he shall not build it one foot further forward, or one foot further back, nor any bigger or higher than the instructions given to him. He shall follow the proscribed plan exactly.⁵⁴

Working like bees, in co-operation and subjection to Christ, the believers at Herrnhut transformed their settlement into “a haven of peace, with two hundred houses built on rising ground, evergreen woods on two sides, gardens on the others, and high hills at a short distance—a haven of faith in a world of infidelity, of unity in a world of strife.”⁵⁵ Communal work projects, such as the preparation of apple “Schnitz”⁵⁶ on long winter evenings, became a time of joyful fellowship in the Hausgemeinde.

⁵⁴ From the *Brüderliche Vereinigung* of 1727⁵⁵ From John Wesley’s description of Herrnhut in the 1730s.

Business

Careful to do nothing that would hinder their fellowship with Christ, the believers at Herrnhut took no interest on loans, and if they borrowed money, made sure they paid it back. An early statute of the community calls for loans to be paid back “on the hour, or else to make other arrangements.”

Community statutes also forbade believers to visit markets on the Lord’s Day, or go shopping if they did not need anything. Overcharging was declared sinful, and the butcher at Herrnhut could not take part in communion after he took one Thaler too much in a sale of meat.

In weekly meetings of the brothers, business matters received prompt attention. The baker was told to make larger buns, and the shoe fixer to finish his work on time. Two women who had brought plums across the border from Bohemia without paying duty were admonished to repent, go back to correct the matter, and apologise. Another woman, for cooking extravagantly (and wasting in that way the resources of the Lord’s Gemein), was held back from communion.

The believers tried continually to waste less and give more. In 1730 they decided to bake no more cakes for special events, but to serve “milk bread” instead. They served love feasts of nothing but bread, salt, and water, and ruled out coffee in favour of garden tea.

A competitive spirit among brothers was handled as sin, and to help one another became everyone’s business. Brothers going to town (Löbau, Zittau, or Görlitz) were to announce it beforehand so the rest could order what they needed. A community statute called for brothers to willingly loan out their possessions. But the same statute also admonished those who borrowed to return things promptly (not making their owner come to fetch them back), and to avoid making a practice of borrowing objects in continual use, such as an axe.

After the forming of “choirs” in Herrnhut, brothers and sisters took weekly collections among themselves. Every Tuesday evening their choir leaders met to report how much money they had and how much they needed, sharing among themselves if necessary—for all food and maintenance money in the choir houses came from these free-will offerings.

Above this level, the community at Herrnhut had a general fund toward which all contributed. The brothers and sisters helped decide how this money was spent and a catechism prepared as a “Manual for Doctrine” put its guiding principles to words:

Q. What expedient was found out in time of persecution for the maintenance of the members?

A. None said that ought of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things common.

Q. When that did not suffice?

A. Then a collection was made for the saints. Q.

In what manner?

A. Each was accepted according to that he had, not according to that he had not.

Q. How did the first Christians act who had something of their own? A. They laboured, working with their hands that they might have to give to them that needed.

Q. How did they give?

A. Not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. Q. What maxim did they go by in this matter?

A. They remembered the words of the Lord: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Dried apples, taken along to eat on trips, or sent to Pilgrims abroad.

Money from the general fund provided for the travel expenses of pilgrims sent out and, in the case of those going to Greenland (Sister Stach and her daughters in 1736), to buy them adequate linen and furs. Money from the fund also bought trombones for the Young Brothers’ Choir, and lead pipes to lead water into the community. The school, orphanage, and public buildings at Herrnhut had their needs supplied from it, but no leaders used the community’s money for personal expense.

Of special concern to the believers at Herrnhut were the poor, and unfortunate. When Friedrich Kühnel’s horse stumbled and broke its leg, they bought him another one. Of frequent mention in the records are shoes purchased for needy families, firewood for the elderly, coffins for those who could not afford them, and small gifts of cash to beggars or wandering prophets to “dismiss them kindly.”

Larger amounts from the general fund allowed a brother to buy his sister out of debt bondage and a converted soldier his way out of the army (sixty-seven Thaler). Families asked to leave the community at Herrnhut received a gift to help them

find a home or start a business elsewhere—all in the spirit of a community statute that read:

The *Almosenpfleger* (stewards of alms) are not to bother themselves about anything except to see to the condition of the homes and people in the community. They shall decide on the best way to help in every case, whether it is to loan, to give, or to refrain from giving. They shall promote a willing and mild spirit in the whole Gemein—one that knows how much better it is to give than receive.

Health and Hygiene

The Moravians who settled at Herrnhut came from simple homes. Some of them, in fact, from homes where “simplicity” had degenerated into untidiness. At first this bothered their new neighbours in Germany, but when the Spirit of Christ transformed Herrnhut, everything changed.

⁵⁷ From *Manual of Doctrine*, published in English at London, in 1742.

Undisciplined children, little boys that had run around in nothing but shirts, suddenly appeared properly dressed, in order, and content. Parents stopped having their little boys and girls sleeping together and passed a community statute against it. Those responsible for community upkeep made regular inspections to ensure that houses smelled fresh and that no one threw garbage out of the windows. When the Josef Neisser family continued with a *schweinische Haushaltung* (piggish housekeeping) they received a public admonition and matters improved.

Muddy trails in Herrnhut gave way, after the renewal, to plastered walk ways. Families put flat stones in front of their doors and kept their geese and chickens penned up. A community statute specified how ashes and chimneys should be taken care of and prohibited the smoking of tobacco.

Also finding direction in community statutes were the *Krankenwärtern* (attendants of the sick):

Krankenwärtern shall be chosen from those of a hearty, fresh, and cheerful disposition, and who take to medical things by nature. Their duty is to visit the sick every day to monitor their progress, to give medicines as needed and instructions on how they shall be used. They shall help the sick in anything

that needs to be done around the place, and above all, speak to them about the condition of their souls. They shall read to the sick and pray with them, discovering what their needs really are, so that they can be shared with the rest of the brothers. . . . The Krankenwärter must be constantly cheerful and attentive to people's needs. He or she must be healthy, humble, merciful, tireless, calm in every crisis, and more concerned about prayer and faith than with medical credentials. . . . Brothers and sisters shall be attended by nurses of the same sex, exclusively.

After the renewal, Johann Christian Gutbier became *Gemeinarzt* (community physician) at Herrnhut. Everyone on his sick list got special food and care. A corps of young people worked under him (Dr. Gutbier always present when younger men attended women) and the entire region felt the blessing of their labour in Christ. Alongside the orphanage, the Herrnhut community also set up an apothecary known far and wide for its supply of medicines, sugar, tea, dried currants, spices, paper, goose quills, wax, ink, and with time a great variety of articles sent back from Herrnhut's foreign outreaches.

Dress

No sooner did the Moravians' hearts become renewed in Christ, than they rediscovered the value of the plain dress their ancestors had taught them to wear. As in Moravia, the brothers at Herrnhut dressed in simple, dark, peasant clothes. They wore home-made shoes (of a pattern that fit either foot and had to be changed every so often), knee-buckled trousers, and broad-brimmed black hats. The sisters wore ankle-length dresses with white muslin capes and aprons, and three piece white caps that amply covered all their hair.⁵⁸ Early on in the separation of the choirs, the strings with which the sisters' tied the caps under their chins took on special significance. Little girls wore scarlet strings. Once converted and part of the Young Sisters' Choir, they changed to crimson. Older single sisters wore pink. After marriage the strings turned light blue, and when widowed, white.

⁵⁸ In 1857, Abraham Ritter, a Moravian minister of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, described what had been the custom of his church in earlier times: "That the Moravians were a plain, unassuming people, is evident

Concerning women's apparel, the "Manual of Doctrine" stated:

Q. What general rule did the apostles give concerning dress?

A. That the women should adorn themselves in modest apparel, with

shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but as becometh a woman professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:9-10, 1 Peter 3:3-4)

Q. What regulation was made at Corinth?

A. Paul writes: “That a man ought not to cover his head when he prayeth or prophesieth, but the woman ought to be covered. That it is a shame for a man to have long hair, but a glory to the woman.

For those at Herrnhut that did not come from Moravia, the conviction to wear plain clothes did not come overnight. In 1731 the leadership spoke with the Countess von Zinzendorf (Ludwig’s wife) about making simpler dresses for herself and the women of her household. She willingly complied. The following year, at a congregational meeting the dresses of both single and married women were declared too short. All sisters were encouraged to keep to the old way of dressing, as in Moravia, and the brothers likewise. The congregation decided that Georg Wäschke, who had purchased material to make himself a purple shirt, should not do so, and young girls should stick to sober, subdued colours for their dresses. (Someone at the meeting reported having watched a group of girls walk through the Hof at Herrnhut, “as gaily coloured as a flock of parrots.”) Not in the quality of clothing, but in its cut and colour, the believers felt, would pride most likely show. And when it became clear to them that “it is a miserable thing when the children of God have to worry about constantly changing styles,” they decided to make a *Kleiderordnung* (clothing regulation) “so the brothers and sisters would not have to make thoughts about how to dress themselves.”

After prayer and deliberation, the community assembled on December 31, 1734, at Herrnhut. Among other things they agreed and wrote:

from the still existing relics of their simplicity, a cardinal virtue, obnoxious to fashion, forbidding to vain show, but fraternising with economy, and harmonising with their Christian profession. Their apparel, therefore, was unstudied, except in cleanliness, and their taste chastened by disciplined judgement. The strait unlapelled dark brown coat, the broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, the knee- buckled small clothes, the broad round-toed shoe, were consistent characteristics of a Moravian brother; whilst the plain drab or black silk bonnet, the three-cornered white kerchief, the plain silk Sunday dress, the comfortable hood-finished cloak, the “stuff” shoe, for comfort and convenience, were the sisters’ concession to St. Peter’s advice, “whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, or putting on of apparel.”

Because it is not fitting that a Gemein of the Lord should be dressed improperly, we have been trying over the years to give guidelines about dress that are known by all. But a certain amount of confusion remained, and offences still

occurred. . . . Therefore we have decided upon a new clothing standard for our tailors, seamstresses, and shoemakers to follow in exact detail.

1. The brothers shall not wear any fresh colours, lay-down collars or lapels, double-breasted coats, unnecessary pleats, or starched garments. But the one who still has clothes like this is allowed to wear them out.

2. The sisters shall not wear any type of lace or embroidery on their dresses, nor lacy veils. They shall not use sheer materials, fancy headbands, buttons, or ribbons, nor shall they use white yarn to decorate their clothes. They shall not wear white gloves, nor white or coloured stockings, colourful caps, or any fresh or bright colours whatsoever. They shall use no colourful ribbons in their bonnets, but only black or blue ones. Red striped or blue printed aprons are to be dyed solid blue on both sides. No printed cotton shall be worn, except for winter head coverings where plain brown is allowed, but no multicoloured prints.

3. Pointed shoes and slippers shall no longer be worn, nor shoes with high heels. Form fitting or short-sleeved jackets shall not be worn, nor ruffled clothing, nor straw hats that cost more than two Groschen. Hat bands shall be of uncoloured, rough linen only. Cloth printed on a white background shall only have black patterns and no big-flowered or flashy designs. . . .

The one who does not follow this prescribed manner of dressing, exactly, shall be excluded from the Gemeinde, and should not be surprised if in his stubbornness he does not get included in future activities.

On the voice of the congregation, Michael Linner became responsible to approve the clothing of the men, Anna Rosina Knesch and August Leopold's wife, that of the women, Heinrich Nitschmann that of the boys, and Rosina Anders the girls's clothing. They took their calling seriously. Many garments, in particular those of the women and girls, did not meet their approval. Some found it hard to understand or accept. But in the end their efforts brought peace and unity, and the Moravians' witness as a "plain church" became clearly established in the world.

In England people sometimes mistook Moravians for Friends (Quakers), and in America for Mennonites or Dunkards, but whoever spoke with them promptly learned they dressed not to please this group or that. They refused to conform to the world in order to "know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Visitors

So many visitors thronged Herrnhut after the awakening that the brothers began to hold special services for them, the *Fremdenstunde* (visitor's hour), every Lord's Day afternoon. Not only that, but within a year's time a great correspondence had developed with seekers throughout Europe and abroad. Even though postage travelled slowly and many did not yet use the mail in the 1720s, sometimes as many as fifty letters arrived in a day at Herrnhut, and a hundred or more sat waiting on answers.

In the Spirit of Christ, those who answered the letters tried to write as clearly and simply as possible, what they believed. Through their contact, hundreds came to the congregation from afar and found their place among the believers.

Not all visits, however, were encouraged or even tolerated. A community statute forbade the entry of quack doctors, clowns, bear dancers, and magicians to Herrnhut. Night watchmen could give food to beggars, but money gifts only on Tuesdays, and only to those the brothers approved. No money was to be given to immoral wasters or drunkards unless they repented of their ways.

To accommodate their visitors, the brothers built a large guest-house at Herrnhut, and elected suitable couples to care for it. In the summer, according to a community statute, men could not sit at its tables after nine, and in the winter not after eight o'clock in the evening.

Order

Only those who felt inner unity with the believers at Herrnhut could live there. Others they gently but firmly helped to find new homes. Even then, living at Herrnhut and cooperating with its communal order did not guarantee full fellowship with the believers. Nor did baptism—a “washing in the blood of the Lamb”—assure communion privileges. Ludwig von Zinzendorf correctly stated the brotherhood's feeling when he wrote:

It is a real satisfaction to a brother or sister to be looked upon by his or her fellow members as the truth is, and no better. When a person comes into the congregation and says, “I have lived so and so and involved myself in such and such” he is welcome. But he must not press to be received, confirmed as a member of the congregation, or admitted to Holy Communion. Nor is this any punishment. It is only what common sense dictates.⁵⁹

Before permitting them to take part in communion, the brothers at Herrnhut instructed new converts carefully. “Only those who have come to love the wounds of the Saviour— those who have begun to understand how much has been forgiven them—may be admitted to holy communion,” they agreed. “And to be slow in admitting people to communion is a great advantage for everyone on both sides.”⁶⁰

Even after formal acceptance into the brotherhood, all members—the old and the new, those in authority and those without—passed through a period of self-examination and private interviews, brothers with brothers and sisters with sisters, before communion. If a question remained about partaking in the sacrament (which to do unworthily might bring damnation) the congregation discerned the Saviour’s will with the use of the lot. “The Saviour was severe today,” reads an entry in the community diary, “and did not allow twenty to partake.” This, considering how seriously the believers at Herrnhut took communion, is not surprising. The “Manual of Doctrine” states:

⁵⁹ *Berliner Reden*, 1738 (see Bibliography: *Des Grafens von Zinzendorff Inhalt dererjenigen Reden welche zu Berlin . . . gehalten worden*)

⁶⁰ *Barbyzche Sammlungen*, note from a *Dienerkonferenz* of 1753

Q. Is this supper appointed for people who are yet in their sins?

A. One cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of devils (1 Cor. 10:21) Q. Are the members of a church liable here to a great danger?

A. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

Q. What then is to be done?

A. Let a man examine himself.

Q. What harm is it if one should go, without being so approved? A. He is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord

Settlers at Herrnhut only received a welcome to take part in communion after promising to obey the community’s rules and conforming to them in every area of life. In a community statute of 1734, the brothers wrote:

One must promptly obey the Saviour in little as well as in big things. To be faithful in little things is something everyone can do. . . . In the same way, minor transgressions of detail must be dealt with just as severely as major ones, for with time they can lead to greater ruin than if someone commits an outstanding

offence. It is not without reason that God has chose to root unconcerned carelessness out from among us with standards, limits, and means of correction (*Ordnungen, Schranken, und Zucht*).⁶¹

In a letter to seekers at Nürnberg, Christian David explained the Moravian position:

The keys of binding and loosing are given to the congregation by Jesus. This is a spiritual power. To have it, the congregation must be in Christ Jesus. It must stand in his spirit, mind and will, and use his Word in the right way. It must let the Word do what it wants in all honesty, without respect of persons. The Word must be its guiding star. The congregation must keep the Word in faithful obedience, in humility and sincerity, and present it to all in purity and truth.

If the congregation wants to bind and loose, it must make its rules, use its gifts and powers of faith, pronounce its blessings or threats, and decide whether a soul deserves punishment or mercy, for the honour of God and the sake of its members' salvation. It may not discipline anyone except in the name of Jesus. Then it must persevere in prayer until that soul feels the binding or loosing of the congregation both in the inner and outer man, either painfully or beneficially. Only then will the disciplined soul give honour to God and confess before God and the congregation that it has sinned. Then the congregation can either show mercy to it and can ask God to forgive it, or it can deal sternly with it, and save it with fear. Happy the congregation when it abides in the mind and spirit of Jesus so that he does the binding and loosing among them.⁶²

⁶¹ Note from a meeting of the brothers, October 20, 1734.

Even though the believers at Herrnhut held the “binding and loosing” of the Lord’s congregation in high esteem, the danger of making static rules and of maintaining them long after they lost their function, did not escape them. A statement of belief, from the records of a meeting in 1740, describes how they felt:

The Brothers’ Church neither makes nor defends unchangeable rules. The Spirit of Christ is the highest authority among us. . . . In the schools of the world one studies things out and hopes to become perfect in knowledge, but in the school of the Spirit one learns piece by piece, and one must always recognise that there are still details we do not understand.⁶³

In subsequent meetings they added:

In our sacred rites such as baptism and communion we as a congregation of Jesus cannot follow an accepted, established, and permanent usage or form like the state churches (*Religionen*). Changes in our congregational order and in the practice of its sacred functions may always be anticipated. But they must be introduced and regulated according to the circumstances and state of mind prevailing in each instance.⁶⁴

Rules dare not be made for the congregation until everyone, from the least to the greatest, has voiced his opinion and consent, or until all have come to a place of rest with them. Rules must be made specifically for every congregation, in light of its own characteristics and needs. They are made to avoid situations that could lead to sin. But after rules are made they must be strictly adhered to. They must first be accepted inwardly, and one can only ask brothers and sisters to be obedient to what they have confessed and approved of themselves.⁶⁵

“The Saviour did not speak much about church discipline,” the believers at Herrnhut decided, “because he wanted his followers’ hearts to keep them in line. We must remember that wherever a church standard is written out, it is an incomplete and imperfect affair.”⁶⁶ In another meeting they declared: The one who makes laws of the good instructions of the New Testament is foolish and deceptive. Doing good, for the believer, is not a command, but the desire of his new nature. Our duty to live holy lives, to be honest, etc, is nothing more than our duty to eat, or to keep ourselves from falling out the window. If we are believers it is our nature, our inclination, and a result of our natural aversion. As soon as we make love a command, because the Bible says, “You shall love your God,” we make it an unnatural affair. The one who has tasted of grace loves automatically. The one who comprehends his Creator’s sacrificial life and death would do nothing rather than love himself to death!⁶⁷

⁶² ca. 1730⁶³ Note from *Dienerkonferenz* of 1740.

⁶⁴ From a record of *Gemeintag* proceedings in 1742.

⁶⁵ *Dienerkonferenz*, 1753⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Ludwig von Zinzendorf further described the feeling of the brothers:

Now this ought to be the basis of our whole spiritual building, for it is the only firm one. If keeping our souls for the Saviour, depended on rules and daily admonitions, all would be lost. These indeed are good, so far as they prove that we have a sharp eye, that guards against wickedness creeping in under the

pretext of liberty. But only a man's own heart is able to judge its own disposition towards the eternal bridegroom, and either to condemn or comfort him.

If we will be a happy people we must be so true to him that we would live right, even if there were no discipline. And those who have directly to do with souls, must take care neither to terrify or attract them with their influence, causing them to behave well for a time without coming to the Saviour. No, the Saviour must be all in all. Every believer must settle affairs with him daily before all things. . . . From the Saviour we learn to distinguish good from bad. Not only this, every one of us must learn from him how to practice virtue and avoid vice. In short, our example in everything is to be found in his humanity.⁶⁸

“Church discipline, the more complete it is, the more refined the hypocrites it is likely to make,” Ludwig wrote. And in his discourses given at Berlin he said:

Of our Saviour and his death and merits we are to remind one another continually, so that our awareness of him may remain acute. But of what is right or not, fitting or not fitting to do, we should not have to speak to one another. . . . We have long wondered exactly how to discern whether a soul has totally or only partially given itself to the Saviour. Because my great aversion for rigid church discipline is founded on how I see this matter, we would do well to search it to the bottom.⁶⁹

Further statements from brothers' meetings confirm the Moravians' commitment to depend on Christ, not on their own rules and discipline:

True church discipline depends on the invisible working of the Holy Spirit in the heart. What people ordinarily call church discipline has little to do with reality.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *ibid.* 1740

⁶⁸ *Berliner Reden*, 1738

⁶⁹
Dienerkonferenz, 1745

The Holy Spirit is our head theologian, and we are merely his assistants. It is good that we have established order and methods, but we must take care lest we use them to tie the Holy Spirit's hands.⁷¹

All reforms, whether they begin at the head, the hands, the feet, or other members of the body, are useless until the heart is truly changed. . . . We aim at nothing other than to apply the desires of our Saviour in a practical way.⁷²

We have no self-constructed system and do not want one. Rather, we are all taught by the rule given to us by God. He enlightens us step by step.⁷³

We must teach what the Saviour taught and clothe ourselves with the Scriptures. . . . Against our teaching no sect should be able to raise valid arguments. Also, we must strictly refrain from establishing a firm opinion on matters that have two sides. . . . We dare not insist that what we want to see is necessarily what the Saviour wants to see. . . . Our theology dare not become cast in iron.⁷⁴

That differences of opinion should arise among them, even after their spiritual renewal, did not surprise the believers at Herrnhut. For this reason they wrote:

Among us we have a fundamental rule: A man shall not be told what to think or what he shall say. The only think we ask is that he does not force others to accept his ideas.⁷⁵

No brother shall do anything against his convictions, but in matters beyond that, all should learn obedience.⁷⁶

Only when a person withstood their congregational order in a rebellious spirit did the believers at Herrnhut put him out from among them. And if he repented they gladly received him back after public confession of sin. Their *Manual of Discipline* stated:

Q. In what order did [the early Christians'] church discipline proceed?

A. If a man was overtaken in a fault they restored him in the spirit of meekness.

Q: He that would not be reprov'd?

A. They would have no company with him that he might be ashamed.

Q. But one that sinned?

A. Him they rebuked before all that others also might fear.

Q. Was this done so as to be unsupportable?

A. They counted him not as an enemy, but admonished him as a brother.

Q. When, after all there was no amendment?

A. They put away such an one from among them, or they withdrew themselves from him.

Q. And if any one at the same time gave great scandal and persisted in it? A. Him they delivered unto Satan , for the destruction of the flesh. Q. What people

particularly did they deliver up to Satan's chastisement? A. False teachers (1 Timothy 1:20, etc.)

Q. To what end?

A. That they might learn not to blaspheme. Q.

Who did the excommunicating?

A. The teachers with their and the church's spirit.

Q. But when the very worst truly humbled himself?

A. Then they forgave him and comforted him and confirmed their love toward him.

⁷¹ *ibid.* 1747⁷² *ibid.* 73 *ibid.* 1748

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 1749⁷⁵ *ibid.* 1746⁷⁶ *ibid.* 1753

On handling sin and repentance, the Moravians wrote:

Among us it is said, "Confess your sins one to another," not in order for sins to be publicised, but so we can pray one for another and be healed. We become involved in another person's failings only to the extent that we can be helpful to him. . . . We must listen to our brothers' and sisters' accounts of failure with compassion and understanding, bearing in mind that we are well capable of failing in the same way. . . . In the world, when a person sins he becomes a marked man. But in the Gemein, the one who sins and repents can be restored to usefulness again. . . . One dare not judge a brother for what he does out of a mistaken understanding or in a time of confusion. . . . A critical or judgmental spirit should not remain in any brother's heart.⁷⁷

"No quarrel shall be allowed to continue for more than a week," stated a community agreement at Herrnhut. "If it cannot be settled, call the congregation together and make disposition of the matter in an hour, or at least before the sun goes down." And, depending on Christ to settle their disputes, those who lived there took nothing to worldly courts of law.

The Lamb and The Light

The peace that came to Herrnhut in the awakening in 1727 shone through everything they did. It transformed the chaos of a refugee camp into a model of communal order and efficiency. It turned lions of law and justice into lambs of mercy and grace. But nowhere, and in nothing, did it bring about a greater miracle than in the mood of Herrnhut itself.

From harshness and suspicion, the Lord Christ changed the atmosphere at Herrnhut into one of holy delight. Brothers and sisters saw one another as if for the first time. Love abounded. Innocence reigned. And as from heaven a wonderful gift of song came to the congregation.

Every evening the choirs at Herrnhut sang and played before the Lamb. Singing perfected, powerful hymns moved the congregation to its feet time after time in joint services. Every day hymn writers and composers added to an infinite variety of arrangements. Brothers and sisters rising in the congregation began singing any verse of any song and the rest joined in, full volume, from the heart, sometimes continuing in incredible medleys that lasted for hours—organists learning to glide from tune to tune between more than four hundred melodies without a hitch.

In the years immediately following the awakening at Herrnhut its people—believing that singing is the truest expression of the heart—wrote over seventy thousand German hymns.

Intimately part of Herrnhut's atmosphere of song was its worship and celebration. Anyone could, and did, call meetings anytime. Love feasts for a few or for many became a preferred way of celebrating special occasions— anything from a babies' festival ("Quite charming to observe, the babies being as attentive as if they understood everything that was said!") to a birthday, to the beginning of the wheat harvest. But celebrations at Herrnhut, in the presence of the Lamb, did not lose the high grace of holiness. Weeping, in times of celebration, was as common as open expressions of joy. "Brothers and sisters should sing from the heart, or else be quiet," the community agreed in 1746.

The congregation at Herrnhut, thanks to Ludwig von Zinzendorf and his friends, made full use of the Christian liturgical tradition and the chanting of litanies became a favourite form of worship among them.

With antiphonal choirs, a liturgist, and the participation of the whole church, the believers sang the *Te Abba*, the *Song of the Bride*, the Great Paschal Litany, the *Agape*, the *Prayer to the Holy Ghost*, and the *Hymn of The Wounds*, to name a few. Special litanies—written by Moravians— accompanied the practice of ordinances like the *Pedilavium* (feet washing), the Kiss of Peace, and baptism.

On the day of the Lord's Resurrection the entire congregation, awakened before daybreak by the young brothers' trombone choir, met in the Saal to sing the Great Paschal Litany based on the Apostles' Creed. Half ways through they

rose to walk, a stream of people to the burial ground on the Hutberg. There standing in a great circle around the graves, they lifted their voices at sunrise to sing the rest of the litany, in which they mentioned the names of all who had gone home the previous year:

Lord *have mercy on us!*

Christ *have mercy on us!*

Lord *have mercy on us!*

Christ *hear us when we pray! . . .*

(chorus) The Spirit and the Bride say, come!

(liturgist) And whoever hears, say come!

(congregation) Amen! Yes, Lord Jesus come! Do not tarry! We wait and long for you!

(sisters) Come!

(brothers) (everyone) Yes, come! Come!

(liturgist)

(chorus) And he will come with a warrior's shout, the voice of the angel, the trumpet of God, From heaven he will come! To judge the living and the dead.

. . .

(liturgist) I believe that our brothers, (names of the deceased), and our sisters (names of the deceased) have joined the upper church, going in to the joy of the Lord, and that only their bodies lie here.

(brothers and sisters) In his earth, and the time shall quickly come when they shall rise with our risen Lord.

(chorus) The right this earth, our mother-place has to their bodies, their souls have to the refuge in his side.

(congregation) We, poor sinners pray, "Hear us Lord!"

(liturgist) And keep us with your church complete . . . in eternal fellowship where we may rest forever in your wounds. . . .

Another favourite litany of the congregation at Herrnhut, beautifully lyrical in German, was the *Te Agnum* (Song of the Lamb):

First choir:

Lord, God we praise you! You, Son of God from eternity Son of Man in time
All angels and hosts of heaven Cherubim and Seraphim

Second Choir

Little Lamb, we thank you!
Honoured throughout the earth Your people bow to honour you, All who
honour Jehovah
And those who sing with gladness

Both Choirs

Innocent Lamb of God!
Holy Bridegroom!
Who descended from the throne to accept humanity!
Your heavenly power and glory Your twelve holy disciples And all the
martyrs
Extends over heaven and earth! All the beloved prophets,
Praise you Lord, with great joy!
All Christianity
The four beasts who never rest Twenty-four elders
The Father on his fatherly throne The Holy Ghost and comforter, one.
King of Honours, Jesus Christ! You did not scorn the virgin's body Honours you
on earth!
Attend you constantly,
Throw their crowns before you. You the right and only Son, In
you, the Lamb, have all become
Only begotten Son of God,
Through whom you came to free us! You robbed death of its power You sit on
the right hand of God You will judge the earth
alive.
And brought your church to earth, Honoured in the Father's kingdom You will
judge all things dead and
Everyone All things dead and alive! *Alles was todt und lebend ist!*
Now help, your servants, Lord! Allow a place in your heavenly reign
wellbeing!
Help your people, Lord Jesus Christ Watch over us. Care for us,
Protect us, faithful Lord

acts.

Have mercy on us! Show us
your kindness Dear Lord, we
trust you Daily we praise you
You, who take the book from the Father To open its seven seals May our
names be found in it,
Seal us against all sin
Among the names of those you know And against the woes of the earth
Give us the garment of righteousness Cleansed in your blood. We whom you
bought with your blood With blessed ones in eternal
And bless your inheritance
And lift us up in eternity.
From wrong inclinations and sinful
Have mercy on us in our need! As we hope in you! Do
not let us be ashamed
And we honour you with trembling

Everyone

That you may be the Lamb and Light and Temple of your community
forever! *Daß du wirst ewig der Gemein, Ihr Lamm und Licht und Tempel
sein!*

Pay Day In a New World

Believing that nothing happened by accident, but that all choices freely made by men and women have eternal consequences, the believers at Herrnhut early began to record events. Every choir house kept a journal. The congregation itself kept one, and individuals wrote their own *Lebensläufe*, the story of their lives (focusing on how they came to Christ and their walk with him) to be finished at death by their choir leaders and read out loud at their “home going” beside the grave.

Home goings (funerals) at Herrnhut, developed into serious but ever more joyful celebrations, to the astonishment of all looking on. Love for Christ, in a dark age of war and disease, overcame the sting of death. The sadness of separation gave way to triumphant joy at sending people on to the Lamb.⁷⁸ “The more passing over the better,” Ludwig wrote, “For in this way we maintain constant postal connection with regions above, carrying with it our greetings and kisses.”

⁷⁸ Abraham Ritter, describing Moravian custom, wrote: “‘Rend your hearts, and not your garments,’ was the well-observed manner in cases of death. It was a privilege and a *principle* of the church to eschew outward mourning for a deceased relative, of any grade, and the sable halliment was never offered

to deepen the shade of a sorrowing heart. . . . Grief, of course, could not be forbidden nor suppressed, but it might be chastened. The community was instructed first, to believe that the departed had gone home, and therefore ‘not to grieve as they that are without hope.’”

A hymn sung at home goings expressed the believers’ feelings well:

Come and help, come with your innermost being to praise our wise and loving Jesus! If nothing separates us from our head he will help us to complete our work until we have believed our way through. Invisible Bridegroom, we will not forget you through it all, until we come to see you on the new way. Loyalty in battle will be what counts until pay day in a new world. Sweat and dust for Canaan land!

Life at Herrnhut, the place of the Lord’s care, was no longer ordinary European life. It no longer revolved around Germany, Moravia, Protestants, Catholics, money, marriage, lands, or earthly things. It was life in the light of eternity, wide open before Jesus Christ, where everything not possessing heavenly worth became passing trivia.

In its earliest years, Ludwig von Zinzendorf had written a song about Herrnhut:

Where are you together, you my beloved, my heart, with your flock for which you suffered terrible pain? Where do you live? (We know that the places where love for one another burns, the paths aglow with your covenant of blood, are known only to you, the Lamb, alone.) You live in seventeen little houses, where the trails open up in Herrnhut, the place of the Lord’s watch— a free settlement that will not go on unless the Lord goes with it, and unless he does in it what he wants to do.⁷⁹

In the mid-1700s the Lord did what he wanted to do at Herrnhut, and eternity alone will reveal the outcome of it.

⁷⁹ *Gesangbuch*, 1900

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The Lamb Victorious

Far more than trivial gifts and *Weihnachtsgebäck* came to Herrnhut with the holiday season of 1733. Pilgrims, sent out by the brothers, had begun to return with encouraging, but thought-provoking reports. Among those who found their way to Herrnhut with them, was a young seeker from the University of Jena, August Gottlieb Spangenberg. He asked serious questions and serious discussions ensued.

In their discussions the awakened believers at Herrnhut spoke of their Czech and Waldensian background. They mentioned the influence of Lutheran Pietism and of German sectarians upon them. “But where does the Saviour want us to go from here?” they asked one another. “With whom? And how?”

Pondering these questions, and more, Ludwig von Zinzendorf sat by the fire in his house on a cold day. Someone had emptied a trashcan into the flames and he noticed how a scrap of paper fell from the fire without getting burned. Picking it up he saw it was a Watchword, followed by two lines from a familiar German hymn: “*Lass uns in deiner Nägelmaal, erblicken unsre Gnadenwahl*” (let us see in your nail wounds how you have chosen us through grace).

For a moment Ludwig stood silent while the significance of the Watchword dawned on him. Then, overcome with adoration and holy joy, he fell on his face before Christ. To Ludwig von Zinzendorf and all believers at Herrnhut, the Lord began to reveal, on this winter day, a “Theology of Blood.”

In Christ’s blood and wounds, not in human tradition, would Herrnhut find the right way to go.

In Christ’s blood and wounds, not in narrow demoninationalism, would it discover true fellowship.

Preaching Christ’s blood and wounds, no more, no less, its Pilgrim messengers would find their way to the ends of the earth.

Once he saw Christ’s blood and wounds Ludwig felt free to let self-righteous Pietism— do good, say your prayers, watch out for sin—go. Suddenly he knew that no amount of *Frommigkeit* (pious works) would save him. He felt the greatness of his own sin and at the same time, wonderful cleansing in Christ’s blood, an immersion by faith in its lifegiving stream, and refuge in the wound in his side.⁸⁰

As the entire community at Herrnhut entered with Ludwig into the reality of this “blood experience” all other concepts of religion faded out among them. They lost sight of everything but Christ’s blood and wounds to such an extent that Ludwig could write, years later: “Since 1734 the reconciling sacrifice of Jesus has become our particular and public and only subject matter, our universal weapon against all evil in teaching and practice, and so it shall remain, into eternity.”⁸¹

In the awakening of 1727 the Lord had already transformed the life and practice of Herrnhut’s believers. Now, in the awakening of 1734, he transformed what they believed.

Fountain of Eternal Life

Like Eve sprang to life out of Adam’s side, the Moravians saw the church springing to life from Christ’s holy *Seitenschrein* (side wound). In it they found the refuge and “true matrix” of the church, giving new birth to souls—the fountain of eternal life in which to baptise all believers “in the Saviour’s blood and water and buried in the hollow of his wound.” Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote:

It is known what a strong cement the ancients used in their buildings, so that a whole wall was like one stone. But ours excels all. When our house is joined together by the Lamb’s blood, and not the least pebble put in without having the moisture of his wounds upon it, we shall be indissoluble. . . . The pierced side of Jesus is the central point from which all that is spiritual may be deduced. There we find the square root of all spiritual and heavenly matters and on it our system is based.⁸²

A later Moravian historian described what happened:

All the formal details of their faith were in practice so overshadowed by the one doctrine of the vicarious atonement that this became their distinguishing mark in worship, belief, and conversation. The atonement was so mysterious to them that they shrank from any explanation of the controversial words, “this is my body.” Their teaching and preaching were exclusively Christocentric, not Christological, always directing their thoughts to the sacrificial death of Christ and his Passion.⁸³

⁸⁰ Jacob John Sessler (see Bibliography) wrote: “Zinzendorf, although a pietist, was not long a follower of the pietism typical of Halle, because he could not correlate his own experience with the struggle of repentance which was emphasized there. Whereas they stressed repentance, struggle, fear, and an angry God, the count emphasized love, peace, and fellowship with Christ. For him regeneration was instantaneous and complete, and with it the reign of love and fellowship with Christ began immediately, resulting in gradual sanctification.”

⁸¹ Cranz, David, *Alte und Neue Brüder-Historie*, Barby, 1771, pg. 231⁸²
Berliner Reden, 1738

⁸³ Jacob John Sessler, *Communal Pietism*

Heavenly Bridegroom

Every one of us lies in a deep sleep, dreaming of what we see and hear, the Moravians believed, until the Lord Christ wakes us up. Then, to the degree we “see” Christ, we see reality. Ludwig wrote:

Through great wrestlings of the soul, through thick smoke and fog, through perils of body and spirit, I push my way through to the hosts of the triumphant, to you unbeaten wonder hero, who overthrows all foes for me. While the mustard seed of my faith stirs itself and brings me to lie like a child at your feet, the enemies may cry that I am a fool. I will not fear that I will lose to them a hair. My faith triumphs. I focus on the Wonderful. My all is more than all the world to me, my friend forever true, my Bridegroom red and white, my Paschal Lamb, my guiding star, my love, my beauty, fort, and banner through eternity!⁸⁴

Jesus, loved from the heart, look and see my heart aflame for you! I seek and run for all I’m worth. No one gets ahead of me. I must find you myself. I must touch and feel you. Is this too bold? Do I want more than what is right? Have I forgotten modesty and overstepped my bounds? If so, forgive me! Love makes me a child!

If I just think, beloved Life, faithful Friend chosen above all others, how you gave yourself for me and how you meant it so gloriously well—I dissolve in great desire to see you, Lord! The reason for my joy in you comes from your goodness. Your fire burns within me. It blazes up within my inner man. In the zeal of my love I reject the world and call it crazy. With soul and spirit I long for your pastures, Immanuel. Come to me in the shepherd’s clothes that men and angels praise. See, I am a weak lamb. Care for me and protect me!

Come Jesus, see the fire in my soul for you! Feed the flame! Fan it more! Let no one quench it. Let it burn until the light of grace consumes me as a whole!⁸⁵

First hundreds, then thousands upon thousands of hymns written at Herrnhut expressed the Moravians’ fascination with Christ:

*Jesus hear me! My hope is in you! I want to meet you on the way to be led by you! You are my sun. Please do not disappear while I walk through dark and hidden places where light and courage may fail. You are my rest and freedom from the woes of the day! You are my true peace, when I am weary and storms rage about my heart. You are my paradise and sure retreat! Fullness of tranquility, refreshing coolness after the heat of battle! Friend above all others, sincere from the heart, and who, upon noticing the distress of those he loves, comes quickly to comfort them. You are my blessing, my Christ! Take me from the region of Satan's attack into the fold of which you are shepherd. Let me die in you, so you may live in me! This is how I obtain salvation. Open the door for me! Oh what blessedness, rest, and time of hope! Oh what joy in the light of the Son that keeps on shining there!*⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Zinzendorf, *Gedichte* ⁸⁵ *ibid.*

In his speeches to seekers at Berlin, Ludwig said:

Our aim is for everyone to keep up a close conversation with the Saviour. And I am concerned for nothing else but that this would be the case with all of us—that it becomes as natural for us to speak with Christ about anything, great or small, as it is to speak with a brother. I am concerned that before opening our mouths to say anything one to another, we would first have first spoken with the Saviour—and that our speaking one with another is done to maintain fellowship of spirits rather than to seek in it our nearest refuge. . . . Let us be diligent, therefore, in conversing with the Saviour and maintaining a correspondence with his heart.

There must be no possibility that anyone should see us in the morning, or that the light and air should greet us before we have been in conversation with the Lamb. Before any of that takes place, we must be able to say, “He and I have talked a good while together.” Should anyone—at least after we are awake—question it, we should be ready to tell him: “I have not been separated from him all night!”⁸⁷

Light of the Trinity

The believers at Herrnhut, overcome with the glory of Christ and the saving power of his blood, did not deliberately change their theology. But shortly after 1734 their critics began to point to what they called a “heretical pre-eminence of Christ” in the community’s life and teaching. In response, Ludwig wrote:

The driest theology that has filled the world is the one of those who talk forever about the Father but skip over the Son. That is the devil's theology. The devil points people to the Father, thinking they will never get to see him anyway, and by doing it so nicely he manages to lead them around the Saviour. The devil places a huge theatrical scene of the Father before the people, hoping to keep them entertained with it, and to keep them convinced that the theologians who figured it out were very wise.⁸⁸

Believers at Herrnhut related in a personal way to Christ—exclusively. “Prayer to anyone but Christ,” Ludwig von Zinzendorf stated in a public meeting, “is totally unnecessary.”⁸⁹ Convinced, like him, that “no one comes to the Father except through me [Christ]” the Moravians loved the Lord Sebaoth (God in his omnipresence), and called him “dear Father,” but only because he was the father of Christ. Their relationship to him was like that of a boy to his closest friend's father—respectful, but strictly coincidental.

The Moravians saw Christ the King as head of the “Court of Elohim” (the heavenly Sanhedrin) and Light of the Trinity. Exactly who the other “persons of the Godhead” were, they did not undertake to define, but spoke of the Father God and the Mother Spirit (die *Gemeinmutter*) as assistants to Christ the Ruling Son. Sometimes they spoke of Jehovah as their Grandfather or Father-in-law, through Christ. They also believed that God (Christ) is distinctively One God.

⁸⁶ *Gesangbuch, 7687 Berliner Reden, 173888* Zinzendorf, *Er das Licht und wir der*

Schein

⁸⁹ *Nine Publick Discourses Preached in Fetter Lane Chapel, 1746*

“We do not disagree with the Socinians that a common reasonable man ought to worship only one God,” an early writing from Herrnhut stated, “but the dispute between us is: Who is that God?”

“If it were possible that there should be another God than Christ,” Ludwig declared, “I would rather be damned with Christ than happy with another.”

Pattern For The Universe

“Let the one who desires to please God take Christ for his example,” wrote a hymn writer at Herrnhut. “Let him, with a humble spirit and diligence, do everything Christ commands. There is no other way, nor gate, nor door.”⁹⁰ Others enlarged on the theme:

Blessed be the diligent soldiers of Christ! Those who refuse to pull on the ropes of sin, who free themselves from pride, hatred, and lust, who overcome the world and bring their own spirits into subjection. Only those who follow Christ in everything are his true soldiers. Those for whom Christ is the way, the light, and the guide, willingly carry his reproach. But those who refuse to go with him to Gethsemane will not share Tabor's glory with him. Go on, soldiers of Christ! Suffer and do, as Jesus has shown you how! Let his innocence clothe you and you will remain in his ranks. The one who loves Christ, seeks nothing but to be his companion in the fight!⁹¹

The chick runs after its mother hen and loves to hear its mother's voice. Help me, Saviour, to follow you like that. . . . Your life shows me my duty. You are my mirror and my light. Oh Lord, how far I still am from being just like you!

You watched out for the enemy. . . . You served your Father with reverence. You kept yourself far removed from idle laughing and joking. Help me to be watchful and serious-minded too. You died to your fleshly desires, and lived to please God. . . .

You trusted him completely. . . . In suffering you were like a lamb, not opening your mouth. Give me such patience when others mistreat me. Help me to take it as a discipline from God, and not as from men. You liked to be alone and preferred quietness. On the mountain and in the wilderness you prayed, sometimes all night long. Your life was a constant prayer. . . .

You stood with the poor and suffering, and showed patience to the erring. . . . Yet when God's honour was at stake you took a clear stand. You did not fear fat-bellied and important, the high, the educated, and the rich. Give me that fearless zeal as well, with wisdom and holy insight! Even though men call your way of life subversive and heretical (*schwärmerisch und ketzerisch*), even though all men shall be ashamed of your way, and even though our neighbours turn against us for following you, we pass through great poverty, distress, and trouble (*viel Elend, Angst, und Trübsal*) to rejoice on Mount

Zion around your throne. If anyone think this way of life is impossible or too complicated, he does not know the teaching of Christ, nor his love. If he would, nothing would seem impossible. In my heart I know that the right and narrow way, the way of the cross, is the only way to you!⁹²

⁹⁰ *Gesangbuch*, 217 ⁹¹ *ibid.*, 441

The believers at Herrnhut referred continually to the example of Christ. But they did not hold unrealistic ideas of imitating him in everything. August Gottlieb Spangenberg, known after his conversion as Brother Josef, wrote:

“Christ left us an example that we should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). If we follow this admonition from the heart, our ways will be full of blessing.

. . . Yet it is very plain, that while imitating Christ, we should not try to do what he did while on earth as a result of his mediatorial office, and as the great prophet sent by God into the world. For if anyone should try to make the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, and the lame walk, in imitation of Christ, he would be as much mistaken as if another would, in imitation of Christ, make a cord and whip to drive those out of the church that have as little right to be there as the sheep and oxen had to be in the outer court of the temple.

To imitate Christ, as the Scripture tell us, means only in those areas in which he operated as a man—just like other men, yet without sin. It means, for instance, that we should humble ourselves like he did, choosing to be poor rather than rich in the world. The Scriptures say, “Let everyone that believes on him think like Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). He did not please himself, so we should not please ourselves either (Rom 15:1-3). He denied himself and took up his cross, and anyone that wishes to be his follower must do the same (Mark 3:24).⁹³

The Cross

“Give me Lord what your children must have to be of use to you,” Brother Ludwig wrote, “Give me a yoke that fits my neck!” Expressing what all believers at Herrnhut felt, he continued:

Jesus gave us a powerful command that not everyone likes to hear: “Take up your cross and follow me!” Jesus carried his cross and showed us the way to go. He marked it with his sweat and blood. But it leads to glory!

Even before the Messiah’s time, all who would be rewarded with him suffered. That great number of men and women of whom the world was not worthy moved in trouble from place to place and had it tough beyond words.

Why should we not want to have our name in the register of the brave? Why should we not want to suffer for the crown? The evil suffer too, and put forth great effort for things that are not worth it. Let them suffer in vain if they want to.

But I have chosen the way where from the seed of the cross one harvests eternal joy!⁹⁴

⁹² *ibid.*, 430

⁹³ August Gottlieb Spangenberg, *Idea Fidi Fratrum*

God placed men on the earth to rejoice in its beauty and to care for it--not only through hard work and sweat, but also on good days when life goes well and prosperity surrounds them. Christians, however, are not here to have a nice time nor to prosper. Their calling is: "Follow Christ!" They follow him through reproach, forcing their way through narrow places, resisting pressure from without and within, to break forth at last into the place where Christ has broken down the door.⁹⁵

A New Nature

Even though the awakened at Herrnhut recognised an ongoing "sinful nature" within them, they did not expect it to rule their lives. Neither did they depend on laws and rules to keep it in check. In his messages to seekers in Berlin, Ludwig explained how some try, like Moses, to make men moral through the outward force of the law. "But in this," he said, "lies the biggest dispute between us and Christian theologians."

They cannot understand why we lay aside the law (with its moral schemes). They think nothing other than libertinism will follow because of the evil imaginations of men's hearts. But we say the inclination of a child of God is good. It is not true as they say, that even in children of God the first motions are those of a corrupt nature that must be curbed with constant good reflections and efforts. No. After we become born again our first thoughts tend toward the Saviour. . . . I believe that if an affection for worldly splendour and a craving for sin still occupy first place in a man's thoughts, or if his inner inclinations still move him to act against the mind of Christ, the Saviour has never yet resided in his heart.

Setting aside all aid of the understanding, even while delirious in a fever, our speech and actions, no matter how confused and weak they may be, must yet testify who is uppermost within. In short, our inclination must constantly be toward what is worthy of Christ. If anything to the contrary shows itself within him . . . or if he begins to feel otherwise, the child of God must certainly be in

such a terror that his hair is ready to stand on end!

As long as any object or creature can yield us greater joy than the wounds and person of Christ—as long as we can, even for a fleeting instant, wink at somewhat that is contrary to his principles and glory—we are still unconverted.⁹⁶

Humility

“Timid and ashamed” on receiving grace in their “sinnerlike weakness,” the believers at Herrnhut easily assumed an “altogether tiny and inwardly stooped over (*ganz klein und inwendig gebeugt*)” disposition. They frequently referred to themselves in letters as “little worms at the feet of Christ” and addressed one another only as “Brother” or “Sister,” believing titles of rank unbecoming. “What does it help to fill our heads with notions of how things are?” asked Ludwig von Zinzendorf. “What does it help to fill our eyes with sights of the temporal? Much better it is to quiet our hearts in holy *Gelassenheit* (detachment). Much better it is to hang our wills and thoughts with Jesus on the cross, and be a fleck of dust before him. Jesus make me tiny! Through your holy blood make me clean and I will lose myself in you!”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Gedichte: Kreuz, des Christen Los*⁹⁵ *ibid.: Christenberuf*

⁹⁶ *Berliner Reden*, 1738

“The queen of all sins is *Hochmuth* (haughty pride),” the brothers agreed. “If a man is proud he absolutely cannot be saved, nor can his sins be forgiven. We have no example of the Saviour ever healing or forgiving a proud person. But he saved adulterers who humbled themselves. The proud are the world’s greatest and foremost sinners and in the *Gemeine* everything depends on becoming very small.”⁹⁸ In other statements on the subject, believers at Herrnhut confessed: Only the teaching of the blood and of the Lamb will preserve our children from the greatest sin, that is *Hochmuth*. In the training of our children we can give them no other example than that of the Lamb who thought nothing of himself, and did nothing for personal glory. If they follow the Lamb they will not walk into sin, yet the children from our *Gemeine*, must also feel and confess that they are sinners to be saved.

One does not find the Saviour through philosophy. The basis of worldly philosophy stands in direct contradiction to the Saviour and enmity against him is everywhere apparent in what the philosophers say.⁹⁹

To have a high opinion of self, or to be presumptuous, is a terrible sin. Ambition and jealousy, so easily evident among young children, if left unchecked, can turn our little ones into devils. In this it becomes evident how much depends on our training of children.¹⁰⁰

Voluntary Poverty

“The Saviour was and is a poor man,” wrote the brothers in 1753. “The one who desires a close relationship with him must stay poor in material things. He must work and face at least a little hardship to supply his daily needs.”

A hymn writer at Herrnhut wrote:

Proud spirit, high opinion of mine, go look in the dark stable where the Saviour lies, curled up like a worm in poverty and helplessness—our Saviour, God and King! Go there and look, proud selfwill, and inflated spirit!

High spirit of mine, the brotherhood of Christ is small, yet mighty. Poverty is in, and around, and with it. Sink into it to become small and humble. The Saviour goes on before. Throw yourself into the dust, proud spirit, bring down what is high in me!¹⁰¹

97 Gesangbuch, 506⁹⁸ Dienerkonferenz, 1746⁹⁹ ibid.

To this the *Manual of Doctrine* added:

Q. What well-grounded presumption do the children of God have against the rich of this world?

A. That they oppress the Brethren and draw them before judgement seats and blaspheme that worthy name whereby they are called.

Q. How do the children of God look on temporal things. A. They are not to lay up for themselves treasures on earth. Q. But if they have somewhat?

A. Sell what you have.

Q. How are they to communicate the gifts they have freely received? A. Freely.

Q. What is the disciples' chief maxim?

A. Whoever does not forsake all that he hath cannot be his disciple (Luke

14:33)

Brother Josef wrote:

One thing in particular, seems out of keeping with the providence of God. By far the most people are poor. Many are slaves or bondmen, living in misery and keeping themselves alive only with great difficulty—the fruit of their hard labour only serving to increase their masters' luxury and greed. If they do anything wrong they receive merciless punishment. If they beget children, they know beforehand that they will live in slavery and bondage like themselves. Even where people do not live in actual slavery or bondage, the strong oppress the weak.

Now, if God sees everything that happens on earth, how can he possibly allow all this? Should he not lift his arm and destroy those who abuse their fellow humans?

To this we may answer: God does not think about poverty and riches like we do. He knows that poverty, not wealth, preserves men from a great number of sins. And to what place do wealth and luxury lead us?

If the truth must be said, we have very little good to report of the conduct of men with means. For the most part they forget God and his commandments. They forget they are but stewards of material things and that God will call them to account for how they use them. Of all people on earth, they are the most unfit for the kingdom of God and our Lord says of them (the wealthy) that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for one of them to enter his kingdom.

The poor, on the other hand, have far less hindrances. Thorns—that is, the cares of this world according to our Lord's parable—and the deceitfulness of riches, do not choke the word of God in them. Their understanding is not blurred by philosophical deceits as are those of the wealthy and the educated. Their self-esteem does not grow through flatteries like those offered to the rich. They escape hundreds of temptations to evil that the rich eagerly pursue. Material need drives them to God, and in eternity we shall see why untold numbers have reason to bless God not for temporary goods received, but for having been allowed to be poor in this world.

Holy Simplicity

The believers at Herrnhut recognised *Heilige Einfalt* (holy simplicity) as the distinguishing mark of all who followed Christ. Brother Josef wrote:

Heilige Einfalt! Wonder of grace! Depth of wisdom, greatest power, supreme adornment, source of love! Work within us that God alone can accomplish! All liberties become bonds, all riches fly away, all beauty becomes shameful, if we do not have it!

Seeing clearly with Einfalt (a single eye) our souls light up inside. But if we see double, everything blurs and our vision grows dim. The one who trusts Jesus alone, the one who finds all things in him, rests on the rock—a child in the blessing of grace.¹⁰²

Another hymn writer wrote:

The narrow way is wide enough for life. If one walks carefully, straight, and still, one will not easily be blown from it. One must concentrate on it all the time, then it is truly wide enough for life. The way of Christ is full of sweet pleasures if one walks it correctly—that is, with faith. And if one puts his heart into it, joyfully, preparing well for the journey, it is full of sweet pleasures.

How can a bear be gentle like a sheep? Or wild wolves submit to close restriction? How can the flesh be minded to obey God and love the way of the Spirit? It is impossible. A bear cannot be gentle like a sheep. Spirit must be born of Spirit before we can walk the Spirit's narrow way. Otherwise it is complicated, and does not work. Worldly minds, be gone! Worldly pleasures, go away! Of Spirit my spirit must be born.

The one born of Christ, follows him only, with a true heart. He suffers, he bears reproach with Christ, before he goes with him, rejoicing, into light. The one born of Christ, is buried with him in death. He rises with Christ and ascends with him to heaven. He receives the gifts of the Spirit of Christ, if he is willing to die with him. The Spirit that directed Christ, directs his disciples. The same Spirit does the same things for both. There is only one way of the Spirit and Christ's disciples walk that way. It does not matter if the way passes through thorns. Only with our heels we tread on thorns. Sorrow causes no deep hurt if we press on, comforted and steadfast, through death and hell (the grave). The light yoke cannot rest heavy upon us. It only crushes what is evil—the new man goes free! The yoke of Christ does not crush the one who knows how to carry it. It is light and easy. Its light and pleasant burden makes our inner beings glad. It lifts our hearts. Our Spirits

gain new courage and our lives wake up to bloom. We taste the goodness of God when our light burdens make our inner beings glad.

Show me, Jesus, show me how to follow you! I am still far behind. Your narrow way is full of sweet pleasures. Good things follow us on it. Show me, Jesus, show me how to walk like you!¹⁰³

One only enjoys an undivided heart by keeping one's focus on Christ. Brother Ludwig wrote:

Whoever wants true holiness . . . must look for it in the heart and person of Jesus. He must know nothing but that the Saviour loves him and love him in return. Then, no matter if he is a child, a youth, or a man, he will become what he ought to be, accepted in the beloved and resting in the Father's affection like Jesus himself during the stages of his earthly life. He may have defects. He may weep sometimes, and be cheerful. Yet he belongs to the family. . . . And his heart delights in becoming humble, faithful, chaste, kind, and gracious, like the Lamb. The moment we begin to live and act in Christ he makes us holy. He transforms us so that we begin to think like he does in every situation. We begin to believe, to hope, to weep, and to rejoice like him. Truthfully, we begin to long for him in love, whether eating, drinking, working, doing business, sleeping, or anything else. In a sense we become absent characters, only half engaged in what we do, because our souls run after him. . . . At times he lets us feel his nearness, appearing to us in his bleeding form, so we may be patient with our earthly state for the time being.¹⁰⁴

Another hymn writer at Herrnhut wrote:

I went tapping along, blind, in the wilderness. My mind and motives were in the dark. My impure will was aflame with worldly passions. But when the faithful shepherd found me and guided me back onto the right way, ungodliness left and in faith I was born again!

Jesus kills the impulse to sin when the old man is put off. Raging waves of temptation lie back and become still, when he as much as lifts his finger against them. He comes to live in the heart and lights its guiding lamps by which to walk in faith through purity, righteousness, and holiness—the proofs of the godly life.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *ibid.* 432¹⁰⁴ *Berliner Reden*, 1738

Innocence and Joy

Not uncommonly, when asked how they were, believers at Herrnhut answered “*kindvergnügt*” (happy as a child). Living no longer with fears of the past (guilt), worries about the present, or future concerns, they relaxed in Christ like children in the presence of a loving parent. This set them free to sing, to rejoice in fellowship together, or even to play in a manner most unfamiliar to the rest of Europe at the time. In a message, Ludwig von Zinzendorf said:

It would be unmerciful to forbid all diversions. To condemn even innocent pleasures is a characteristic of melancholy minds. [Innocent pleasures] may be useful, if for nothing else than to sweeten this mortal existence for those who have nothing better.

The one who becomes a new person in Jesus Christ sees mortality in an altogether different light. . . . He notices what is pleasant in it, even as things now stand. His slavery ends and he fears no longer. He lifts up his head in sickness and age, for redemption, not fear, stands before him. He does not anticipate Sheol nor eternal silence, but expects to leave his body to be present with the Lord. . . . Whatever seemed illogical and offensive to him before, now demands his respect and awe. He thinks like Jesus, does all physical functions like him, prays, works, journeys, sickens and dies like him.¹⁰⁶

Purity

Fully conscious of Christ’s humanity, and patterning their lives after his earthly example, the Moravians accepted all of human experience straightforwardly and with common sense. They believed every Christian, the married as well as the single, could (and should) follow Christ. “We ask our married couples to be aware of the presence of Christ in all their affairs,” agreed the brothers in 1753, “so that they may live before him in joy.”

Moral purity, they also associated with cleansing through faith in the blood. Even though they did not practice outward circumcision, Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote:

Through the merit of the wound of circumcision we trust our choirs will live in sanctity and that our youth and virgins will keep their bodies from a dissolute nature, reserved to the Creator alone. Doing this, they will be able to use them for his service in a right way, if and when it shall be his will [in marriage]. And in the state of marriage we also trust that the perfectly chaste man, Jesus Christ, will free the act of begetting children from the enchantment of uncontrolled lust

(entwined into this act as if by magic), according to his original plan. We trust he will also free our women from the usual dread of child bearing, and make this act—even though it is painful—such a holy experience of worship to God that they can rejoice in it body and soul.¹⁰⁷

In celebrations of pre-marital purity and the consecration of their bodies to Christ, the young sisters found fellowship with Mary whose heart the Saviour's presence had warmed. The young brothers' choir, on the other hand, held the occasional *Beschneidungsfest* (circumcision feast) "in honour of Christ's first wound." For this, Ludwig, wrote a hymn:

¹⁰⁶ *Berliner Reden*, 1738 ¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

Head of the young men of your people of grace . . . most holy wound of the covenant that you as a small boy received in your member—otherwise known as the member of shame but through this cut restored to its place of reverent honour—may you be praised with a hundred thousand tears by the choir that understands the depth of your secret covenant! From the first drop of blood from this wound . . . now comprehended by the choir that sees the human body through spiritual eyes, the old system of shame-ideas began to disappear. . . . The young boys' choir has become the joy of the church, converted and consecrated to a host of young men for Christ! Hail to the march of the church! Hail to the ranks of our youth, and to the youthful Jesus' praise!

This sacramental wound is a wound of dedication. It casts down the ideas of the world and renews creation's glory in us. In the choir we no longer think like people used to. We no longer live in suspense, nor in a vacuum of lack of knowledge. Now we can think like the Creator when he designed our bodies. We see his holy destination for our bodies like Jesus saw it when he was a young man. . . .

The pain of the covenant wound takes with it what still belongs to the power of sin. . . . The wheel of nature, always turning back to active sin, is stopped by the cut that severs the birth-hood from the most honoured member and makes the desire of youth like Jesus' mortified body. . . . Then the fierceness departs, and the ways of the Lamb appear in the face of youth. . . . After young men become permeated with Jesus-likeness, nothing shows itself in their members anymore that is not like Jesus. Their bodies may look just like before, but Christ who suffered this agony becomes visible in the whole choir, that even in their bedrooms set nothing before one another but the image of Joseph's son.

With the wound of the covenant, the reproductive power of young men is consecrated and legitimized in the choir. . . . And even though our congregation has sorted out a number of young men and destined them for marriage, those who are still bent before the Lamb in their unmarried state, seek to become like Jesus in everything until every last member of the body honours him alone.

It is also within God's plan, when one of the Jesus-like young men proceeds to holy marriage. It may cause sadness (on the part of those left behind) but when the Lamb himself comes and calls one of his servants to become a member of the married congregation, it is a joy to all. . . . Therefore, may God Consecrator, God the man of all states of life, God the praise of the church, be honoured before all the world. He who fulfills his purposes in the church sprinkled with his blood—the church that awaits your flame, Creator God, Man and Lamb!¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Abridged from *Gesangbuch*, 2220

In their choirs, the believers at Herrnhut observed the *separatio sexus* (segregation of men and women) with zeal. A wall even separated brothers from sisters during worship in the Saal.

Along with this, the congregation early turned to the use of the lot to discern the Lord's will in marriage (young men drawing papers with names from a box that always held a blank or two). Worldly romance had no place in Herrnhut. Complete resignation to the Saviour's choice took its place, and marriage, for the Moravians, became nothing but “a practical means of advancing God's kingdom,” or a “strategic union to promote spiritual development.” Nevertheless—unlike their critical neighbours expected— young men and women who found each other in this atmosphere of *Gelassenheit* (personal surrender of the will) rather than the passion of romance, virtually always established joyful and stable homes. Sins of a moral nature among the Moravians were rare, and divorce unknown.

Peace

Following Christ, the Moravians returned at once to his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, and to the practice of their ancestors, Petr Chelčický, and the Poor. Brother Ludwig, soon after the renewal of the brotherhood, said publicly:

Our congregation does not hold to the opinion . . . that the children of God shall be masters of this world and root out the ungodly. That is a notion in no way

suiting the kingdom of the cross. For what should we do with scepters and jurisdiction, if our Saviour would give them to us? We are not made for such things. On the other hand, we respect from the heart those that are called and will take the trouble to rule over us, to be our kings, princes, and protectors.¹⁰⁹

The Moravians' *Manual of Doctrine* covered Christ's teaching on nonresistance:

Q. How do the children of God treat their enemies? A.

They love them (Matthew 5:44)

Q. When cursed by them? A.

Then they bless.

Q. When hated by them?

A. Then they do good to them.

Q. When despitefully used by them?

A. Then they pray for them that it may not be laid to their charge. Q. Why do they act in this manner?

A. That they may be the children of the Father which is in heaven. Q. Who hath given the greatest example herein?

A. Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends. And Jesus hath reconciled us by his death when we were enemies.

Q. What is one specific rule of Christ?

A. give to him that asketh thee and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

¹⁰⁹ *Berliner Reden*, 1738

Q. And another?

A. Whoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Q.

Further?

A. Resist not evil. Q.

For instance?

A. If any man will sue that at the law and take away thy coat let him have thy cloak also.

Q. If any one should lay hands on us?

A. Whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also. When brothers from Herrnhut investigated possibilities of settlement in other lands, their nonresistant position raised questions. Brother Josef, meeting with the

Dutch West India Company, explained what they believed at Amsterdam, in 1734. “Beyond a refusal to serve in the army, how far does discipline reach?” Dutch officials asked him. “Would you take part in meting out criminal justice, that is, in capital punishment?”

“No,” Brother Josef replied, “we would not. The government carries the sword, and that not in vain. But the highest discipline we use in the Gemeine is the *Ausschluß* (excommunication). In this we seek to walk by the rule of Christ and the apostles who exercised no worldly authority.”

When the believers settled in Georgia the British asked their young men to enlist or else hire a substitute. David Nitschmann explained why, for the love of Christ, they could not obey. Neither would they register, or help the British build a fort in Savannah.

“When a person does something against us, we need to be so friendly to him that he soon forgets he wronged us,” wrote the brothers in 1728. “And by doing so he does not become our enemy because of shame.”¹¹⁰

Along with their nonresistant position, the Moravians took Christ’s command literally, not to swear. “We would rather have our hands cut off than raise them to swear an oath,” testified Pilgrims enroute to the New World.

Into all the World

In their *Manual of Doctrine* the Moravians discussed the responsibilities of Pilgrims sent out to tell the world about Christ:

Q. What do they wait for in the execution of their charge? A.

For open doors 1 Cor. 16:9

Q. What is the sign of this? A.

Many adversaries.

Q. Where is it best to preach?

A. Where Christ is yet unknown. Q.

Why?

A. That one might not build upon another man’s foundation.

But along with Scriptural theory they had a wealth of practical experience to draw from. Christian David, for years a roving evangelist and daring knight of the Kingdom, wrote on a journey to Latvia in 1729:

A person unwilling to move from place to place and to live among the common people, or one who cannot survive in poverty, would not get much accomplished here in Livonia. In the four months I have spent here at the Wollmarshof I have suffered more hunger and thirst than I did in Herrnhut during eight years. . . . The one who seeks souls dare seek nothing else, or he loses himself.¹¹¹

In another letter, Christian David wrote to seekers at Nürnberg:

[To evangelise effectively] one must remember how the dear Saviour once assumed the form of a servant, and while among poor blind people, sat down at their feet. He knew how to fit in anywhere to win people over and persuade them. Even today he adjusts his message to fit all people with their religions, customs, and practices. He gives all of them in every place the most suitable freedom, gifts, powers and mediators.

In the same way, God's children today should live irreproachably and like true Christians among those that are outside, seeking to remove their prejudice in every conceivable way, approaching them with deference, answering all questions modestly, being of service to them, and showing them love on first opportunity. In all things concerning the church they should seek to adapt themselves, not staying away from public services unless necessary, not abusing the freedom of the children of God, but according to love willingly becoming servants that correctly use what others abuse. They should hallow what others profane, willingly fellowshipping with them in their degenerate sects, but only as the good salt of the earth, and to become all things to all men.¹¹²

“One does not start by telling heathen people about the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” decided the brothers in a meeting at Herrnhut. “Rather, one must start by telling them of the Saviour. Then, when they are children of God, one may go on to speak to them about the Father, the Spirit, and the Holy Three in One.”¹¹³

Several years later they added:

Among the heathen one must not speak in an abstract way about a “Great Spirit” or similar concepts. One must speak directly, and at once, about Jesus our Saviour. One must seek to develop the friendship and inclinations of the people toward him. Then, out of the concept of the Saviour comes their understanding of God.¹¹⁴

An early Moravian Pilgrim to the West Indies wrote: “The Methodists’ way of converting people is to shake them over hell, but of the loving Jesus one hears

very little. They teach that one must be holy for God to accept us.” In contrast to this, the brothers at Herrnhut wrote in 1739:

¹¹¹ Letter to the brothers at Herrnhut, from Riga, November, 1729. ¹¹² From a letter to seekers at Nürnberg, ca. 1730. ¹¹³ *Dienerkonferenz*, 1740

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 1747

Our plan of action as a church is to aim for the heart at once. We attempt to bring all people to a knowledge of Jesus the crucified one in their hearts, and to see the value of his wounds as the most important thing, so that it may remain their motivation from that point on for the rest of their lives.

In a meeting on August 21, 1742, the brothers decided on two rules for Pilgrims sent out. First, they were not to meddle into the work of other Christians. Second, they should “avoid disputes with any contentious person, choosing to remain quiet rather than to argue. On meeting contentious people, they should hear them out, then answer with a terse, ‘That is my view too,’ or, ‘I do not believe that way,’ and avoid further argument.”

“What we teach must be so simple,” the brothers agreed, “that whoever wants to argue against us must find himself in the position of speaking against the clear light of the sun. We must be very careful how we refute what others say.”¹¹⁵

Wherever they went, the Moravians held to a clear plan of action. In some places they established “home” communities. In others they simply encouraged seekers in forming fellowships of their own. “To bring the Gospel to the heathen and to establish colonies,” they concluded in 1747, “are two different matters. In the latter case the brothers and sisters must prosper in a material way to keep on living. But in the former they must be resolved to lay material pursuits aside.” Then, no matter what their calling, or how they adapted themselves to local situations, Ludwig von Zinzendorf’s words applied:

If we continue faithful, and preach nothing to any one but what the Holy Ghost has already told them in the spirit, we shall see true and lasting fruit, even though the numbers and noise may be less.¹¹⁶

The Saviour's Church

“The first purpose of Christ’s death was to save us from sin,” wrote the brothers at Herrnhut. “The second purpose was to bring all of us scattered children of God together in one spirit, in one soul, in one invisible, and finally in a local, visible, body.” To this they added:

Every soul must deal directly with the Saviour. We dare not become middle men in the process. The Saviour must deal personally with every soul, or else the soul has nothing. . . . The all-satisfying heart religion is a matter between the individual and the Saviour alone, but as soon as it becomes a matter between Jesus and I, and this one and that one as well, it is the *Gemein* (community). In the community of believers the Holy Ghost is prophet, Christ is priest, and we the members are the little church.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* 1741116 *Berliner Reden*, 1738

Describing this *Gemeinschaft*

(community, fellowship) of believers, a Herrnhut hymn writer wrote:

Gemeinschaft with the children of God, how sweet and good it is!
Gemeinschaft in the ridicule we face, Gemeinschaft in steady peace,
Gemeinschaft from the earliest strirrings of our hearts that were hard as stone,
Gemeinschaft on the journey through the valley of the shadow of death to the highway of life. Unknown treasures of the Kingdom of the Cross open up to us when we begin to struggle in Gemeinschaft and become as brothers and sisters one to another. Man was not meant to be alone. Neither did Jesus design the new life to be lived in the wilderness.

Brothers, let us all take care, lest the sweet unity that promises success to what we do—the unity that is our hope of victory in battle, the treasure of the elect, and the entertainment of heroes on their days of rest—should break down.

Remember, souls, the brothers and sisters who love you. Prepare to use for one another the beautiful gifts you received on entering Jesus’ Kingdom. You men, pray without wavering! You women, teach without using words! Young

men, struggle against flesh and the devil! Young women, pursue quietness! All of you, run until you grab the prize!

Remember, the whole world rests on rotting pillars. Our work shall stand against it! Let some, diligently supported by the rest, go and engender Jesus- souls. Let us all permit ourselves to be elected ornaments for Salem, the glory and praise of God's city of peace!¹¹⁸

For as much as the believers at Herrnhut valued their church community, they did not put it into the place of Christ. "The one who develops a close relationship with the church but who does not know the Saviour," the brothers agreed in 1749, "is a dangerous person. Through people like this, many are brought to ruin." At the same time, they made it clear they did not consider Herrnhut all there was to the church of Christ.

"The Moravian church dare not be looked at as synonymous with the Church of God," the brothers agreed. "Even though there may be as many as twenty Christian groups in the world, there is only one Christian Church—one family of God, with one heart and one head. . . . This is the church of all that look to the Saviour."¹¹⁹ After receiving a sister back into the congregation (from which she had been excommunicated) an early Moravian Pilgrim to Suriname wrote:

In a meeting for the whole congregation we explained our service in the Gospel and the name Herrnhuter usually attached to us That name has caused all manner of misconceptions and misunderstandings. Far too many times people compare the "Herrnhuter church," the "Herrnhuter doctrines," or even the "Herrnhuter religion" with the Lutheran, Reformed or other Christian churches and Judaism. We told the congregation how they ought to see themselves simply as members one of another in our *Brüdergemeinde* (brothers' community), and how our *Brüdergemeinde* in turn is simply a tiny segment of the whole church, the true church and Gemeinde of Christ, partially visible and partially invisible over the face the earth. Our hearts' desire is that everyone who wants to belong to the church will not rest until the Spirit of Christ has made him a member of the living church and body of Christ. If this would be our goal and become a reality among us it would not happen so often that baptised and communicant members hide sin, covering it up with lies and hypocrisy, only to keep on being counted as brothers and sisters or members of the Herrnhuter church!¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Gesangbuch*, 711

Brother Josef, thinking of similar problems, wrote:

Christianity—that is, all who preach Christ and are called Christians—has been broken up into many groups. Now if every one of those groups lived as closely as possible to the truths with which it is been entrusted, if every one tried continually to lessen its errors and abuses, they might all exist near one another without getting into each other's way. But if any one of these groups begins to presume it is *the* Church of Christ, or to present itself as the *only* church in which a man can be saved, it judges itself too leniently and others too severely.

We cannot deny that some groups are more attractive than others, and that more of the Gospel's truth is to be found in some than in others. In the same way, more hindrances to the way of godliness may be found in some, and the rules and constitution of others are more in agreement with the Bible. Some leave more room for errors against the doctrine of Jesus, and others control scandalous vices and sins more effectively, etc. Nevertheless, we may hope in God that he will bring many seeking souls to grace in every one of these groups. Even in Elijah's idolatrous times, the Lord had reserved seven thousand to himself that had not bowed their knee to Baal. In the same way today, even though apostasy is everywhere visible, who would doubt that his power can do the same again? Who would doubt that the Good Shepherd can preserve his sheep—those who know his voice and follow him in simplicity and truth—in and among all the Christian groups?

Certainly the Moravians believed in an "ecumenical and catholic" church (the undivided body of Christ in its entirety). But they believed just as firmly in the need for visible church communities. Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote:

The Community of God in the Spirit may be called the invisible Church of Christ, as described in Hebrews 12. This is the church everyone enters when he is born again. It is the church above, but there is also a church below: a visible church.

The visible church is either militant or triumphant. The militant church, out of the wisdom of God, has not been unified, neither in belief nor practice, ever since the days of the apostles, except in those places where it has had an outward communion. There the church is to united in order, in love, and in basic beliefs, and the brothers who separate themselves from such a congregation are heretics with the spirit of Korah. These little visible churches are not stationary nor permanent.

¹²⁰ *Diarium von Bambej*, 8. Oktober, 1781

The invisible church has many members that do not know the blessing of belonging to such visible congregations. Many of them belong instead to the sects. The sects are large groups of people with one confession who do not have the power of Christ but who confuse confessional unity for real church unity. Where children of God live in such a sect they must discern whether it is harmful or not. Harmful sects are those that teach fundamental errors in doctrine or practice, those that use force to compel people to believe in a certain way, and those who condemn others. Such sects one dare not support nor condone. One must testify against them and do what one can to draw together a fellowship of true followers of Christ. If this is allowed within the sect, it is alright. But if not, one must keep on witnessing fearlessly to the truth, with godliness and honesty, until one gets thrown out of it.

We need to warn all men about the poison of sectarianism in belief and practice, but we should not encourage people to leave the sects at once. Such encouragement has very negative results, and if followed in the wrong spirit can greatly hinder the work of Christ.¹²¹

“Our church,” agreed the brothers at Herrnhut, “is a free city for all souls desiring to be true to their consciences. We love other churches too, both from the east and from the west and seek quarrels with none. We do not encourage people to leave other churches to join ours. In fact we do all we can to deter them from doing so. Our only purpose is to point all men to the Head of the Church himself.”¹²² With this remarkable belief, Herrnhut became one of the few Christian communities as easy to leave as to join. Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote:

It is a principle among us to set before everyone the unqualified option of going away at any time. Hearts truly laid hold of by the wounds of Jesus, will not go away and get lost. Confidence among brothers may fail, but hearts [preserved by Christ] find their way back.¹²³

Gestures of Humble Deference

The brothers at Herrnhut practised the Christian rites—water baptism, communion in bread and wine, the holy kiss, feetwashing, and others— asking no questions, only performing with joy these “gestures of humble deference” for Christ. Even though they took them seriously, the Moravians did not feel that baptism or communion saved them. “At the cross,” the brothers agreed in 1740,

“the blood of Christ was sprinkled over all humanity. Therefore all children are saved.” Several years later they added: “The believer who dies unbaptised is not for that reason condemned.”

Concerned that none should depend on outer rites where inner conviction failed, the brothers agreed in 1753:

¹²¹ *Extract-Schreibens, d.d. Mens. Febr. 1730, nach W. in Ehistland*¹²²

Dienerkonferenz, 1753

¹²³ *Berliner Reden, 1738*

Our children are not ready to go along to communion just because they are ours and have reached years of accountability. Rather, when they individually become partakers of God’s life within them, they come to the place where they need this spiritual food.

Even their choir and educational system did not look to the Moravians like anything to lean on. In a meeting they took note:

For the training of children one does not necessarily need institutions like ours. . . . The goal in our home congregations should be for all parents to educate their own children. Our ongoing need for congregational institutions is mute evidence of our shortcoming in this area.¹²⁴

Such modest views of their own work helped the Moravians to conduct their affairs in a relaxed and joyful way. “In normal situations,” the brothers, for instance, agreed, “chosen leaders should hold communion services. But when they are gone, other honest disciples of Christ, on whom the Spirit rests, may well serve the congregation.”¹²⁵

Modesty also prevented unhealthy “spiritual competition” and a desire to demonstrate special gifts in public meetings. Christian David wrote:

Jesus and the apostles usually prayed in secret, except during great and extraordinary awakenings, and this is really when one should pray in public. . . . But when one seeks guidance in deep matters, one must do it in quietness and deal with one’s innermost being. In such cases one does not need many words. One does not need much audible prayer, or outward activity.

[The Pietists at Halle] conduct prayer meetings, and that is the end of it. It may be good for beginners, but after they learn how to rattle off long wordy prayers to be heard by men, the results are nil, as examples show.¹²⁶

A hymn writer at Herrnhut wrote:

The one who desires nothing on earth lets God's love take care of everything. His inner being remains quiet. His pulse remains normal. His heart is at rest. In the midst of all manner of dangers his vision remains clear.¹²⁷

Before taking part in communion, Moravian believers washed one another's feet. Their *Manual of Doctrine* stated:

Q. What action did the Lord Jesus perform towards his friends before his departure?

A. Jesus rose from supper, laid aside his garments and washed his disciples feet.

124 Dienerkonferenz, 1747125 *ibid.* 1753126 From a letter to Ludwig von Zinzendorf, June, 1732. ¹²⁷ Gesangbuch, 474

Q. What compact did he make with them?

A. Since I your Lord and master have washed your feet you ought also to wash one another's feet.

Q. Did he do it on purpose that they might copy him?

A. He said, "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you."

Then, followed the "blessed warriors' meal" in six stages. First we need to confess our sins and forgive the sins of others. Second, we enter by faith "the holy of holies," that is, collective awareness of being "in Christ, hidden from the world and safe in the wound in his side." Only in such a condition, the Moravians believed, may communion services become meaningful to us.

The third stage of communion comes with the eating of the bread—Christ, the bread of life, coming into us. Only as he does this, and his presence becomes real, dispelling sin, do heavenly light and joy descend upon us. The fourth stage is the welling up of our love for him, as we remember his body, broken for us. The fifth stage is forgiveness of sins as we drink the wine and believe in the merits of the blood. The sixth and final stage is fellowship one with another around the table of the Lamb, celebrated by the holy kiss of peace.

Brother Josef wrote:

Holy Communion is a mysterious enjoyment of the body and blood of Christ. That is, we enjoy the bread and wine by associating it with the body and

blood of Jesus in a manner incomprehensible to us, and therefore inexpressible, whenever the Holy Supper of the Lord is enjoyed according to the mind of Jesus Christ.¹²⁸

In 1747 the brothers agreed:

In the innermost parts of the Spirit we are with the Saviour every hour and every moment. We are with literally in his presence, but in the Evening Meal we are also with him in a sacramental way. The first is for the heart, the second is also for the sake of Gemeinschaft.

Bowed before the Word

Highly exalting Christ, the Living Word, led believers at Herrnhut to exalt his recorded words as well. “The moment one comprehends the sacrifice of Christ and his eternal love, one comprehends all of Scripture,” the brothers agreed in 1740. “The one who understands the redemption paid for by Christ, understands the highest wisdom and is, of all philosophers, the greatest. . . . Where the understanding of Christ’s work is missing however, even fifty years of good works will be of no avail!”

The brothers also wrote:

We cannot learn doctrine from human books, rather we must wait until the Holy Ghost reveals things to us from the Scriptures, time after time. That is what makes us wise to Kingdom of Heaven. The knowledge of this blesses souls and makes those who are already blessed, more blessed (*jedes solches Erkenntnis macht Seelen selig, und die seligen seliger*).¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Spangenberg, *Idea Fidi Fratrum*

About matters that are against the Scriptures we need ask no questions.¹³⁰

Where we have a clear command in Scripture, we have no business nor right to examine the matter further—except to discern how and when to obey it, and to whom it applies.¹³¹

Ludwig von Zinzendorf, wrote:

I set the gold, the noble gift of the Word, far above worldly possession and wealth. If the Word should no longer count, on what would faith rest? I would give up a thousand worlds before giving up the Word. Being the Word’s witnesses is a higher calling than the world can comprehend. We witness to its

power, the power of the Word the Father sent out: the Lamb of God! We, the Bridegroom's friends and relatives, testify of it.

World, you see wonders wrought by Jesus, the Word, in human flesh. He works wonders in the lives of the poor from whose faces the light of eternity beams! You see this from afar. Does it not move you?¹³²

If nothing else, it moved the believers at Herrnhut to an unsurpassed degree, as described in a statement from the Pilgergemeine, meeting at London, in 1742:

The distinguishing mark of all our congregations is to cleave to the Lamb, our mediator, not hindering him in declaring anything his Father wants to tell us. . . . We know not where to fly but to him and his wounds We can appeal to nothing higher, to know him is for us a sea of perfection. His love, in which the lies the mystery of his atonement, is most beautiful to us. All the saints in heaven will never have admired it enough, and to sing of it unceasingly is our theme. If we, as a result of this affection, are accused of a certain vagueness or indifference to everything else, we own that accusation to be true.¹³³

“*Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur* (Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him)!” became the song and banner of the renewed Moravian Church.

¹²⁹ *Dienerkonferenz*, 1738

¹³⁰ *ibid.* 1740 ¹³¹ *ibid.* 1753 ¹³² *Gedichte: Liebe zum Wort* ¹³³ From the record of a meeting of elders and deacons at London, 1742.

11

Go!

“Go and dance! Go, look at the girls! Go to the tavern, for once, and be normal!”

Five serious young men looked at the village Burgomaster and said nothing. What could they say? Deep in Roman Catholic Moravia in 1724, deeply convicted to follow Christ, they could not obey the man, even though he meant his advice well—and even though he was Johann Töltschig’s father (Johann being one of the five).

The boys saw nothing but conflict, more threats, and danger ahead. When Johann’s father forbade them under pain of severe punishment to meet again, they knew they had only one option. At ten o’clock the following evening David Nitschmann and Melchior Zeisberger—like the Töltschigs of German Waldensian background—joined Johann to flee. Hastily made plans worked. Once out of earshot they knelt to sing the old Unity hymn, “Blessed be the day when I must roam, far from my country, friends, and home,” and struck out for Leszno in Poland.

On the way to Poland they stopped to see the Moravian refugees at Herrnhut, in Germany. The sight that met their eyes disappointed them. The grain looked poor. Large families lived in makeshift houses. But when a group gathered to lay the cornerstone for a school and orphanage (they happened to arrive at Herrnhut on May 12, 1724), their disillusionment turned into amazement and joy.

Brother Ludwig prayed at the laying of the cornerstone. “Dear Lord, if what we are doing is at all useful to you, bless it. But if this is nothing but the product of our own schemes and actions, destroy it at once. Do not let us go on with anything but what you have in mind.”

Inspired with such humility before Christ, and such a surrender of plans and wills, the three young men decided to travel no further. They stayed at Herrnhut and after the awakening of 1727, Johann was one of the first to hear the call of Christ to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

With Wenzel Neisser and David Nitschman, Johann set out for England in 1728. Carrying little with them but a burning desire to preach Christ, and to share with others the blessings they had received, the young men ran out of money in the Netherlands and one of them nearly got sold as a bond servant to

the East Indies. But Christ came to their rescue. Money appeared, and at the home of a Dutch merchant in London they met two seekers, John and Charles Wesley.

No Choice But To Go

While Johann Töltzschig visited seekers in England and Ireland, and other believers travelled through Poland to Latvia and Russia, to Denmark, Switzerland, and beyond, all of Herrnhut prepared itself for the road. German authorities had turned hostile. Disturbed by Herrnhut's rapid growth, they exiled Brother Ludwig in 1736 and took measures against the refugees around him.

Far to the west, in the valley of the Wetter River—the “Wetterau” between Frankfurt am Main and the Taunus highlands—an indebted nobleman, the Count of Ysenburg-Wächtersbach came to their aid. His fields destroyed by a long history of war and neglect, lay in weeds. His castle, the Ronneburg, stood in disrepair. No matter what the Moravians believed, the count welcomed them onto his estate with an eye on their willingness to work and technical skills.

The first refugees from Herrnhut entered the old Ronneburg with sinking hearts. Animals had slept in the place. No door or window closed properly. No stairs were safe to use. Rats scampered off into dark cobwebby corners, and a strange collection of tramps, drunkards and gypsies slept among garbage on the grounds. But the love of Christ soon transformed the cheerless place. Working with their children and visitors from far and near, the Moravians cleaned and repaired the castle and planted the fields around it. They began a free school for the children of the area and gave their ragged neighbours clothes. The Lord blessed their work and as fast as pilgrims went out to preach Christ, new seekers came to join the community.

Not long after their arrival in the Wetterau, the Count of Ysenburg-Meerholz let the believers move into the much homier and better cared for castle of Marienborn, nearby. But the movement grew so fast that all buildings on the grounds filled up and by 1738 the third heir of the Ysenburg family, the Count of Ysenburg-Büdingen, gave them land on which to build a new community however they desired.

Widening Horizons

Working with boundless zeal and joy, the brothers and sisters built the choir houses, the Saal, and the circle of barns and outbuildings that became the new community of Herrnhag (the Lord's refuge). Contacts with seekers in Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, and throughout Germany and Scandinavia brought a stream of new residents until several thousand lived under careful management there. Its fields and workshops, tended to by many willing hands, prospered. Within a few years the brothers could loan money to their landlord counts, and more became available all the time to send Pilgrims out with the Word.

Peter Böhler, a young German believer sailed to England the year of Herrnhag's founding. No sooner could he communicate in English than he found himself speaking to crowds of one to four thousand people, sometimes as many as twenty times a week. In spite of the persecution of wealthy and powerful people, the brothers founded new communities they named Grace Hill (*Gnadenberg*) and Lamb's Hill (*Lammsberg*, renamed Fulneck) in Yorkshire, and Ockbrook in Derby. Johann Töltschig moved on to Ireland and many seekers found Christ and one another there.

Protestant leaders resented the Moravians' arrival in England. They distrusted their communal order, their refusal to bear arms, and above all their "blood fanaticism." Under growing pressure the English government passed a law forcing all young men attending Moravian meetings into military service, while at Swindon in Wiltshire an angry crowd drenched the English convert, John Cennick, with water from a fire engine. At Stratton they sprayed him with blood saved up from the butcher, and angry cries of, "Lamb, Lamb," followed Moravian Pilgrims wherever they went. But by 1749, King George II granted them the privilege (like the Quakers) not to swear oaths or bear arms.

For several years a Moravian community—Pilgerruh, the "Pilgrims' Rest"—existed in the north German province of Schleswig. Some from Herrnhut settled in the Hanseatic city of Reval (now Tallin, Estonia), and in the Netherlands on the estate of Heerendyk in the barony of Ysselstein. After a number of years they moved from there into an old castle at Zeist. Wherever they travelled, or wherever they found lodging for a time, they kept their transience clearly in mind. Brothers and sisters, especially those of the Pilgergemeine, moved continually further until twenty-five years after Johann Töltschig left for England they had reached more

than a million people around the world with the Gospel—in forty-three languages. Even then, a hymn-writer at Herrnhut wrote:

Unknown land, barren wilderness! God's hand will yet be praised in you! So many dark places where the torches of faith have long burned out . . . Unknown land, infinite is the seed that shall yet come out of you! In you the pious shall be seen, a holy city. You who still sit in darkness, dirty with false teaching . . . Infinite shall be the seed of God's grace in you!

Wonderful light! Light you have never heard of in your unconverted state, shall break in upon you like shining rays of the sun. Dark swamps of disease it shall penetrate, dancing in joyfully, opening your face for the first time. Oh wonderful light! . . . The long hidden secret of God's promise to Abraham is about to be revealed as many become his seed. The world with all its heathen is about to be filled with the glory of God's grace.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ *Gesangbuch*, 710

12

Into All The World

Having tasted the joy of leaving all things for Christ, no amount of opposition could stop the Moravians from going “out into all the world” in the 1730s. The Order of the Mustard Seed revived, and in preparation for service abroad, young believers began to study languages, medicine, geography, and the Bible, with zeal. A number of them took classes at the University of Jena, but with Brother Ludwig’s caution always in mind: “You must not be blinded by reason and order, as if people first had to learn to believe in God, and after that in Christ. That is wrong, because they already know God exists. They must be instructed about the Son for there is salvation in no other.”

During this time Ludwig von Zinzendorf and David Nitschman travelled to Copenhagen in Denmark. There, in the home of a Danish nobleman, they met Anton Ulrich, a black slave from the West Indian island of St. Thomas.

The brothers listened spellbound to Anton telling of slave transport to the New World, of their wretchedness on plantations there, and of how he used to sit on the shore of St. Thomas, longing to know God. “Should you cross the ocean,” Anton assured them, “you would find many slaves in the same condition. Perhaps you would even find my sister Anna and tell her about God like you have told me.”

After baptising Anton at Copenhagen, Ludwig—profoundly moved by his story—wanted David Nitschmann to set out at once for the West Indies. But things did not fall into place so quickly. Anton travelled back to Herrnhut with them instead, where he spoke to the whole congregation on July 21, 1731. In halting Danish, with gestures and stories that struck the believers to the heart, he described slavery. “But to speak to my people would be difficult,” he told them. “To reach them you would most likely have to become slaves yourselves.”

That night, after the meeting, Johann Leonhard Dober, a young potter who had come to Herrnhut from Silesia tossed and turned in bed. He shed many tears. The thought of innumerable black people, living and dying in bondage, without hope and without God in the world, kept him awake until morning. All day long he cried inwardly to Christ. Then he met on the Hutberg, the following evening, with other believers to pray, and discovered the same thing had happened to his friend, Tobias Leupold.

On their way back from the prayer meeting the young men passed Brother Ludwig's house. Through the open window they heard him saying to a guest, "You know, among our young people the Lord has messengers to St. Thomas, Greenland, Lapland, and who knows what other countries!" Filled with joy on hearing this, both Leonhard and Tobias hurried home to write letters telling the congregation of their willingness to go to the West Indies. In Leonhard's words:

I can tell you that my intention has never been just to travel abroad for a while. What I desire is to dedicate myself more firmly to our Saviour. Ever since the Count [Brother Ludwig] has returned from Denmark and spoken of the condition of the slaves, I have not been able to forget them. So I decided that if another brother would like to accompany me, I would give myself over to slavery in order to tell them as much as I have learned about our Saviour. I am ready to do this because I firmly believe that the Word of the Cross is able to rescue souls even in degraded conditions. I also thought that even if I would not be of use to anyone in particular, I could test my obedience to our Saviour through this, but my main reason for going would be because there are still souls in the islands that cannot believe because they have not heard.

Martin Linner, leader of the young men's choir, did not like the idea of Leonhard leaving Herrnhut. He was a valuable youth, both for his working skills and his godly example among the rest. But after a year of waiting before the Lord the congregation allowed Leonhard to draw lots concerning his future. The slip of paper he pulled out said: "Let the boy go, the Lord is with him." Not Tobias Leupold, however, but David Nitschmann received the call to go with him.

Sent Off

After a farewell service (during which the congregation sang more than a hundred hymns by memory) and spending their last night at home in prayer, Leonhard and David left Herrnhut at three in the morning on August 21, 1732. Brother Ludwig accompanied them to the edge of the village. They knelt on the road and prayed together. Ludwig laid his hands on their heads and gave them a solemn charge: "Do everything in the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Then, with one ducat each, and a few extra clothes in a bag, they set off on foot for the other side of the world.

Whoever they met told the young men to turn around and go back. “What you want to do is unthinkable,” Danish authorities told them when they reached Copenhagen in September. “You cannot become slaves. The only way for you to reach the New World is to join the army.”

To preach the gospel to black slaves not only seemed bizarre to Danish Protestants (the country had turned Lutheran in the Reformation). It ran directly counter to their beliefs. Many of them still suspected God made white people and the devil those of other colours. To buy and sell blacks seemed logical to them. But to tell them of Christ and offer them eternal salvation—never! Even Anton, whom the brothers met in Copenhagen, changed his mind and begged them not to go. The brothers said little and prayed much.

The Lord Christ opened the doors. After all captains in port had flatly refused to take them to America, a Danish princess, Charlotte Amalie, learned of the young men’s desire and took their side. She sent them money and a Dutch Bible. (Neither Leonhard nor David could read Dutch, but it was the language best known on St. Thomas.) With the money the men bought carpenter tools and a captain hired them to make a closet on his ship. Seeing their willingness and careful work, he recommended them to a friend and they found passage to the New World at last.

Accursed Paradise

With dread and excitement the young men first saw the palm-fringed shore of St. Thomas on December 13, 1732.

Recently purchased from France, together with St. Croix and St. John, this most prosperous island of the West Indies already supplied all of Denmark with sugar and tobacco. Dutch Reformed families, owners of its 150 plantations, lived in airy palaces surrounded by mud and cane thatched huts of black slaves whom they firmly believed “predestined to perdition.” Every month, new shiploads of naked wretches from Africa—cannons trained on hatches where they lay in darkness below deck in their own filth—arrived at St. Thomas’s harbour. Those who turned deathly sick en route their dealers tossed overboard, to save on water. Those who survived, they led, skin and bones, eyes glazed with terror, onto the wharves of St. Thomas, to place at the mercy of “Christian” landlords who promptly broke them in to work.

Under the vigilant eye of Dominie Jan Borm, Reformed pastor of the island, strict Calvinist rule kept all in their places—slaves subject to masters, and masters subject to God and the church as they understood it. Blacks enjoyed few liberties and no luxuries. Living without furniture on dirt floors, dressed (if at all) in loincloths, they ate with their hands and slept on the ground. Small pox, lockjaw, and leprosy killed many.

Outnumbered six to one by their black slaves, white Christians lived in perpetual fear of revolt. St. Thomas law required the cutting off of slave's hands lifted against their masters. First time run-aways had one foot cut off. Subsequent attempts resulted in cutting off the second foot, then one leg after the other. Floggings occurred every week— five hundred lashes (permitted by law) being equal to the death sentence. Masters cured the wounds of minor floggings by having them washed with salt and Spanish pepper.

St. Thomas law required the prompt execution of slaves planning revolt— masters to be paid by the government for every slave decapitated or hanged. The same Protestant law fined people fifty pounds of tobacco for working on the Lord's Day (Sunday), and obligated all whites to attend church.

Order, greed, and terror in the name of God—the two brothers from Herrnhut felt it enveloping them at once, and wondered what place they would find in it.

First Fruits

A Dutch planter, Lorenzen, hired Leonhard and David to finish a new house he had built and gave them a place to sleep. Then, on first opportunity they set out with a letter from Anton to look for his brother and sister.

In a plantation on the south side of the island the young men found them. Not only was Anna amazed to hear from her brother in Europe. She listened open-mouthed to Leonhard's kind words of the Saviour. She called more of her family and friends together and even though they could barely understand his mixture of German and Dutch (the slaves spoke a Dutch creole) they heard Christ's promise of good news for the poor and broke out in excited clapping of hands.

Leonhard and David spoke slowly. They used the simplest words they knew to tell the slaves about Christ, the Son of God, and his blood and wounds. Their message—with the Spirit's direction—fell on open hearts. Anna, her husband Gerd, and Anton's brother Abraham gave their lives in childlike trust to the Lamb.

“If I could have the whole world,” Anna told the brothers soon afterward, “and if that kept me away from the Saviour I would not even bother considering it.”

On another occasion, when Leonhard asked her how things went, she said: “Quite well, thank God! For although the day’s work did not give me time to say my prayers, my heart has never stopped calling the Saviour. I thank God for mercifully allowing me to be with him while in the company of others.”

Opposition

Life on St. Thomas gave Leonhard and David no time to exult in their first victories on the island. Many slaves, after their curiosity wore off, made fun of them and opposed their message. “Why should we do what is right, while you white people do otherwise?” they asked. Nearly all black people stole, lied and got drunk, and as one of the brothers reported, “Chastity is a virtue of which they are completely unaware.”

When Anna refused to celebrate a pagan festival, Gerd became angry with her. Suspicion and disunity arose between them and Abraham. Gerd got drunk and earned a flogging from the governor. David left for Europe on April 17th and Leonhard turned deathly sick. On July 11th a hurricane struck St. Thomas, then the island (that has no ground water or wells) turned totally dry. Many slaves began to die of hunger and thirst.

Leonhard, skilled in making pottery since his childhood, set up a kiln and tried to make pots and jugs. But the clay did not fire well. Even his kiln collapsed and on most days he was too sick to stand, let alone work.

Both white and black people on the island made fun of Leonhard’s projects. Then, in November, a slave revolt on the island of St. John brought panic and disorder to St. Thomas. White authorities reacted with yet more cruel tortures and executions of slaves. But from here and there, souls in need found their way to Leonhard’s hammock where he lay with a burning fever and listened to his words of instruction.

Once he had partially recovered, the governor of St. Thomas hired Leonhard to do his bookwork. But he soon saw that this put him out of touch with the island’s black population. So he resigned, and even though forced through poverty to live on bread and water, he returned to doing odd jobs and carpentry. Adriaan Beverhout, the owner of a small cotton plantation gave him work, and another slave, Heinrich, found Christ.

Greater Plans

While Leonhard and his small circle of friends overcame one obstacle after another in St. Thomas, the entire community at Herrnhut, harrassed by the German government, discussed the possibility of moving to the West Indies. A Danish landowner invited them to settle on the abandoned island of St. Croix, so after much prayer and careful preparation, the Wenzel and David Weber and Timotheus Fiedler families left for the New World in 1733. With them travelled Tobias Leupold, David Nitschmann, Matthäus Schindler, Matthäus Miksch (a school teacher), Kaspar Oelsner and Martin Schenk who left their wives in Germany for the time being, and the single brothers, George Weber, Johann Böhm, Matthäus Kremser, and Christian Neisser.

The group, largely formed of refugees from the old Unity settlements in Moravia, included a mason, a carpenter, a wheel maker, a tailor, and several farmers. Travelling though Stettin (Szczecin) in Pomerania, where they helped to build an orphanage while waiting on a ship, they sailed on the *Einigkeit* from Copenhagen on November 12, 1733.

Cramped into a compartment below deck, too low in which to stand, five yards long and five and a half yards wide, the entire group from Herrnhut faced their first trials together. No sooner did the *Einigkeit* enter the North Sea than a storm drove them up against the coast of Norway. For several days and nights the ship skirted disaster until it anchored safely in a fjord near Tremmesund. There they set up camp in caves along the shore until spring came. Suffering extreme cold the women spun and the men carved wooden utensils until, several unsuccessful attempts behind them, they returned to sea on March 11, 1734.

Five days later, Wenzel Weber's wife, Elisabeth, gave birth to a baby they called Anna. Another storm, more terrible than the first rose from the sea and the little ship pitched so dangerously that water barrels below deck burst from their lashings and rolled from side to side, threatening to crush the passengers. Only after 21 days did the stars come out again. Then they entered the tropics. The wind stopped. The believers' windowless compartment (in which a lamp had to burn all day) grew "hot as a Russian bath house," water became scarce, only salted meat remained, and two of the brothers, Matthäus Schindler and Kaspar Oelsner had scurvy. Crew members began to die, and in their sick and crowded state, the travellers' patience one with another grew thin.

On June 11, 1734, the *Einigkeit* arrived at St. Thomas. Tobias Leupold, with two others, set out at once to find Leonhard Dober on the Beverhout plantation. The

only detraction from their joy at meeting one another was the news that the believers in Herrnhut had chosen Leonhard to lead the young brothers' choir and he had to return to Europe. A month after their arrival at St. Thomas Johann Böhms died, followed by Timotheus Fiedler's wife and David Weber.

St. Croix

Deeply grieved by the misery of the slaves, the brothers and sisters from Herrnhut decided to buy as many as they could and treat them like equals— hopefully leading them to Christ and training them for work as messengers to their own people. With this in mind they bought twelve adult slaves to accompany those who would settle in St. Croix, and a seven-year-old Loango boy to send back to Europe with Leonhard Dober.

On the short trip to St. Croix, little Anna Weber died and they buried her on arrival. For thirty-eight years the island had lain uninhabited. Pigs and cattle, long turned wild, foraged among abandoned farms of the former French colony. Thorny scrub had grown up “so thick one could barely find a place to sit down.” But with a great desire to build an outpost for truth the brothers set up camp and the sisters began to work over open fires, cooking food and washing clothes.

With the help of the twelve Africans the believers on St. Croix cut back the brush to plant the seeds they had brought from Europe—lettuce, parsley, and cabbages—with West Indian cassava and yams. But the heat and bugs overwhelmed them. Rain water, carefully collected, did not reach, and when they drank from brackish streams they turned sick. By the time the rainy season began, their first two-room house, with walls of reeds, still had no roof.

Christian Neisser died on September 4, followed within a month by David Weber's widow, then Matthäus Kremser, Elisabeth Weber and Matthäus Miksch within two weeks time. By January, 1735, when Tobias Leupold died, only seven survived, too sick to care what happened to them.

New Courage and Hope

In the meantime, back at Herrnhut, the “awakening to the blood” inspired new volunteers, Kaspar Güttner, Martin Barthol, Matthäus Freundlich, and a doctor, Gottlieb Kretschner, to join the believers in the West Indies. They left Europe in the spring with Anna Nitschmann, Elizabeth Oelsner, Maria Francke, and Judith Leopold (wives of men who had gone before), three of whom were already

widows and did not know it. Completing the group were Johann Gold with his wife, and the widow Anna Berger.

The new group landed on St. Croix at the end of May. Words could not describe the shock they felt on meeting the survivors. But wasting no time in lamentation, they tended to the sick and with great love pointed all to Christ, his blood and wounds. Lack of water and all hardship notwithstanding, such joy in the Spirit broke out among them that first eight, then all twelve of the Africans from St. Thomas humbled themselves and “allowed the Lamb to wash them in his blood.” A month after their joyful arrival all the newcomers lay sick. Anna Nitschmann died first, followed by Kaspar Güttner, Elisabeth Oelsner and Martin Barthol. The doctor, Gottlieb Kretschner died in September, Martin Francke and Anna Berger in October. Old David Nitschmann, Martin Schenck’s widow, and George Weber found passage back to Europe. So did Judith, Tobias Leupold’s young widow, and Martin Francke’s widow. But their ship, presumably taken by pirates or lost in a storm was never heard from again. Even worse, Timotheus Fiedler who stayed on St. Thomas, lost his faith and became a plantation administrator. That left only Matthäus Freundlich, the shoemaker, and in December he also moved back to the island of St. Thomas.

An Open Door

On March 13, 1736, Friedrich Martin, a young tailor who had come to Herrnhut from Silesia, landed on St. Thomas with Johann Andreas Bönike. Once again their meeting with Matthäus Freundlich brought more tears than words. But within days of their arrival, the newcomers had come to know many slaves and determined to meet every last one on the island.

On his way to a meeting he had planned on a Lord’s day before the end of March, Friedrich Martin met a boy on the road. “Would you like to know your Saviour, the Lamb of God that took on himself the sins of the whole world?” Friedrich asked him. The boy looked startled. But in sudden miraculous understanding he said clearly in Dutch creole: “With great pleasure,” and handed Friedrich two live chickens. It was all he owned.

Others began to come, some walking long distances, to attend meetings for worship and instruction. Then, on September 10, 1736, Brother Josef came. He found the brothers, surrounded by eager disciples, holding an evening prayer meeting under a cane roof.

Brother Josef sensed Christ’s presence at once, and further meetings, held on

the Carsten plantation at Mosquito Bay, drew hundreds of seekers. The boy who had given the chickens became the first to receive baptism. He took the Christian name of Andreas. With him Brother Josef baptised two other young men, Petrus and Nathanael, and a great company took part in a love feast following.

But Brother Josef, for as deeply as he became attached to the new believers on St. Thomas, could not stand the climate. When the time came for him to leave, he lay sick unto death. The brothers helped him onto a ship for the island of St. Christopher. Stopping in at St. Eustatius, he saw a ship for New York and in his distress, made a transfer the Lord seemed to have arranged.

The captain who took Brother Josef aboard had lived as a child in an Anglican home on Staaten Island. His mother had taught him about God and prayed with him every night. But she died when he was twelve and in his despair he ran off to sea. There, for eight years he led a wicked life. Three times pirates caught him. One time he swam from a captured ship to safety in another. When he finally returned home he found his father had died too and he left for the sea again. Now, when Brother Josef spoke to him about his soul, he repented with many tears and found Christ.

New Believers, New Trials

After Brother Josef left St. Thomas the awakening among the slaves kept on spreading. It spread much faster than anyone expected, and certainly faster than any white people on the island liked.

White Protestant “Christians” who owned the slaves felt convicted. Many of them (their governors and preachers included) lived in shameless debauchery. “How can you black devils live up the Gospel,” they asked, “when even we white people, to whom it was given, cannot do it?” Other masters, proud of their Christianity and of the fair treatment they gave their slaves (for whom they assumed the role of protective “father figures”) felt encroached upon by Friedrich and Matthäus’s work. “Our slaves are happy,” they insisted. “They have it much better with us than they did in Africa. So why come and stir up discontent?”

Some masters flogged their slaves for attending Moravian meetings. Nearly all took their books away if they caught them learning to read—one master making it a practice to set the books on fire and swat them in his slaves’ faces. “That,” he said, “is how my *Neger* will learn to read.”

Black sisters, no longer allowing themselves to be violated at will by their masters, suffered particular trials. Some, stripped of their clothes, suffered merciless floggings. One, locked into a dungeon had hot sealing wax dripped onto her head until her body was scorched. “But if we have suffered in the past for being bad,” one sister asked, “why should we be unwilling now to suffer for doing good.”

When an elderly believer turned sick his master denied him water. His wife tried to bring him some but he struck her across the head with the broadside of his sword, and when the brother died he did not allow anyone to bury him, but let him rot away in his hut.

Mobs of drunken white men regularly broke up meetings (like in the story in Chapter One). They beat Friedrich Martin severely. But no believers suffered more than those deliberately sold to other West Indian islands to separate them from Christian fellowship. Concerning these trials, Christian Georg Oldendorp, a brother from Herrnhut who lived on St. Thomas fifty years later, wrote:

Their longing for Jesus Christ and his mercy was strongest when they had to suffer and bear great distress on account of him. When their masters forbade them to attend meetings in which the brothers were to teach them the gospel, they did not fail to visit the brothers in private. They also made up for lost instruction by getting together in small groups on their own plantations to strengthen one another. Hidden in the scrub forest, many found safe places where they could gather to pray and open their hearts one to another. There they learned what Jesus meant when he said that where two or three come together in his name, he will be among them. Black brothers and sisters have assured me that during those hard times they felt such love for the Saviour and enjoyed such grace in their hearts that they gladly suffered any imaginable tortures for his sake.

Grace and Growth

Not only white people harassed the new believers on St. Thomas. Hostile fellow slaves burned Petrus’ house, with his precious New Testament. A black woman with a knife attacked a sister on her way home from meeting and those steeped in witchcraft tried to cast spells.

While trying to keep everyone encouraged and looking the right direction, Friedrich Martin found himself deteriorating rapidly. Always sick, plagued

with thirst and dysentery, he became so weak he could no longer walk straight. His mind began to go blank for hours at a time and he found it increasingly difficult to remember what he did, where he had been, or where he went. Matthäus Freundlich felt sick too. Then, to make matters worse, Johann Andreas Bönike turned against them, lost the faith, and lightning struck him dead one night on the road to Mosquito Bay.

Walking skeletons themselves, Friedrich and Matthäus could think of nothing else to do but take in the abandoned children they found starving during the drought of 1737. They hired Rebecca, a free mulatto woman, to take care of them, and on May 4, of the following year, Matthäus, for the sake of decency, married her. Friedrich, who had been ordained a minister of the Unity of Brothers through a letter sent from London, England, performed the ceremony and they began their life together with nine adopted children. On the same day Friedrich married two black believers, Zacharius and Susanna.

After Friedrich's ordination he chose four sincere young men to be his helpers: Andreas (the boy with the chickens), Petrus, Johannes, and Christoph, all of whom had proven their loyalty to Christ and whom the believers loved and respected. A month later, Andreas and Johannes's white master sold them to a plantation on St. John. Pleas for consideration fell on deaf ears so weeping, but not in despair, they left in chains for their new place of bondage.

All setbacks notwithstanding, crowds of seekers that gathered in the evenings to learn of Christ grew ever larger. In their poverty the slaves worked hard to buy the candles needed by those who read the Scriptures. Out of unbleached linen they also managed to make decent clothing for those who would be baptised—the women in ample dresses with capes, and white head coverings tied with strings under their chins, the men in white shirts and trousers.

Every convert, after baptism, chose a "spiritual companion" with whom to meet at least once a week. Spiritual companions shared their joys and trials and encouraged one another. Beyond this, and in spite of difficulties because of their slavery, the believers formed choirs, took part in the hourly watch (day and night prayer vigils), and shared in material ways as much as possible.

Friedrich and Matthäus instructed the new believers in morality and how to live as Christian families—concepts unknown to them, both in Africa and the New World. Christian weddings, celebrated with beautiful hymns, prayers, and great joy, took place. The brothers followed them up with regular visits and advice on child training. But the planters ridiculed their efforts. "Marrying cattle," they

called it, and insisted that black people have no family feelings like whites. They made it a point to separate Christian couples one from another, to find other mates for them, and to sell off their children.

The congregation on St. Thomas celebrated frequent love feasts and communion services, everyone bringing what little food they could—fish, crabs, or vegetables—to share one with another. Before every communion the brothers held a question and answer period. They interviewed all participants privately and the better they came to know one another the more they marvelled at what Christ had done.

Not only did the congregation include both island blacks (creoles), and “salt heads” (slaves brought from Africa). It included people of many different tribes and customs. Only the first two baptisms on St. Thomas already brought members of the Mandinga, Mangree, Fante, Atja, Kassenti, Tjamba, Amina, Watje, and Loango tribes into the Gemeine. But subjected in love to Christ, they learned to make decisions together and function as one body. Christian Oldendorp wrote:

As soon as they returned from exhausting work in the fields, they gathered, falling on their knees, to pray and sing. There loved one another like members of one family to such a degree that whenever something happened to disturb the harmony of the group, they fell on their knees at once and asked the Saviour for pardon and grace. They also kept the practice of hourly intercession. . . . Even while working they took turns praying to God and asking for his intercession every hour of the day. Without clocks they kept to their hours at night by looking at the stars and by the crowing of the cocks. In this way, one slave awakened the one whose turn came next to pray.

In a letter to the brothers and sisters at Herrnhut, Petrus wrote:

God’s grace that I have received into my heart fills me with joy. I have left what is bad and learned to love Jesus Christ who died for us. Now we pray to the Lord in this place together: “Dear Lord, have mercy on us! Bless us and teach us how to know you so that no evil may remain among us. Help us to do what is right so that pride, covetousness, and immorality may no longer find place among us.

Challenges

Only by walking closely with Christ could the brothers of the new church on St. Thomas meet every situation that arose. Newly converted slaves lived among constant temptations to drink cane liquor, to commit immoral acts, or take part in African religious rites. Many of them had several “wives” and children from all. But they promised, on entering the brotherhood, not to take more. And if they wished to separate from all wives but one, the brotherhood encouraged them. Marriage partners separating for other reasons lost their place in the congregation.

From the beginning, the brothers made the seriousness of taking part in communion clear. When they found calabashes decorated with ribbons, bird feathers, and sea shells (magic tokens) in an old sister’s house, they suspended her membership and admonished her to repent. Those found stealing one from another, or from their masters, also lost their membership, as did any who took part in acts of rebellion. A few, like Nathanael, one of the first baptised who turned apostate, had to be requested not to attend services anymore for the disturbances they caused.

The goal of the brothers in St. Thomas was to overcome the evil of slavery by good, not by force. But this required much patience. Christian Oldendorp wrote: No matter how much joy the progress of the black congregation gave the brothers, the backsliding and unbelief of some of its members brought them much sadness as well. Because the slaves lived among temptations of all kinds, it is surprising that not more of them fell into sin. Those who did were always outnumbered by those transformed through Jesus’ teachings. Still it was necessary for the brothers to admonish and keep back from communion those who did not live according to the gospel. These, they remembered with compassion and joyously welcomed back if they grew tired of their own ways and returned to Jesus Christ, the merciful high priest, and the community of his believers.

With great joy the brothers from Herrnhut watched the new believers learning to read. But newly discovered knowledge threatened, at times, to get in the way of Christ. Christian Oldendorp wrote:

Because many converted slaves did not know themselves well enough, they fell into the common error of trying to become better and more pious without first having found grace and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ blood. They simply accepted Christianity in its external forms, that is, in diligent learning, in singing and praying.

Georg Weber, one of the first Moravians on St. Croix wrote:

It would not be hard to start a Christian sect [cult] among these black people. They excell in copying external forms of religious practice without experiencing real changes of heart. Because of this many of their good resolutions do not last long. Sin resumes its rule over them, and soon after their conversion they are as deeply immersed in the pleasures of the flesh and other evil practices as before.

Only after “daily presenting Christ to them as a friend of sinners, and by persuading them that the salvation of souls can be found nowhere else but in the wounds of the Lamb” did the fire of love fall on the believers at St. Thomas and fill them with power.

The Mountain of Trumpets

As often as they had opportunity, the brothers and sisters at Herrnhut sent encouraging letters to the ones on St. Thomas. An even greater blessing came with the arrival of Johann Christoph Schönewerk and his wife in 1738,* but the heat and tropical disease overcame them. He died soon after arrival and she died three days later. By this time, with help from home, the brothers had managed to buy several of the baptised slaves and a small cotton plantation, twenty-seven German acres, on the central and highest part of the island.

Such rejoicing broke out among the black believers at the purchase of the land that a meeting for praise lasted all night and until the sun came up the following morning. Now they had a place to gather undisturbed. Hundreds came for every meeting, the sick carried in on shoulders and one-legged former runaways hobbling in on canes (one brother had lost two legs in punishment and could only crawl). Even blind and deaf people came, sensing the spirit of worship there. The congregation chose eight more leaders and baptisms became continually more frequent.

Because they used trumpets to announce meetings there, the believers named their new community on the hill the *Posaunenberg* (Mountain of Trumpets), but its days of peace and rejoicing were numbered.

Trouble For The New Church

Led by their pastor, Jan Borm, the white people of St. Thomas determined to get rid of Moravian influence on their plantations, once and for all. The case they picked for their excuse was Matthäus and Rebecca Freundlich's marriage.

"Since when is it lawful for a white man to marry a black woman?" angry islanders (many of whom had mulatto children from numerous concubines) asked. "What is more, who authorised Friedrich Martin to marry them?"

In the midst of the turmoil surrounding this charge, Nathanael, whom the black congregation had excommunicated, arrived in a drunken state at Dominie Jan Borm's house and asked for rebaptism. The Reformed pastor asked him many questions before triumphantly reporting to the governor of St. Thomas the "wretched and miserable condition of the supposed converts of the Herrnhut brothers."

As if this were not enough, a tropical storm struck the island. The house where Timotheus Fiedler (another apostate brother) lived, suffered damage and those who came to help found valuable stolen goods in his possession. Dominie Jan Borm and the St. Thomas government needed nothing more. "These Moravians are thieves and hypocrites!" they stormed. "Not only do they come to pervert our slaves. They commit acts of perversion themselves. To jail with the accursed Herrnhuters!"

Dragged before the St. Thomas court, Friedrich Martin, Matthäus and Rebekka Freundlich, found themselves faced with the option of swearing they had nothing to do with the theft or going directly to jail. Because they could not swear (and the governor knew they wouldn't) they landed in a putrid cell, hot like an oven during the day, nothing to sleep on at night, at once.

Great crowds of black people risked punishment to come to the barred window of their cell to listen to Friedrich's words of encouragement. Friedrich and Matthäus made buttons in jail, and Rebecca had her sewing with her. Their example of peaceful nonresistance deeply inspired the believers, now numbering 750 souls on 51 plantations, under the able leadership of the black brothers Christoph and Mingo.

Mighty to Save, Strong to Deliver

With the German brothers in jail, Dominie Jan Borm and the Protestant officials on his side wasted no time in doing what they could to bring the black

congregation to ruin. The pastor had black believers brought before the court, one by one. In particular he interrogated the leaders, throwing complicated theological questions at them to see how they would respond. On top of that he asked them to explain which faith is more Biblical, the Lutheran or the Reformed, and whether they thought black people would some day rule whites.

“We know nothing about religion,” the black Christians answered him, “except that the Lamb of God has died and taken our sins away. We do not know whether blacks will ever rule whites, but we know that after death we will stand before Christ where all men are equal.”

“See, they know nothing,” Pastor Borm rejoiced. “Those Herrnhut prophets are baptising untaught savages!”

Pastor Borm sent one of his helpers, a Protestant minister, to jail to marry Matthäus and Rebekka, but they refused his services. “We are already married,” they told him. For this the court sentenced them as a public nuisance, living in unlawful immorality, and ordered Matthäus to pay a hundred *Reichsthaler* within 24 hours. Rebekka, who had been baptised by her white father into the Reformed Church, was formally excommunicated and ordered to be sold again as a slave, the proceeds of her sale going to Protestant charities (the St. Thomas hospital fund).

Friedrich Martin, charged with baptising and holding communion illegally, as well as performing church functions that belong only to legally ordained ministers, was to be held for punishment and exile. But the sun had not gone down on the day of these distressing court decisions when the trade winds carried an unexpected ship into St. Thomas’s harbour.

People from Germany—and it soon became apparent, very important people—stepped onto the hurriedly cleared wharf. The governor, hiding his frustration as well as possible, could do nothing but formally welcome Nicholas Ludwig, Graf von Zinzendorf und Pottendorf, with two Moravian couples, Georg and Elisabeth Weber, Valentin and Veronika Löhans, to St. Thomas.

St. Thomas authorities were surprised and confused. They knew that Ludwig came directly from Herrnhut. But they also knew he enjoyed the favour of the Danish court and that in rank he stood, as a count of the Holy Roman Empire, far above any one of them. So when Brother Ludwig cheerfully asked for Friedrich, Matthäus and Rebekka’s release, they gave it promptly and said no more about it.

The Lord had delivered them.

Triumphs Of a New Church

Brother Ludwig and the two couples from Herrnhut had a hard time believing their eyes. The growth of the Saviour's Gemein on St. Thomas far surpassed anything they had heard or imagined. At the same time they could not believe how Friedrich Martin had changed. Disease and relentless activity had aged him so much, that when he emerged from prison no one from Germany recognised him.

Brother Ludwig, with his gift for languages, soon caught the drift of Dutch creole, and began to write hymns in the language. In his diary he wrote:

Three days after I got to St. Thomas and Friedrich Martin was still weak unto death, I took charge of the worship service for him. Brother Abraham, in moving and penetrating words, led in the opening and prayer. . . . After that I was nearly swept off my feet as the large group of black people (more brothers and sisters than I have ever seen at one time in any of our congregations) stood to sing and cry out, some with many tears, "My Lord, My Lord, the One who has redeemed me from condemnation!"

About eight days later, on a Sunday afternoon, nearly half of those plantation workers who have turned to Christ came to visit me and we had a service in a large Saal. There was hardly room for everyone to stand (yet the segregation of the sexes has already been taught and is practiced here). Oh how glad I was to be able to sing with this large congregation two of my favourite hymns: *May you be praised Jesus Christ, and Let the Soul of Christ Make Me Holy!*¹³⁵

During Brother Ludwig's stay the congregation chose more leaders, and to the joy of all, he bought Andreas and Johannes back from St. John for 200 pieces of eight. Friedrich Martin described the situation:

Hardly a day passes when we are not visited by souls feeling their misery and crying out for mercy. Wherever we go we hear someone in the sugar cane, among the bushes, or behind a house, praying and crying out to the Saviour, asking him to wash away his sins with his blood. We no longer have people satisfied with getting a bit of school knowledge. Now they come to us feeling their lost condition. Their only conviction is of their own wickedness and their need of the Saviour's mercy and help.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ August Gottlieb Spangenberg, *Leben des Herrn Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf*, 1774.¹³⁶ From a letter, 1740.

"The Saviour is melting souls like wax," another worker on St. Thomas

reported, and even the children, as many as four hundred at a time, came to the Posaunenberg on Lord's Day afternoons for special love feasts. Valentin Löhans wrote:

The amazing impact of the Saviour's grace and mercy among the heathen in these days cannot be described! The blood of Jesus flows over them, softens their hearts, and makes them see how great his love is. They feel his power. He becomes great to them and his grace, important. Their hearts have opened up. Many of them who were dead as stone have been moved by Jesus' death, the constant subject of our preaching, and now they cry for mercy. Jesus' death and his blood have penetrated their hearts, making them cry out and search for the Redeemer. It is heartbreaking to listen to them as they lie at the feet of the Lamb and cry out to him.

No one, however, could have felt more surprised about the growth of the new black church than the people who did all they could to stop it—and failed. Georg and Elisabeth Weber returned to St. Croix and with the help of many friends began to build a new community they named Friedensthal (Valley of Peace). This time the heat, the tangled scrub, and the scarcity of water did not surprise them. But they faced even greater opposition. During the dry season, hostile neighbours set fire to their houses again and again. Practically every night the cry of fire sounded through Friedensthal. One night ten houses burned at once, on another night fourteen. The largest fire spread to surrounding plantations destroying forty-eight houses, including many that belonged to black believers, in one night. But through severe trials, Friedensthal became a home and refuge for many. The Lord blessed gardens planted in the rainy season and spiritual gifts far outshone every material loss. Stephanus, a black leader there, told a baptismal class in the early 1740s:

We may be ignorant, but we have a master teacher, the Holy Spirit, that explains everything to us. We should enjoy and take part in everything the Saviour has earned for us. The way to it and the gate are open. Still, we should not only stand at the gate and look in, but enter and go to the Saviour himself. This cannot be accomplished only by coming to the church. No, we dare not be satisfied with that. Not the church but real communion, real *Gemeinschaft* with the Lord Jesus, will save us. That is the right way. No one can excuse himself by saying he has no time for this because of his master's work. Dear brothers and sisters, I know that one can think about bad things during all kinds of work. I say this from my own experience because I have often done that all day long, during the blind

period in my life. If that is true, can we not just as easily think about good things? Can we not put the beloved Saviour before our eyes, and occupy ourselves all the time with him, remembering in our hearts what he has suffered and done for us? I wish that all of you, from this time onward, might do this and enjoy the grace and blessedness our dear Lord has earned for us. He will gladly give it to you.

Conquerors

Grace and blessedness came to the believers on St. Thomas and St. Croix, even though trials continued. A group of drunken white men held Georg Weber up at gunpoint, but he testified so fearlessly of his confidence in Christ that they could not kill him. Others waylaid Matthäus Freundlich and nearly beat him to death. Some planters threatened the Danish government with pulling out of St. Thomas if no one got rid of the Moravians. But the church kept on growing.

A river of mercy flowing from Christ's wounded side attracted more and more seekers weary of sin. Brothers and sisters kept coming from Herrnhut to help in the work, and with time, reached every plantation on the island with the message of peace.

On his return from America and St. Thomas in 1739, Brother Ludwig met two young brothers from Herrnhut, Gottlieb Israel and Alban Theodor Feder, in Amsterdam. They planned to travel to the Guinea Coast in Africa, but Ludwig persuaded them to go to St. Thomas instead. "The church there needs you," he told them.

On their way across the Atlantic Alban turned deathly sick. Gottlieb, crippled from birth and left as an orphan at Herrnhut, did his best to care for him. Then a great storm blew up. The ship lost its course and ran aground off the shore of Tortola. The captain and crew escaped, but they left the two believers and all slaves on board to perish. Three slaves and the boys from Herrnhut climbed out the bowsprit and jumped onto a rock. High waves came crashing in and threatened to tear them away. They had so little room on the rock they had to lie stacked up on one another. Alban tried to jump from rock to rock and swim to shore, but the waves carried him out to sea. "Go, my dear brother, in peace," Gottlieb shouted after him in the wind and storm, not knowing whether he heard him before he drowned.

Clinging to the rock until the afternoon of the following day, the four survivors saw people coming to rescue them. From St. Thomas, soon after his arrival, Gottlieb sent a long letter home in which he wrote:

Oh what a great blessing it is to see how the Saviour shows himself to these black people! First they are awakened. Then they come to know their own hearts, finding out how bad they are. After that, they shed tears and cry for mercy until they have found faith in Jesus' wounds. Oh, how joyful are they then! They come running through the night to tell us about it and bring joy to our souls.

Even though he walked with difficulty, Gottlieb Israel found his way about the island and blessings came to many through him. In another letter he wrote:

The Saviour is both powerful and merciful among us . . . but the prince of darkness has been very busy in his attempts to steal souls from him through temptations and threats . . . Pray that the congregation of the faithful may build on Christ the cornerstone and be strengthened in his blood. I am not so anxious to see a large number of converts as I am to see the ones who find the Saviour to experience his living presence in their hearts.

Georg Weber's wife died in childbirth and their little daughter a day later.

Johann Schurr's wife gave birth to twin sons that both died and she followed them in death after two days. Gottlieb Israel turned sick and died. Johann Böhner and his wife, newly wed ran into a serious storm on the way to St. Thomas.

While he struggled with the sailors to lift a broken mast, his wife died and had to be dropped overboard. By the time Johann reached St. Thomas, Valentin Löhans had died so he married his widow, Veronika.

Friedrich Martin, on the other hand, not only survived but managed to visit the new Moravian community in Pennsylvania where he married Maria Leinbach.

Jakob Tutweiler, a brother from Switzerland who survived a flogging by a plantation owner, settled on St. John and began the new Bethany community.

Johann Michael Wäckler, Samuel Isles, and Nikolaus Schneider fell into the hands of French pirates and landed on Martinique. Joseph Schaw, an English brother, got lost in a storm at sea and was not heard from again. . . .

The story both of the ones who came and of the ones who joined the brotherhood in St. Thomas, became one many-faceted testimony of Jesus' grace. Not infrequently hurricanes flattened the cane fields on St. Thomas, uprooted clumps of banana plants, and carried roofs and buildings into the sea. Epidemics followed floods, and on January 17, 1759, a series of earthquakes rocked St. Croix, the third one tearing the earth open with a loud roar, nearly

tipping the meetinghouse of the Friedensthal community. But in less than twenty years of Leonhard Dober's arrival, there were usually a thousand or more applicants for baptism all the time. Slave villages had changed from night to day, squalid, nearly naked people having turned into neatly dressed men and women with orderly families. Miserable huts had given way to plastered cottages among vegetable gardens and flowers. Wild dances and sacrifices of animals to unknown spirits had given way to weddings and funerals held in peace.

By the time Christian Oldendorp came to St. Thomas in 1768, seventy-nine Pilgrims sent out from Herrnhut had lost their lives in the West Indies. But for every one that died there were sixty baptised converts. Within fifty years nearly nine thousand African slaves, only on St. Thomas, had found their way into the Saviour's Gemeine. And this was only the beginning.

13

To The North

One year after the first brothers from Herrnhut sailed for St. Thomas, Christian David, with Matthäus and Christian Stach (cousins) left Copenhagen for Greenland. Ignorant of what lay before them, they “took nothing with them for the journey” and expected to find food, a means of income, and lumber to build, on the island.

Their first sight left them speechless. They saw rocks and snow. Unfriendly fishermen in furs slipped about in kayaks between chunks of floating ice in the harbour. The few Danes who ran a trading post there felt discouraged themselves and did little to help the brothers. Inspired nevertheless, by Christian David’s boundless faith in Christ, they set to work with a will.

Already late in spring, but with plenty of snow left in the shade, they planted cabbages, lettuce, and turnips. Nothing grew. From the Danes they purchased a few sheep and a goat and cut skimpy grass for hay. They also learned to use seal oil for their lamps and how to make bedding and clothes out of seal skins. But on their first hunting trip they lost their boat in a storm and an early winter caught them unprepared.

Instead of helping them, the Greenlanders made fun of the brothers from Herrnhut and kept asking how soon they would go away. They stole what they could from the brothers and instead of showing interest in Christ, tried to tempt them into immoral acts.

Matthäus and Christian Stach attempted to learn the Greenlanders’ difficult language, but led by their angekoks (spiritual leaders) the people of the island refused to teach them anything. Even though two thousand lived around the crude shelter the brothers had built, none of them ever came to visit or find out what they did. Then, in 1733 they began to die of smallpox.

First dozens, then hundreds of Greenlanders died. So frightened did they become that when they saw pox beginning to appear, many stabbed themselves to death, or jumped into the sea to drown. Following the epidemic, the Danish settlement where the brothers from Herrnhut lived, suffered even greater want. Then, in 1735 no ship from Europe came. With only half a barrel of oatmeal left for another year, and a few dried peas and biscuits, the brothers knew they faced starvation. Every day they combed the beach for shell fish and sea weed. But every day they found less. Already weak with hunger they set out in a leaky boat,

hoping to find food further away. A storm came up, soaked them to the skin, and carried them out to a barren island where they had to keep running in circles through the night to keep from freezing. After four days they made their way back with the Lord's help. Then winter storms struck in full force. Daylight hours virtually disappeared and in their dugout of stones and frozen sod, suffering from scurvy, they drank the soup of boiled tallow candles to stay alive. The Lord heard their prayers.

Forty leagues to the south of where the brothers lived he moved the heart of Ippagan, a Greenlander, to travel north to bring them food. And when the ice finally opened and a ship arrived, on July 7th 1736, who should stand on deck but Matthäus Stach's widowed mother (one of the original refugees from Moravia) with his two sisters, Rosina, twentytwo years old, and Anna, just turned twelve!

First Fruits of Greenland

After five years of continual struggles—struggles to stay alive, to build a relationship with the Greenlanders, and to get along one with another in trying conditions—the brothers finished their preliminary translation of the Gospel of Matthew into the Eskimo language.

Shortly afterward, Kayarnak, another man from the southern part of the island came to visit and listened carefully to stories about Christ. He brought his extended family and before the end of the month two other families moved in. The brothers began a school for children and scarcely able to believe what was happening, held instruction classes for those who repented and believed in the Lamb.

On March 29, 1739, on the feast of the Lord's resurrection, Kayarnak, his wife, a son and a daughter, became the first Greenlanders to enter the Saviour's Gemeine through baptism. David Cranz, a brother who spent time in Greenland during the 1760's, wrote:

The converts explained in public the full reason for their hope in Christ. They promised to renounce all heathen practices and superstitions to walk according to the Gospel as they had been taught. Then they received baptism with fervent prayer and the laying on of hands, commended to grace in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In the meeting where this took place, the presence of the great Head of the church could be felt in the most powerful way. Tears flowed

in streams from the eyes of the recently baptised and those who had come to watch were so overcome that they earnestly desired to become partakers of the same grace.

That the Saviour himself brought about this change of heart among the Greenlanders no one doubted. But it also had to do with a change among the Moravian brothers. David Cranz wrote:

Around this time a great change took place in the way our brothers instructed the Greenlanders. Up to now they had mainly spoken to them of the existence, the attributes, and the holiness of God. They had called on the people to obey God's laws, hoping through this to prepare their minds gradually to receive the higher and more mysterious truths of the gospel.

It is true, common sense would tell us this is the right thing to do. But in practice it does not work at all. For five years the Pilgrims in Greenland tried this route, barely managing to get people to listen to them. But as soon as they determined to preach nothing but Christ and him crucified, without first "laying the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith towards God," they saw its converting and saving power. No sooner did they bring this "word of reconciliation" to the Greenlanders in all its natural simplicity, than it reached the hearts of those they spoke to and produced the most astonishing effects. A way opened up to their consciences and their understanding was opened up to the light. . . . They saw that they were sinners and trembled at the danger in which they stood. They rejoiced in the Saviour's offer of grace and became capable of enjoying higher pleasures than to have plenty of seals to eat and partners to sleep with.

Building on the sure foundation of the crucified Redeemer, new converts rapidly gained an abhorrence for sin and the power to do what is right toward God and their neighbours, living soberly, righteously, and in a godly way, in this world. They began to look forward to the glorious hope of life and immortality, and walked in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

So powerfully did conviction fall on the Greenlanders, after 1739, that one worker reported people "trembling like frightened deer" in their meetings, bursting out in tears and running away to weep. Kayarnak, the first of the believers, soon travelled south and stayed away for a year, only to come back with many more. At long last a Christian community began to take shape around the brothers' first miserable settlement. They named it Neuherrnhut, and by 1747 built a Saal large

enough to accommodate three hundred or more people—the number that often met to worship there.

A People Transformed

To everyone's dismay, Kayarnak, after his return from the south, contracted tuberculosis. But he prepared to die in peace. "I was the first of my people to know Christ," he said. "It is right now that I should be the first to go and meet him." His Christian burial, held in an orderly way with singing and a reading of Jesus' words in the Eskimo language, stood in powerful contrast to the wretched deaths of unbelievers on the island.

Soon afterward, another believer who had taken the name of Daniel, became the first Greenlander chosen to leadership in the congregation. He helped both the islanders and the settlers from Europe very much. Not only did he preach simple, powerful sermons. He showed the Europeans how to hunt, how to store dried meat and fish, and make better clothes. Everyone, even the Danish traders, looked up to him as a man of God.

The winter of 1752-1753 lasted longer and turned colder than any other the brothers had seen. The ocean froze as far out as one could see. Such high winds blew down from the north that their houses shuddered as if in a constant earthquake. Even icebergs split open offshore, everything blew full of snow and lightning flashed in the storms. Following this hard winter came three months of sickness when great numbers, including thirty-five believers, died. Many orphans and widows stayed behind. But the people of Neuherrnhut had become loving and caring. Not only did they assume responsibility for those in need, they responded with open hearts to the needs of people they had never met.

When the news reached Greenland of the massacre of Indian believers on the Monocacy Creek in Pennsylvania, the whole assembly broke out in loud weeping. Some offered to send reindeer skins or boots to those who survived. One brother said, "I will send them a seal so they will have something to eat and oil to burn."

Following the translation of the Gospels into the Eskimo language, the brothers worked on a hymn book and simple catechism. With the community at Neuherrnhut firmly established, Matthäus Stach moved further south and began another one, Lichtenfels, on an island close to the shore. In a few years it also became the home of three hundred people. After that Johann Sorensen and his wife and Gottfried Grillich began the third community, Lichtenau, 700 km south

of Neuherrnhut where another two hundred joined the community.

A Transformed Sea Captain

Working with Danish traders, not always favourably disposed to believers on Greenland, involved trials and expense. For that reason, when the brotherhood's ship, the Irene, landed at Godthåb in the summer of 1747, loaded with building supplies from the Netherlands, it brought great joy to the whole congregation. Not the least among the joys was to greet Christian David, returned after several years absence, and Nicholas Garrison the sea captain Brother Josef had led to Christ in the West Indies.

Captain Garrison, now working full time for the Unity of Brothers, had much to tell. After his conversion he had hurried home to his family to bring them the good news. Then, with his fourteen-year-old son John, he had returned to sea to bring the Gospel to the wretched men he had wasted so many years with. On this trip, Spanish pirates captured him and his son and dumped them onto the shore of Cuba. There they walked fifty km through the wilderness toward Bayamo.

Carrying his son, dying of thirst in the heat, Captain Garrison had walked until he could go no step further. Then the Lord showed him a stream. They both recovered and found their way to the town where the governor threw them into jail. There, amid terrible curses and fighting in the heat, Captain Garrison spoke of Christ with miraculous results during fourteen months. Then they let him go. Brother Ludwig and his daughter Benigna sailed with him back to Europe in the brotherhood's ship, almost landing on the rocks off the Isles of Scilly, in a storm. In England, the Captain met his son John, who had found his way there from Cuba. They returned quickly to New York, picked up Mrs. Garrison (whom the Saviour also awakened) and the rest of the captain's twelve children, and returned to Europe. The French captured them en route and took them to St. Malo. From there they found their way through the Netherlands to Marienborn in the Wetterau where they settled among the believers.

On their way back from Greenland, narrowly escaping disaster among icebergs in Davis Strait, Captain Garrison and Christian David took five Eskimo believers to visit Marienborn and other communities in Europe.

Perils On Land and Sea

Even though the believers' communities on Greenland became better established—the brothers and sisters from Europe living in wooden homes with their animals protected in comfortably attached stables during long winters—getting to and from the island grew no easier. They could have written books about their adventures.

After years of faithful service in the community at Lichtenau, Gottfried Grillich left one year in the fall for Denmark and Germany. Pack ice trapped his ship for five weeks. With winter coming he made his way back to shore, but left again in February. This time the ice crushed the ship he travelled on. He helped the sailors drag a lifeboat across the ice for a two day journey before they came to open water. A storm caught them unawares, but after three months of struggling to stay alive, he reached the island community of Lichtenfels. That fall he managed to leave safely.

Other pilgrims in Greenland, Christian David Rudolph and his wife left Lichtenau after twenty-six years, in the month of June. Trapped in the ice until mid-July, they finally managed to distance themselves from the shore, but icebergs roaring and crunching shifted around them. The sailors fastened slabs of ice to the sides of the ship with grappling irons to protect it. In a letter, Christian David Rudolph described how it went:

Early on August 25 a storm rose in the south-west. It drove the icebergs close to our ship. They looked terrible and we expected them to crush us. Once we struck a small rock but not much happened. Then we hit the ice head-on with such force that several planks broke and water rushed in. The captain and part of the crew jumped into a life boat at once. The rest worked frantically to loosen another boat for the ship was filling with water and going down fast on her starboard side. By the time they had the boat ready, only the gunwhale remained above water. My wife and I stood on the deck alone, with the water already higher than our knees, holding fast to the shrouds, before the sailors helped us into the boat.

We were about a league out from shore and seventy-eight miles from Lichtenau. We feared our lifeboat, heavily laden and leaking badly, would sink too, so we steered for the nearest island. It was a steep naked rock, but we found a small spot with grass. From there we tried to salvage what we could of the wreck, but the waves beat frightfully against the rock and tossed the boat so violently that our rope broke, and it got away on us. Eight men jumped into the other boat at once and caught it. But the wild waves kept them from regaining our landing

place and carried them out among the ice that quickly crushed both boats. Only one man drowned, however.

All hopes of reaching land vanished and there was much weeping. When it got dark we lay down, close together, with no tent or covering. All this time it had rained heavily and it kept on raining through the following day and night, the water rushing down in torrents from the summit of the rock. All of us were soaked and lay in the water that stood in pools around us. But this was good for in this way we had fresh water to drink.

On August 27 the captain and most of the sailors made their way, jumping and climbing across the floating ice, to shore. We would have gone with them but after two days without food did not feel strong enough. With the ship's cook we stayed behind on the rock with no hope but what came from the Lord our almighty Saviour. We saw nothing else but that we would die here. The thought of lying unburied as food for the ravens and other birds of prey already hovering around us, troubled us for a short time, but the consolations of our Saviour overcame them and we soon felt entirely resigned to his will.

After nine days a band of Eskimo seal hunters found the Grillichs and the cook, still living. They gave them food and dry clothes, and brought them back to Lichtenau. Other believers travelling to and from Europe simply disappeared.

Labrador

Friedrich Martin, pilgrim to St. Thomas, wasted no opportunities to speak with others about Christ. Travelling on a Dutch ship he spoke to Hans Christian Erhardt, the ship's mate, who humbled himself and came to trust in the wounds of the Lamb.

Back at Zeist in the Netherlands, Hans Christian became a member of the believers' community. But he could not forget the people and places he had seen. Already in 1741 he had served on a whaling crew off the wild, desolate, coast of Labrador (now part of Canada). With the support of brothers in England he organised a group to travel there in 1752. They took supplies and building materials for themselves, as well as goods to trade with the Eskimos for a means of contact. But shortly after their arrival and the founding of the community they named *Hoffenthal* (Valley of Hope), hostile Eskimos fell on Hans Christian and six others with him on a trading excursion and killed them.

In the meanwhile, the Lord had prepared a brother from Denmark to work on the Labrador coast. Jens Haven first came to know Moravian pilgrims travelling through Copenhagen. Struck with their message, he found his way to Herrnhut where he worked ten years in the community's printshop. Then, even though he felt attracted to the Labrador coast he had heard and read about, he followed the Lord's call (through the use of the lot) to Greenland. Four years later, after learning the Eskimo language at Lichtenfels, he returned to England and with the brotherhood's approval left from there for St. John's in Newfoundland.

At first Jens found work as a carpenter in the British colony. But, speaking their language, he soon made friends with the Eskimos. After another trip to England where the Lord gave him with a wife, Mary Butterworth of the Lamb's Hill in Yorkshire, he returned with two other couples, a widower, and seven single brothers to establish a new community at Nain, 250 km north of Hoffenthal's ruins.

One of the first to find rest in the wounds of Christ at Nain was a medicine man and leader among the Eskimos. The brothers baptised him Peter. Another medicine man, Tuglavina, even more powerful and obstinate, followed. But for twenty-five years the brothers worked in Labrador's extreme cold and poverty with few results. Seeds of love they scattered in the snowy wilderness did not bear fruit until two young Eskimos, Siksagak and Kapik, coming to make trouble repented instead and a time of glorious awakening broke out. With the help of Eskimo believers the brothers rebuilt the former community at Hoffenthal and began two new ones, Okak and Hebron, far to the north on the shore of the Ungava Peninsula.

Cold Feet, Warm Hearts

Finding their way between scattered Eskimo settlements in Labrador proved no less challenging than in Greenland. In 1774 Christoph Brusens and Gottfried Lehmann drowned when an ice floe crushed their boat. Several years later a group of believers travelling on the ice from Nain to Okak met a similar disaster.

All day long it had snowed heavily. Guided by the Eskimo brothers Markus and Joel, and an old medicine man travelling with them, the believers found themselves a good distance from shore when the ice began to break. With a thundering roar the floe buckled as the ocean lifted and lowered it. At intervals the brothers could see rocks protruding along the shore and rushed with their dogs and sleds to scramble onto them while the ice sank.

No sooner did they gain this refuge than the floe broke up. “The sight was tremendous and awfully grand,” one of the group wrote afterwards. “Large fields of ice raised themselves out of the water, struck against one another, then plunged into the deep with a violence that cannot be described and a noise like the discharge of innumerable batteries of heavy guns. The darkness of the night, the roaring of the wind and sea, and the dashing of the waves and ice against the rocks nearly deprived us of the power of speech.”

With the help of the Eskimo brothers, the group made an igloo in which to sleep. But by two in the morning salt water dripped through. Everyone awoke. Joel snatched his wife and child. Mark and the others scrambled out behind him and they just reached the top of the rocks before another great wave came crashing in and carried their igloo out to sea. In the darkness, in densely swirling sleet and snow, they built another shelter but “not a thread” of their clothes remained dry, and they nearly starved during the five days it took them to return Nain.

Epidemic followed epidemic on Labrador. The Hudson’s Bay Company opposed the Moravians’ work and supplied the Eskimos with liquor. Gruesome murders took place among them. But warm love for the Saviour flourished in his Gemeine and the brothers and sisters that lived there overcame every difficulty in their way.

Northern Europe

Three years before he left for Greenland, Christian David already felt the Saviour calling him north. Setting out from Herrnhut on foot he found a way along the Baltic Sea, through Poland and Courland to Riga. Some of the time he walked barefooted along the beach. In other places he struggled through swampy forests, wading up to his knees in water for hours, and after the snow fell he joined a fifteen-sled train to Reval (Tallin) on the Gulf of Finland. There a noble woman invited the brothers from Herrnhut to begin schools and many doors opened to the Gospel. Ten years later, Christian David wrote:

The Saviour’s work in Livland [Estonia] goes on. But we need help. Rejoice with us that his grace is accepted by hundreds of seekers, like men rejoice in the time of harvest or after a battle when they divide the spoil. Praise the Saviour in his Gemein! Sing to him and do not keep silent for he is the blessed and beloved one! Who would not want to serve him with all his heart?

The Lamb of God knows how much it cost to redeem us and how much he loves our souls. It is still like in the days when John baptised. Many come to confess their sins and ask what they must do to be saved. But faith in the wounds of Christ is only now being comprehended. . . . Many who believe still depend on the law for their salvation. The side-shrine opened by a spear in Jesus' side has not yet been opened to them. But a few have obtained grace to enter that holy of holies through Jesus' blood. . . . In Livland and the surrounding area more than six hundred thousand people still need to hear this message. But for the time being we must hang our pilgrim gear on a nail and sit still. We must teach the people through quiet example, showing them first how to work with our hands. Jesus compels no one to conversion, but moves them with the power of love.

When the *Lammsberg* (mountain of the Lamb) and *Seitenschrein* (side wound) communities took shape in Livland, Christian David became the enthusiastic director of their building projects—choir houses, meeting rooms, and *Gemeinhäuser* patterned after Herrnhut.¹³⁷ Even though faced with opposition he wrote in 1743:

I am building cheerfully and let nothing disturb me. Overseeing various projects at the same time, I have carpenters, masons, furniture builders, and sawyers at work. Several stone cutters are getting ready to build the mill. Others are making wheels, digging wells and burning brick. The boys take care of the horses and wagons and the girls bake bread. . . . We have not started with building the Saal, but the first storey of the large residence is ready for its ceiling. Its windows have glass in them. I have not yet decided what to do with the plank house that gets too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. But we will figure something out. . . . There will be two kitchens, one for single brothers and one for the sisters, and two dormitories. The ceramic works and bakery have been built under one roof, the ovens, windows, and doors already done. . . . Along with this, we are threshing a good crop of rye. The foundations for a mill and a dam have been laid. All four millstones are finished and a waterwheel and gears will soon be ready to use.

From Reval, Andreas Grassman, Daniel Schneider and Johann Nitschmann found their way to the Lapps in far northern Sweden, and later with Michael Miksch to the Samoyeds and other tribes living along the Arctic Ocean. At Archangelsk, Russian authorities took them captive and kept them in a dungeon for five weeks. Then they sent them, with three soldiers, on foot to St. Petersburg. Crossing a

frozen lake, two of the soldiers broke through and would have drowned had the brothers not acted quickly and saved their lives. They arrived at the Russian capital as friends and the Tsar sent them back to Herrnhut unharmed.

¹³⁷ Falling from the second storey of a building in progress, Christian David surprised everyone when he got up and began running away at top speed. “I wanted to keep my blood circulating,” he explained later.

Travelling, working, building, praying—with their eyes fixed on Jesus, brothers and sisters from Herrnhut watched his Gemeinde take shape in the far north, during the mideighteenth century.

14

To The West

Nothing fascinated Katharina Budmanski like the secret book. Day and night she lived around it. Deep in Roman Catholic Moravia in the early 1720s she learned to read from it, with her mother's help, and her heart told her its message came from God.

Reading the words of Christ, Katharina found the way to inner peace. But trouble came with it. Her father, a strict Catholic from whom they had tried to keep their Bible hidden, became suspicious. Whenever he sensed Katherina and her mother trying to get off by themselves he followed them, or appeared suddenly. Finally, on the day of All Saints in 1725, after Katharina had turned 21, she dared act on what she believed and left home.

With her mother, a descendant of the forbidden Unity of Brothers, she had discussed it briefly. Her mother had told her that beyond the Sudeten Mountains, somewhere to the north, believers lived in peace with God and one another. "But tell me nothing of your plans," she had cautioned Katharina. "The less I know, the better it will be for both of us."

In the crowd of worshippers entering the village chapel on the day of All Saints, Katharina slipped away from her parents, unnoticed, and made her way behind village orchards, across the fields, into mountain forests surrounding her village of Seitendorf. From the top of a high ridge, she looked back and saw people already leaving the church. Knowing she would soon be missed and pursued, she committed herself to Christ and hurried on. By the next day she reached Niederwiese, home of more secret believers, who directed her across the mountains through Silesia to Herrnhut.

Nothing in Herrnhut disappointed Katharina. With her whole heart she gave herself to the Saviour and his Gemein, taking her place as a nurse in the young sisters' choir house. Her father learned where she stayed and did what he could to get her back. But instead of that happening, her mother escaped and found her way to Herrnhut as well.

When the Saviour led Katharina into marrying Friedrich Riedel, a young stone mason at Herrnhut, she did not object. Neither did she complain when their first two children died, or when the congregation chose Friedrich to accompany Brother Josef, Johann Töltshig, Peter Rose, and seven others to America, in

1735. The Saviour, she had learned, makes no mistakes, and true joy springs from true surrender to him.

For a long time Katharina heard nothing from Friedrich and his companions. Then word came from America that they had arrived safely, the weather was warm, and she should come too. The British governor had given five hundred acres of land to the brothers at Savannah, Georgia. He had promised them exemption from swearing oaths or bearing arms, and said they could establish a Christian community however they desired.

With a group of twenty from Herrnhut, Katharina sailed from England in the winter of 1736. Fierce storms hindered their progress. On the fifth of February many thought the ship would go down, but casting themselves before the Saviour the believers on board sang and prayed. Their tranquillity in danger spoke to John and Charles Wesley, travelling on the same ship to America, and after twenty-one weeks at sea they reached Savannah in safety. To Katharina's surprise, Friedrich had turned sick and died, so the brothers quickly arranged her marriage to Peter Rose. With him she moved five miles up the Ogeechee River where they settled on an island among the Creek Indians. A friendly chief, Tomochichi, arranged for them to teach his tribe to read and write.

Katharina did well at learning the Creek language. She loved the children and found they easily memorised scriptures and songs. During their time on the island the Lord gave her two more children of her own. But her new husband often left for days or weeks at a time, visiting seekers. The Indians around her drank more and more liquor, their wild dances and songs lasting late into the night, and when the Spanish made war on Georgia, she was thankful to leave.

Pennsylvania Refuge

The British in Georgia did not trust the Moravian believers who, like Petr Chelčický and their Waldensian ancestors, refused to take up arms to defend the colony. The Spanish, just to the south in Florida, would have trusted them even less. But the Saviour had everything arranged.

Shortly before the Moravian believers settled in Georgia, the Schwenkfelders who had lived with them at Herrnhut moved to Pennsylvania. At the time the war with Spain broke out, Brother Josef had gone to visit them, and sent back reports of the healthier climate, the presence of many other nonconformed believers (Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkards), and the freedom from military obligations there. To

the brothers and sisters in Georgia it sounded too good to be true. But in little groups they made their way north, and friends in Germantown, not far from Philadelphia, opened to them their hearts and homes.

Brother Josef had not spent much time in Pennsylvania before a cluster of seekers gathered around him. In the home of Christoph Wiegner, a Schwenkfelder living with his mother and single sister, they met in the evenings to sing and pray. Johannes Gruber, a leader among the “Inspired” came to the meetings. So did the Reformed brothers, Heinrich Antes and Johannes Bechtel, the Dunkards Wilhelm and Andreas Frey, with Christian Weber, Conrad Weiser, Francis Ritter, and others. Seeing the reality of Christ’s church, far above denominational boundaries, they called themselves nothing but “brothers in unity at the Skippack” and prayed for the day when all who loved the Saviour could serve and worship him in similar peace. Peter and Katherina Rose, with the others from Georgia, found their place among these warm-hearted believers at once. But living in Germantown did not remain their privilege for long.

The First of The Mohicans

The better Brother Josef came to know Conrad Weiser, one of the seekers sometimes attending meetings in Germantown, the more interested he grew in his story. Conrad told him how he came to America as a child, settled with his parents in a German colony in New York, and spent long periods with the Indians. Living among the Mohawks, Conrad said, he learned their language and now used it in his work as an interpreter for the government.

Conrad showed Brother Josef the diary he had kept on a journey from Pennsylvania to the Finger Lakes area, south of Lake Ontario, on foot. He spoke of six Indian nations that lived there under wise and fair rulers. He spoke of their great towns and just laws. The more Brother Josef heard, the more excited he grew. “Souls for the Lamb!” he declared. “Who will go and tell them of the life-giving blood?”

Not only Brother Josef found Conrad Weiser’s reports exciting. When Christian David heard them back at Herrnhut, he jumped up and would have rushed to America at once. Brother Ludwig suspected the nations Conrad described might be the ten lost tribes of Israel, mixed with the Scythians or another ancient race. But the congregation brought the matter before the Saviour and chose Christian Heinrich Rauch, a twenty-two-year-old brother to visit the Indians in New York (near Conrad Weiser’s first home in America) in 1740.

The first Indians Christian met—two Mohicans called Shabash and Wasamapah—agreed to take him to their village. But they both got drunk and forgot their promise. Christian found lodging with a family of German settlers instead, from where he made his way to the Indian village alone.

The Indians hardly knew what to make of him. White traders, the only people they had much to do with, did not come to their villages alone, much less unarmed like Christian Rauch! Traders came with rum, cloth, and supplies to exchange for furs. Christian came with nothing. He knew only a few words in their language, yet acted friendly. What did he want? When would he go away?

At first the Indians of Shekomeko made fun of Christian and threatened to kill him. But to their amazement he hung around until after they had eaten and it grew dark. Then, finding a place near the fire, he curled up in a blanket and went to sleep.

The Indians looked at him in disbelief. A white man sleeping peacefully, without arms, in Shekomeko! Obviously he did not know much about the place. Or did he possess some unseen spiritual power? As quickly as they had despised him, their attitude changed to one of deep respect, and when Christian woke up he found them eager to learn what he had to say.

The longer Christian lived and worked among the Shekomeko villagers, the more they realised he was no ordinary white man. He loved them, and spoke of God's Son who loved them too. Almost a year after his arrival Shabash and Wasamapah both repented and found mercy in the wounds of the Lamb. Christian felt the hearts of others becoming tender as well, and made plans to travel with them to Pennsylvania.

Arriving in Germantown early in 1741, Christian Rauch with his group of Mohican friends, brought great joy to all that loved Christ. In a meeting with the "Skippack brothers" at the home of a Mennonite farmer, Jan de Türck, in Oley, Christian described his work at Shekomeko. Mennonite, German Baptist, and Schwenkfelder believers had gathered there. So had the spiritually minded of local Lutheran and Reformed congregations, with a few white-robed brothers from the Sabbatarian community at Ephrata. All listened to the new Mohican believers telling how the blood of Christ had washed their sins away.

No one could doubt their testimony. They spoke of how dreadfully they had lived under the bondage of superstition, liquor, and fear. But now their faces shone with peace and who could deny them the privilege of Christian baptism?

For a moment the brothers and sisters gathered in the Mennonite home looked at one another. How should the new believers be baptised, by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling? Someone suggested the Saviour should decide the matter and the brothers cast lots. Pouring appeared as the Saviour's choice, and the gathered crowd found their way out to the barn where kneeling over the water trough, the first three Mohican believers, baptised with water poured from a hollow gourd, received the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Not long afterward, Wasamapah (whom Dutch traders had called Tschoop) also asked for baptism and took the name of Johannes. Everyone that knew him "before and after" marvelled. From a drunkard and fighter the Saviour transformed him into a gentle believer with firm convictions. In 1742 when the Christian Mohicans of Shekomeko— Abraham (Shabash) and his wife Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jakob, Thomas and Esther, Jonas, and Timotheus—formally became a congregation of the ancient Unity of Brothers, Johannes served as interpreter for the brothers from Germany and become an enthusiastic evangelist among them. A year later the Indian believers celebrated their first communion and love feast. In July 1743 they built a Saal. Abraham, the first baptised among them, became their leader, and by the end of that year they numbered sixty-three souls.

Trouble For the Christian Indians

As the congregation of believing Mohicans increased, their testimony touched the hearts of native Americans throughout the English colonies. Tired of the disorder and debauchery contact with white traders had brought them, more and more turned to the Saviour. In him (and to stand in spiritual communication with unseen worlds was not a new concept for them) they found more than any medicine man had told them about. They found inner peace and forgiveness for their sins. Their attitudes changed to where they could live in peace one with another—at Shekomeko, in a new community they named *Gnadensee* (Lake of Grace) in Connecticut, and four other locations among the New England hills.

Believers in Christian Indian villages overcome the barriers that years of warfare and abuse had erected. Rachel, an Indian sister, became the first to marry a European, Friedrich Post. Christiana, another sister from Shekomeko, married Joseph Bull, a Quaker baptised by the Moravian pilgrim Andreas Eschenbach in 1742. From widely varied backgrounds they become one Gemein at the feet of the Lamb—Christoph Pyrlaeus from Switzerland, Johann Jakob Schmidt from Reval

in Livland, some from Germany and Moravia, and a growing number of believers from the tribes of the Allegheny, Hudson Valley, and Northeastern Woodland regions. But the enemy would not leave them undisturbed.

Unfriendly white settlers in New York, led by Gilbert Tennant, a Methodist preacher, could not stand what they saw. Week after week, Gilbert denounced the “pernicious sect of people called the Moravian Brethren” over his pulpit, together with their “detestable Arminian doctrines of the free will and the apostasy of the saints.”

“I cannot stand as an unconcerned spectator,” Gilbert Tennant declared, “to behold the Moravian tragedy. My heart bleeds within me to see the precious truths of Christ opposed, slighted and trodden under foot by our new Reformers, and that under a pretext of extraordinary sanctity, love, and meekness.”¹³⁸

Not everyone in New York shared Gilbert Tennant’s “grief,” but colony authorities under continual pressure finally arrested Friedrich Post and David Zeisberger (a young brother who fled with his parents from Zauchenthal in Moravia, coming by way of Heerendyk to America), kept them in jail for six weeks, and banished them for refusing to bear arms or swearing oaths. The colony also passed a law forbidding Moravians to preach or hold unauthorised meetings, and obligated all suspected of belonging to their “sect” to swear the oath of allegiance.¹³⁹ A British official locked and sealed the doors of the Saal at Shekomeko, and the Indian congregation, by now numbering over seventy baptised believers, knew the time had come to leave.

Bethlehem

While young brothers put everything they had into bringing the Indians of New York and Connecticut to the Lamb, Peter and Katharina Rose, with their companions at Germantown found work as well. Some of them, travelling by sea from Georgia to Pennsylvania, had come with the English evangelist George Whitefield. Even though they could not understand everything he said, his plans to build a Christian boarding school on a five thousand acre tract at the Forks of the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers, sparked their interest. William Penn’s daughter, George Whitefield said, had left behind the estate, called Nazareth. Now, with the help of his supporters, he planned to build on it a school for freed slaves and whoever could not afford an education elsewhere. He hoped

to teach practical skills along with the academic, and to train his students in Christian virtue.

¹³⁸ *The Examiner*, Boston, 1743

¹³⁹ The same law gave Dutch and French Reformed preachers, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Quakers and Anabaptists (groups less likely to upset colony affairs) total liberty.

In Germantown the Moravians kept seeing George Whitefield. He spoke at a meeting in Wiegner's house, and when he asked them if they would build his school for hire, they consented readily. A few of brothers made their way to the forks of the Delaware, set up camp under an oak tree, and held a meeting to praise the Saviour for seeing to their needs.

For a short while the building project went well. The brothers from Herrnhut—skilled stone masons among them—worked on the lower storey of the first large building on the Whitefield property. Some made friends with Indians living in the area. But when George Whitefield and Peter Böhler (who also came to Pennsylvania by way of Savannah) began to discuss the doctrine of predestination, things stopped going well. George Whitefield became very upset. “How dare you Moravians insist that anyone can be saved?” he stormed. “Don't you know that God alone grants that privilege to whoever he wills? How dare you insist he must grant it to all?”

When the brothers from Herrnhut remained unconvinced by his Calvinist teaching, George Whitefield broke his contract and asked them to leave his property at once. They left. But not for long.

A short distance south of the Nazareth estate, closer to the forks of the Delaware, the brothers bought another tract of land. With even greater zeal they began to chop down trees and construct their first building of logs—a house and stable combination—before the snow fell. In the meantime, George Whitefield, short of help and out of money, had to give up his plans and his estate came up for sale. The brothers, seeing in this a divine opportunity, quickly agreed to buy it.

In Germantown, Peter Rose died. But more seekers kept coming and Katharina, even though she missed her second husband, found help to raise her children in a growing circle of believers. By 1741, when Brother Ludwig and his daughter Benigna arrived in Pennsylvania, he found the Moravians already living on their new land near the forks of the Delaware. Around them stood the great silent forest. Snow lay deep beneath the stars. But inside their first log building they shared a cheerful love feast of corn cakes and coffee made of roasted rye. With a choral

liturgy—the work of Peter Böhler—all joined to sing before the Lamb of God in his advent season, and when the issue of naming the new community arose Brother Ludwig could think of nothing else but Bethlehem.

New World Peace

Brother Ludwig saw more than casual parallels between Bethlehem in Pennsylvania and the place of Christ's birth. Peace and goodwill among men, he believed, might come again at Bethlehem. With the Quakers he dreamed of a new order in the New World where Christ would reign—a new land without forts or major harbours, not devoted to commerce “lest it incur the jealousy of surrounding nations.” In Pennsylvania, Ludwig hoped, the Indians would find mercy in Jesus' wounds. Slavery would end. The black, the white, and the brown would all live as brothers, and unity among Christians would flourish again.

For all these “holy expectations,” what the brothers on the Skippack had begun, seemed a sure sign. Already on December 15, 1741, Heinrich Antes had published an open letter to the Christians of Pennsylvania—German and Swedish Lutherans, Dutch and German Reformed, Swiss and Dutch Mennonites,¹⁴⁰ Socinians, Quakers, Schwenkfelders, Dunkards, Seventh Day (Ephrata) Baptists, the Wissahickon Hermits, the *Neugeborene* (Baumanites) of Oley,¹⁴¹ and the Inspired:

Dear friends and brothers,

For lack of trust and because we suspect evil one about another, a terrible thing is happening in the Church of Christ, and among souls called to follow the Lamb. Even though we have been commanded to love one another, the good that could be happening among us is continually brought to nothing. For this reason, for two years or so, some of us have thought of calling a general meeting, not to argue about opinions, but to learn how to understand one another in love. We think we should come to agreement on the basic issues of faith, and learn to accept one another in love even though we may disagree on matters peripheral to the salvation of our souls. If we would do this, much judging and criticising could be eliminated and the world would stop making fun of us for preaching peace and conversion while fighting among ourselves.

Considering all this in prayer, and acting on the counsel of many brothers and souls that seek after the Lord, we have decided to meet this coming New Year's

day in Germantown. You are invited to attend, along with your brothers that have a foundation for their faith and are able to explain it. This invitation has been shared with nearly all the other groups through letters like this. There will probably be a large gathering, but do not let this keep you from coming, for everything will be taken care of without much commotion. May the Lord Jesus grant us his blessing.

From your poor and unworthy brother,

Heinrich Antes.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Appearing in the list as *Vereinigte Vlaaminger und Waterländer*¹⁴¹ A celibate group, rejecting all sacraments, and believing themselves incapable of sinning— therefore beyond need of the Scriptures. Most of the *Neugeborene* joined the Moravian Church and moved to Bethlehem.

¹⁴² *Büdingische Sammlungen*, vol. II

The meeting at Theobald Endt’s house in Germantown, on New Year’s day, 1742,¹⁴³ left all who came with much to think about. Brother Ludwig described his vision of a *Gemeinde Gottes im Geist* (Church of God in the Spirit): “My goal is to help all the scattered children of God to find their way, not into the Moravian brotherhood— something I would rather strive against —but into that universal Gemeinschaft of believers into which the *secta moravica* must also finally merge.”

With powerful conviction Brother Ludwig exposed the foolishness of bringing Old World divisions into the new, and challenged believers to rise above denominational strife to glorious liberty in the blood of the Lamb. Did that mean all Christians needed to merge into one mega-denomination? Not at all! “The Church of God in the Spirit,” Ludwig explained,

consists of innumerable believers around the world, united in the same basic beliefs. Not all of them have to belong to one household of faith, because in their diversity the wisdom of God lies hidden. If all Christian groups are merely parts of the same whole, there is nothing evil in each of them maintaining their own order and fellowship and no one should leave them as long as he is needed in them. Every one of these small groups that for geographical or other reasons has become a distinct unit is the church made visible. And if every visible manifestation of the church rests on Jesus Christ and is built a spiritual house, then diversity is something beautiful.¹⁴⁴

If all Christians united, some who attended the meeting in Germantown wondered, what would happen to existing institutions?

To the brothers from Herrnhut it did not look complicated. Man should not take it upon himself to destroy what God tolerates, they believed. Much of religion belongs to Babel, but only God knows what to tear down and what to leave standing. We may leave the work to him. We will not overcome denominational strife by trying to tear denominations apart. But if we bring people within them to see the Lamb, Babylon (denominational confusion) will crumble and disappear on its own. The emphasis of the Germantown meeting lay on the believer's "privilege to sin no more." Deeply inspired with this, and with the vision of unity in Christ before them, all who attended planned to hold another meeting soon, in the cloister at Ephrata. But a number of events changed their plans.

Leaving Germantown, Brother Ludwig visited the Schwenkfelder colonists and preached for them on the day of the Three Kings. Then he stopped in at Dunkard, Mennonite, and Lutheran homes. Wherever he went, he found people more inclined to argue than to pray. About the Dunkards, Ludwig wrote:

143 January 12, according to the Gregorian calendar¹⁴⁴ *Authentische Relation von dem Anlass, Fortgang und Schlusze der am 1sten und 2ten Januarii Anno 1741/2 in Germantown gehaltenen Versammlung einiger Arbeiter derer meisten Christlicher Religionen und vieler vor sich selbst Gott-dienenden ChristenMenschen in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin*

They are God-fearing people and do what their conscience tells them. Even though they do not have much light, they are sincere, and for that reason friendly. It seems they should unite with the Mennonites, if only they could agree on how to baptise, for that would make one less sect in the country.

About the Mennonites he wrote:

It is not our work to judge these people. In the Netherlands the blessing of the Lord has come among them, and many are true builders of the Invisible Church. But those of this land [Pennsylvania] have been more against us than for us, right from the start. Also, they are a small isolated religion with boundaries and gates. . . . We must leave them in the hands of the Lord.

The Lutherans, Brother Ludwig found sharply divided over the case of a baptism on the Tulpehocken Creek in Berks County. One pastor had agreed to baptise an infant presented to him by a drunken father, Philip Beyer. Another insisted that baptism (for the drunkenness) was invalid, and groups of people formed on both sides.

The Reformed, wherever Brother Ludwig and his companions from Herrnhut travelled, opposed them with their talk of the sovereignty of God. The Inspired accused them of holding to “meaningless sacraments.” And in the end, even the Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata turned against them, forbidding them to hold their next meeting there. “All the Count [Brother Ludwig] wants,” his opponents declared, “is to get everyone under his own hat.” Christopher Sauer, a printer at Germantown, began to publish material against them, and Ludwig—forced to conclude that “everyone in Pennsylvania, except the Quakers, keeps their religion primarily to plague others”—gave up his plans.

From Jews to Gentiles

Saddened by the Pennsylvania colonists’ rejection, but by no means discouraged, Brother Ludwig and his companions turned their attention to the heathen. “If the Jews—that is, the white Christians—have no desire for unity in the wounds of the Lamb,” they reasoned, “the Indians may.” So in the summer of 1742 a small group, including Brother Ludwig, travelled west.

West to the Tulpehocken Creek and Conrad Weiser’s house the brothers made their way before they met a large group from the Six Nations region, south of Lake Ontario. Important chiefs had come—Shikellamy, Canastego, Coxhayion and others—on business with the Pennsylvania government. Some had brought their wives and children. All smiled when Chief Coxhayion’s little son ran out to meet the men from Germany. Brother Ludwig picked him up and the boy threw his arms around his neck. “A little child shall lead them,” the brothers said in wonder, and the Indians took it as a sign from heaven.

For several days Conrad Weiser helped the leaders of the Six Nations and the Unity of Brothers speak with one another. They spoke of the Saviour and his work. With growing astonishment at their unity of ideals, they discussed the basis for peace between white and Indian people in America, and Brother Ludwig promised Chief Shikellamy (who lived much closer than the rest) that he would come to visit him.

Following several months of planning the group set out for Indian territory in the middle of September. Conrad Weiser served as interpreter. Joshua and David, two boys from Shekomeko recently baptised at Bethlehem, went along, as did Heinrich Leinbach of Oley, Martin and Johanna Mack (newly married), Peter Böhler, Anna Nitschmann, Brother Ludwig and his seventeen-year-old daughter, Benigna.

With pack horses heavily loaded (one with nothing but Brother Ludwig's writing supplies and the books he planned to read) they followed the Shamokin trail. West over the Blue Mountains, five days through silent valleys, and across the last high ridge before the Susquehanna, they made their way. Describing their descent from there Brother Ludwig wrote: Anna, the most courageous one among us, a brave girl, led us down the hill. I held onto the end of her coat to keep from sliding off my saddle. Conrad held onto my coat, and Peter Böhler onto Conrad's. In this way we all kept each other from slipping and the Saviour helped us safely down.

The sight that met them was worth all hardships encountered. On a flat spot at the forks of the broad, shining Susquehanna, stood the little houses of Shamokin surrounded by sheltering peaks.¹⁴⁵ Shikellamy, the Six Nations chief living in the village, welcomed them with open arms. He set food (boiled squash) and drink before them, and sitting by his fire, the brothers took note of his sincere interest in what they told him.

From Shamokin the travellers made their way north to Ostonwakin, and east into the valley of Skahantowano (the Wyoming Valley) where the Shawnees lived. Everywhere they met curious people—so interested in the brothers' buckles and buttons Brother Ludwig soon had to tie his clothes shut with strings—but not all of them were friendly. Only after escaping, by the grace of God, a plot to take their lives, did Brother Ludwig and his companions return after several months in the wilderness, to Bethlehem.

“Sea Congregations”

While the believers in Pennsylvania turned to the Indians, events in Europe brought more and more of them to seek passage across the Atlantic to America. In the spring of 1742 a group of fifty-six—mostly from Herrnhut and refused permission to settle at the Pilgerruh community in Holstein— sailed from England on a chartered ship. Georg Piesch travelled with them as their leader. The entire crew consisted of Moravian boys, and a “little Herrnhut,” or *Seegemeine* (sea congregation) as they called it, formed on board.

¹⁴⁵ Sunbury, Pennsylvania, today.

Three brothers' and three sisters' choirs (for children, adult single, and adult married passengers) kept to their own sides of the ship—brothers on one and sisters on the other. Days on board began at six with a call to wash and dress.

Morning prayers came at seven, with a reading of the Watchword, and breakfast at eight. Then the English believers on board began their German lesson for the day, and German believers studied English. At twelve, those assigned to kitchen duty served the meal. At seven in the evening everyone gathered for prayer and song services, one hour of German and another of English, followed by a daily brothers' meeting and bedtime at ten.

All passengers had clearly assigned duties. Some kept track of the time, some cleaned, some prepared the food, and others did nothing but see to the comfort of the elderly and sick. All night long the hourly watch continued. One day they set apart for prayer and fasting, and with great joy in the wounds of the Lamb they celebrated love feasts at sea. Even though storms slowed them down and pirates pursued them three times, they arrived by June 7, 1742 at Penn's Landing in Philadelphia, in good spirits.

Another sea congregation of 120 people—including thirty young couples married as the Saviour directed at Marienborn,¹⁴⁶ just before departure—arrived a year later. Captain Garrison brought them on the *Little Strength*, and in 1749 another group of thirty-nine single brothers and forty-eight sisters. Promptly after arrival in Bethlehem, at a great love feast, the Saviour joined thirty-one couples in marriage. Some settled in Bethlehem, others in Nazareth, and twenty-two youths built a young men's community at a place they named *Gnadenhöh* (Heights of Grace).

Light In The Wilderness

With so many young believers at Bethlehem, its population quadrupled within a few years and the brothers had to enlarge their log *Gemeinhaus* (community house). They also built new stone residences—single brothers' and sisters' choir houses, a chapel, and quarters for many new families around it. On the Nazareth estate, a group of single sisters moved into the Whitefield school building. Katharina Budmanski Rose, who had overseen the widows' choir for several years, married Johann Michael Huber and together they became the *Kindereltern* in the childrens' house there.

Like a joyful army the young men set to work clearing land, planting grain and vegetables, and building a circle of shops and a grist mill in Bethlehem. Hans Christoph Christensen, a hydraulic engineer from Holstein, built an oil mill and the community's ingenious water works. But far more than earthly things got looked after. As soon as they could talk English—even haltingly—the brothers

visited Scotch and Irish settlers on the southern bank of the Lehigh, and the English in New Jersey. Thanks to Captain Garrison a group of seekers on Staten Island formed a congregation, and in evening meetings at Bethlehem the believers heard letters read from St. Thomas, Greenland, Livland, Africa, and wherever Pilgrims from Herrnhut had gone. To each letter they responded with a song.

¹⁴⁶ with the use of the lot

No weekend passed at Bethlehem without anxious seekers coming to evaluate the believers' community. From all Pennsylvania settlements, from all denominations they came to speak of their inner need and worship the Lamb together. Before long the congregation put up a guest house with a believing couple on day and night duty to receive them. The *Fremdenstunde* (meeting for strangers) on Lord's Day afternoons became a regular English-language service, and when this did not suffice, the brothers began to hold daily "question and answer" sessions from three to five in the afternoon. So many came to some meetings they had to stand at the back of the Saal, in crowded hallways, and down the stairs of the Gemeinhaus.

A few glimpses from the Bethlehem diary of this period:

Saturday, September 4, 1742: In the daily *Viertelstunde* we sang the litany as always. After the softly spoken request, "Bless us with your holy testaments dear Lord," two Indian catechumens from Shekomeko and a single brother from Oley, a Quaker, were baptised into the death of Jesus. We could feel the Saviour's presence in a special way.

Saturday, October 16, 1742: We spent a blessed Love Feast at noon in the Lord's presence, remembering our brothers and sisters in Europe who were being fed with the Lamb's flesh and blood at this very time. In this way we felt united with them in Spirit. The single brothers' choir held their all-night vigil and received rich blessings. They discussed their condition, both as individuals and as a choir, thoroughly one with another and made plans for the *Sprechen* (personal interviews) next week. During all this they were keenly conscious of the Lamb's presence among them.

September 22, 1743: An Englishman came to visit. He seemed like a nice man and asked to live among us. He was also ready to place his ten-year-old daughter in our care. The man was serious and we did not question his motives. But because Bethlehem is full at this time we could not take him in.

Sabbath (Saturday), December 11, 1742: All the brothers and sisters rose at four in the morning for the feet washing. His water and blood made us clean. Then came communion. We felt the blood from the Lamb's wounds sweeping through our hearts, souls, and bodies, like a flood.

April 13, 1743 and other dates: We became vividly aware of our Saviour's death and blood and he showed his grace, particularly to the single brothers' choir. . . . Our communion was unusually blessed, and we were overcome with wonder in the gracious presence of the Lamb. . . . The Lamb showed himself to us, a little band of sinners with special grace. . . . The head of the congregation allowed his gracious presence to be felt among us with power. .

. . Our love feast ended today with an explanation of the Watchword, during which the Saviour came to us in unspeakable joy. . . . We celebrated our love feast in tender awareness of the Lamb's presence. . . . This Sabbath we spent quietly in the presence of our Lord. . . . Tonight the single brothers went about singing and praising their choir's elder [Christ] with musical instruments. At six o'clock we held a love feast for the whole congregation in which his Spirit moved us mightily, causing us to fall on our faces and worship him. . . . The Indian brother Jakob from Shekomeko spent fourteen days among us and came to love the Saviour again.

December 29, 1743: The older sisters laid hands on Anna Maria Birstler at her baptism and received her with a kiss. Lights flashing from the blood of the Lamb circled through the Saal and melted the hearts of the brothers and sisters to tears.

November 13, 1756, on the celebration of the chief eldership of Christ: We felt the Saviour's presence so powerfully we could no longer speak, pray, sing, or anything else. Such an awareness! Oh Lord! All of us were in tears and we fell with our faces on the ground before him. I cannot, no I will not describe it!

Shelters of Grace

When the Indian believers from Shekomeko and the Connecticut villages arrived in Pennsylvania, the brothers gave them a place along the Monocacy Creek at Bethlehem. There, close to the *Wundeninsel* (Island of the Wounds), a place the brothers kept as a refuge for those wanting to pray alone, they set up camp. But living next to so many people did not suit them well. They missed the unspoiled wilderness in which to hunt and fish. So with the help of Martin Mack and David Zeisberger they settled further up the Lehigh, on a 1400 acre tract along the

Mahoney Creek. There they built a new community named *Gnadenhütten* (Shelters of Grace).

With great eagerness the Indian believers erected a new *Gemeinhaus* and *Saal*. Around it they built a log *Pilgerhaus* (residence for temporary workers), a young brothers' choir house, family residences, a barn, a stable, a kitchen with bake ovens, and a milk-house. Particularly important to their well being, they built a saw and gristmill from which many rafts of lumber floated down to building projects at Bethlehem and Nazareth. After a few years they bought more land across the Lehigh River, and their farms and fruit orchards flourished.

At the same time, Chief Shikellamy, through Conrad Weiser, asked for the brothers to settle in Shamokin on the Susquehanna River. Martin and Johanna Mack answered the call. With the help of the villagers they set up a smithy in 1746. Joseph Powell, a young brother from Shropshire, Johann Hagen, and Anton Schmidt came to help them. They showed the villagers how to plant turnips and cabbage, and the seed of Christ's Word they planted flourished as well. Not only Chief Shikellamy, but numerous ones of his family and the Lenni Lenape people among whom they lived repented and found peace in the Lamb.

From this place David Zeisberger, Johann Jakob Schmick and groups of Indian believers made their way upstream to establish the *Friedenshütten* (Shelters of Peace) community at Wyalusing, and *Friedensstadt* (City of Peace) in far western Pennsylvania.

Rainbow of Promise

Before Brother Ludwig returned to Europe, the brothers in Bethlehem took care of an important issue. Up to this time they had worked with one man, a "chief elder" in charge. But "having found this office too much for a mortal being" they asked the Saviour (with the use of the lot) whether he would not take it himself, and he consented. That evening, on November 13, 1741, a rainbow arched across the eastern sky and the believers fell on their faces, assured of the Saviour's approval and committed as never before to surrender themselves to him.

From this time onward the use of the lot, taken as the Saviour's voice, became the last word in every major decision—and to the believers on the American frontier, it brought security and peace.

Samuel and Mary, the first Indian believers to celebrate a Christian wedding, received permission from the Saviour to become man and wife in 1744. That

same year Andreas (the boy that had given Friedrich Martin the chickens, on St. Thomas) and Maria became the first black couple married at Bethlehem. Andreas, purchased by Brother Ludwig, had come to Pennsylvania with him. But he returned, and three years later the Saviour called Johann Michael Huber (Katherina's third husband) to St. Thomas as well. A storm struck his ship. It sank and he drowned on the way there, leaving her a widow again. Chief Shikellamy, baptised in his old age, died in 1748, resting in the wounds of the Lamb. The brothers rejoiced at his home going. But great tribulations fell on the Indian believers soon afterward.

Angered by white settlers' seizure of their lands, the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) and Shawnee tribes revolted against British rule in the 1750s. The French, from Canada, supported them, and reports of sudden massacres began to trickle in from the frontier. In the Path Valley, at Penn's Creek, in the Northkill Amish settlement, and along the Swatara Creek Indians fell suddenly on lonely cabins to burn, scalp, and destroy. Some, particularly women and children, they led captive.

For Martin and Susanna Nitschmann, with the rest of the believers at Gnadenhütten on the Mahoney, this frontier violence became a serious threat. Unconverted Indians hated them for turning so many of their number into peace-loving Christians. Those among the Indian believers, not well grounded in Christ, found it easy to slip back into their old ways. One of Chief Shikellamy's sons, after white frontiersmen treacherously murdered his wife and children, became a leader in the Indian revolt. So did Teedyuscung, a Shawnee the brothers had baptised as Gabriel. But threats ended and action began on the evening of November 24, 1755.

Martin and Susanna Nitschmann, Gottlieb and Johanna Christina Anders with their baby, Joachim Sensemann (whose wife was sick, upstairs), Georg and Susanne Luise Partsch, with several young people sat around the supper table at Gnadenhütten on the Mahoney. It had just grown dark and the dog seemed restless. Joachim stepped outside to make sure the door to the Saal was latched. The others kept on eating. Then they heard pounding footsteps, dogs barking furiously, and Joseph Sturgis rose to open the door.

A roar of gunshot and painted warriors burst into the room. A bullet grazed Joseph's face and Susanna Nitschmann saw her husband drop to the floor. Shots in quick succession struck John Lesley, Johann Gattermeyer and

Martin Presser.¹⁴⁷ Susanna herself was struck by a bullet and while the others scrambled up steps to the loft she slipped and fell into the arms of an Indian who dragged her out the door, surrounded by war whoops, tomahawks, knives, and guns.¹⁴⁸

From the single brother's house, Peter Worbas (who had been fasting that evening) looked on with horror as he heard continual gunshots through the floor into the loft where the others had fled. Then he saw flames and Joseph Sturgis leap from an upstairs window. Following him Susanne Luise Partsch also jumped out and ran, followed by Georg Fabricus promptly struck down by a tomahawk and scalped.¹⁴⁹

For fifteen minutes Peter listened to shots and yells. He saw one sister run from the burning building to a cellar nearby. Then something momentarily distracted the warrior posted in front of his door, and he also jumped out and ran. The last he heard were the screams of Johanna Christina's baby above the roar of the flames.

By the time David Zeisberger and believers from the other side of the river arrived on the scene, nothing remained of Gnadenhütten but a blanket and a hat left on a stump with a knife sticking through them. Grief swept the believers' congregation, but only for a short while. Hearts fixed on the Lamb could see nothing in this bloody massacre but a confirmation of life as it is—short and perilous, a prelude to the everlasting—and set out with good courage to build new and larger settlements in the Tuscarawas River valley of Ohio. There, with the believing Indians of western Pennsylvania, the survivors of Shekomeko and Gnadenhütten built the new communities of Schönbrunn (Beautiful Spring), Lichtenau (Meadow of Light), another Gnadenhütten, and Salem. Their squash and beans grew wonderfully. The forest abounded in game. Once more they planted fruit trees and flowers, and before long their central meetinghouse at Schönbrunn, built for five hundred, could not hold the crowds of Indian believers that came to worship there.

Witness of Grace

Back in Bethlehem, trials of faith continued through the French and Indian war. But the Saviour's grace did not fail. A band of Indians gathered to fall on Bethlehem before dawn on Christmas, 1755, experienced it with singular power. Just before the planned attack, heavenly music broke out above them, floating over the town and out across the Lehigh River. The single brothers' trombone

choir stood in the belvedere above the Saal, playing the Advent Chorale, and all the Indians could do was listen, speechless, before fading back into the woods. One of them, who came to the Saviour several months later, told the brothers what had happened.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Presser, not immediately killed, managed to drag himself off to the woods where his body was found several days later.

¹⁴⁸ The Indians took Susanna to Tioga and eventually killed her.

¹⁴⁹ Georg's body, riddled with bullets and mutilated, was found the following day, still guarded by his faithful dog.

In the summer of 1752, Brother Josef, Heinrich Antes, and four others left on horseback to explore and purchase one hundred thousand acres of land in North Carolina. On this tract they named *Wachau* (Meadow of the Watch) believers coming both from Europe and Pennsylvania built the communities of Bethabara, Salem, Friedberg, Friedland, and Emmaus. And from here Pilgrims left to bring the good news of peace to the Cherokee and Catawba Indian tribes.

South of York, Pennsylvania, the brothers began the small community of *Gnadenheim* (Home of Grace), and near Lancaster, a larger one they named Lititz, after the first home of the Unity of Brothers in Moravia. In Lititz, and at Hope, New Jersey, they built brothers' and sisters' choir houses in beautiful "home communities" from which the brothers contacted seekers far and wide.

The Revolutionary War brought new trials to the believers, in particular to the Christian Indians of the Tuscarawas Valley in Ohio. American militiamen massacred eighty-six of them at the village of Gnadenhütten and the rest fled to Canada. Opposition continued here and there but on the Love Feast celebrating fifty years at Bethlehem, in 1792, thousands had been added at immeasurable cost, and immeasurable gain, to the Saviour's Gemeinde in America. And in that Love Feast, as a special witness to his grace, one of the eight surviving settlers was still able to take part. That was Katharina Budmanski Huber. Christ's words still fascinated her.

15

To The South

In the wet fall of 1734 Brother Josef took the post coach to Köln am Rhein. High water and muddy roads hindered him all the way. At Köln he joined a company of Jews travelling to Nijmwegen. “On the way we all nearly lost our lives,” he wrote later. “Our driver got drunk and not only succeeded in rolling our wagon over once, but also got off the trail and so deeply mired in the swamp I thought we would all go under and perish. God helped us. The night was as black as a bag but a man came with a lantern and got us out. Around midnight, after totally losing our way again, we came upon another man who showed us the right road. From Utrecht we took a boat to Amsterdam.”¹⁵⁰

In Amsterdam Brother Josef stayed in the home of the Mennonite minister Jeme Teknatel, an awakened brother, eager to take part in the Saviour’s work however he could. He helped Brother Josef contact the Dutch West India Company with the prospect of settling in Suriname on the coast of South America.

All Herrnhut, perpetually in trouble with German authorities, dreamed of settling in a new land. Would Suriname prove the Saviour’s choice? Brother Josef did all he could to find out, and a year later the community sent Georg Piesch (a shoemaker who had fled from Kunvald in Moravia), Georg Berwich, and Christoph von Larisch, a young convert from a noble family, to sea.

Their voyage started out badly. Leaving Texel in the Netherlands at the beginning of October on a ship of the Dutch West India Company, they had barely lost sight of the last lights on Cornwall before a storm struck.

Everyone turned sick. So violently did the storm pitch and toss the ship in the waves that a Jew sharing the brothers’ cabin lost his mind and came plunging after Christoph, trying to stab him with a nail. Of thirty-five soldiers on board the ship, the brothers never saw more than ten sober at a time. But after three months they landed safely at Fort Zeelandia, outside Paramaribo, on the Suriname River.

Nothing they had imagined prepared them for what they found. Every year the planters of Suriname, Dutch, English, French and German, one third of them Jews, imported from ten to twelve thousand slaves from Africa. From ships unloading at Fort Zeelandia the brothers watched them come, “like walking skeletons covered with a piece of tanned leather,” to be branded, given names, and fattened for sale—traders seeing to it that women expected babies, if at all possible, to bring higher prices. Under the blazing sun the brothers from Herrnhut watched them

pick cotton and cut cane. In the fine houses of Paramaribo they saw them wait on their indolent masters—many of them unmarried but living in a circle of concubines—and state of society in the New World dawned slowly upon them.

¹⁵⁰ *Brief Spangenberg's an Zinzendorf, Amsterdam, d. 7. Dec. 1734*

The first man the brothers visited in Suriname, a pastor of the Dutch Reformed church, warned them to avoid whoredom and laziness. “But we soon discovered he was stuck in both, up to his ears,” the brothers wrote. Horrified, they saw how white children grew up slapping and kicking slaves, and how a white gentleman cracked the skull of a slave on the street for not lifting his hat. White ladies branded beautiful slave girls on their faces, and disfigured them in other ways to keep their husbands from looking at them. Punishment for running away (something the Suriname planters feared with good reason) ranged from cutting off legs and arms, beating with steel rods until every bone was broken, decapitation, and burning at the stake, to such bizarre methods as hanging people from hooks, or tying a fourteen-year-old boy to a dog house, forcing him to bark at every passing boat until he lost his mind.

On the plantations the slaves worked in unhealthy and dangerous conditions. A hatchet hung ready in sugar mills to chop off arms that not infrequently got caught in the rollers. Slaves tasting sugar had all their teeth knocked out at once. And when the brothers found work in a stone quarry at Berg en Daal, south of Paramaribo, they began to suffer like the slaves from heat and malnutrition. Within two months of arrival young Christoph von Larisch died. The two other men, too sick to know clearly what they did, stumbled to and from work “like deaf mutes among the slaves with whom we could not speak” until they found a captain kind enough to take them back to Europe.

Berbice

When he was eight, in his hometown of Wernigerode, in Germany, Ludwig Dehne’s mother died. His father, a soldier, married again, but he grew up unhappy and alone. By the time he turned seventeen, such *Seelenangst* (anguish of soul) had overtaken him that he thought his life had to end. But he met a pilgrim from Herrnhut instead and came to rest in the Saviour’s wounds. His step-mother, when she heard of it, spat in his face. His father turned him out of the house. But Ludwig found work as a tailor in Weimar, and after five years came to Herrnhut where he joined the single brothers’ choir.

Now, with Hans Güttner, a young brother from Silesia, Ludwig accepted the call to South America in 1738. Soon after leaving Texel in the Netherlands a storm hit them. Then Barbary pirates chased them for twelve hours. “How good it is to trust our Saviour in times like this,” Ludwig wrote in his diary.

After three months at sea, the brothers reached Suriname and the mouth of the Berbice River. Eyes wide with wonder, they floated past an Amerindian camp on the shore. Brown people without clothes sat around a fire eating what looked like the roots of a tree. Was this what the Watchword for that day, September 12, 1738, had meant? “I will give them a sign. Some who are awakened I will send to the heathen along the sea, and far away to the islands, where men have not heard about me nor seen my glory. They will tell the heathen of my wonderful works.” With hearts warmed by the Saviour’s promise in a strange land, Ludwig and Hans continued upstream to Fort Nassau.¹⁵¹

The Dutch governor of Berbice Colony did not welcome the brothers from Herrnhut. “Unless you swear the oath of allegiance,” he threatened them, “I will send you away on the first ship that leaves.” Only grudgingly did people give them work. For food and lodging they paid high prices, and before long they both felt sick from the heat. But Hans wrote a cheerful letter to his parents at Herrnhut, hoping it would reach them within a year:

My beloved parents, I greet you from the heart. I kiss your hand, and wish you much grace from our Saviour. This is to tell you we are well and cannot praise him enough for his faithfulness. He helps us through everything. They do not know winter in this land. Fruit grows all year, and there are always twelve hours in the day and twelve in the night. The sun passes straight overhead. There are snakes here as thick as a man and fourteen feet long. We cannot wear our woollen clothing. It is too warm. One makes bread here from a root. It gives two kinds of heathen here, some black and some brown. The black ones are slaves, the brown ones are not and live in little shelters. We visited them. My heart breaks when I see these people. If only I knew their language!

I am doing carpenter work here on a plantation. Brother Dehne is making clothes. Carry no worries for me. It is very well in my heart. I stay your faithful son,

Johann Güttner¹⁵²

As soon as the brothers knew Dutch well enough they began to teach two black boys, James and David, and the son of an Indian chief, a boy they

named Jonathan, how to read and write. The also walked far into the rain forest to meet the Indians. After one trip, Hans wrote:

I got lost and wandered about until ten o'clock at night. Then I came to an Indian shelter. I stayed with them. They took me in good, and made me a fire. It rained very much. They gave me cassava bread to eat but I could not say much to them. In the morning one of them went with me to show me the right trail. I cannot help but see these people with compassion.¹⁵³

In spite of struggles trying to decide what best to do (not always able to agree right away), Ludwig and Hans learned to work together. They held a Singstunde every day and began to celebrate communion in bread and wine, even with only the two of them present.

¹⁵¹ The site of Mara, south of New Amsterdam, Guyana, today.

¹⁵² *Hans Güttner an seinen Vater, Johann Güttner, in Herrnhut, 7. December*

¹⁷³⁸¹⁵³ *Hans Güttner an Leonhard Dober, 8. Februar 1740*

Combé

A month after Ludwig and Hans arrived in Berbice, in 1738, Georg Berwich returned to Paramaribo. This time he came with his new wife Rosina, daughter of Jakob Neisser of Sehlen in Moravia, and the young brother, Michael Tannenberger. “*Sie sahen uns als Wunderthiere an* (they looked at us like animals in a zoo),” Rosina wrote home about the Dutch officials at Fort Zeelandia. No one could understand why ordinary white people from Europe—let alone people without money and no intentions of making much—would come to South America.

“What will you do here?” a Dutch official asked the believers. When told that they intended to farm and work for their living, he shook his head. “You could work hard at this place for a whole year,” he said, “and have nothing to show for your efforts. Only the major cash crops, cotton or sugar, produce, and for that you would need many slaves. You white people cannot work in this heat and with these bugs. It has already been tried. The Labadists came with three hundred people and almost all of them died. So did a group of nineteen families from the Palatinate. Only one woman with her son is still living! It is impossible, and I tell you the truth, you had better go back to Germany while you can!”

Sobered, but not dismayed by the official’s words, the brothers hired themselves out to plantation owners, the Berwichs on the estate of Jan Pieter Visscher, and

Michael at Sandyk, an eight hour journey away. As in Berbice, their eyes soon opened to the wickedness around them. In a letter home, Rosina Berwich wrote: The whites here are much worse than the heathen. They steal and deceive wherever they can, yet if their deeds are uncovered they blame their black slaves! They cannot stand us because we do not live like them. All day long they do nothing but curse and swear, gorge themselves on food, drink wine, and fornicate. They say if we refuse to do likewise we will not survive here, it is the way of this land. I told them such things do not even attract us, and it is terrible how they carry the name of being Christians yet live like that.¹⁵⁴

On the Visscher plantation, both Georg and Rosina—true to the official’s predictions— soon lay sick unto death. Then, to their horror, a black man brought Michael Tannenberger from Sandyk, skin and bones, delirious, and laid him at their feet. Michael no longer knew them. The white people of the plantation shunned them, and with the blacks they could not converse. But the Saviour did not leave them. In May 1739, Rosina wrote to her family in Herrnhut:

We got your letter and read it together. The Saviour gave us much grace and we rejoiced to hear how he does not let the work among his children in all places lie. He will not let us get stuck here in Suriname either. We got a hold of ourselves in the Spirit. We are coming to rest on a foundation of love. We drink from the flood that pours from the Rock. We walk on a highway of grace. . . .

¹⁵⁴ *Brief Rosina Berwich an Anna Nitschmann, 1738*

Right now my husband is very sick according to the body. On May 17 he began having the red dysentery and fever. He has never looked as bad as now. The Saviour knows better than anyone else what is to become of us. My husband is tiny and stooped over inside. It looks bad that we have no medicines with us and I fear for him, yet since I can do nothing about it I will leave it up to the Saviour. He is a doctor to the sick in body and soul, and cures all damage with his blood and power. He is my only comfort. For myself I can say I am still doing well. Even though there are days when I cannot get up, I always recover and get up the following day. May the Saviour be praised for helping me this far so I can serve my husband. Otherwise I do not know how things would go.

This was Rosina’s last letter. No doubt sicker than she let on at the time, she died soon afterward. But both Michael and her husband survived. And the following

year Heinrich and Katherina Steiner (formerly of the “Inspired” in the Wetterau), Johann Hadwig, Heinrich Meisser, and Georg Zeisberger (brother to David) came. So did Franz and Maria Barbara Reynier, formerly of the Ephrata cloister community in Pennsylvania. Their presence brought the brothers great joy and with Franz’s skill as a doctor, everything looked more encouraging. Soon after their arrival, Heinrich Meisser wrote:

What we have to do is important to us and the Saviour will help us overcome the thousand obstacles that stand in the way of freeing the heathen from bondage. We will learn the language now. The Indians are more decent and orderly than the white people among whom the devil keeps his fire and hearth. The white people live like beasts, but we bring everything to the heart of the Saviour. . . . We love one another and will let him show us what to do from here on. . . . It seems as if the power of the blood were already touching the roots of paganism and I expect to see plants and fruit. I am rejoicing in the wounds of the Lamb.

Half an hour’s walk down the river from Paramaribo, the brothers found an abandoned plantation for sale at a place called Combé. They offered its owner, a Jew, three hundred florins, and to their delight, he accepted it. Even though they did not enter the house on the property “for fear it would collapse and fall on our necks” they thanked the Saviour for the citrus and coconut trees already growing there and eagerly made plans to reclaim the rest of it from fast growing jungle vegetation. Besides this, they saw the first signs of a spiritual harvest in South America. Franz Reynier wrote:

On the evening of the day we bought the plantation, such a number of people came to our Singing Hour that the place where we stayed got full. We thought they just came out of curiosity and it would not happen again. But since then such a crowd—including both Jews and Christians—has been coming every evening that only about half of them can get into the house. The rest have to stand in the yard and those among them that know High German the best, help us sing.

On the evening of the 29’th of October we dedicated our little plantation. Before going out we had our Singing Hour in town. Then at seven o’clock we gathered there and held communion. Before going ahead with that we had our band meeting where we expressed our innermost feelings about one another, so that we could forgive one another with the whole heart. I spoke on the importance of communion and what believers may expect from it. I also gave an explanation of the rite of footwashing and why we do it. Then we brothers practised it among

ourselves and our two sisters did the same. After this we had communion and discovered in it the blessing we looked for. We live in close community and daily sense the Spirit of the Saviour among us.

With great anticipation, the brothers planted bananas, sweet potatoes, and cassava on their new land at Combé. They also tried beans, cabbage, and corn. They bought some chickens, a cow and two calves. At the same time Brother Franz Reynier began to visit the “sick houses” of local plantations. In unlit, unventilated quarters, with dirt floors serving as the only drain, he found slaves too sick to walk lying on sloping boards. Undressed, unable to care for themselves, their masters put them there to avoid contaminating the healthy, but with no thought for their cure. The dead lay among the living, and in the tropical heat Brother Franz found nothing but the love of Christ able to penetrate the sick houses’ atmosphere of horror and doom. Even though he could not speak much with the dying slaves he could attend them with mercy, and little by little hearts began to respond.

Opposition From Without

At first the planters of Suriname paid little attention to the believers from Herrnhut. Expecting them to die or get discouraged they thought they had little to worry about. But when their work at Combé began to bear fruit they rose up in alarm.

For years the planters had taken care of slave rebellions, runaways, and insubmission. They had developed ingenious methods of “breaking in” slaves and training them to all manner of work. But when slaves got converted and began to live noble, orderly lives, the planters feared them. They had no idea how to deal with slaves more righteous than themselves, and resorted to further irrationality and violence.

On the other hand, most of the Moravian Pilgrims were craftsmen and day labourers, used to working for others. Most had been refugees and lived in poverty. Like the slaves they had crossed the ocean. Like them, they lived under the arbitrary rule of rich plantation owners, so they naturally felt an affinity with them, and with the Indians in Berbice, from the start. Just as naturally, they felt an aversion for their fellow Europeans. Franz Reynier wrote: In the beginning [the white people] made fun of us, especially the Lutherans. They asked us “What do you poor people think? Will you seven be a church!”

They also made fun of our living together in community of goods. They said that among the people of Suriname not even the closest blood relatives, often not even husbands and wives, could stand one another. They asked us how we could attempt anything so foolish as bringing people together from all corners of the world, people who could barely speak one with another, and who know nothing about one another, then expect them to share everything on the basis of belonging to the same religion!

Another pilgrim wrote soon after arrival in Berbice:

The white people here are as a rule utterly depraved. They think only of staying here until they have made enough money to return to Europe to live in luxury and dissolution the rest of their lives. While they are here they revel in every abomination. For this reason we find it the most comfortable to stay among the Indians. Among them we sense wellbeing in our hearts.¹⁵⁵

The Dutch Reformed pastor of Paramaribo warned his congregation publicly not to have anything to do with the Herrnhuters that “hold everything in common, even their wives.” Beyond that, he pressured colony authorities to pass a law forbidding the brothers to hold public meetings, to pray, to teach, or allow people to take part in their worship.

Fortunately the old house at Combé had many cracks in the walls. To comply with the new law, the brothers shut the door when they held meetings, but as great a crowd gathered as ever to listen in the darkness outside. And some who came grew as bold as to warn their masters they should sooner forbid people to go to drinking houses than to Christian meetings.

Another source of irritation to the Dutch in Paramaribo was the brothers’ refusal to swear or to take part in armed night watch duty. But in this, colony law overrode their objections. In August 1740 the authorities ruled: “In case of enemy attack or other emergencies that call for bearing arms, the Moravian brothers shall be treated in every way like the Mennonites of this country. . . . In the case of swearing of oaths they shall have the option of using the *Mennoniteneydt* (affirmation).” For the time being the brothers’ legal situation seemed secure. But they soon faced. . .

Opposition From Within

Living in close quarters at Combé, with constant questions about food, visitors, work, and plans for the future, the believers found their love for one another tried out. Franz Reynier wrote:

We now live together here on the farm. We are very happy one with another and only wish our little Gemein would be larger. We wish more would come to enjoy our blessedness together, but whoever thinks of coming should be ready to leave all selfish ambition and self will (*Eigenheit* and *Eigenwillen*) behind. The Saviour treats us with greater sharpness here than he does you brothers in Germany. All of us work in close proximity all the time. No one pursues his own interests. No one has more to say than another. Neither do we look through our fingers one at another for we try to help one another in priestly love, even in the small areas of life. We do this in confidence knowing that all of us want to be taken captive in every area by the Lamb.

¹⁵⁵ *Theophilus Schumann, Pilgerhut in Berbice, an Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 27. December 1748*

This makes our Gemeinschaft daily more meaningful and ties us together in such a way that no demon can tear the band of our unity. In the beginning it happened a few times that one did not feel like accepting the loving reminder of another. But we did nothing more than commit the matter to the heart of the Saviour. He pursued that discordant member day and night until he came back in anguish and sorrow to make things right. Now all of us fear to fall into the Saviour's discipline, all recognising that we are students in his school.¹⁵⁶

Often sick and usually feeling tired in the heat, the first of the group to die was Johann Hadwig. None of the rest felt able to take care of the crops they had planted and everything grew up in weeds. The planters (fearful of reports he might spread) forbade Franz to visit their slaves and he turned to making shoes. But sales were slow, the material needs of the community kept growing, and Heinrich Steiner got very discouraged. Even though his wife, Katharina, wanted to stay at Combé he took her to Paramaribo. There she turned sick unto death and in his search for work he neglected her until she had large bed sores. Tempted to discouragement himself, Franz Reynier wrote in 1741:

Men's hearts here as hard as stone. If we hadn't been called to come we would certainly leave. The Jews here are just like in Germany. Slavery has become a part of the black people's mentality. They believe that after death they will go to a

land where there is nothing but eating, drinking, and sensual pleasure. Therefore they are not afraid of death.¹⁵⁷

But Georg Meisser, keeping his focus right, wrote soon afterward:

We have a free and open way to the wounds of the Lamb. This has become such reality for us that it makes pilgrimage a pleasure. How great is our joy, brothers, in being chosen to serve him! I believe the Lord will shoot us like an arrow to hit his mark. For that reason he has let me recover. We were all sick for eight months. The nature of this land and climate oppress the tent [the body] very much. Yet may the Lamb be praised that he gives us such inner cause for rejoicing!¹⁵⁸

Pilgerhut

Coming to the Saviour, for Heinrich Beutel, meant he had to flee from Jägerndorf in Upper Silesia. Even though it was late in the year and the leaves had fallen, the threat of Roman Catholic authorities in his home village forced him on. More than that, he felt obligated to help Katharina Ludwig, another young believer attending meetings with pilgrims from Herrnhut, to escape. Her parents had threatened to turn her in to the police.

Heinrich and Katharina left late at night. But the police got wind of it and set out, four on horseback, two on foot, in hot pursuit. The fugitives heard them come and huddled down in the underbrush, calling on the Saviour to hide them until the sound of their persecutors faded away. Then they got up and ran, tearing their clothes in the night, hardly daring to catch their breath or drink water until they had crossed the mountains and the border into upper Lusatia in safety. There, at Herrnhut, they found refuge in the young brothers' and sisters' choirs. Katharina married Joachim Sensemann,¹⁵⁹ and at Marienborn in the Wetterau Heinrich married Elisabeth Paschke. Eight days later, on October 8, 1739, they left for South America.

156 Nov. 26, 1740¹⁵⁷ *Johann F. Reynier an die theure und ehrwürdige Kreuzgemeinde, 16. September 1741* ¹⁵⁸ *Georg Meisser an Bruder Götz in Heerendyk 27. Januar 1742*

At Fort Nassau on the Berbice River, the newlyweds found Ludwig and Hans still alive and trusting in the Saviour's wounds. On their suggestion they all moved in dug-out canoes a twenty-four-hour journey upstream to the Wironje Creek. Many Indians lived there. Further from Fort Nassau they suffered less opposition from the planters, and with good hope (although Elisabeth was sick with her first

pregnancy) they built a log shelter and named their place *Pilgerhut* (The Pilgrim's Watch).

An eleven-year-old black boy, whom the brothers named Christian, moved to Pilgerhut with them. So did Jaantje, the seven-year-old son of a Dutch father and an Arawak Indian mother. On December 21, 1740, Elisabeth gave birth to a little boy, and not long afterward Johann Gräbenstein, a cheerful brother who had grown up on a farm in Ansbach, in Germany, joined them.

Johann liked children and made friends with Jaantje (who knew Arawak as well as Dutch) at once. Spending hours with him, he gradually produced a simple story of Christ in Arawak, in written form. With this the “three Johns”—Jaantje, Hans Güttner, and Johann Gräbenstein—set off into the virgin rain forest to win South America for the Saviour.

On widely scattered *campos* (grassy clearings in the forest) they found Indian groups, usually five or six families, living with their chiefs. More often than not, the men were out hunting. Some women, if they had not seen white people before, put up their hands and ran screaming into the woods. But Jaantje became a good interpreter, and once they recovered from the shock of meeting, the Indians became very curious. The boys read for them the story of Christ and sang. Sometimes they had to sing on and on, while some Indians looked through their things or touched them to see how they felt. Because the Indian groups moved constantly about, the boys never knew when or where to find them. They carried their own hammocks and enough cassava to last them for five to nine days. Sometimes long snakes or jaguars frightened them. Stinging bugs bothered them all the time, and on unfamiliar trails they easily got lost. Describing one such event, Hans Güttner wrote:

It got dark in the forest and I could no longer see where to go. I crawled on hands and knees to keep on the trail, but even so I got lost. I told it to our Saviour and asked him to help me. When I had told it to him I began searching again and found the way back to the river. There I found my boat and came to the brothers again. Then I thanked the Saviour.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ With whom she travelled to America on the first “sea congregation” where she lost her life in the attack on Gnadenhütten on the Mahoney. She lay sick, upstairs, the night the Indians came.

A few Indians made fun of the boys in their attempt to communicate with them. But as time went on, more and more showed a genuine interest in “the Creator’s Son.” On rare occasions the boys even found men who had worked on plantations

and knew some Dutch. Once they met an Indian who to their amazement spoke Plattdeutsch well.

Back at Pilgerhut, Georg and Susanne (Funk) Kaske, joined the group. Susanne, a convert from Pennsylvania, had grown up on the frontier and took part eagerly on long trips into the rain forest. Not only that, she took special interest in the garden and cassava the brothers had planted. With the rest, she helped care for the fruit trees, coffee bushes, cows, goats, and chickens.

Fresh Start at Combé

After the group at Pilgerhut seemed fairly stable, Hans Güttner left to visit the brothers at Combé, near Paramaribo. By the time he got there, he felt very sick. The Steiners had returned to Europe—no longer part of the brotherhood, even though she had not wanted to leave. The Reyniers had also separated from the rest, and everyone looked discouraged. Hans grew steadily worse himself, and died on August 23, 1742. Two months later, Wilhelm and Magdalena (Müller) Zander arrived.

Newly married, the Zanders came from Berks County, Pennsylvania, where he had been studying Indian languages with Conrad Weiser. Soon after they arrived, Wilhelm wrote:

I found the brothers in a state of confusion. The devil had deceived them and filled their heads with things against one another. He had managed to divert their eyes from the wounded Lamb and was trying to turn them crazy. Yet in their hearts they longed to return to the Lamb and wished for a new hour of grace in which they could be bound together in love again. This took place on the first Sunday after our arrival, and was inwardly felt by all present. We felt *him*. Now we are totally new people together! Once more we are people who see the Lamb and call on him. We look to him to lead our way to the Indian people.¹⁶¹

Wilhelm and Magdalena began visiting the people around them—black, brown, and white—at once. Describing what happened by Christmas, he wrote:

On the night of Christ, December 24, 1742, all of us were together in great blessedness. We discussed our circumstances thoroughly and what we should do from here on. It occurred to us to ask our Saviour to send us an Indian soul for a gift. This our deep desire was granted the very next morning. A young man, an

Indian, came walking in. He was a decent fellow and we named him Franz. He soon made it known that he wanted to stay with us and has been here since.

¹⁶⁰ *Hans Güttner an die theure und liebe Kreuzgemeinde, 5. December*

¹⁷⁴¹₁₆₁ *Bericht Zanders über seine Thätigkeit in Suriname, 1742*

With new hope stirring the believers at Combé, they dared make an offer and purchased five hundred acres on the Cottica Creek. That involved travel in dugout canoes. None of them had experience, and in a sudden rainstorm several of the brothers almost drowned together. But not until the week of Christ's passion did serious accidents occur. Franz set out to look for game. After waiting a long time on him to return, the brothers saw his capsized boat come floating downstream and knew something had gone wrong. They set out to look for him, but Georg Zeisberger got into deep water and drowned. Wilhelm Zander became too sick to remember what he was doing or even to recognise people, while his wife had her first baby. Six days later it died, and Franz and Maria Barbara Reynier returned to Pennsylvania.

The Gemeine at Pilgerhut

In spite of setbacks at Combé, the Saviour's Gemeine at Pilgerhut in Berbice, flourished. One evening when the boys came to an Arawak settlement several days journey into the rain forest, a very old woman came to sit beside Johann Gräbenstein. She listened carefully as he read the story of Christ. When he finished she asked him to read it again—and again. Finally, when she understood how the Son of Kururuman (the Arawak's name for the Creator) had come to die, and how his blood washes guilt away, her face beamed. "I want to be washed in the blood," she said.

With Jaantje's help, Johann talked with her and prayed. But the next day, when the old woman insisted on coming with them, the brothers gently told her it was impossible. "We live too far away," they said. "It will take us three days to get back and you could not walk that far."

The old woman surprised them. Shortly afterward, while the brothers worked around Pilgerhut, she suddenly appeared on the edge of the forest, with her daughter. Pointing to herself she said, "Wash me in the blood from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet!"

Struck with wonder, the believers at Pilgerhut could do nothing but praise the Saviour and get ready for their first baptism in South America. In their community diary they wrote:

We believed her desire was from the heart, and the Saviour allowed us (through the use of the lot) to baptise her on the 31st of March. She was the first of her people. Our sisters put a long white gown on her and led her into the Saal. Brother Kaske spoke to the congregation. Then our sisters knelt with her and Brother Kaske poured water over her head, three times, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, while naming her Hanna. One could not keep back the tears. Our sisters laid hands on her and blessed her. Then they led her, light and joyful, out of the Saal.¹⁶²

¹⁶² *Diarium von Pilgerhut, 31. März 1748*

With old Hanna's conversion the windows of heaven seemed to open over the South American rain forest. Soon after her, the brothers baptised an Arawak believer they named Simeon. After him came Magdalena, then Jonathan, the boy the Indian chief had entrusted to their care. Old Hanna's grandson received baptism as Nathanael, along with Jakob and his wife Sara, who knew Dutch. Isaak followed, and a fifteen-year-old girl the believers named Elisabeth.

No one could doubt the transformation. Their faces shone. Released from *Jawahu* (Satan) whom they recognised as chief of evil spirits, they revelled in the joy of freedom from fear. As the Saviour whom they called *Wakukü* (Our Life) forgave them, they learned to forgive one another. Old Hanna told the brothers how her heart turned warm inside her, and others testified to feeling the Lamb's blood pouring over them.

The believers from Herrnhut boldly preached Christ and him crucified— never questioning whether it made sense to the Arawak Indians or not. And, strangely enough, it made sense. The more Johann Gräbenstein learned their language, the better he understood their beliefs about God and the world. In the beginning, Arawak Indians believed, all people used to live happy lives in a land of plenty. No one used to die. But when people disobeyed Kururuman they had to go out of that land. That he should now have sent his Son to make it possible to get back, did not seem at all incredible. More and more believed and almost daily baptisms took place at Pilgerhut.

On the feast of Christ's Resurrection, in 1749, the brothers and a great number of Indians gathered for the singing of the Paschal Litany and a love feast—a brown-skinned multitude, mostly naked, but with the baptised ones dressed in white linen robes. Jakob's wife, Sara, did the interpreting and the brothers baptised a young convert they named Christian.

Christian's parents received baptism soon afterwards as Johannes and Maria, followed by Thomas and Esther, with Isaac's wife, *eine sehr dreiste Wilde* (a very bold savage), who took the name Rebekka. Joseph became a follower of the Lamb, together with his two wives, Mary and Martha, admonished by the brothers not to be selfish in their places. When Rosina and Lydia (old Hanna's daughter who had walked with her to Pilgerhut) received baptism with Lydia's husband Philip, three Arawak sisters, Sara, Rebekka, and Magdalena, laid hands on them. Jonas, Bathsheba, and Joshua followed. Then Moses and Miriam, a married couple baptised together, and Jeptha, who had been the most powerful *bogayer* (medicine man) of the region, with his wife Debora and two others.

Behind it all, old Hanna spent her days sitting on a hammock under a thatched roof on poles at Pilgerhut. Too old to work anymore she spent her time praying. Day and night she prayed until every one of her grown descendants—her children, her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren, and her great-great-grandchildren—had come, one after another, to rest in the Saviour's wounds. She prayed until the day following a particularly blessed love feast on July 31, 1760, when with a smile on her wrinkled face, she went home.

“Orderly and Beautiful Lives in Peace”

So many Arawak people came to Pilgerhut to live that the brothers needed to settle them in satellite communities, Gnadenhütten, and Friedenshütten, along the Wironje Creek. There, amid cassava patches and fruit trees, they learned how to follow Christ. The pilgrims from Herrnhut, a chronicler of the church in Berbice wrote, “were not only sent out as preachers, but as Christian colonists. Through their work and way of life they were to show the Indians and black people what Christ is like and to win them for him.”¹⁶³ This involved challenges.

Arawak men had never done gardening or work around home. They only hunted, and let the women do the rest. Even women expecting babies, or with little ones in their care, worked in cassava patches while men sat in hammocks under the shade. How would this change? The German brothers at Pilgerhut decided to

teach by example—and it worked. Before long, all believing men pulled weeds and built their own houses.

Used to continual heat in the rain forest, Arawak families lived without clothes. But after they loved the Saviour, their thinking changed. Theophilus Schuman, who came to Pilgerhut with his new wife from Germany in 1748, wrote:

Every morning and evening when they are home we have hours (meetings) with them. We read to them about the Lamb and speak with them through Jonathan, our interpreter as well as we can. We feel the presence of the Lamb among us. Four young brothers live with us so they do not have to be constantly among the naked women. They have made a room for themselves alongside that of our single European brothers, and we try to spend as much time with them as possible. Until now they have been used to nothing but unlimited personal liberty. Now they are learning to study. They are starting to speak a nice German, and are understanding us better all the time. We expect the Saviour will use them as witnesses among their own people.¹⁶⁴

When asked if they wanted to get married, the young Arawak believers, did not seem in a hurry. They showed more interest in teaching and as soon as Immanuel and Aquilla learned how to read they began to hold classes for the rest. They also helped the brothers from Germany translate Scriptures and songs. This provided more challenges. The Arawaks, for instance, had no concept of sin. But they knew what disobedience meant. They only dimly comprehended abstract ideas like love, worship, or faith. But they lived according to rigid ethics of their own. It did not take long for the Europeans to realise they had things to learn from the Arawaks too.

The Indians kept themselves cleaner than the Europeans. Believing that sweat weakens the body, they bathed frequently throughout the day. In their houses—thatched shelters without walls—they sat on clean sand, and they treated one another very politely. Young people called their parents and others of that age “honoured ones.” Older people called all young men “handsome ones” and it took the believers from Herrnhut a while to learn the correct titles for women, girls and children, and how to use them.

¹⁶³ Fritz Stähelin

¹⁶⁴ From a letter to Ludwig von Zinzendorf, December 27, 1748.

Even though the Arawaks did not have an exact word for humility, they well knew the attitude. One should not look another person in the face while speaking

“like a dog,” they believed. Rather, one should rise so that others might sit and count it a privilege to give. Arawak hospitality always involved eating and drinking together.

Jonathan, along with Sara, became a gifted interpreter—repeating in musical, almost sadsounding Arawak, what the brothers told him in German. Not only did he repeat what the brothers said, he offered brilliant explanations of his own, and evening meetings at Pilgerhut soon attracted up to one hundred and fifty or more people—old Bilka, a crippled widow regularly first in the Saal. On joyful *Gemeintäge* (monthly all-day meetings) the Indian believers listened with great interest to letters from Germany, Greenland, Africa, and from their distant kin in North America.

Life in communal residences at Pilgerhut (from three to five families to every house) provided the new believers with pleasant fellowship. Even work became pleasant as they learned to do it together in a Christian way. Before they met the Saviour, the Indians drank fermented cassava and fought at their festivals. Now, during the cassava harvest, or at great fish poisonings along the river, they sang German and Arawak songs. They held frequent love feasts, and around fires in the tropical night they listened to brothers speak of the Saviour whom they loved.

During these evening meetings, the believers first noticed new faces among the crowd— not Arawaks, but painted Caribs and Waraus, clutching tall spears. Silently, cautiously, they came out of the woods, then disappeared again. But the brothers did not fear. The Lamb was with them in the heart of the South American wilderness, and like him, they had no need of arms.

On Christmas eve, 1748, the believers celebrated the baptism of Peter and Anna. On New Year’s day Cornelius, Noah and Tabea, Rachel (Peter’s second wife), old Leah, and Jeptha with his two wives, Caritas and Rosina, received baptism, and the community diary reports:

Our Esther went out after the meeting with several sisters and most of the visiting women. She explained to them what they had heard. They stayed out until late in the night, praying, and from this time on, it happened regularly.

The first Arawak wedding, celebrated with great joy at Pilgerhut, united Christian (Johannes’s son) and Klara, in marriage. Wilhelmina, a young Arawak believer, married Elieser, a Carib, soon afterward.

In their unconverted state the Arawaks feared nothing more than death, and the souls of the departed. But the Pilgerhut Diary describes what happened when the first believers among them died:

Our old brother Simeon was the first of the Arawak Christians to go home. He was sick for a week. Every time we spoke with him he was content and remembered the wounds of the Lamb. Minutes before he took his last breath one of the brothers asked him what he was thinking. He answered, “I am thinking about the Lamb of God and how he will make me a new person.”

Moments after Simeon went home, our old sister Naemi (mother of Jephtha and Rebekka) followed him. Before her death she had spent much of her time in conversation with the Lamb.

We held the burial in the evening. We covered the coffins with white cloth and decorated them with green branches from trees. Everyone gathered in the Saal. We sang and spoke to those who gathered of the blessedness of going to be with the Lamb. Then we walked, a long column of people following those who carried the coffins, to where we laid the bodies to rest. Four brown brothers and two white ones carried the coffins. We sang while we buried them. Then we returned in an orderly way to the Saal. We thanked the Lamb for blessing with such grace the homegoing of these first believers among the Arawaks. Instead of being filled with fear and superstition they all left with a great blessing.

Another entry in the Diary reports:

Our nine-year-old Daniel was bitten by a snake and soon died. One could picture in him the boy Jesus. He was a decent, blessed, child. Half a year ago when his grandmother was mourning the death of her son Cornelius, he said: “Do not cry, Grandmother. He is with the Saviour. We will soon be there and see him too!” Yesterday in the childrens’ hour he had such a happy face, fixing eager eyes on the teacher who spoke. He always paid attention like that. Today, down by the river, as soon as he got bitten by the snake he told his parents: “I will not stay with you. I am going to the Saviour.” Soon afterward he said: “Now it is over. I no longer feel any pain.” Then he died.¹⁶⁵

Not everyone that came to Pilgerhut learned to walk with Christ. Sometimes, because they did not understand the people well, it took the brothers a while to notice what happened among them—like the illicit relationship that developed between a black boy and an Indian woman they took in. A few walked off with things that did not belong to them, lied when questioned, or covered up the sins of others. But the beautiful testimonies of the sincere, far outshone every trial, and convinced the brothers over and over that their coming from Europe to South America had not been in vain. Wilhelm Zander wrote in 1745:

¹⁶⁵ *Diarium von Pilgerhut, 31. März 1758*

Now we live in joyful community one with another, sensing the efforts of our beloved Mother [the Holy Spirit]. The Lamb is with us and we feel his wounds. I rejoice to be his little creation, to love him and to know that he loves us—not from compulsion but voluntarily, out of grace!¹⁶⁶

Theophilus Schuman wrote:

The Arawak brothers and sisters have the privilege of coming to know without detraction or confusion the centre of all blessedness: the Lamb with the wound in his side. Washed with the blood and water of that wound it is no wonder that excesses so often associated with revival have not occurred among them. They have thrown themselves down before their Redeemer and are constantly becoming more joyfully dependent on his wounds. Their blessedness has greatly increased since we can speak their language well enough to talk to them without interpreters.¹⁶⁷

In a letter to Brother Ludwig he added in 1748: “As often as one comes upon Pilgerhut in the wilderness where so many live orderly and beautiful lives in peace, one has to fall down and kiss the feet of the Lamb.”¹⁶⁸

A Growing Light

Far from a trackless wilderness, the brothers from Herrnhut found South America’s rain forest a complex world of its own—complete with efficient communications and travel. It did not take long for the parents, brothers and sisters, and more distant relatives of the Arawak believers to learn about Pilgerhut. A few, like Thomas and Esther, left on regular journeys into the forest, bringing others back with them every time. The baptised believers Amos and Ignatius with their wives, and Manasse, a single brother went to live west of the Essequibo River, toward the great falls (Kaietur). Tobias went even further, to the Orinoco River delta, and did not return for several years. But when he did, the brothers rejoiced to see him even more at rest in the Saviour’s wounds than before.

The same could be said for Jeremias and Abisai of whom the Pilgerhut Community Diary reports:

Jeremias and Abisai came back to us from the other side of the Essequibo. We had not seen them for five years. They confirmed our feeling that once a soul has truly come to know the Lamb, he will not lightly remove himself from his

faithful arms. The two brothers told us we should not think of them forgetting the Saviour. The thought that he died for them and that they belonged to him, washed in the blood, never left them in all their travels.¹⁶⁹

Jeptha, the converted medicine man, and his wife travelled far to the south where he spoke about the Saviour at many tribal councils. When he returned after a year he described how they had travelled to the end of the Essequibo, carried their canoes across the hills and floated down other streams to a great river in the south (the Amazon?). Around this time the first Warau family came to live at Pilgerhut, and a delegation of strange but “very decent Indians” came from the Orinoco delta to “hear about the Lamb.” So did a group of fifty from the Muruka area, and a chief from the Corantijn River with eighty men, women, and children.

¹⁶⁶ *Wilhelm Zander an Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 29. November 1745*¹⁶⁷

Theophilus Schumann an die Societät in Zeist, 23. Juli 1749

¹⁶⁸ December 27, 1748¹⁶⁹ *Diarium von Pilgerhut, 18. März, 1757*

Visits the German brothers themselves made into the rain forest no longer resembled their first laborious journeys. No one feared them anymore. Requests came constantly, begging them to come here and there. But even they stood in wonder before the Lamb the day an old man walked out of the forest into the clearing at Pilgerhut. He came with a circle of dignitaries, carrying a silver-studded cane. Through their interpreters the brothers learned he was the “chief of chiefs,” the head of the Arawak nation itself.

Ephrem

By the mid-1750s the brothers needed more space and Ludwig Dehne with the Arawak leader Christoph moved to a new location on the Corantijn River with a large group of believers. They named it Ephrem. But within a short time everyone turned sick. The Indians felt sure evil spirits lived there and fled. Christoph stayed for a while longer, then for two years Ludwig, trusting in eventual victory through Christ, laboured on alone.

So sick he could scarcely walk Ludwig cleared the land, planted bananas, fifty coffee bushes, sweet potatoes, oranges, and limes. Before he harvested his first crop he went many a day without food. One time an ant bit him and he did not know how long he had lain unconscious before he came to. Another time a snake nearly strangled him. In his diary he wrote:

When I lay down in my hammock to sleep a fairly large snake let itself down from the roof beams upon me. It circled three times around my neck and head and began pulling itself tight. I thought this could be my end. With my one hand I could reach a piece of chalk and with it I wrote on the table: "Do not think it was the Indians that killed me. It was a snake." Then it came to me to call on the Saviour to deliver me. I pushed upwards on the snake so suddenly and so hard I skinned my cheek, but I got it off. It was dark and I could not see where it went, so I crawled back into my hammock to sleep. Every evening, for a while, a jaguar would roar close to my shelter.¹⁷⁰

More worrisome than the danger of wild animals, however, were the hostile Caribs of the region. In his diary Ludwig wrote:

In November [1757] the Carib Indians finally came to carry out their threat of striking me dead. At noon, while I was eating, around fifty men came on canoes and surrounded my shelter. They were terrible to see. Some had iron hatchets and some knives. Some carried wooden clubs and other weapons. I went out and welcomed them in Arawak. One man, whom I noticed was their captain, shouted back, "Talk to us in Carib." They said more things but seeing I could not understand, they finally had an interpreter step forward. "Who gave you permission to build here?" he asked.

"The governor," I answered. "Why did you come to our land?"

I answered with pleasure: "I have brothers across the great water. They heard that the people of this land do not know their Creator, so they sent me to tell you about him. I am to learn your language, then more of my brothers may come to join me.

"Are you Spanish?"

"No."

"Are you French?"

"No."

"Are you from the Low Country then?"

"No. I came here from the Low Country, but I came from further away. I come from the brothers who love you."

"Have you not heard that we want to kill you?"

"Yes, but I did not believe it. You have men among you who have spent time with me and who know that I did not come to harm you."

"That is true," the chief answered, "and they have told me that you are not like other white men."

“So if you know that I love you, why would you want to kill me?” At this the Carib chief began to smile and the circle broke form. Through the interpreter they began to ask me questions. Before they left they wondered how I stood for food, and promised to bring me some.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ludwig Dehne, *Lebenslauf*

With the Caribs on his side, Ludwig’s situation gradually improved and new believers came to join him at Ephrem. First a few, then steadily growing numbers of Caribs and Waraus found peace in the Saviour’s wounds. Visitors came, sometimes sixty or more at a time, bringing chickens, fish, and fresh venison. After several more years at Ephrem, the entire community moved to a healthier and more adequate location upstream they called *Hoop* (Hope). The pilgrim Hans Wied described it years later:

The house at Hoop is somewhat like an Indian house, and somewhat like the houses of the colonists. The front side is covered with boards. The other three sides have double walls of sticks, plastered white. The inside partitions are also of sticks. The floors are of a hard-packed mixture of clay and chalk. The ceilings of the brothers’ and sisters’ rooms are also of sticks, but the large room where they eat together and where they have their meetings is open up to the roof of cane and palm thatch. Covered walkways lead to all the outbuildings, the kitchen, the storehouses and stables so that in rainy weather one can get everywhere in the dry.

Saron

Early in 1757 the believers Elias, Immanuel, Bartholomäus, and sixty others set up camp at the mouth of the Corantijn to fish where its wide brown waters merge into the tropical sea. To watch a ship coming upon them did not surprise them. But when they recognised the face of their beloved brother Johann Gräbenstein on board (coming back from Germany), the Indian believers went wild with rejoicing.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

Johann did not come by himself. On the brotherhood’s ship with his new wife Rosalina, he came with Wilhelm Zander, Mathias Nyborg (an unmarried brother from Finnland) and six other men—the converted sea captain, Nicholas Garrison, at the wheel—with a load of materials to build a new community in Suriname.

Much had happened to Captain Garrison since his trip to Greenland with Christian David. Coming back to Germany from there, he found his wife and one of his children had died. But he married again, made more trips between Pennsylvania, England, and the Netherlands, and now found himself in South America—eager to do what he could for the Saviour's Gemein. Pulling up to the docks at Nieuw Nickerie on the Suriname coast, the newcomers from Europe met their second surprise: Theophilus Schuman and a group of brothers from Pilgerhut en route to Combé. Rejoicing for the Lamb's direction in bringing them together on the wild coast of South America they sat down for an impromptu love feast in his name.

Soon afterward the rejoicing turned into serious considerations. The group came in the rainy season and all turned sick. Johann Gräbenstein died even before Captain Garrison decided on a site for the new community, a lovely plain along the Saramakka River. His widow married Wilhelm Zander (Magdalena had died and was buried at sea). While laying out the new site Captain Garrison—as skilled a surveyor as he was a pilot—walked into a nest of bees that almost stung him to death. But with the willing cooperation of all, a circle of buildings stood in the wilderness and the brothers knelt on the clean sand floor of a new Saal by March 25, 1757.

They had hurried to finish it before the feast of the Lamb's Resurrection. But Mathias Nyborg's home going came first. Never complaining, always eager to help (the morning the brothers at Herrnhut knocked on the door of his room to ask him to go to Suriname they found him standing with his bags already packed) he had turned deathly sick before anyone knew it. During his last days he seemed to speak constantly, very happily, with the Saviour. But no one understood him because in his delirium he spoke only Finnish, until he drew his last breath and they laid him to rest beneath the aloe trees. With the help of some from Pilgerhut, Aquila (chosen a leader in the congregation), Levi (one of the best hunters in the group) Ananias, Stephanus, and Timotheus with their wives, and the single sister Maria Agnes, the believers planted new cassava plots, yams and cacao at Saron. All thanked the Saviour for their new refuge in the wilderness, but the day after a blessed Gemeintag and communion on June 25, 1761 the Bosneger (bands of runaway slaves that lived in the rain forest) attacked.

Just before the morning meeting on the Lord's day, Ludwig Dehne, on a visit to Saron, returned from his morning walk in the woods. Suddenly he saw the brother Daniel Kamm come running wildly toward him. Shots rang out, followed by

terrible screams. Wilhelm Zander fled from a burning house and Ludwig saw one of the Indian brothers fall with a long arrow sticking from his back. Within moments flames roared from the palmthatched buildings of Saron, but neither Ludwig nor any of those that escaped remained to see what would happen.

Only after days of flight in almost continual rain, living on fruits of the forest, did a number of those that survived find their way back together. At Saron they found the bodies of eight believers that had died in the attack. Eleven women and children had disappeared, presumably kidnapped by the Bosneger, and most of the buildings at Saron lay in ruins. But taking fresh courage in the Saviour, the brothers set out to repair what was left and keep on building the community. Old Georg Weber, refugee from Kunvald in Moravia, pioneer on St. Thomas and St. Croix, moved with his fourth wife, Martha, into what had been an Indian shelter. Others cleaned out the cow barn in which to live, and a few settled in the carpenter's shop. All turned sick. Both Georg and Martha soon died and Theophilus Schumann who had come to Saron followed them shortly.

Bambey

Early in 1763 the community at Saron, thriving once more in the Saviour's love, hosted three unusual guests. Black guests, and very shy, they came from a twenty-two day journey up the Saramakka River.

At first the guests, who knew some Indian words and English creole (the language used by slaves), did not talk much. They only said they came from large villages up the river where they planted yams and sugar cane, where they kept chickens and pigs, and found wild game in abundance. But the more they questioned them, the more convinced the believers at Saron became that they were the very men who had fallen on Saron earlier and destroyed it.¹⁷² Knowing this, they became immensely interested in them and tried to learn more.

What had brought about the change in the Bosneger's attitude toward them? What did they know about God, and how could one get there?

Following the instructions their black visitors left them, Ludwig Dehne with two young brothers, Rudolf Stoll from Winterthur in Switzerland and Thomas Jones from England, left in 1765, to travel up the Saramakka River.

Several weeks travel upstream, having found their way through five sections of raging white water, the brothers reached the settlement where Abini, one of the men who had visited them, lived. In his diary Ludwig wrote:

¹⁷² Seven years later when a band of Bosneger visited Saron, the brothers wondered about an Indian man among them. It turned out he was Gottlieb, the son of the Arawak brother Ignatz, kidnapped on the day of the massacre in 1761. He had become totally absorbed in Saramakkan black society and married there.

On the 24'th of December, around two in the afternoon we arrived at the village where Abine lives. Roars and screams of joyful welcome, along with the firing of guns, followed us until we were inside one of the lodges. Close to it sat the council house. As soon as the elders had gathered there they summoned me. The head elder stood in the middle of the circle and spoke to all about what he had in mind for us and our work. Everyone was very happy and thanked him. After the meeting Abini came and invited us to live with him. We accepted his offer and I began to tell them about their Creator, and the one who loved them enough to give his blood for their peace. "Well," he said, "You must be talking about our Gran Gado!"

"That is right," I told him. "I am talking about the one who made heaven and earth, the one whom all men must honour and obey." At this the Bosneger trembled and feared that their gods would be unhappy.

Several nights later a terrible roar echoed through the Bosneger village. No one knew where it came from, but the people did not doubt their gods were angry and staged a three day feast to pacify them. Even Ludwig, who had spent many years among the heathen, had never seen or heard anything like it. The Bosneger were not gentle, peace-loving people like the Arawaks. One could not even talk with them as to the stern Caribs. Pounding on drums, shouting in unearthly voices in unison, and dancing until they wallowed in the dirt, rolling their eyes back into their heads, the Bosneger worshipped cruel spirits and seemed in bondage to them. Women ruled the village, often through dark spiritual powers, and even little children took part in wild celebrations.

Unlike the Indians, the Bosneger (still remembering the horror of slavery) held no respect for white men. Some demanded guns from the brothers, and on not receiving them became angry. But Abini showed himself friendly and placed his grandson, a twelveyear-old boy named Schippio, into Rudolf Stoll's care.

The brothers settled close to the village and began to plant peanuts. After two months Thomas Jones died, but Christ's presence became ever more powerful.

Arrabini, a leader among the Bosneger, began to question the power of their gods and show serious interest what the brothers had to say about the Saviour and his blood.

Early one morning Arrabini took a decorated wooden *obeah* (cult figure) and burned it to see what would happen. Then he took his gun, went down to the river and trained it on a lazy crocodile, worshipped by the villagers. “If you are really a god,” he told the crocodile, “I will not hit you. But if you are just an animal, I will shoot and kill you.”

A shot rang out and the crocodile dropped dead.

The whole village reacted in horror. “What will happen to us now?” the people wailed. “Arrabini has slain the body of a god!”

Before long Arrabini lay in his house, deathly sick. Everyone believed the gods had cursed him. The witch doctor cursed him too and said he could never have children again. But Arrabini recovered. When he found a Boma snake in his house one night (another supposed god) he killed it too, and a year later his wife gave birth to a little boy. They named him Isaak.

The unconverted villagers, led by their chief priestess, did what they could to hinder the brothers and drive them away. One man became possessed by a spirit identifying himself as Jesus, and tried to convince the villagers to listen to him instead of to Ludwig and Rudolf. But more and more began to hunger after the truth. Grego, the son of the chief priestess herself, began to come to the brothers’ evening meetings for Bible study and prayer. The Saviour touched his heart. With tears in his eyes he promised to go back to the village and tell everyone about Christ.

Thoni and Fonso, Grego’s friends, began to come, followed by a boy named Jessu, and with great joy, Rudolf noticed their hearts becoming tender before the Lamb as they learned how to read and write. When Schippio had a sore foot, an infected puncture wound, he prayed for it to get better. On his slate he wrote, “Jesus meki mi foette kom boen.” On the day Arrabini, the first believer among the Bosneger, received baptism in the name of Christ a great crowd of villagers converged upon the meeting with cutlasses, loaded guns, terrible shouts, and curses. But Arrabini, baptised Johannes, gave them a calm and beautiful testimony and the crowd faded away in fear. Schippio received baptism some time later as David, and Grego as Christian, followed by many more.

With Johannes Arrabini’s help the brothers built a community at Bambey on the Saramakka River. Once more they planted cassava and bananas. Once more they

built a Saal and celebrated great love feasts in holy joy—not infrequently with visitors from the Saron Indian community they had once destroyed.

“Christ’s Sacred Nearness”

Johannes Arrabini, beloved leader of the Saramakkan Christians, became known in the communities of the rain forest as a quick and wise counsellor. When a careless man told him he did not fear hell because he would have much company there, Johannes told him: “Go stick your hand in the fire. Does it hurt any less to burn all your fingers at once?” No matter what the evil one and his followers brought up against him, Johannes overcame their opposition with the blood of the Lamb, and the Saviour’s healing power spread through Suriname.

In 1767 the brothers bought a large wooden house in Paramaribo itself. With a well and water tank, a garden, and numerous outbuildings, they began a Christian community unlike any they had attempted before. Johann Gottlieb Krohn from Stettin on the North Sea, Johann and Eva Penner from Schwerin, and other believers from Germany began to make clothes. They hired free blacks to help them and loaned slaves from masters in the city. Their business prospered. Learning songs and listening to stories about Jesus while they worked together, the employees of the clothing factory soon became a band of earnest seekers—a black brother, Cupido, who took the name Christian, becoming the first to receive baptism.

But even in Paramaribo, the heat, the opposition, and the challenge of their racial diversity, kept the believers struggling for survival—both physically and spiritually. Those not sick unto death were always hot, itchy, molested by stinging bugs day and night, or suffering from eye infections. Steady rain could last up to forty-eight hours or more, sometimes beating down so hard no one could hear what the brothers said in their meetings. After Johann Penner and most of the other Europeans at Paramaribo, including her husband Jesse, had died, Charlotte Petersen wrote a letter home in 1762:

All the men have gone home, and now Sister Weber has gone home too. Regina (Frau Millies) and I are the only ones left. We cry much and our hearts could dissolve in lamentation for all the brothers and sisters we have lost. It is very hard on the tent [the body] here, especially for people already over forty. Such people, like us, cannot take the climate and are soon delivered off. When one comes here the air is so hot and heavy it feels like one will suffocate. Then one is soon sick and it goes between life and death.¹⁷³

In all the communities of Suriname and Berbice, the list of those who “went home” [died] grew rapidly longer, and in constant need the brothers and sisters of all races—black, brown, and white—learned to share their suffering with Christ and one another. One night the believers at Pilgerhut heard terrified wailing (*klägliches Geschrei*) outside as the Arawak brother, Philip, came running with his little daughter, just bitten by a snake. During a meeting at the same place, the sisters suddenly noticed two abaras, the most poisonous snakes of all, under their benches. Another one appeared among the children during a love feast, and at Saron an eight-foot-long kunukusi bit the Arawak brother Elias.

Fields, laboriously cleared by hand in rain forest communities, soon lost their fertility and the brothers at Pilgerhut had to search far and wide, some travelling all the way to the Demerara colony, for enough cassava to feed themselves. Even so they had barely enough. Ants and blight destroyed what they planted, and faced with the need to pay all their own expenses (the European communities having enough debts of their own) the brothers lived simply and worked hard. They also experimented with whatever they thought might bring extra income. Theophilus Schuman collected spiders, scorpions, and centipedes to preserve in alcohol and send to Europe in case they had medicinal properties. He also offered to supply a German pharmacy with regular shipments of snake fat, and tried raising vanilla. Others made shoes and did carpenter work.

Travel, both on South America’s wide rivers and at sea, involved dangers. When the brothers on the Corentijn bought a boat they sunk it with everything inside on the way back from the Demerara. On another occasion they soaked two hundred pound sacks of flour and the sisters had to bake it all right away—making Zweiback to last for months.

Spanish and French pirates lurked along the coast. On one occasion when they fell on a group of believing Indians the Arawak brother Stephanus startled them. He had lived along the Orinoco River and in good Spanish told them about the Lamb of God. In 1781 Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice fell to the English under Sir George Rodney. A year later they passed into French hands, then back to the Dutch. Then all the colonies became English until their final partition to France, the Netherlands and England after the Napoleonic war.

¹⁷³ September, 1762, from Paramaribo

During these disorders the brothers Hans-Georg Jorde and Kaspar Pfeiffer suffered capture at sea. Carried off with three hundred prisoners (eighty of whom

soon died) they suffered unspeakable thirst and brutal treatment. Hans- Georg died too but Kaspar kept his courage and did what he could to preserve his dignity among the wild and filthy men. One day he tried to wash his clothes. A big wave came in and swept them away. After months at sea, wasted beyond recognition with starvation and disease, long hair flapping about his face and nothing but a rag tied around his loins, he arrived on Barbados.

Pirates also caught Ludwig Dehne when he finally returned to Europe with a one-year-old black child. But no one, perhaps, had a more eventful ride across the Atlantic than Elisabeth Möser.

Coming to Suriname from Europe as a young bride, Elisabeth soon found herself a widow and decided to return. The English, at war with the Netherlands, captured her ship, kidnapped her, and gave her a berth in a cabin with six rough men. At first they tried to make her participate in wild parties on deck. But they soon came to respect her firm convictions, and left her alone to pray. When the ship docked at a West Indian port and Elisabeth realised it was Bridgetown, Barbados, she asked to see the pilgrim Johann Gottlieb Klose, then living on the island.

Bruder Klose, at first her captives did not understand, and told her, “Yes, yes. You may keep your clothes!” But when Elisabeth persisted and pointed to the town, they let her go with two friendly girls who said they knew where to take her. The girls led Elisabeth deep into the worst part of town and into a tavern. They took her upstairs and showed her a room. To her horror, when Elisabeth stepped inside, she found a man lying in bed, waiting for her. Crying to the Saviour for help, she turned and fled. A friendly captain took her to the island of St.

Christopher. From that place she found passage with another ship to Cork in Ireland. There the people took her, with her plain dress and head covering, for a Quaker. But a Dutch captain could understand what she said and put her on a ship for Amsterdam from where she found her way back to the believers’ communities.

Far more serious than the threat of snakes, poverty, and pirates, however, were white planters’ continual attempts to ruin the believers’ communities. Because the brothers would not swear oaths or bear arms, the planters said, they would exile them and drive all their Indian converts back into the woods. The planters did all they could to turn the Indians against the brothers, saying Pilgerhut was nothing but a trap through which the brothers would capture them. They said the brothers planned to take them all to Europe to sell as slaves. They gave the Indians rum and warned the Dutch government the Moravians were planning a rebellion.

The Dutch Reformed church circulated a warning against contact with the Moravians because they were “doctrinally unsound.” At the same time, colony authorities tried to force the brothers to enslave all Indians living on their land, claiming it was illegal to farm in the colonies without doing so. Time after time, Dutch planters chased their cattle onto the believers’ crops, and Lauerens Storm van s’Gravensande, governor of Essequibo and Demerara threatened to kill every Moravian that would set foot on his territory.

The Indian believers, far from turning against the brothers because of the planters’ threats, lived in constant fear that white colonists would capture them. None of the pilgrims in the rain forest knew the extent of this fear until an Arawak boy saw a strange boat coming up the Wironje Creek one day at noon. He shouted an alarm and within minutes Pilgerhut stood empty. But real danger did not come, in the end, from white planters. It came from Cuffy.

On March 1, 1763, a strange band of refugees appeared in Pilgerhut. In bedraggled clothes, their hair dishevelled and nearly senseless with fright they were a Dutch planter’s wife with six household slaves and all her children, escaping the greatest slave revolt in the history of the Guiana colonies. On February 23, in a massive uprising at the Magdalenenburg plantation on the Canje Creek, a slave named Cuffy and his supporters established black rule in Berbice. In quick succession the Juliane, Lelienburg, Elisabeth, and Hollandia plantations had fallen, followed by twenty-five others in rapid succession.

Cuffy, an intelligent and educated man, set up black rule at Fort Nassau. The tables turned. Suddenly white gentlemen and ladies worked in the fields under the whips of black masters. White arms lifted against them got chopped off. Whites trying to run away lost a leg. White women everywhere suffered violation with a vengeance and the heads of many planters stood on pikes along the road. In a wave of unspeakable savagery swarms of black men and women ravaged Berbice colony, looting, burning and killing. They beat drums and danced. In wild feasts they roasted white children to eat with their parents’ wine.

Hearing the roar of cannons on the nearest plantation, only an hour downstream, Heinrich and Elisabeth Beutel, Johann Heinrich Clemens, Georg Meisser, Friedrich Vögtle, Johann Nitschmann, Gottlieb Schultz, the Indian believers Christoph with his wife Akale, Ruth with her two children, Michael, Christian, Martin, Gottlieb (a lame boy), and the rest at Pilgerhut fled.¹⁷⁴

In some ways, the flight from Pilgerhut reminded Heinrich Beutel of his escape from Jägerndorf in Silesia, years before. But now he was old. His wife had a hard time keeping up. Some of the group was sick and they had to leave the work of many years behind them—clothing, cattle, linen, furniture, tools, even the carefully maintained archives of the Pilgerhut community.

¹⁷⁴ Johann Heinrich Clemens wanted to ask the Saviour first (with the use of the lot) whether they should abandon Pilgerhut, but none of the rest felt that was necessary.

Stumbling through the rain forest on narrow trails in the dark, the brothers and sisters split up into smaller groups. Old Georg Meisser, pioneer at Combé, widowed for the second time, slipped on a rotten log and fell into a creek. A small group of blacks patrolling the Berbice frontier fell on them and stripped them of the few things they had managed to save—including the handwritten Arawak dictionary Theophilus Schuman had spent years to prepare—but let them escape with their lives.

Weeks later the first survivors came straggling into the plantations of the Demerara colony. Johann Heinrich Clemens wrote: “Brother Beutel and his wife . . . Gottlieb and I were almost six weeks in the forest. The brothers Vögtle, Meisser, and Nitschmann reached Demerara by Green Thursday, but the rest of us had the grace of being fed with the body and blood of Jesus Christ while still in the wilderness. . . . In all this the Saviour was unspeakably close to me.”

Pilgerhut, after Cuffy’s rebellion, lay in charred ruins. So did Ephrem, and black marauders repeatedly raided Saron—killing Nathanael (Old Hanna’s great-grandson) who served as a leader in the congregation. But as long as the believers kept their eyes on the Lamb, they flourished no matter what happened. Sixty years after Georg Piesch, Georg Berwig, and young Christoph von Larisch set foot at Fort Zeelandia, the pilgrim Hans Wied, visiting Hoop on the Corantijn, wrote:

On the day of our *Gedenkttag der Gemeinde* (day of communal remembrance), after our morning blessing at the house, Brother Lösche led the first meeting. The place was full and the worshippers reverent. At ten in the morning the whole congregation came together for a baptismal service. Those to be baptised sat in white clothes, on chairs in front of the audience. After the liturgy, led by Brother Fischer, he baptised a young Indian woman, Smerra, and gave her the name Zippora. I baptised Arowa, naming him Manasse, and Brother Lösche baptised Sebaygu, naming him Cleophas. The sacred nearness of Jesus’ presence

surrounded us. It built me up to see the Indian brothers' and sisters' active participation and how they came, after the service, to congratulate the newly baptised ones and greet them with the kiss. In the evening we celebrated communion, in beautiful silence and order, with all the members.¹⁷⁵

The Lamb, in the eighteenth century, built his church in South America. ¹⁷⁵

Reise der Geschwister Hans Wied von Paramaribo nach Hoop . . . im Jahre 1794, Gemein Nachrichten, 1795

16

To The East And Other Places

“As pilgrims on earth and friends of the whole world, we can be at home anywhere,” a meeting of the brothers decided in Germany, in 1749. From Labrador igloos to a bark shelter on an island in Canada’s St. Clair River (where Christian Friedrich Dencke lived among the Ojibwas who “let the dogs lick their dishes clean and ate one another’s fleas like sunflower seeds”) to leaf houses without walls in the rain forest, they had already found this true. But vast regions of the world still remained, to them and other Europeans, unknown. Untold numbers of “heathen” still needed to be won as friends, and all the Moravian believes could hear was the Saviour telling them: “Go!”

David Nitschmann and Christian Friedrich Eller had already sailed, by way of the Cape of Good Hope and Zanzibar, to Ceylon, in 1738. At Mogurugampelle (Shady Spot in Which to Rest by the Way) in the centre of the island, they had discovered an open door for the Saviour’s message. But white Protestant preachers serving Dutch traders on the island, drove them away.

Nine years later Friedrich Wilhelm Hocker (a doctor) and Johann Ruffer found their way with an Armenian trader overland from Syria to Baghdad. At Aleppo they joined a camel caravan following the Euphrates River. More and more traders joined until the caravan included two thousand camels. But numbers did not guarantee safety. Kurds fell on them near Shermakhan and robbed them of everything they had—even their clothes. In the confusion, the two brothers from Herrnhut lost each other. Severely wounded and barefooted on the burning sand, Friedrich walked for a day until he arrived, nearly dead with thirst, at a village. Kind people gave him clothes. Others brought him water, bread, and grapes, and in the village Friedrich found Johann again. After another month of travel bandits attacked them again. This time they left Friedrich with his underwear, and Johann with a shirt, but they had to travel nine days with only a little bread and water until they came to Ispahan, in Persia.

For two years the brothers lived in Persia, seeking contact with old Christian churches, and telling the Muslims what they could about Christ. When they left Ispahan bandits attacked them once more and stole everything they had. Johann Ruffer died and Friedrich made his way to Egypt. In Cairo he learned Arabic. The Muslims tolerated him because he knew medicine, but when he set out with

a band of traders to Abyssinia their dhow sank off the coast of Mecca and he lost all his supplies.

After a trip back to Europe, Friedrich returned to Egypt with Johann Heinrich Danke, and Hans Antes (son of Heinrich, of the brothers on the Skippack, in Pennsylvania). This time they made their way up the Nile. Fighting between desert tribes kept them from reaching Abyssinia, but young Hans made clocks and Friedrich attended the sick—while demonstrating life in the Saviour's wounds—until he died.

Before Friedrich Hocker left for Egypt the second time, fourteen single brothers from Herrnhag, under the leadership of Johann Stahlmann and Adam Völker, made their way around Africa to the rainy Malabar Coast of India. There, at Tranquebar, where rice paddies lie between the ocean and the Western Ghats, they established a small community they named *Brüdergarten* (Garden of Brothers). One of the young men, Christoph Butler, began to learn Malabar and Portuguese at once. The rest, even though suffering under the heat, set about erecting buildings and planting crops. A year later a group of families arrived under the leadership of Nicolaus Andreas Jäschke. Many died. Six brothers that survived moved onto the island of Nancowry in the Bay of Bengal. In 1771 others moved to Serampore, near Calcutta.

Russia

Thirty-five years after the first brothers from Herrnhut found their way on foot to Archangelsk on the White Sea, Peter Konrad Fries and Johann Erich Westmann (just returned from the West Indies) travelled to St. Petersburg. Russian authorities no longer wanted to capture or imprison them. In fact, their new empress, Catherine II (a German noblewoman by birth), was asking Moravian settlers to come.

In St. Petersburg, Catherine II gave the brothers a document promising them great freedom and exemption from bearing arms. She also granted them a tract of nearly eleven thousand acres, far to the south-east, in the lower Volga region. The brothers saw it as a miracle of grace. Not only would that place them in the midst of the heathen Kalmuk tribes. It would give them a base from which to reach Persia, China, and Mongolia.

Daniel Heinrich Fick and four companions from the single brothers' choir at Herrnhut travelled overland to Nizhny Novgorod in 1765 and sailed down the

Volga to get the place ready. They came prepared to fell trees and build with logs. But to their amazement they left the last forests behind at Saratov and entered treeless steppes. What lumber they needed had to come floating down the Volga. Their land proved salty and largely unfit for growing crops. But with four married couples, a widower, twenty-five single brothers and seventeen single sisters that came from Herrnhut a year later, they built a new community called Sarepta.

The brothers and sisters planted many trees. They built large choir houses, a Gemeinhaus and a Saal, in a protected place along the river. Even though swarms of mosquitos bothered them in the summer and harsh winters buried them in snow, the trading post they set up proved an excellent way of getting to know their neighbours, and they soon felt at home. Kalmuk tribesmen brought horses, beef and furs to trade for goods the brothers shipped in from St. Petersburg. The young men in the community also set up shops where they wove cloth, baked bread, built carriages, dyed wool, tanned leather, and made shoes, clothing, locks, and candles. Joachim Wier, the community doctor, not only cared for patients from far and wide, he discovered a mineral spring near Sarepta. This brought even more patients, many of whom had money and paid well for the hospitality the brothers offered them.

In the midst of all the work necessary to build their new community, the brothers did not neglect what they had come for. Gottfried Grabsch and Georg Gruhl made their way into the Caucasus and Muslim lands. Johann Gottfried Schill and Christian Hübner translated large portions of the Scriptures into the Kalmuk language. The priests of these nomad tribesmen, followers of lamaist Buddhism, opposed them. When a group of twenty-three Kalmuks, touched by the mercy of the Lamb, moved to Sarepta the priests notified Russian authorities. Claiming the Moravians could not legally receive converts, they came and took them away. But faithful pilgrims, like Konrad Neiz, did not give up. And in his wandering life among the Kalmuks he made a discovery that would change Sarepta forever. He discovered mustard.

Using the Kalmuk's recipe the believers at Sarepta began to cook and sell a delicious mustard spread. Russians all over the country, including the tsar Aleksandr I, tasted it and wanted more. Before long Sarepta's mustard and vegetable oil factory supplied the whole community with a stable income.

In spite of disastrous fires and revolutions on the steppes (that caused the whole community to flee in 1774), Sarepta came to stand as a witness of the Saviour's peace. Russians came from far away to visit it. Other German colonists along the

Volga and in the Ukraine—Lutherans, Mennonites, and Hutterites—looked to it for spiritual direction and believers from there began the branch communities of Schönbrunn and Gnadenhal (Beautiful Fountain and Valley of Grace) nearby.

Africa

The year after the awakening to the blood in Herrnhut, in 1735, the Moravian refugee Heinrich Huckoff met a mulatto from the Gold Coast (Ghana). Touched with what he heard, he travelled as soon as possible to the slave trading centre of São Jorge da Mina. Four years later the brother Abraham Ehrenfried Richter entered Algeria. But Georg Schmidt, who fled Kunvald in Moravia as a seventeen-year-old, first established a community after the pattern of Herrnhut on that continent. He did not come unprepared. On a trip to Moravia with Melchior Nitschmann the Austrians had captured him and handled him roughly in prison for six years. But in his affliction—alone—Georg prayed. He found a sure source of strength in Christ and travelled, on his release, to the Netherlands to learn Dutch. From there he sailed to Africa, landing at Cape Town on July 9, 1737.

In the Cape Colony Georg found white Protestant settlers (Dutch Reformed and Huguenots) greatly outnumbered by the Malays, West African blacks, and local tribes they had enslaved. Cattle ranchers and farmers—the Boers—ruled the surrounding veld. Among them, in squalid *kraals* lived the Bastards (the offspring of white settlers and their slaves) the San and Khoikhoi people.

Georg found the Khoi villagers shy and humble. But those living close to large numbers of white settlers feared them (for good reason—men in Cape Town bragged how many “wild” Khoi they had shot, along with zebras and antelopes) so Georg decided to go further inland. He caught a ride with some Dutch settlers in a covered cart drawn by twelve oxen. Along dry river beds and over barren hills they made their way against a cold wind until they approached Stellenbosch. There, in a sheltered gorge along the Sonderend River, Georg found a band of Khoi hunters with whom he decided to stay. *Bavianskloof* (Monkey Ravine), the Dutch called that place.

Georg’s first challenge was speech. Few of the Khoi women or children knew Dutch. Their language (recognised since then as one of the most difficult in the world) consisted of sharp clicks made with the tongue, with the teeth, with sudden gusts of air, and sounds from the throat or nose. Some of the same sounds meant different things on five different tones.

No Dutch people had tried to learn the Khoikhoi language. They called it *Hottentotten* speech for the way it sounded, and took for granted these slight brown-skinned people were predestined by God to damnation—good for nothing except work, if even that. Georg set out to prove the contrary. He made friends with the Khoi children and taught them to read and write Dutch, while he learned words in their language. He took in an orphan boy and soon had fifty students in classes he held every day. As communication between them improved he told them about the Saviour. He prayed with the people and taught them songs.

The first Khoi villager to repent and receive baptism, Georg named Willem. He was the boy that lived with him. Following this, he baptised forty-six others, and the Saviour's love shining from Bavianskloof brought results no one would have expected. Thirty-nine Dutch settlers, marvelling at their neighbours new-found peace repented and became followers of the Lamb as well.

Those that did not repent arrested Georg and shipped him back to Europe. For fifty years no one from the believers' communities could come to South Africa. The Dutch, staunchly Calvinist, refused to take them there or let them in. Georg Schmidt died. But in 1792, with Dutch politics in upheaval, the brothers Heinrich Marsveld, Daniel Schwinn, and Johann Christian Kühnel managed to find passage to Cape Town again. They hurried out to Bavianskloof, hardly daring to see what they would find.

They found Lena, the last baptised member of the Khoi congregation, still living.

Lena could not walk anymore. Her eyes had grown dim. But after she understood who the brothers were, she had a grandchild fetch her most treasured possession —a Dutch New Testament wrapped in sheepskins inside a leather bag. Georg Schmidt had given it to her when she was young. For fifty years she had guarded it, even though she could not read, and treasured what she remembered about Christ.

The newly arrived brothers from Herrnhut found the seed planted by Georg Schmidt lying dormant, but far from dead. Some Khoi villagers, even though they did not understand it well, had kept on reading from the Bible, generation after generation. Now that the brothers lived with them again they quickly responded to its message and a new community, *Genadendaal* (Valley of Grace) took shape in South Africa.

Dutch farmers did not like their Khoikhoi workers “wasting time” at meetings in Genadendal. They feared what would happen if all of them would learn how to read and “think themselves equal to whites.” So many, who had depended on the farmers for their living, lost their jobs. This, with poor hunting and several dry years in a row, soon brought the believers to the edge of starvation. At Genadendal they planted fruit trees and worked hard to prepare the land for crops. But a dam they built for irrigation broke, and swept their fields, with most of their houses, away. It ripped up the trees they had planted and buried promising gardens with rocks and sand. Johann Friedrich Hoffman, Gottfried Horning, etc. Hyenas fell continually on the sheep and goats the Khoi believers tried to raise. But when the brothers Adolf Bonatz and Johann Heinrich Schmidt set out with thirty Khoi hunters to eliminate them, they met a greater danger:

Not far from Genadendal they discovered a hyena and fired at him, but being only slightly wounded it escaped. After searching for it in vain the brothers left. One of the Khoi hunters heard something in the scrub, however, and called them. Johann Heinrich Schmidt hurried back, dismounted, and entered the bushes with several of the hunters close behind. When they had reached the middle of the scrub their dog roused some animal, but tight foliage prevented them from seeing what it was. Those standing outside, when they saw it was a leopard, fled, leaving Johann Heinrich and one of the Khoi brothers alone. Not knowing which way to get out, and afraid of meeting the leopard head on, they backed up slowly with their guns cocked, ready for attack. All of a sudden the animal sprang on the Khoi brother, pulled him down and began to bite his face. Johann Heinrich aimed his gun at the leopard but at such close quarters he could not get a good shot. Then, when the animal saw him, he let go of the Khoikhoi and jumped at him. Johann Heinrich’s gun went flying and he held up his hand to defend himself. The leopard bit him close to the elbow and hung on. With his other hand Johann Heinrich caught it by the throat, and managed to throw it back, pinning it down with his knee. He called for the Khoi hunters who came running. One of them stuck his gun in behind the brother’s arm and fired. He killed the leopard but the Johann Heinrich had eight ugly wounds from his elbow to his wrist, the teeth having sunk in to the bone.

Drought, hunger, and accidents notwithstanding, the community at Genadendal became established and flourished in the Saviour’s love. The Khoi women, taught by sisters from Herrnhut, learned how to sew and made handcrafted articles for sale. The brothers planted more trees and vegetables and turned to raising grapes. They also built a blacksmith shop, a furniture factory, and a mill. Seekers came

from far and wide and in slightly more than twenty years, 256 mud-and-wattle houses, plastered white, with doors and windows, and thatched roofs, stood along the wide, flat street of Genadendaal. Peach and pear trees bordered the street. The believers planted many rose bushes, and their village became home to more than a thousand baptised Khoi believers.

At their regular meetings the believers made room in the Saal for visitors from many places, and their love feasts drew joyful crowds. Once again their lives spoke to the Dutch farmers, one of them who told the Khoi brother Philip who worked for him: “You Hottentots surprise me very much. No matter how wretchedly and drunkenly you live before coming to Genadendaal, once you are there and hear the Word of God you become utterly different. You seem to receive mercy and grace. I was born and raised a Christian. I have a Bible and read it often, yet I find those blessings still escape me.”

Philip answered him, “Even though I cannot read the Scriptures myself, I remember much of what I hear.” Then he related to his boss the parable of the workers in the vineyard, applying it in a fitting way to the situation of the Dutch and Khoikhoi believers. The farmer listened carefully. “You know,” he said when Philip was done, “I never understood that parable before. But now I do!”

This farmer was only one of many Dutch colonists to humble himself before the Lamb and become a supporter of the Khoikhoi congregation.

Antigua

Johann Töltschig, pilgrim to England, found one Yorkshire boy particularly eager to hear what he had to say. Night after night Samuel Isles came to meetings of the believers at the Lammsberg until 1743, when he left his parents’ home, surrendered everything to the Saviour, and went to live among the brothers in the Netherlands and Germany.

From Germany Samuel left for St. Thomas in 1748. French pirates captured the ship he travelled on and took him to Martinique. When he managed to leave that island Dutch pirates overtook him, and the Spanish narrowly missed capturing him again before he slipped into the St. Thomas harbour.

Eight years later, newly married, and with his wife Molly expecting their first baby, Samuel landed on Antigua.

Samuel and Molly did not know anyone on the island. They had thirty pounds sterling with them and looked at once for a means of supporting themselves.

Behind a rickety wooden house they rented, they planted kale, cabbage, and turnips. They used hollowed out gourds for dishes. Within a year Samuel baptised the first awakened slaves on the island, Joseph and Abraham. Then Molly died. John Bennet, a tailor from England, came, and Samuel married Maria Margarethe Zerb from the brothers' community at Bethel, in Berks County, Pennsylvania. The believers on Antigua lived in serious poverty, often stitching clothes by candlelight until late at the night. But with the help of those who brought a few stones every time they came to meeting, they built a Saal just north of St. Johns, at a place they named Spring Gardens. Samuel and Maria Margarethe had a child they named Joseph. But Samuel, already deathly sick when he arrived, died soon afterward. Then she married the brother Paul Schneider. A week later he died too (some tropical fevers hit suddenly) and the brothers married her for the third time to Johann Christian Auerbach. With him she had one daughter that died.

By this time Peter Braun, a brother from southern Germany, Benjamin Brookshaw from England and Johann Meder from Livonia had joined the fourteen believers on Antigua. Benjamin soon died and a hurricane devastated the island. But like John Holmes wrote later:

The catastrophe seemed to have a positive effect on the black people, teaching them the necessity of knowing the Lord who hides from the wind and is a refuge in the time of storm. An awakening broke out among the slaves, spreading like a fire in every direction. Those who came to the meetings at Spring Gardens increased every year so that by 1775 they numbered around two thousand and not a month went by without the baptism of ten or twenty more.¹⁷⁶

Altogether serious in their desire to know the Lamb, some slaves walked as far as ten miles after their day's work in the fields to attend meetings in Spring Gardens. They did this week after week even though their masters beat them for it and the pilgrims living there soon found themselves answering the door day and night. So many came "their hearts tender to the Saviour's mercy" that the brothers had little time left over to earn money or eat.

A new community, Grace Hill (Gnadenberg) took shape on Antigua, where the brothers soon baptised two thousand believers. Another four thousand attended meetings, or took part in instruction classes throughout the week. In 1778 hardly any rain fell, and famine struck the island. Some planters fed their cattle rather than their slaves (thinking the slaves could find food on their own) and a time of terrible thievery began. Many of the believers, coming home from work, found

all the food and other possessions gone. Four years later the French attacked. One believing slave found himself carried to Guadeloupe, but he took it as the Saviour's leading and preached the Gospel there.

Little by little, as their slaves persisted in following Christ, the Antigua planters came to believe in their sincerity. One master tried for ten years to entice the believers working on his land to commit fornication. He did everything he could to tempt them. But not one of them, neither old or young, fell into his trap. Neither could other slaves lead them astray.

After nearly everyone on their plantation professed Christ, a young slave named Richard and his friend planned a dance. They planned it on the Lord's Day and hoped to distract the believing young from going to meeting. But it did not work. No one came to the dance and the boys decided they might as well go to meeting too—if nothing else than to have some fun.

¹⁷⁶ John Holmes, *Historical Sketches of the Missions of the United Brethren*, pg. 340

They went to laugh and make trouble. But they stayed to pray. So powerfully did conviction fall on Richard, and so earnestly did he call on the Lamb for mercy that the brothers soon baptised him and he became a leader in the congregation. With unswerving faithfulness he served the Saviour and his Gemein until he turned ninety-nine years old. Then he went home.

All Antigua changed. Where as many as twenty or thirty slaves had commonly been hanged on Monday mornings for weekend fighting or stealing, crime almost disappeared. Murders became unheard of, and the practice of witchcraft died out. The brothers began a school for eighty students. Almost before they knew it, they had seven hundred students eager to learn how to read and write. Because not nearly everyone could come during the day, they began to have classes during the night as well. Both at Spring Gardens and Grace Hill crowds had grown to where communion had to be served on shifts. By 1788 more than six thousand baptised members met there for worship, and the brothers began a third community they named Grace Bay. Membership there grew to rapidly to more than a thousand as well.

During the war with America in 1812 another famine struck Antigua and two hundred from the Spring Gardens community alone, died from hunger. But with their eyes on Christ the enslaved believers did not lose hope. More than anything else, they liked to sing. Those who could read, like the black leader, Jacob Harvey,

carried their hymnbooks with them and learned hundreds of songs by memory. One day, after a brother from Europe saw Jacob's hymnal crammed with blades of grass, dried leaves, cane tops, bits of paper, and rags, he said in surprise, "Why Jacob, you will break your book apart."

"But massa," Jacob answered apologetically, "Dem me partikler hymns!" After a Good Friday service at Spring Gardens, another European brother, Joseph Newby, wrote:

From where I sat in my room I had a good view of the roads leading from different plantations. From every direction I could see groups of people come running at various distances, and as it occurs when people eagerly haste after something from which they expect much pleasure, one may see the attitude of the mind in the bent of the body. So it was here. They took every short cut, the young and healthy passing the aged and the lame, and the latter pressing on with all their might, every effort telling of the eagerness of their souls to be present at a place where they might hear the marvellous of Jesus giving himself a sacrifice for sinners.

When I considered that many, if not all, of these people had thrown down their hoes in the middle of the day, left their noon meals, and foregone the little rest of which they stood so much in need for the support of their bodies, under hard labour, I broke out almost involuntarily in this ejaculation: "Oh Lord Jesus! Feed these poor hungry souls with the precious word of thy sufferings and death. Oh enable thy poor unworthy servant to give them their meat in due season!"

Sowing in Tears, Reaping with Joy

The brothers Andreas Rittmansberger and John Wood landed on Barbados on 1765. Andreas promptly turned sick and died. But others came and a circle of believers formed around them until the great storm of 1780 struck the island. Hardly any house stayed standing. Absolute chaos reigned as black and white survivors struggled for survival among the ruins. When the brother John Montgomery and his wife (parents of James, the hymn writer) arrived from England in 1784 they found only fourteen believers surviving.

After six years the Montgomerys left to begin a new congregation on the island of Tobago. Daniel Gottwald and James Birkby began to work among the slaves on St. Christopher and a congregation of more than two thousand baptised believers took shape—this in spite of French invasion and a tidal wave that

carried the town of Basseterre into the sea. Christian Heinrich Rauch, who first lived among the Mohicans at Shekomeko, travelled to Jamaica where he died in 1763. But once again, his efforts bore fruit. Within a year of the arrival of the first brothers in Jamaica eight hundred or more slaves attended their meetings.

Jamaica, like Antigua, was an English Island. Some of the plantation owners were Methodists (or had come under Methodist influence) and allowed the brothers to establish the Carmel community on seven hundred acres at St. Elizabeth, and later on, Emmaus. Mesopotamia and Eden, followed, and one of the pilgrims reported:

The number of our hearers increases all the time. The preaching of the Gospel works powerfully in the hearts of the black people and changes the way they act. Some walk in true fellowship of Spirit with our Saviour and have received the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins. Others mourning because of their sins seek salvation in Jesus. Of the latter class there are about two hundred. Recently, on a Lord's Day, a black man from an estate about fifteen miles from here [Carmel] brought me a stick marked with seven notches. Every notch he told me stands for ten slaves on that estate that pray to the Lord. About twenty of them attend meetings at a plantation called Peru. They are all unbaptised but want to receive holy baptism. The awakening spreads, and we hope that our Saviour will gather a rich harvest.¹⁷⁷

The believers on Jamaica lived in the hope they had in Christ, but far from everything went as they would have liked. "The people of this island have all sunken in ungodliness," wrote one of the first pilgrims on the island. "Either they serve the god of money, or else the god of their flesh." French pirates captured Nathanael, son of Peter Braun, coming with his new wife from Pennsylvania, and took them to Sainte-Domingue (Haiti). In 1780 a hurricane flattened the Mesopotamia community and severely damaged the rest. In their first fifty years on the island, forty-seven believers from Europe died of tropical fevers. But their afflictions, compared to those of their black brothers and sisters, were light. One of them described life on the plantations:

¹⁷⁷ Brother Lang, letter from Carmel of March 15, 1813

Every morning at dawn, a shell is blown to call the slaves to work, and they all have to appear at once to join their gangs. Every gang walks off to the field under the direction of the driver, also a black man, armed with a long whip. The children, from six to twelve years old, under the care of a black

woman, also armed with a rod, form another gang and go to clean the pasture or any other work suited to their strength. These black drivers are steeled against all pity and compassion, being generally as brutalised as can be. The gangs go to work all day in the sun, their only covering being a cloth tied around their loins. In digging cane holes they have to keep in line and anyone getting behind feels the driver's whip. There is no let-up in the work, except at noon when they eat. Late in the evening, after the sun goes down, they come back weak and faint. Not infrequently they also have to keep on working by the light of the moon. Then the overseer who has kept track of how much they worked flogs those men or women with whom he is dissatisfied. They have to lie on the ground and before the whip comes down the third time, they are already covered with blood. . . . Not an evening passes without us hearing the crack of the whip and the screams of the victims. But what can we do? We are as much despised as the slaves. If we write a line to the overseer begging him to have mercy, it sometimes, but not often, helps to save one of the poor creatures. Day after day, the same toil, the same scenes continue.¹⁷⁸

Slavery continued on the British West Indian Islands until events in England changed the situation forever. Hannah Moore, an English Christian deeply troubled by what she heard, wrote against slavery. So did William Wilberforce, a Member of Parliament, and others. Many people in England stopped buying sugar produced by slave labour, and revolts in Haiti and the Demerara Colony (at that time the world's largest cotton producer, and one of Great Britain's wealthiest overseas possessions) convinced the government to call for change.

In 1833 the British government—against all opposition of the planters—voted to set the slaves free. Five years later, on the stroke of midnight, August 1, 1838, when the act went into effect, three hundred and twelve thousand slaves, only on the island of Jamaica, prepared to celebrate. Thousands of them baptised believers, clothed in white, gathered at their chapels shouting, “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed,” and praising God.

That same night, hundreds of thousands more in Barbados, Demerara, Berbice, and other British islands celebrated the end of their slavery. But nowhere did the brothers feel more deeply grateful than on the dry island of Antigua, lit up that night with the almost continual flashes of a great thunderstorm. Of the thirty thousand free men and women rejoicing in the rain, almost all belonged to the Saviour's Gemeine.

¹⁷⁸ Henry Whitley's account from J.H. Buchner, *The Moravians in Jamaica*, London, 1854

Like Samuel Isles, pioneer of the Spring Gardens community said there before his death: “As little as one can accomplish, one likes to do what the Saviour would most have liked to do.”

17

Of One Blood

“You children of the Most High, how is your love one for another?” an eighteenth century Moravian hymn writer asked, “How do you follow the true impulse for unity? Do you stand tied together as one? Has no division of spirits occurred among you?” In answer to his own questions he wrote:

Our Father in Heaven knows our hearts. Without love we have no reason to call ourselves brothers. . . . But as soon as we are born from above we become brothers and sisters in Christ. We have one Father, one faith, one Spirit, one baptism, one way to heaven that we all travel together in full unity of heart. In our unity we find nothing but sweetness, for all suspicion, hatred, and offences have flown away.

Our Mother that is above [the Holy Ghost] holds us together and baptises us with heavenly fire. No difference finds place among us because humility has united our hearts. Where selfishness, quarrelling and hatred survive we cannot feel the grace of love, neither can we prosper in the choir of foreign thrones.

Zion’s fellowship brings us to leave our earthly kindred and sets our brothers and sisters in Christ in the place of former acquaintances. The one still enchanted by love of the world, even though he wants to have a place in the brotherhood, can in no way be accepted by it until he makes himself small at the foot of the cross. . . . On the other hand, see what a blessing it has been for the redeemed to be counted as brothers! Praise the Father, for he brought it about! Sing to him with united hearts and voices! Do not let one hour pass without love and praise! We stand before the Lord as one in his covenant.

What I am, brother, you are too! Through the Lamb’s wounds and bruises we share our inheritance. With all that we have we struggle toward the same fatherland. The church as one strives toward Christ and we must be ready, brother, to die one for another like Jesus who made us his heirs. One member feels the other’s pain.

Let us remind and point one another to the crown of life! If Babylon thirsts for the blood of the saints, let us stand, watch, and defend ourselves together. The crying of the children will yet be heard and with the force of unity Babylon will be destroyed among us! Who can resist the power of unified spirits?

Let us love and rejoice in our hearts, making life sweet one for another, even though in pain. Let us press into innermost fellowship with Christ, illuminated by the blood. . . . In the world to come it will go even better with us. Our whole brotherhood before the Father, ablaze with love, will rejoice in his blessing. Oh let us give one another our hands and hearts and pray that Zion may soon be rescued to where love knows neither beginning nor end!¹⁷⁹

In no other way did those who went out from Herrnhut testify more powerfully to the Saviour's love, than through their lives in brotherly community. Even though they had settled in places around the world and their influence had spread into all branches of Christianity, they renewed their commitment—at a meeting in Marienborn in 1764—to building *Ortsgemeinen* (communities at specific locations) as bases from which pilgrims could work. Without the Ortsgemeine, they believed, their pilgrims would have nothing to set before the world as an example. They saw the Ortsgemeine as a continuation of the early Christian community, preserved in part by Catholic orders, but long fallen into ruin, and looked to the Saviour for help in restoring the “little places he has chosen for his people's special abode, the communities on which his Shekina rests.”

The Ortsgemeine, the Moravians believed, should be a model for all members of the great Church of Christ (seekers of all denominations) to learn from and follow. It should be the prototype of the truly awakened community, where brothers and sisters “live only by the rule of Christ” and “possess the spirit and understanding required for life together.” As such, the members of the Ortsgemeine enjoy a “special grace that sets them apart from all other children of God,” but only as long as they gave their minds and hearts to the furtherance of the common good.

If a member finds that the pursuit of his career does not contribute to this, he shall not insist on continuing it, but willingly and without resisting forsake even what means very much to him. It must also be remembered that outstanding economic success for one brother easily creates problems for all. Even though he may have been poor and humble, the brother who becomes economically very successful may no longer feel motivated to concern himself with the welfare of all. We must take great care that economic success—even though we must thank those who bring it about—does not distract us from our most important work.¹⁸⁰

Genadendaal in South Africa, Sarepta in Russia, Saron in Suriname, Lichtenfels in Greenland, Lamb's Hill and Ockbrook in England, Friedensfeld on St. Croix, Salem in North Carolina—every Moravian community told the world in its own way what the brothers and sisters believed: “*In commune*

oramus, in commune laboramus. In commune patimus, in commune gaudimus (we pray and work together, we suffer and rejoice together).” But nowhere did the ideal of the Ortsgemeine reach happier fulfilment, or shine brighter in a dark world, than at Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. One who recorded their story wrote:

Every man, woman, and child became part of one household. Everyone worked for the good of the whole. They gave their time and labour, receiving in return shelter, food, and clothing. No one was paid any wages. The church owned all the land, all the buildings, even the tools with which the people worked. Yet no one was forced to surrender his private property. Anyone who disliked the system was free to leave. As it was pointed out, there was no wall around Bethlehem.¹⁸¹

179 *Gesangbuch*, 886180 Marienborn Synod, *Protokolle der Sitzungen 4. August, 1764*

When families moved to Bethlehem (that operated as one household with Nazareth and surrounding settlements) they signed a document releasing everything they owned to the “General Economy” of the church. But when anyone left, the church took it as its Christian obligation to give them back as much as they had brought in.

Because of the risk involved in this arrangement, both for the church and those joining, the believers accepted new members only after careful proving. “Better make the door coming in very small,” they said, “and the door going out very large, than the other way round.” At a meeting in Bethlehem they decided in 1742:

Applicants for membership, even those considered outstanding brothers, and who have spoken publicly in the congregations from which they came, must be tested, examined, and treated in an impartial way. Only if this is done with humility and discernment may the congregation keep itself pure. All denominations and sects strive to grow larger and stronger. But our rule must be to keep the door wide open for everyone wanting to leave, and to be very cautious in letting them in. It is more likely that our church will turn sick from being too large than from being too small.¹⁸²

Even after newcomers passed the congregation’s approval, the brothers used the lot to discern the Saviour’s will about receiving them. They also made sure that everyone knew, before joining, what to expect. In 1744 they put the rules of their General Economy into writing:

1. The Lord's people shall serve him in two divisions: the Pilgergemein and the Ortsgemein. The pilgrims shall tell the good news of Christ to all. Those who stay home shall take care of the children, the lands, the buildings, and the livestock.

2. In the beginning, the pilgrims are to have the community at Bethlehem as their home base. But they shall move about like a cloud before the wind of the Lord so that all places may bear fruit. They shall establish small congregations wherever needful and possible.

3. At Bethlehem there is to be a Hausgemeine formed of representatives from every calling and division of labour (the builders, the educators, those who buy provisions, those who prepare food, those who see to the clothing, the sanitation, the record keeping, etc.) The Hausgemeine shall see to the needs of the whole congregation, and in particular the needs of the Pilgergemeine.

¹⁸¹ Fredric Klees, *The Pennsylvania Dutch*, pg. 99¹⁸² *Diarium Bethlehem*, 31. Oktober, 1742

4. The single sisters shall have their own dwelling, as well as the single brothers, and they shall be organized in their respective choirs.

5. In America, where getting married is not so complicated, partners shall be found for the young people as soon as expedient.

6. The purchased lands [the Whitefield tract] shall be divided into six agricultural communities: Nazareth, Gnadenthal, Christiansbrunn, Friedenthal, Gnadenhöh, and Gnadenstadt.¹⁸³ At Bethlehem the brothers shall carry out their trades.

7. The Whitefield house at Nazareth shall become the nursery¹⁸⁴ and school of the small children.

8. We shall use no denominational name other than *Evangelische Brüder* or

Brüdergemeine (“evangelical brothers” or “community of brothers”).

9. Our purpose is not to make everyone Moravian. Not everyone we reach with the Gospel shall be expected or even encouraged to join our communities. But if another Ortsgemein takes shape it may follow our pattern.

10. We shall take the Gospel to the Indians in an apostolic way (without regard to denominations). Those who have become baptised into other groups shall be allowed to remain there, and we will concentrate on baptising those who are awakened through our work.

11. The Wyoming Valley shall not be forgotten.

12. The *Zusammenkünfte* [general meetings like the one held at Theobald Endt’s house in Germantown] shall continue to be open to all Christians. They shall continue to represent the Church of God in the Spirit.¹⁸⁵

Jacob John Sessler, a descendant of the first believers in Bethlehem wrote years later:

The only ties that bound them together were their promises, their good will and the sense of a mission that was peculiarly theirs. . . . Members donated their time and labour in exchange for nothing more than food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their children, and received no other reward than the joy of seeing the Gospel preached and the salvation of their souls. . . . Material reward in the form of wages in such a spiritual enterprise as theirs was for them much beneath the holiness and dignity of their work. They belonged to no man and would accept no man’s wages, for as they said in the Brotherly Agreement of 1754, “We all belong to the Saviour. What we have belongs to him, and he shall dispose of it as pleases him.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ The last two of the six were never developed.¹⁸⁴ Children, after they turned eighteen months old, spent the day in nurseries, supervised by teams of sisters. When the congregation saw that this was not the best, the practice was discontinued and parents again assumed full responsibility for their own. ¹⁸⁵ From the rules of the General Economy, adopted in 1744.

Enemies of the believers in Bethlehem accused them of living “as in a military academy” and suspected they were “papists” of one kind or another. But as long as the brothers and sisters desired nothing but Christ and loved him, they found their *Gemeinschaft* a source of continual joy.

Only in true Gemeinschaft (community, fellowship) in Christ, the brothers believed, could true equality become theirs. Everyone equal before the Lamb. Equal in life and death, buried under stones of equal size lying flat on the ground. In equality and community the Saviour's Gemeine would become visible to all, like Heinrich Antes exclaimed on the day the first sea congregation arrived: "Today, at last, a visible church of the Lord can be recognised in Philadelphia!" Peter Böhler, when the question of continuing the General Economy arose in 1758, declared:

Our communal housekeeping does more to promote the Saviour's cause than any gold mine he might have given us. If every one that takes part in it serves Christ, then it is for us an inexhaustible treasure. . . . I do not know whether our people would have held out against the spirit of worldliness if the Saviour had not counter-attacked it with our communal housekeeping. Considering this, you may easily guess how I feel about seeing it continue.¹⁸⁷

Community: Body and Soul

Making no distinction between their fellowship in the Spirit, and their daily work together, the Saviour's *Kreuzgemeine* (Community of the Cross) at Bethlehem handled both with great seriousness. A committee of brothers decided what to build and who worked where. Other committees decided what to eat, where and what to buy, how to make their clothes, who should care for the sick, and how to keep the settlement clean.

The believers worked seriously, but heaven and earth touched one another at Bethlehem. Worship flowed into work, and work into worship. With extraordinary joy the single brothers' choir celebrated the "Festival of the Tree Cutters" soon after their arrival. Following their love feast, eaten together, they marched to the music of trombones, axes on their shoulders, into the snowy woods. In a few years they cleared seven hundred acres and had most of it under cultivation. By the late 1750s nearly two thousand five hundred acres of cultivated fields surrounded Bethlehem and Nazareth.

The builders and carpenters, likewise set to work with music and a love feast, built seventeen community dwellings (some of them with dozens of rooms on three or more floors), forty-eight farm buildings, five schools, twenty manufacturing shops and stores, five mills, and two inns in a little over fifteen years. Every spring the farm brothers celebrated the Feast of the

Sowers, and on the first day of harvest the whole community gathered before dawn for the Reapers' Love Feast. Those in charge handed out sickles and forks, then all marched in formation—to the music of a full brass band—to the fields. All day long they cut, tied, and stooked the grain while some played music, others shared Scriptures in breaks for rest and prayer, and the children brought water from the spring. Harvest days ended with young men playing trumpets, leading the singing congregation home as the sun went down.

¹⁸⁶ Jacob John Sessler, *Communal Pietism* ¹⁸⁷ March 9, 1758

Frequent feasts throughout the year celebrated the work of the spinning sisters (the grandmothers of the congregation), the dairy brothers, the smith and cart making brothers, the cooks and the washing sisters, and whoever else, from the oldest to the youngest at Bethlehem, took part in the General Economy. Every feast called for new songs, fitting decorations, and messages from those in charge. At the celebration of the stable brothers they sang:

May you be praised Jesus Christ, the Lord we love! We praise you for becoming man, you set over all things by God. You lay in a stable at Bethlehem, not only for Shem's chosen race, but for cursed Ham and Japheth's tribe as well.¹⁸⁸

Brother Josef wrote a song especially for the sisters:

Know sisters, the blessing of your ceaseless work for Christ. Driven by love, you spin and weave. You sew and wash with vigour. Now may the Saviour's grace and love, be yours in joy forever! You Christ, mover of hearts, the ones who milk, who wash, and reap, look to you. They wait on you and long for the blessing from the wound in your side. While milking, washing, or reaping, all they can see is you! We live for you on earth. We spend our time working for you, day by day, until we may go to see you!¹⁸⁹

Jacob John Sessler wrote:

As they made no distinction between secular and religious education, so they did not distinguish between secular and religious work. All work was religious. A religious spirit was put into the most menial tasks. Milking, spinning, washing, knitting, and all other occupations were services unto God, because the purpose of them was not to accumulate wealth but to support the itinerant preachers, teachers, and missionaries. As the apostle Paul worked with his hands that he might preach the gospel without cost to others, so the home congregation was

diligent in its task as the chief servant of the pilgrim congregation. The stable caretaker was on a mission for the Lord as well as the missionary among the Indians.

Another reporter of life in the believers' community wrote:

¹⁸⁸ *Auf ein Liebesmahl der Stallbrüder in Bethlehem, 31. Dezember, 1753*

¹⁸⁹ L. T. Reichel, *The Early History of the Church of the United Brethren . . . in North America*, Nazareth, 1888

At Bethlehem the brothers counted it an honour to chop wood for the Master's sake, and the fireman, Spangenberg [Brother Josef] said, felt his post as important "as if he were guarding the Ark of the Covenant."¹⁹⁰

Visitors to Bethlehem marvelled at the order in which everyone found something to do that fitted him or her exactly. Old men and boys, and sometimes women, herded cattle. A visitor in 1761 reported waking up in the morning to the sound of two sisters driving "a hundred cows, a number of them with bells, a venerable goat and two she-goats, down the street." And all young people learned trades that transformed Bethlehem into a model of industry on the Pennsylvania frontier. A little Dresden perhaps? Or a Leipzig? Only ten years after the founding of Bethlehem its residents practised two hundred and twentyseven different trades. They wove linen, taught school, baked bread, dyed and bleached cloth, shoed horses, bound books, tanned leather, butchered cattle and pigs, and made soap, nails, barrels, hats, shoes, clothing, furniture, pots, and nearly everything else a frontier settlement might need. Jacob John Sessler wrote:

Each trade had its masters and apprentices. They held regular meetings to control the quality of their products, to regulate prices, meet outside competition, and provide training. When outsiders came to buy wares, there was to be no bickering about prices. On the contrary, the prices set at the tradesmen's meetings were to be strictly observed.

The General Economy had become a bee-hive of activity. The brothers wore clothes of fabric their own hands and machinery had woven, among which were to be found eleven qualities of linen. Their large pottery, the products of which were in great demand by outsiders, became famous. . . . Three sawmills converted rough-hewn timber into building materials. . . . The sisters did work suited to their abilities, such as baking, weaving, spinning, dyeing and tailoring. Since the economy was one large family the united strength of the group was exerted where the need was greatest. In busy seasons on the farms, some of the tradesmen left

their shops to help in the harvest fields. And when members of the Pilgrim Congregation were not engaged, or were home for a while, they had to work wherever they could be of assistance.

Conscious of the Saviour's presence among them, the believers at Bethlehem worked hard and kept an honest record of what they did. Every pound of butter, every egg, every leg of beef used in the choir houses got recorded. So did every bushel of grain harvested, and the number of lambs born in the spring. One visitor observed:

They mix the Saviour and his blood into their harrowing, mowing, washing, spinning, in short, into everything. The cattle yard becomes a temple of grace they conduct in a priestly manner.¹⁹¹

Brother Josef wrote:

¹⁹⁰ Helmuth Erbe, *Bethlehem Pa., eine Kommunistische Herrnhuter Kolonie des 18 Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, 1929

¹⁹¹ Uttendörfer und Schmidt, *Die Brüder*, Gnadau, 1914

In our economy the spiritual and the physical are as closely united as a man's body and his soul, and each has a strong influence upon the other. As soon as all is not well with a brother's heart we notice it in his work. But when he is rejoicing in Jesus' wounds, and his love to the Lamb is tender, one takes note of it in his conduct immediately.

Community: The Human Element

"Everyone shares the spring house at Bethlehem," one visitor wrote. "Each family has its shelf, and even though they place no watch there and the door is not locked, everyone is sure to find his plate of butter or his bowl of milk exactly like he left it when he comes back."¹⁹²

That the believers at Bethlehem, united through the Saviour's blood, should treat one another kindly, could be expected. But not everything took place automatically. Some needed little reminders to keep relationships pleasant, as these announcements made at community meetings show:

No one shall dig through Adolf Meyer's medicine cupboard when he is not around. . . . Whoever uses tools shall put them back where he got them. All brothers should try to use the tools more carefully. . . . The cows should be

brought in early. The night watchman shall wake little Hans Tannenberger to be sure he gets up on time. . . . Sisters shall take off their stockings before coming into the Saal for footwashing. The way they do it now is not modest. . . . Brothers who sleep in Singstunde will get a written reminder from the choir leader.

Animals, the brothers agreed, should all be kept in fences, and they allowed only a few dogs in the community “as needed.” Brothers took turns cleaning streets. No peddlars could come to Bethlehem. No one had permission to stay out late, or loiter in the street. Parents were to keep their children at home and clean their chimneys regularly.

Every choir had its rules. Boys and girls should not mingle freely. No one should enter another’s room without a good reason, and two should never be in a room alone without a light. Idle talk, too much laughing, every sign of straying from Christ met with the prompt concern of brothers or sisters— usually those in charge. If their kind admonitions did not bring results, offenders appeared before the whole congregation to repent of their deeds or else (depending on how the lot fell) to say goodbye.

Within a year of their arrival at Bethlehem the brothers already had to deal with Matthias Hoffman for making vulgar remarks. “It was the brothers’ opinion that he should leave for a time,” the diary reports, “because he did not appreciate the advantages of living in the Saviour’s community enough.”

Even though outsiders thought it looked like “popish confession” the brothers and sisters at Bethlehem considered their monthly interviews one of those advantages. Living in responsibility one to another led them into freedom and peace. It propelled them outward with the good news of Christ and filled them with song. One writer described what happened:

¹⁹² Isaac Weld, 1796

Music was a must. The children in the choir houses ate their dinners off wooden trenchers, but they learned at an early age to play the violin, the viola da gamba, the flute or French horn, and to sing in a chorus. This was quite as important as the three R’s and even more so. The first settlers brought musical instruments with them. On January 25, 1744, a pinet, brought over on *The Little Strength* from London, reached Bethlehem. “In dulce Jubilo” was sung at a love feast on August 21, 1745, in thirteen different languages: Czech, German, Latin, Greek, English, French, Swedish, Dutch, Wendish, Gaelic, Welsh,

Mohawk, and Mohican; and there were three persons there of three more nationalities, Danish, Polish, and Hungarian, who did not sing.¹⁹³

The Wheel and the Hinge

Exulting in the harmony of their diversity, and with no greater desire than to please the Lamb by bringing more souls to him, the believers at Bethlehem appointed brothers to leave on regular excursions in every direction—like the spokes of a wheel. The *Pilgerrad* (Pilgrim Wheel) they called it, and looked forward to the day when every branch congregation established through it (like Schoeneck and Lititz toward Lancaster, Bethel in Berks County, and Hebron in Lebanon County) would become the hubs of new wheels. Eventually, they hoped, wheels upon wheels would cover all America, as in Ezekiel’s vision.

At the same time, the community at Bethlehem saw itself as only one leaf of a hinge. All believers, its pilgrims taught, hinge on Jesus Christ, the “nail in the middle” of his church that holds it securely and around which every congregation must revolve. With this in mind they “wandered far and wide through the American colonies, reaching isolated parts of Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia no Christian minister had ever been seen. They penetrated the Alleghenies. They went as far north as Canajoharie in New York and Broadbay in Maine. They visited New Haven, Newport, Long Island, Staten Island, and nearby New Jersey.”¹⁹⁴

“Concerning these pilgrims,” the Bishop Christian Friedrich Cammerhof wrote:

every one must be ready for service at all times. If our Saviour tells one of them to get up at 3:45 and go joyfully on his way, he must do so without hesitation. Nothing should keep him back from doing the Saviour’s will. On the other hand, if the Saviour tells any one to stay home and care for the farm, we thank him that he has chosen brothers to that work too. Their work and calling is a noble one too. The pilgrims’ work calls for a crossbearing character. They must be driven by nothing but the love of Christ. They must be ready to give up all other interests and economic pursuits for their calling.

¹⁹³ Fredric Klees, *The Pennsylvania Dutch*, pg. 103 ¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* pg. 98

Here in Bethlehem we cannot help but lay down our bodies, souls, and everything we have for the joy of Christ. We work on the foundation of what we

feel in our hearts—a desire to do everything to serve the Lamb and his people. For this reason one sees so many busy hands in Bethlehem—in the blacksmith shop, at the wagon maker’s, in the carpenter’s shop, in the tannery, in the stables, and in countless other buildings and corners around the place. No one thinks, “I am doing this for me.” Even for the Indian brothers and sisters among us it would be a great punishment were we to tell them to work and live for themselves. Yes, and if anyone among us should think, “If I would work this hard in the world I could live a comfortable and prosperous life,” he would have to be out of his mind and crazy.

If only you could be here and see what is happening! One week you would see the tradesmen deep in their work and with nice operations going. Several weeks or a month later you would ask: “What happened to the master tanner?” Oh, he has gone to Muddy Creek! “Where is the shoemaker that did such good work?” Out beyond the Susquehanna! “Where is the master weaver?” He has gone to Maryland and Virginia! “What are they doing there? Are they studying to improve their professions or have they gone to earn more money?” No, instead of that they are using up our money to go among totally unknown people to tell them the Lamb of God bled and died for them.

This last winter, right when we had the most weaving to do, Leonhard Schnell (our master weaver) suddenly left for a three hundred mile journey on foot to Canahojarie, not even knowing whether he would get to preach there or not. Right before harvest, Joseph Powell, our assistant farm director, left for Shamokin on the Susquehanna to build a house and blacksmith shop among the Indians. And we gave him our blessing with a thousand joys.¹⁹⁵

Two hundred and fifty-one years later I visited Shamokin again. . . .

¹⁹⁵ *Cammerhof an Wilhelm Zander in Berbice, 21. Januar 1747*

18

Dry Grass And Seeds

From Conrad Weiser's place at Womelsdorf, through Pine Grove and Tower City I crossed the Blue Mountains on the Shamokin Trail. It rained, that cold Sunday afternoon in December. Hurrying to see my wife and new son at an Amish midwife's place, I feared it would turn dark before I descended the last steep hill—where Brother Ludwig held onto Anna Nitschmann's coat tails—into Sunbury. It did. But I found the site of Chief Shikellamy's village, on the north side of town where the great rivers come together, at once. I stood, and "remembered" even though I had never stood there before. On the far side of the Susquehanna, half a mile wide at Sunbury, golden lights moved along the water's edge below the rock face of a mountain.

Trains stood in rail yards on my side. Above them, in a quiet residential area, built out to a flood-wall, I found the state historical marker: "Shikellamy, Oneida chief and overseer or vice-regent of the Six Nations, asserting Iroquois dominion over conquered Delaware and other tribes. He lived at Shamokin Indian town, Sunbury, from about 1728 until his death, 1748. Said to be buried near here."

Shikellamy, baptised member of the Unity of Brothers, resting in the wounds of the Lamb. At this place Peter Böhler and Ludwig von Zinzendorf preached in his home. In this soil Martin and Johanna Mack, just married (Martin, who became a bishop in the Gemeinde and died the year after the hurricane, at Friedensthal on St. Croix), planted turnips. Here Joseph Powell the farm director that left Bethlehem "right before harvest" built a blacksmith shop.

From where I stood on the flood-wall I watched the Susquehanna move under reflected lights toward Shamokin Dam. Plumes of vapour from the Cellotex plant billowed into the night sky. Beneath them, on what might have been a restaurant, I saw a sign "Christian Assembly" and stepped in. A woman with frizzy hair and green tights, evidently a good cook, met me among preparations for a Christmas banquet. "Moravians, nope never heard of 'em! Sheila," she called over her shoulder from where she stood squeezing out the mayonnaise, "Ever heard tell of a Christian community here in the 1700s? Plain people that preached to Indians?"

Looking thoughtful, but no less friendly, another woman emerged from the kitchen. She had heard of Moravian College in Bethlehem but did not know that a church started it.

In Bethlehem itself I found things more encouraging. Not only did I discover a number of people well aware of Moravian *Pilgerwerk* (mission activity) in the past. I found a group, including a Moravian pastor, actively involved in church planting and mission communities today.

On a sunny winter morning we met under rough-hewn ceiling beams in the Saal of Bethlehem's 1742 Gemeinhaus. January sunlight streamed through many-paned windows onto the hardwood floor upstairs. We sat on bare benches, Anabaptist men with beards, a sister in a long dress and white head covering, one brother from England, one from Hungary, discussing with modern-day Moravians (not for a pageant but for real) the situation of Hindu refugees in Venezuela. We spoke of travel through the Orinoco delta to the Demerara. We discussed how best to get from Berbice to Suriname, and sang Brother Ludwig's song, *Jesu geh voran* (Jesus still lead on) together.

How I wished this meeting could have taken place two hundred years earlier! But it didn't, and some time later I sat with other Moravians, Anabaptists, and Lutherans in a restored meetinghouse on the campus of a Brethren college. A Moravian bishop spoke on Ludwig von Zinzendorf's "ecumenical theology." A panel, including a student from Herrnhut (after the breakup of communism, no longer in East Germany), a Lutheran theologian, a Moravian history professor, and a woman who carefully spoke of Christian "siblinghood" discussed what he had to say.

Conversation turned to the Moravian focus on the blood of Christ. The bishop smiled. "We no longer speak about that," he explained, "Because we have learned that not everyone comes to God through Jesus Christ. Some, like our Muslim brothers and sisters, come to God through God. . . ."

Sitting in the Brethren meetinghouse I could not help but think of Joseph Müller. Born in a Swiss Anabaptist home he emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1735 where he found the Lord among the Brethren (Dunkards) at Germantown. They baptised him by trine immersion. But through contact with the Skippack brothers and meetings of the "Church of God in the Spirit" he joined the Moravians.

Andreas and Wilhelm Frey, like Joseph Müller of Mennonite background, and their sister Veronika who became his wife, also humbled themselves before the Lamb and moved to Bethlehem. When Brother Ludwig returned to Europe in 1743, Joseph travelled with him. As part of the Pilgergemeinde he made his way through Saxony and Silesia, back to Mühlheim on the Rhein where he visited

Gerhard Tersteegen. He became leader of boys' choirs, first at Herrnhag then in England. Andreas and Wilhelm, his brothers-in-law left the Moravians again, but Joseph felt sure he had found the Saviour's Gemeine. In a letter to his Dunkard and Mennonite family he wrote:

If the Saviour [through the use of the lot] had allowed it, we would baptise by immersion. But neither in Pennsylvania or in Germany has he wanted it this way, no doubt because we Dunkers make too much out of it. . . . God does not like when we emphasise anything but Christ, his death and wounds, and his bloody atonement. All other things—baptism, the Lord's supper, footwashing, going to meeting, vigils, prayers, fasts, and the alms we give—easily become idols to us. . . .

I do not think the Moravians are the only true church, but they are certainly the best I know of at this point. I do not say this because of their beautiful order and outward appearance. Many take that for the thing itself. Rather, I say this because the Moravian church rests exclusively on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, that is, on Jesus Christ and on his blood. This word of the cross separates their doctrine from all other doctrines in the world.¹⁹⁶

“Christ, his death and wounds, and his bloody atonement . . . beautiful order and outward appearance . . . the word of the cross.” Browsing the Moravian exhibit on the day of the bishop's visit, I could not help but compare what Joseph Müller saw with what one sees today. Under the lids of glass cases I saw old Moravian books and pictures of their “beautifully ordered” communities. I looked at Moravian tools and handcrafted articles, and on stands around me hung evidence of their “outward appearance”: broad-brimmed hats like the Amish, long dresses with capes and aprons, head coverings in three pieces that covered all the hair and then some, and black bonnets like those still worn among the Old Order River Brethren.

With these peculiarities they went—trusting the Saviour alone for their protection, and following his instructions explicitly—to St. Thomas, to Greenland, Suriname, and South Africa. With this they enjoyed his favour and brought thousands upon thousands of black slaves, natives of the rain forest, Khoi tribesmen, and Eskimos to him. Yet now it might be indiscreet to mention his saving blood.

Is this what happens to movements that go “all out” for Christ? Two Mennonite ministers, Jaan Stinstra and Jeme Teknatel (the man in whose home Moravian brothers stayed in Amsterdam) discussed that question centuries ago. Jaan

Stinstra, minister of the Harlingen congregation and for many years moderator of the Frisian Mennonite Society, said “yes!” He predicted the apostasy and decline of the Moravian church.

In fact, no one in the eighteenth century, predicted it with greater force and accuracy.

Jaan Stinstra and his Mennonite friends had little time for the *Herzensglauben* (heart religion) of the Moravians. “Who cares whether our hearts turn warm or cold when we pray?” they asked. “No amount of inner feelings, of evangelistic zeal, or great ideas about following Christ will last through time. Such emotionalism, if let go, destroys common sense, but an honest *Gehorsamsglauben* (religion of obedience) goes on forever.”

In 1753 Jaan Stinstra wrote a book against the Moravians and their influence, *Waarschuwinge tegen de Geestdrijverij*, that others soon published in England under the title *A Pastoral Letter Against Fanaticism addressed to the Mennonites of Friesland. . . which may serve as an Excellent Antidote against the Principles of Fanatics in General and the Herrnhuters or Moravians in Particular*. The book also appeared in French (with an introduction giving the story of the rise of Herrnhut) and soon after in German.

¹⁹⁶ From a letter from Joseph Müller to the Brethren in Germantown, November 1749.

Leaders of the Dutch Reformed church read Jaan’s book and became greatly alarmed. They sent a letter to all Dutch colonies in the East and West Indies, to New York, South Africa and Suriname, urgently calling on Reformed pastors everywhere to stand against the “heretical and dangerous influence” from Herrnhut.

Both the book and the letter brought great hardship on Moravians around the world. In Ceylon it resulted in their expulsion altogether. But Jeme Deknatel, minister of the Mennonite congregation *bij ‘t Lam* (by the Lamb) in Amsterdam, did not support it. “Why fear the Moravians or be hard on them?” Jeme and his friends (like Peter Weber, another Mennonite minister from Germany) wondered. “If we know and walk with Christ, how shall Moravian influence harm us?”

Jeme Deknatel saw nothing dangerous about a “heart religion” or an emphasis on personal experience. “What religion might we have,” he wondered, “if it is not *bevindelijk* (something to experience and feel)?” When the Moravians organised a congregation in Amsterdam in 1738 he became an affiliate and often preached at

the Heerendyk community even though he kept his membership in the Mennonite church. He sent his sons, Jan and Jakob, to the Moravians' school in Marienborn, and entertained brother Josef, Brother Ludwig (who celebrated communion with him) and others in his home.

In a letter to Leonhard Dober, Jeme Deknatel told of the wonderful fellowship with Christ he and his family had discovered through influence from Herrnhut. "We have rid ourselves of much self-love and self-made piety," he said, and through prayer meetings in his home, correspondence far and wide, and his writings distributed from Russia to Pennsylvania he shared with his Anabaptist brothers and sisters what he had found.

Hutterite believers wrote to Jeme Deknatel from eastern Europe. Through this and direct contact with Herrnhut (Brother Ludwig issued passports for them) many escaped from Roman Catholic lands to begin a new life in Russia. In southern Germany and Switzerland Peter Weber and groups of seekers under Moravian influence "woke up" to Christ. So did Mennonites and Dunkards in Pennsylvania (among whom this influence resulted in the formation of the "River Brethren") and the Mennonite *Brüdergemeine* (named after the Unity of Brothers) in Russia.

In Harlingen itself, right in Jaan Stinstra's congregation, hungry seekers discovered fellowship with Christ through Moravian influence, and when Jaan forbade Jeme Deknatel to come and preach for them, they began to meet for prayer and communion services in their homes.

"We dare not stand in the way of the Saviour's work in believers' hearts," Jeme Deknatel, and his friends insisted. "If Christians lose a *Herzensglauben* they will surely lose their *Gehorsam* (obedience) as well. . . ."

But Jaan Stinstra was the first to be proven right. When Brother Ludwig returned to Germany from America in 1743 he found the Moravian church growing by leaps and bounds. More than twenty thousand people—four thousand of them in Silesia alone—had joined, and new Ortsgemeinen, Niesky, *Gnadenfrei* (Free Grace), and *Gnadenberg*, had grown up almost overnight. Another one, Neudietendorf was underway in the German province of Thüringen. Brother Ludwig, who had asked for release from leadership two years earlier, felt bewildered at first, then upset.

All this happening without him involved? What about not making proselytes and just helping people find Christ where they are? Brother Ludwig felt his vision betrayed. He also felt certain this rapid growth, particularly with its "sectarian distinctions" brought from Moravia (refusal to swear oaths or bear arms, plain

dress, life in community), would bring German rulers in ever greater wrath upon them. So he lost no time in going to government officials, requesting them to cancel permits they had given for more building projects, and at the Hirschberg, near Ebersdorf, he called the leaders of all Moravian congregations together.

In a difficult conference that lasted a week, it became clear that even though Christ might serve as “chief elder” of the church, no one but Ludwig von Zinzendorf, with his noble rank and assets, would have the last word. What could David Nitschmann, Wenzel Neisser, Martin and Leonhard Dober, and other leaders, most of them refugees from Moravia, say? They owed their livelihood (and quite likely their lives) to the Count on whose property they lived. Four months later they signed a document of submission giving him “unlimited control and oversight” of the Moravian Church.

Things happened fast. Under Ludwig’s unrestrained leadership waves of ever greater evangelistic zeal swept through the communities, while the first sentiments of disdain for Herrnhut’s “prudish ways” made themselves felt at Marienborn and Herrnhag. Thankfulness for Christ’s blood progressed rapidly from emphasis to obsession. “In our congregation it becomes bloodier all the time,” Christian Renuus von Zinzendorf (Ludwig’s son) wrote. “To speak of the cross and the blood becomes continually more pleasant and goes deeper into the heart. Every hour of the day we taste nothing but wounds and wounds and wounds and wounds.”

A stream of songs written after Brother Ludwig’s return, exhausted the ideas of the “blood conscious ones” how to put their fascination with Christ to words—but they kept on writing and singing nevertheless. For those who had not felt the Saviour’s presence “warming the heart” their songs became unintelligible. Even some who lived in fellowship with him began to wonder where this matter of his *Wunden* (wounds) would take them:

Des Wundten Kreuz-Gotts Bundesblut Die Wunden-wunden-wunden-fluth, Ihr Wunden! Ja, ihr wunden!

(The Cross-God’s covenant blood of the wounds, the wounds-wounds-wounds flow from its wounds! Yes its wounds!)

Euer Wunden-wunden-wunden-gut Macht Wunden-wunden-wunden-muth Und Wunden, Herzens-wunden.

(Your wounds-wounds-wounds possession, gives you wounds-wounds-wounds courage, and wounds wound your heart.)

*Wunden! Wunden! Wunden! Wunden! Wunden! Wunden! Wunden! Wunden!
Wunden! Wunden! O! Ihr Wunden.*¹⁹⁷

At Herrnhag the brothers built a niche, lined with red velvet, into the side of the Saal. Children placed into it pictured the believers' rest in the side wound of Christ. At a "bloody festival of grace" the whole congregation marched through a red arch to celebrate the same. Thinking of themselves as little *Kreuzluft-vögelein* (birds of the air around the cross) fluttering about the "magnetic body of the Lamb," they pictured themselves with their beaks pushed deep into his wounds, drawing on his blood until "stiff and full with ecstasy" they would close their eyes in unconsciousness. Nothing but a fresh spurt of blood, pouring over them from head to foot, would awaken and loosen them to flutter around the cross again. They sung of licking round and round in Christ's wounds like in a block of salt (*Ich hab es um und um belekt, Das Stein-salz! O wie hats geschmeckt!*), of crawling deeply into them like little bees, or swimming like fish in the sea of his blood. But this focus on the wounds—even though most Moravians believed it rested on Christ—did not keep their eyes on him. Neither did it save them from disaster.

Financial mismanagement, most of it happening during the "years of blood" and indiscriminate use of the lot, finally brought the whole Gemeinde to the brink of bankruptcy. The beautiful communities of the Wetterau, Herrnhag (built with the labour of thousands of willing hands) and Marienborn had to be abandoned. In the east, a Russian army destroyed the Neusalz community. The Sharon community at Chelsea, in London, and Heerendyk in the Netherlands had to be sold. Pilgerhut in South America was abandoned like the work in the East Indies and many preaching places through England, Ireland, and Germany. Even so, by the time Brother Ludwig died in 1760 and the believers bought Herrnhut from his heirs, the church faced outstanding debts of nearly eight hundred thousand Reichsthaler (besides the five hundred thousand they had already paid).

Jaan Stinstra felt completely justified. His prophecy had come true—even faster than he expected. In his old age even Jeme Deknatel, John and Charles Wesley, Peter Weber and others who had warmly defended the Moravians and opposed him had to admit, somewhat hesitantly, that he had been right. But the story did not end. . . .

¹⁹⁷ *Gesangbuch*, 1945

Jeme Deknatel's prophecy also came true.

Not only did the Mennonites clinging tightly to a strict *Gehorsams glauben* (Jaan Stinstra's congregation at Harlingen included) turn further and further away from personal faith in Christ—eventually losing interest in “conversion” and personal piety altogether. Their focus on correct teaching and good works, as opposed to a focus on Christ, led them to spiritual death. First a few, then dozens of Mennonite congregations died out in the Netherlands and Germany. Ever shrinking groups failed to keep their young people, and marks of nonconformity to the world fell away, one after another. Their peace witness disappeared. Even though their interest in foreign missions survived for a while, a generation after Jaan Stinstra's death the few remaining Mennonites in Western Europe lived little differently than their Lutheran, Catholic, and unbelieving neighbours.

And the Moravians, after the “blood enthusiasm” died down, followed suit.

During the years they spoke of little else but the Saviour's blood and wounds many had failed to read his words or follow his instructions carefully. They also forgot to teach them to their children. Hymnbooks took the place of Scriptures, and ever more exciting celebrations—in “halls decorated with pine branches and thousands of candles, with fancy lettering and displays, much Christmas baking, drama, and other sorts of childishness” as described by Andreas Frey—took the place of sound teaching. Jacob John Sessler, describing what happened at Bethlehem in America, wrote:

The emphasis on their hymns, while it apparently unified them externally, left them without an intellectual grasp of their belief. They largely replaced religious instruction and the study of the Bible itself. These hymns were supposed to be the expressions of hearts already “set on fire” for the Lord, but the fact was that many who sang them were not “set on fire.” Later generations did not share the sentiment which those hymns presupposed. With the breakdown of the General Economy the individual pursuit of business afforded the Brethren less time for participation in [worship] services. In short, the Brethren were no longer imbued with the piety to which a previous generation had given expression. They now dared to question the traditions and beliefs of their church without being stricken with the sinfulness of such an attitude.

On his return from America, Brother Ludwig had already attempted to modify what he saw as “sectarian influences” from Moravia. He wanted the communities to fit into the main-line churches of Europe (Lutheran, Anglican,

Reformed) and even though he left room for those with peculiar convictions to practice them, he no longer felt they should be required of everyone. Pilgrims who had suffered harassment for years because they would not swear oaths suddenly received directions from Marienborn to “make nothing more out of it.” Some obeyed and swore oaths of allegiance. Others, standing for what they had always believed, returned to Europe or Pennsylvania. In meetings after Brother Ludwig’s death the church elected an “Elders’ Conference” (a board of governors) to oversee all Moravian communities. Trained theologians defined what they believed, experienced businessmen took charge of their money, and historians recorded what they had done. As long as those whose “hearts had been truly warmed” lived, the Ortsgemeinen continued to function (even though their children and grandchildren grew restless within them) but drastic changes followed.

By the late 1700s most communities had allowed hourly intercessions to cease. They no longer washed feet before communion (something old Friedrich von Watteville mentioned in a letter of admonition from his deathbed), and the bands, choirs, and weekly or monthly interviews fell into disarray. The Elders’ Conference tried to improve and enlarge Moravian schools that had acquired fame as among the best in Europe. In 1775 they made the leaders of all congregations directly responsible to Herrnhut, “agents and representatives of the Elders’ Conference,” rather than to the groups they served. For a time they also set up a dual membership system: Those who wished to belong to the Moravian church but not follow all its customs could take part as associate members, and receive communion twice a year. Those fully integrated, an “inner circle” of dedicated members, could meet for communion once a month. But after 1800 the speed of the Unity of Brothers’ deterioration only increased.

In meetings at Herrnhut early in the nineteenth century the use of the lot came up for question. Many members did not feel like using it anymore, particularly not in marriage. At first the Elders’ Conference allowed them to stop putting in a blank slip. Then they made marriage by lot necessary for ministers and missionaries only. After a few more years, they dropped it altogether. Along with it, they dropped all dress standards, both for men and women. The sisters stopped wearing their white *Shnäbelhauben* (head coverings), and in 1836 the Elders’ Conference decided to exchange the “kiss of peace” with an ordinary handshake.

Up to this time, only members of the Moravian church could live in the Ortsgemeinen. The church still owned the mills, tanneries, stores, and guest houses within them and employed many of its working members. But families managed their own affairs. Young men and women living in their choir houses, found work elsewhere and no longer shared their possessions. They simply paid for their keep, like at boarding houses, and after repeated incidents of drunkenness and immorality (or theft, as in one case in Germany where a brother in charge made off with a large sum of money), the church decided to close the choir houses down.

At Bethlehem in Pennsylvania the church began to allow its members to sell land to non-Moravians in 1844. Other communities “opened up” soon afterward, but no change affected the brothers and sisters more than their gradual acceptance of military service.

For a hundred years since their flight to Herrnhut, and century upon century before then, Moravian believers, as “pilgrims on earth and friends of the whole world,” had refused to take part in war. War and worldly government, like taking up arms for self-defence, looked to them like the exact opposite of Christ’s way. As late as in the 1770’s (during the Revolutionary War) the brothers at Gnadenheim, near York, Pennsylvania, wrote: “To take part in military service is sin. It calls for church discipline.” In a message to the young brothers at Bethlehem, Bishop Johann Ettwein said: “To take up arms is the same as murder, and to hire a substitute for the militia, the same as hiring a murderer instead of being one. . . . Your work is to serve Christ. Therefore you may not allow anything to break your close connection or your allegiance to him. For this reason, do not get involved in political excitement.”

A generation later, Moravians in Europe fought on both sides of the Napoleonic Wars. The same took place in America where the church band from Salem, North Carolina, played for Confederate troops at Gettysburg. And during both World Wars young Moravians marched to opposite tunes—mere Americans, Britons, or Nazis. Herrnhut itself passed from the Heiland’s hands into those of the Führer, then into East German communism. But the story did not end. . . .

A chorus of frogs sang in the rain the night we met with the leaders of the Moravian Church in Guyana, at Georgetown. Sitting around a table under a bare light in the basement of the manse on New Garden Street, we heard water dripping outside its open windows. Water ran from coconut palms. Mosquitos

circled about, and the happy noise of children playing across the yard in the John Amos Comenius school drifted to us. A brother read the Watchword. We prayed together and an East Indian Christian (a welcome sight among the rest of the brothers, all Afro-Guyanese, in this racially divided land) spoke to us. We discussed plans together. Then we stood, holding hands, to pray again and sing a Moravian hymn.

After the meeting I met leaders from West Demerara, Graham's Hall, Beterverwagting, Berbice. . . . As if walking straight out of the story those names evoked they almost startled me with their reality. Anabaptists from England, America, and Canada, here we stood among Moravians again— Afro-Moravians in South America on the eve of the twenty-first century— just as colourfully diverse, yet as directly a result of central Europeans seeking for Christ as we. And in that strange diversity but common unity it occurred to me that we may not have missed our last chance yet.

All those that predicted, like Jaan Stinstra, the ruin of the Moravian church saw some of their prophecies come true. But all of them, to greater or lesser degrees, suffered the same ruin themselves. Apostasy comes in many ways. No matter on what we focus—on strict obedience to the letter, on heady emotionalism, on missions, on revival, on community, on nonconformity, on peace—if it is not Christ, it leads to ruin. But awakening only and always comes through humble repentance.

The first Mennonite meetinghouse in America, at Germantown, like the Moravian Gemeinhaus at Bethlehem, has become a museum. To a certain extent both of us have become “museum churches.” All Christians like to know something about us, and mention us in their footnotes. But what would happen, I began to ask myself that wet tropical night on New Garden Street, if we woke up together? What would happen if in full recognition of our *Sünderhaftigkeit* (wretched sinnerness) we would fall on our faces before the “Bridegroom of our Souls” then rose to follow him in radical obedience? What would happen if we caught a new vision of the *Gemeinde Gottes im Geist*, a “Jesus Church” for the 21'st Century, then lived it out in simplicity and peace?

Could many good traditions, the Pilger and the Ortsgemeinen, “choir houses” for single brothers and sisters, “pilgrim wheels” and the “hinge,” not come back to life and serve the Saviour again?

Could what the Moravians had and what the Anabaptists (always bickering and dividing over details) needed, not come together? On the other hand, could the

“If you love me keep my commandments” teaching of the Anabaptists not protect those who exult in the wonder of Christ’s mercy today?

It will not take a fresh understanding of Scripture, it suddenly occurred to me, for us to rediscover the great joy of the early Moravian, the Anabaptist, the Waldensian, the early Czech, Albigensian, Bogomil, and first Christian movements. It will not take years in college or celebrations of history— artefact displays, Moravian stars, beeswax candles, or music by Bethlehem’s Bach choir. It will not even take this book. . . .

All it will take for heaven to move and earth to shake again is a “night on the Hutberg.” All it will take is what David had and Saul did not—a vision of ourselves as *ganz klein und sündlerisch*, utterly wretched in our sins before God (both as individuals and congregations). Then, on our faces in repentance before him, we might see what the believers at Herrnhut saw, and our Saviour might finish in us what he began in them.

Just before Easter, in 1999, I visited Bethlehem for the last time before moving to South America. Patches of frozen snow still crunched under my feet on the burial ground in the middle of the city. The rising sun, dazzling in mist above the Lehigh, shone through giant trees not yet in bud. Squirrels scampered from tree to tree, and I heard the roar of morning rush hour traffic.

. . .

Johann Michael Zahm, Sinsheim Pfaltz, 1737, Michael of the Mennising Nation, John Peter of the Wampanosh Nation, Thomas Fischer, Neustadt an der Asch, Simeon a Delaware, Johannes (Tschoop) a Mohican—the gravestones, some still under snow, lay flat among dry grass and seeds. Row upon row of stones, they lay like I knew the brothers and sisters buried there had sat in meeting. Every one alike. All on the same level. First I walked where the married brothers lay: Johann Friedrich Cammerhof, David Nitschman Zauchenthal 1696-1772 episcopus, Christian Werner, Copenhagen, William, son of Johannes an East Indian and of Magdalena an African, Georg Heinrich Loskiel, Angermunde, Courland, 1745-1814, Joseph a Mohican. Jens Wittenberg, Christiania [Norway], Joachim Busse, Reval, Livonia, 1758. . . .

Then I found myself among the young brothers’ and little boys’s choirs: Johann Ignatius Nitschmann, Joseph “Indian boy” 1759, Samuel (a Delaware) 1757, Timothy Horsefield, Johann Gattermeyer, William Shippen, Christian David Heckewelder, Friedrich Christian Beutel [son of Heinrich

and Elisabeth, pioneers at Pilgerhut], Ludwig Daniel Lukenbach. . . .

On the other side of the central path through the burial ground I read: Agnes Fischer, Mühlhausen im Schweiz, 1788, Anna Helena Haberland, Berthelsdorf, Elisabeth Weber, Modekrick [Muddy Creek], Susanne Elisabeth Funk Kaske [Pilgerhut, Berbice], Anna Caritas of the Shawnee Nation, Eve of the Mohican Nation, wife of Nicodemus, Elizabeth Langgard, s'Gravenhaag, Barbara Schlegel, Franconia, Helene Birnbaum, Kärnten, 1784, Rosina Neubert, Kunwald in Mähren, Marianne Garrison [the converted sea-captain's wife], Dorothea Schmidt, Württemberg, Maria Elisabeth Pitschman, Oberschlesien And among the girls choirs, Susanna Carolina Eggert, Lydia Carolina Hübner, Lisette Lewering, Johanna Elisabeth Unger, Mary Pyrlaeus, Juliane Fischer, geboren in Surinam, Rachel and Anna Maria of the Delaware Nation, Clementine Sophie Borheck, Carolina Henkel, St. Croix. . . .

Baby girls that died before they had names lay under simple inscriptions, *Beata* (Blessed) Schropp, Beata Schultz, and baby boys under the name *Beatus*.

From London and Donegal and Wittgenstein they came. From Schaffhausen, Hungary, Yorkshire, Antigua, St. Thomas, Heidelberg, Stockholm, the Aarau, Liverpool, Jutland, Holstein, Lübeck, Hinterpommern—their names (many of them old Waldensian and Unity names from Moravia) standing in silent witness this spring morning above the Lehigh to what happened in southern France, in Czech lands, and at Herrnhut in the eighteenth century.

In this burial ground I could not feel sad. The *vollendete Gemeinde* (triumphant congregation) that left its names at this place is no longer here. Their trials passed. They had their turn. They saw the Lamb and changed the world. Now it is our turn.

At the time of the awakening in Herrnhut, Brother Ludwig wrote:

A Church remains immovable, as long as she is faithful and the Saviour prospers her. But the moment her spirit is gone, and the body is without life, it must, according to general and eternal justice, be dissolved, and lose its form also. Those church bodies which are not dissolved when life is wanting, either never had it, but were statues, or if they had, then they are carcasses in the sight of God, till their figure likewise drops. But God who raises the dead and has

promised eternal duration to his own schemes, foresees an hour when he will call such a vanished church out of her grave. Then she is fairer than before.¹⁹⁸

An hour foreseen by God to rise from the grave? Should we “behold the Lamb” like the young slave singing with all his heart among the St. Thomas underbrush, that hour might come today.

¹⁹⁸ *Berliner Reden*, 1738

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