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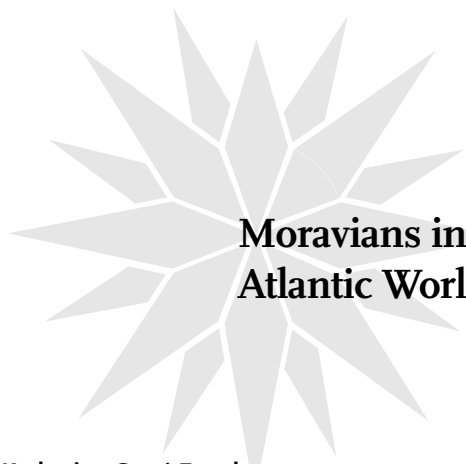➡ For additional information about this article

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ABSTRACT: In its first sixty years, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, went from being an energetic hub of evangelical outreach to a quiet retreat in the northeastern Pennsylvania hills. During the settlement's early decades, the Moravians took advantage of Britain's broad pro-Protestant policies and of the expanding Atlantic economy. Deep engagement also brought friction, however. This article argues that Bethlehem's retreat resulted from its very engagement in the wider British Atlantic world and from the difficulties caused by the Moravians' desire to remain a distinct community in a rapidly changing political and religious environment.

In August 1790, Judith Sargent Murray published an essay extolling the virtues of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in the *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*. "Bethlehem," she wrote, "is in the state of Pennsylvania—it is situated 54 miles north of Philadelphia—it is a beautiful village, and without the smallest degree of enthusiasm it may be pronounced a terrestial [*sic*] paradise." The setting was serene: "Embowering shades, meadows,

hills, and dales, strike the eye with agreeable variety. Parallel rivers pursue their glassy course, the margins of which are planted by the flourishing and highly perfumed locust, cedars, chessnut [*sic*], and a variety of trees bearing the most delicious fruit."[1]

Murray had good company in taking time to describe Bethlehem. In 1777, John Adams, while traveling on his way from Boston to Baltimore to join Congress, wrote to Abigail that Bethlehem was a "curious and remarkable Town." He too was struck by the order, abundance, and beauty of the place. "When We first came in sight of the town," he wrote, "We found a Country better cultivated and more agreably diversified with Prospects of orchards and Fields, Groves and Meadows, Hills and Valleys, than any we had seen." He went on, as many other visitors did, to discuss the diverse industries pursued in the Moravian town, the water works and mills, the choir houses of the single brethren, the single sisters, and the widows. Indeed, the description became almost ethnographic: "They have a Custom, peculiar, respecting Courtship and Marriage," he wrote, when describing the process by which elders arranged matches, and he noted too that a Moravian brother showed them "the Curiosities of the Place."[2]

The curiosity Adams displayed when he had the opportunity to pass by Bethlehem was mirrored by that of earlier visitors. Benjamin Franklin, the youthful diarist Hannah Callendar, and colonial administrator Thomas Pownall each left an account of visiting such a unique settlement. In each case, the same basic territory was covered: the Moravians emerge from these travel narratives as a pious, industrious, and, as a 1773 visitor called them, "inofensive" people. The image was replicated visually, such as in Nicholas Garrison's pen and ink view of the town, drawn around 1780 (fig. 1). Bethlehem and its neighboring Nazareth were, and remained over decades, quaint. A destination for tourists, a place "other" than what surrounded it, a separate world in the northeastern Pennsylvania landscape, an isolated enclave.[3]

1. "Description of a Journey to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, by a Lady," *New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 1 (August 1790): 458. Accessed on Proquest American Periodicals Series, October 10, 2011.

2. John Adams to Abigail Adams, Baltimore, Feb. 7, 1777, printed in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 2:154–56.

3. For Hannah Callender's visit to Bethlehem, see George Vaux, "Extracts from the Diary of Hannah Callender," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 12, no. 4 (1888): 432–56; Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Louis P. Masur (New York: Bedford Books, 1993), 139–40; Thomas Pownall and Lois Mulkearn, eds., *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States of America, being a Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1949); "Philadelphia to Bethlehem Journal," 1773, AM 202, Collection 1005, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

FIG I. View of Bethlehem in 1784, water color by Nicholas Garrison (Moravian Archives, Bethlehem)

Bethlehem's founders, the men and women who laid out the town plan in the early 1740s, would have been quite surprised by the characterization of their town as "quaint"—a term defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "attractively or agreeably unusual in character or appearance"; "pleasingly old-fashioned."[4] In other words, sweetly irrelevant. Those of the founding generation might have been relieved to know that they were no longer considered a threat to the stability of Protestantism, but they also would have been surprised to learn that the boundaries of their community were so narrow. Bethlehem was not, in its early decades, an isolated outpost cut off from its surroundings—it was a busy hub of a vibrant and exceptionally mobile group of evangelists. Yet this is not merely a forgotten history. On the contrary, Bethlehem's transition from internationally connected and threatening to isolated and quaint tells us a great deal about eighteenth-century religion and about the British Atlantic world more broadly.[5] This becomes apparent through the investigation of

4. "Quaint," definition 9.a., *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed online October 10, 2011.

5. For recent treatments of Bethlehem and Moravian history that emphasize its vibrant first

decades, see especially Beverly Prior Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem: From Communal Mission to Family Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

three subjects: first, the nature of the religious establishment in the eighteenth-century British empire and the consequences it had for Moravian religious identity; second, the way Moravians made use of the broader Atlantic world around them; and, third, the way transatlantic ties restricted Bethlehem, setting it on a path to becoming something "quaint."

BRITISH RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

The British are famously known for having grown their empire by "salutary neglect," a phrase that was already in use in the eighteenth century. While the Spanish executed grand, centralized plans, and the French and Dutch organized essentially commercial regimes in the western Atlantic, the British government permitted the privately sponsored and often haphazard growth of a series of settlements that were politically disjointed and often religiously Dissenting (from the Anglican Church). The most obvious explanation for this is that in the same era in which the colonies were being planted, England itself was experiencing incredible political turmoil. The seventeenth century witnessed the founding of Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts, as well as the proprietary colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Carolinas. But that same period of time also witnessed the English Civil War, a conflict between Puritan and royalist forces within England itself, and, at century's end, the Glorious Revolution, the bloodless coup in 1688 in which the almost-entirely Protestant nation ejected its Roman Catholic king and invited in William of Orange and his wife Mary to rule. These events came on the heels of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France, which ended toleration for French Protestants and set the stage for the geopolitics of religion known as the "Protestant Interest," in which Britain militarily and politically took the lead in supporting Protestant causes, including welcoming Protestant refugees, such as the French Huguenots and Austrian Salzburgers, into its fold. Simultaneously, the

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Press, 1988); Craig D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Jesus is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Gisela Mettele, *Weltbürgertum oder Gottesreich: Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine als Globale Gemeinschaft, 1727–1857* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

British, who felt they had overcome their own heritage of religious violence and strife, invested in an image of themselves as having found the best form of religious establishment. The Church of England united believers and supported both the good behavior and the salvation of English Protestants.[6]

Ideologically, then, by the early eighteenth century, Britain stood for Protestantism, religious toleration, and the triumph of liberty. Practically, however, the religious establishments of Britain were more complex. While the Church of England was established in England and, eventually, in most of the British Caribbean possessions and in the southern colonies on the British North American mainland, the rest of the empire represented a much more diverse set of legal and religious realities. Scotland, joined to England permanently both by geography and by the Act of Union in 1707, had an established Presbyterian kirk. Ireland had an established Protestant church on the model of the Church of England, but northern Ireland possessed a significant Presbyterian population, and, of course, the majority of the Irish population was Catholic. Massachusetts and Connecticut were founded as Puritan colonies at a time when Puritans were persecuted in England. They too set up their own religious establishments, which famously persecuted both Puritan dissent and members of other sects, such as the Quakers, and New Englanders only reluctantly accepted the presence of the Church of England after King William gave the colony a new charter in 1691. Rhode Island, founded by Roger Williams, and William Penn's Quaker Pennsylvania both embraced religious toleration as a positive good, eschewing any form of legal establishment. New Yorkers grappled with an ongoing division between members of the Dutch Reformed community and the growing English population. In sum, substantial contradictions

6. The literature on Protestantism as a unifying factor among Britons is vast. See, for example, Linda Colley's seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and J. D. C. Clark, "Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity: 1660–1832," *Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 249–76 for a historiographical treatment. For the politics of religion and foreign policy in Britain, see Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England, 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Andrew C. Thompson, *Britain, Hanover, and the Protestant Interest, 1688–1756* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006); Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity, c. 1650–c. 1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and R. Barry Levis, "The Failure of the Anglican-Prussian Ecumenical Effort of 1710–1714," *Church History* 47, no. 4 (December 1978): 381–99.

and uncertainties lay at the heart of the British religious establishment. Though British culture invested deeply in the ideal of itself as a Protestant nation that embraced religious liberty, exactly what that meant on the ground was quite muddy. It was never clear, for example, how the Act of Toleration of 1689 applied in the colonies. Compliance with that act would have extended the category of "Dissenters"—those Protestants who dissented from the Church of England—to the North American colonies, an absurdity in places like Massachusetts where those who were "Dissenters" in Britain were the establishment.[7]

Dynamic and diverse population growth layered on top of this legally complicated situation. Both Britain's pro-Protestant politics and proprietors like William Penn invited Protestant settlers from around Europe to British North America. Lax naturalization laws encouraged foreign colonists to join the colonial polities, though whether naturalization granted by Pennsylvania (for example) extended to England was less clear. The English and Anglican Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge and the German Halle Pietists joined together to support the migration of Salzburg refugees, a moderate number of whom settled in Georgia. Large numbers of Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians immigrated to North America. The former left an established church and came to regions where their church was not established without ever leaving the larger polity of the British Empire. By the mid-eighteenth century, one could certainly argue that alongside Britain's rhetoric of Protestant identity, a deeply conflicted religious establishment rendered the meaning of that pan-Protestantism nearly unintelligible.[8]

The Moravians burst into the British Atlantic world against just such a backdrop. The group serves as an ideal touchstone from which to examine the shifting nature of the British Atlantic because it embodied,

7. For a succinct summary of British religious arrangements, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

8. For naturalization laws, see John Smolenski, *Friends and Strangers: The Making of a Creole Culture in Colonial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). For Germans in North America, see Renate Wilson, "Halle Pietism in Colonial Georgia," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1988):

271–301; Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine: A German Pharmaceutical Network in Eighteenth-Century North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); and A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). For Scots and Scots-Irish Presbyterians, see Marilyn Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625–1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

at once, the early eighteenth-century hope that Protestant Christendom could be reunited—a variant of the same hope that animated British geopolitics—and because the controversies that surrounded the Moravians highlight just how deep the divisions between various branches of Protestantism remained.

One could imagine that the ecumenical Moravians, who claimed the identity of pre-Reformation Protestants and who sought actively to bridge the boundaries between Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican, not to mention between revivalists and orthodox, would have been welcomed in the British Empire. Certainly, the rapid growth of the Moravians within Europe and Great Britain attests to the appeal of Zinzendorf's teachings and of evangelicalism more broadly, even if the Moravians' total numbers remained very small. But in this British religious environment where the boundaries between state churches and denominations were contorted and conflicted, the Moravians' desire to be all things to all Protestants was too controversial. They were not, as they sometimes claimed, simply members of foreign state churches. Yet they also rejected the idea that they represented a separate sect.

Engagement with Britain thus facilitated Moravian expansion, precisely because of that empire's pan-Protestant mission, but it also required the Moravians to declare an identity of sorts because of the politics of religious establishment within the empire. These issues came to a head with the oft-discussed Act of Parliament in 1749. With this piece of legislation, the Moravians tied their fortunes to the British Empire, and in exchange for protection and freedom of movement, accepted what amounted to a denominational identity. This was in effect a retroactive sanction of a process already well under way. By the time the Moravians received permission from the British Parliament to act as they wished in the British Empire as, essentially, a non-Dissenting Protestant denomination, they had already taken up residence throughout the Atlantic world. Major settlements in the Caribbean (most important, in the Danish West Indies), Georgia, New York, Greenland, and Pennsylvania, in addition to extensive work in Britain, made the Moravians nearly ubiquitous.[9]

Bethlehem's 1741 settlement in Pennsylvania, as a mission outpost dedicated to the spread of evangelical Protestantism to the region's non-Christians and "unchurched" folk, has to be seen within this

9. For the Moravians in England, see Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For their challenge to the "confessional order," see Fogleman, *Jesus is Female*.

extravagant moment of propulsive energy. The little frontier town fifty miles north of Philadelphia was hardly an isolated hamlet. It was a crucial node in a well-articulated, politically savvy, and economically astute web of religious activists. Most important in the current context, however, is the way that engagement with the British Atlantic both facilitated and rechanneled Moravian energies. The British Empire's willingness to permit Protestant groups to settle throughout its territories made it an ideal zone of expansion. The political barriers to settlement were very low, and indeed the added incentive of missionary work among non-Christian people made the opportunities doubly compelling. Simultaneously, however, the complex and fraught nature of the religious establishment in the British Empire had made it impossible for the Moravians to be simply Protestant or simply Christian.

MORAVIAN ATLANTIC ENGAGEMENT

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Moravians found themselves acting broadly on the British Atlantic stage. How did this geographic fact affect them? This question has, quite naturally, been studied most extensively in its religious dimensions—the missions, the itinerants, the anti-Zinzendorfania—but to understand the myriad ways that the community made use of and integrated itself into this environment, I explore here two other aspects of transatlantic engagement: transatlantic shipping and transatlantic commerce. Each serves to show how interdependent the Moravian community was—widely dispersed and yet deeply connected.[10]

To take transportation first, the many members of the international *Brüdergemeine* were in nearly constant motion, crossing the Atlantic from England to New York, from New York to the West Indies, from Amsterdam to Greenland. Such travel brought the energetic Moravians into equally frequent contact with the seamier and riskier aspects of the eighteenth-century world. Travel was extremely expensive, ships were prone to disaster and did not run on schedules set by individual passengers, and fellow travelers might not maintain the high moral standards the Moravians demanded of themselves. The desire to protect themselves and their financial resources from the uncertainties of transatlantic travel effectively drove the Moravians

10. This and the subsequent discussion draw heavily on the larger work contained within Engel, *Religion and Profit*.

into the shipping business. This preference for separation and security ran contrary to the Moravians' missionary impulse but dovetailed perfectly with the prospect of efficiently concentrating on missionary projects where they would be most productive, rather than squandering money on travel.

Despite the clear need for transatlantic passage, however, the Moravians entered the shipping business gradually. The Pennsylvania project required many people, and in their methodical way, church leaders organized mass migrations that protected their congregants from moral and financial hazards. The "first sea congregation" included fifty-six people, mainly married people and single brothers, and sailed on the *Catherine*, a ship purchased by the Unity specifically for that journey, from London to Philadelphia in June 1742. A second sea congregation followed the first, in the fall of 1743, this time comprising 115 members and sailing on the second congregation ship, the *Little Strength*. In the case of the *Catherine*, the ship also transferred capital from Europe to America while it was bringing over the first sea congregation, as the ship was sold in Philadelphia and the profits steered into mission work.

On the heels of the successful *Catherine* venture, leaders decided to buy a ship for long-term use. Unfortunately, luck did not smile on that particular project. Nicholas Garrison, a ship's captain who had first met "Joseph" Spangenberg, Bethlehem's longtime administrator, in St. Thomas in 1736 and then traveled to Europe with Zinzendorf in 1743, bought the *Little Strength* in London. She transported the second sea congregation safely to America, but on her return voyage, while carrying only a few passengers, Spanish privateers captured the ship. Already the Moravians were probably using the ship for more than transportation. In June 1754, a Swedish visitor to Bethlehem reported being told about the loss and the fact that the Moravians had attempted to have the ship returned, "as it was a great injustice to make a prize of a vessel which had been sent out for the sake of promulgating the Gospel to the world." The visitor was skeptical, however, and "inquired whether it had any lading." Upon learning that the ship "carried some brandy, sugar, etc.," he retorted, "Do brandy and sugar belong to the promulgation and extension of the Gospel?"[11]

Neither the discouraging loss of the *Little Strength* nor cynicism from contemporaries deterred the Moravians, however, who next decided to commission a ship, the *Irene*, at a shipyard in Staten Island (fig. 2).

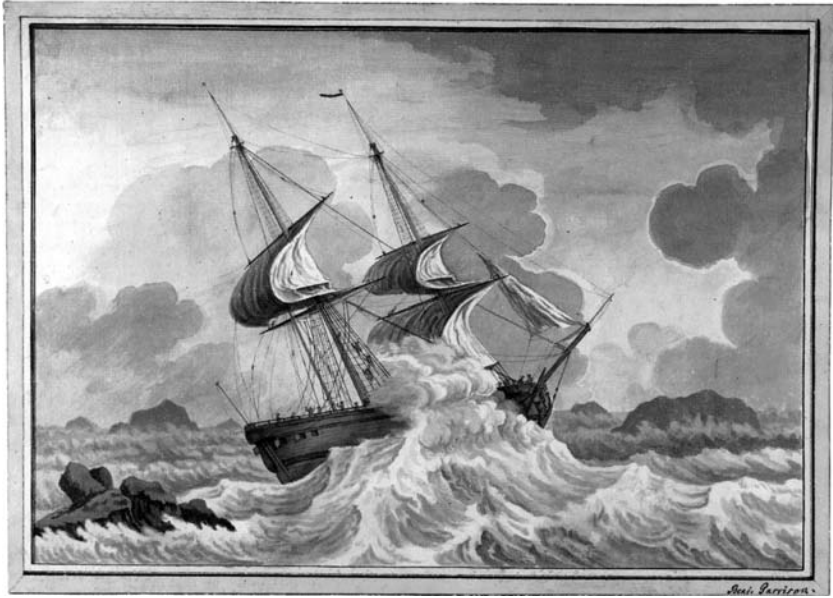11. Engel, *Religion and Profit*, 103–6.

FIG 2. Moravian ship the *Irene*, ink drawing by Benjamin Garrison (courtesy Unity Archives, Herrnhut)

This represented a massive investment in capital, and, as the building dragged out longer than they had hoped, a major investment in time. Through such investments we see the Moravians becoming an Atlantic community—rather than merely a population of co-religionists distributed around the world. They worked to maintain ties and thus to bridge the various political and social localities that individual communities found themselves in. The *Irene* first sailed for Amsterdam on September 8, 1748. Over the next ten years, the ship made thirteen round trips, almost all of them between New York and London, many of them carrying new Moravian migrants to America or church workers back to Europe, and always carrying letters and news between distant congregations. As with the ill-fated *Little Strength*, lost to privateers, she also became a trading vessel. Reminding us that a transatlantic community was never simple in the eighteenth century, the *Irene*, like her predecessor, was lost to a privateer, this time French.

As the dual commercial/communal use of the church ships (*Gemeinschiffe*) suggests, the Moravians were attentive to the commercial as well as

the religious possibilities of transatlantic connections. After the loss of the *Irene*, the Unity found a new way to profit from its unique configuration of merchants and missions around the Atlantic, building on the remarkable economic vitality of the mid-eighteenth-century Atlantic world. The Moravians' explicitly commercial ventures also remind us that religious and capitalistic ventures were not in conflict for the Moravians, the latter were an indispensible tool for facilitating the former. As early as 1749, Jonas Paulus Weiss, a prominent member of the church leadership in Europe, had wondered about the potential for profit from the Unity's dispersed networks. He posed the question "whether or not, for the maintenance of the affairs of the Savior, a permissible, honest, upright commerce, manufactures, etc. is to be regarded as a proper thing for the congregation (*Gemeine*) of the Savior, particularly because, with our extensive establishments in all provinces, the nicest opportunities would be there." Over the next decade, such opportunities only increased, and the *Irene*'s commercial expeditions went some distance toward proving it. By 1758, missionary outposts on the western side of the Atlantic, particularly in Suriname, were including goods for trade in their requests for supplies, a situation that Weiss thought could become problematic for missionary collections since contributors might assume their donations went to further a business and not to save souls. In May of that year, just a few months after the *Irene* was lost, Weiss proposed that the Moravian Church erect a commercial society (*Commerzien Sozietät*) dedicated to both profit and missionary work, which would centralize trade and yet also clearly separate it from the work of spreading the Gospel.

The proposed organization combined personal and community profit through a society of merchants who would capitalize on the Moravian network to create new commercial opportunities. Weiss intended to "find Brethren who, at their own risk and solely for their account, [will] take care of the buying and conveying of wares, and who will freely dedicate half of the profits found therein to the [mission] establishments, and make do for themselves with the other half." With such an arrangement, "neither the Unity nor the establishments can or should ever be harmed" by the trade, but the church and missions would benefit greatly. This semi-private project, however, raised new questions about ethical economic behavior—not because it differed fundamentally from the trade in which the *Irene* had been engaged, but because it would exist outside the church's tight

control. Weiss felt it necessary to address the issue explicitly: "It is not my idea to erect a great company," he wrote, "from which one has to fear danger and disadvantage over time, or [my purpose to create a company] out of the intention of becoming rich or otherwise making great profit, where one could be seduced to serve oneself with unequal advantages, or to do someone harm; but rather that one should no longer hesitate to start a commerce, if it were also first very gently and small, that the Lord could sanctify and bless."

Weiss continued, addressing directly the issue of the ethical differences between commercial and traditional economic activities. He rejected the idea that the commerce he proposed was more dangerous than any other business. "The objection," he wrote, "has no more ground than with cobbler's and tailor's work or with other Professions, or from beer and spirit making business, or by the sale of natural goods." In those trades too, he continued, "people can also suffer damage, but always, when it happens, are themselves responsible for it, not the commerce or the industry." To avoid such an outcome, "one will try to erect [the society] in the best way possible so that all damage will be avoided." Avoiding damage, in Moravian terms, meant ensuring that those who participated in international trade kept their eyes on God. As long as this happened, commerce was no more perilous than any other worldly pursuit. Count Zinzendorf said as much in 1754, addressing what had been perceived as his ambivalence toward those engaged in commerce, "It's all the same what one does. If the Savior has given one what is necessary, one takes the talent and uses it." Commercial activity, carried out in an appropriate manner, was therefore seen as of no danger to the community, while the profits it engendered could offer great benefits.[12]

The Moravians' engagement in Atlantic transportation and commerce points toward several conclusions. First, the community invested in its nature as a close-knit community. Ties between distant places were important and worth paying for. Second, the Unity self-consciously sought to make the most profit it could, including taking good advantage of its far-flung settlements and communities. The Moravians were at the forefront of their economic age and used trade to tie their settlements together; as business people, they were anything but quaint. Last, and most broadly, the growth of the Atlantic economy facilitated the religious developments of

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12. Engel, *Religion and Profit*, 107–9.

which the Moravians were a part. The stability and economic opportunity provided to Protestants by the British Empire transformed the Christian world, so that large numbers of not only Anglicans and English dissenters but German, French, Dutch, Scottish, and Scots-Irish Protestants also moved to the western Atlantic. These groups, particularly the Moravians, then played a key role in the growth of Afro-Protestantism. In short, the consequences of the religious and imperial politics of the British Empire are difficult to overstate.[13]

HOW DID ATLANTIC CONNECTIONS LIMIT BETHLEHEM?

The Moravians expanded their presence as missionaries, settlers, and merchants into virtually all regions of the Atlantic world. Yet this does not mesh with our image of Bethlehem as "quaint," an image that had clearly emerged as early as the 1770s. I would like to suggest, therefore, that the Moravians' engagement in the Atlantic world, specifically in the British Atlantic, led to Bethlehem's contraction, as well as the contraction of the wider Moravian community, in a parallel of the dual consequences of the Act of Parliament in 1749. In a story of conflict within the Unity, we see a combination of forces operating to limit Bethlehem's future and setting it on the path to "quaintness."

The roots of the conflict lay in the different experiences had by Moravians in Europe and in Pennsylvania during the long years of the Seven Years' War, a conflict that Winston Churchill called the "first world war." In Herrnhut, the deepest wounds of the war were financial, but they were exacerbated by Zinzendorf's death in 1760, which threw the church into a period of turmoil and reassessment. Unity leaders believed the crisis could be surmounted only through careful planning, which to them meant centralized management. They rightly worried that if the whole system were not brought under control, all the achievements of the *Brüdergemeine* would slip away. As a result, they began shifting authority toward the center in the network of Moravian communities. Bethlehem's experience in the war was equally visceral, but the racialized frontier war in Pennsylvania had

13. For the Moravian role in the development of Afro-Protestantism in the Atlantic world, see Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

taught the American Moravians a quite unrelated but equally important lesson: the key to survival was keeping peace with the neighbors. Bethlehem would be in danger, they believed, as long as Indians lived in or near town. The two communities, in other words, interpreted this moment of change in opposite ways: Herrnhut sought to strengthen transatlantic ties, while Bethlehem learned how crucial it was to pay close attention to local situations. These two lessons came into conflict when Unity leaders took the helm of the missions, and Herrnhut's desire for centralization ran headlong into Bethlehem's conviction that the days of new, local missions were over. For the foreseeable future, it was simply too dangerous to begin new endeavors among the Indians.[14]

The core of the problem between the Herrnhut and Bethlehem leaders lay in slow communications, and it began, perhaps counterintuitively, with Herrnhut's sensitivity to Bethlehem's situation. After the 1764 General Synod, a committee convened in Herrnhut to reexamine the future and needs of all the Unity missions. The problem of the encroaching white settlement dominated the conversation on North America, as Herrnhut's leaders recognized that the chief difficulty facing native Moravians was their vulnerability to whites who were unwilling to tolerate the Indians in their midst and sought to eliminate them from their borders. At that moment, the fate of a group of Moravian Indians then imprisoned in Philadelphia, supposedly for their own safety, was the principal problem. "What the Savior will do with this little Indian congregation in the future, we must wait [to discover]," those in Herrnhut commented, though the parameters of what He might suggest seemed limited to them. "They will probably never again come to live in Nain" (a former Indian settlement adjacent to Bethlehem), a circumstance that perhaps was not so unexpected since "it was nothing but dear need that caused the Indian brothers and sisters to have to live among the white people before, which in any case has its difficulties." Furthermore, they added, "on the borders of the white people they should probably also never be established, because in that case, if a war broke out, they are first and most exposed to danger from all sides." Unable to find a solution, the committee ultimately decided, via the Lot, to recommend merely that Bethlehem be "attentive" to the Indian missions. At that point, then, Herrnhut's leaders seemed to recognize that local knowledge should prevail.

14. For a broader discussion of the Seven Years' War and the Moravians, see Engel, *Religion and Profit*, 137–46 and 181–89.

Soon after, however, Herrnhut's awareness of the political challenges then facing the missions to the Indians seems to have faded from mind when letters received in March 1765 regarding the Indians in Philadelphia raised the worry that Indians were drifting away from the mission fold. "The Indians are going out of the city and into the countryside again," reported the missionaries in Philadelphia, "which however has no good effect on their hearts." Furthermore, as those in Herrnhut observed, "most Indians are in a sad situation and do not follow their missionaries, so that life for Brother and Sister Grube and Schmick becomes difficult." Nonetheless, the presence within the troubled congregation of a small number who continued to be faithful to the Moravian way gave the Unity's governors hope, if only they could be protected from all the dangerous influences—white and Indian—around them. After brief consideration, they submitted a new question to the Lot: "Whether one should write to the conference in Bethlehem as a good suggestion the idea to settle the faithful hearts among the Indians in Nain?" The Lot indicated that the Savior concurred, and the necessary letter to Bethlehem was quickly drawn up, outlining what amounted to a complete about-face in Herrnhut's Indian policy in just a few short months.

News took considerable time to traverse the Atlantic, however, and this reality could damage transatlantic relations within the community if it was not handled sensitively. Bethlehem's leaders did not meet to discuss the first suggestion (that they should be attentive to missionary opportunities) until July 1765, at which point they also had before them the contradictory instruction, endorsed by the presumably infallible Lot, that they resurrect Nain. At that time, shortly after the Indians in Philadelphia had traveled north to Wyalusing, leaders with particular interest or expertise in the area—including David Zeisberger and the Schmicks, who had been in Philadelphia—convened to determine what could be done to preserve this essential aspect of Bethlehem's religious life. For the most part, the assembled leaders avoided discussing plans for new or major undertakings in missionary work, and Zeisberger noted that "for this time no missions were to be thought of among the Indians, because they had not yet resettled since the war." Despite Britain's vastly enlarged territory, which Moravian leaders in Herrnhut had seen as a great opportunity, the combined forces of Bethlehem's financial challenges and the tense racial atmosphere of the region made new projects unthinkable. References to future plans were oblique and minimal; even attempting to teach Indian languages to new missionaries appeared too complicated to be undertaken at that time.

Instead, Bethlehem's leaders focused their energies on how to handle the immediate futures of the two congregations they retained, each politically complicated in its own way. Their caution points clearly to their desire to make peace with their neighbors—understandable after a decade of near constant turmoil—and, essentially, to conform to "American" racial norms of segregation between Indians and Europeans.

Yet conforming to American norms did not coincide with remaining obedient to Herrnhut's leadership. The Bethlehem conference addressed the specific issue of Nain with an eye toward skirting the imperative of the Lot sent from Germany, reiterating its own difficult position, and also avoiding conflict within the Unity. "As concerns the move back to Nain of the Indians," they concluded, "there are great reservations there, because since the Indian attack on the settlement, [the lives of Indians in Nain] were neither day nor night safe, and [they] were therefore brought to Philadelphia." Time had passed, but racial anger had not cooled. Even the Indians' brief passage through the Lehigh Valley on their way north had been enough to excite new problems, they said, and in just a couple of days "before they moved to Indian land, the opposition of our neighbors was raised into being again, so that the authorities themselves deemed it necessary to give them a safe escort to the border and to let them take another retreat than was first intended." The impossibility of a new mission at Nain was clear "because this opposition has not yet lifted, so those Indians, who settled in Nain again, would always be in danger." Bethlehem's leaders hoped to convince Herrnhut that they had good cause for ignoring the Lot, but they also looked for more technical grounds upon which the Lot could be set aside. "Because now however the complete congregation of the Indians . . . is again together, as they were in the barracks," they wrote, "and therefore the circumstance is not there, for which the direction of the Directorate was given us, thus we have found nothing to consider for this time regarding Nain." These technical grounds for ignoring the Herrnhut Lot—that they could not identify a specific subset of the larger Indian congregation that should be given special spiritual care at Nain—may have been somewhat disingenuous, but the overarching sentiment was clear. From Bethlehem's perspective, intimate relations between Moravians in town and the Indian missions were a thing of the past and dangerous, even impossible.[15]

15. For the preceding paragraphs, see Engel, *Religion and Profit*, 190–93.

Herrnhut's leaders were not sympathetic to this line of argument, however, and in the year surrounding the conference on the future of the Indian missions, a tense series of transatlantic exchanges made this point clear. In May 1765, before the Bethlehem missions conference even convened, Herrnhut received word that the Indians in the barracks at Philadelphia had requested but been denied permission to return to Nain for a short time. Early the next month, Unity leaders learned that Bethlehem had decided it was too dangerous to resettle Nain, though they assumed that "they had thus not yet received the Lot from here that they should keep the faithful Indians in Nain." By late July, when another detailed set of reports arrived from Bethlehem, the Unity leaders' frustration began to show through. "It was very difficult for us," they recorded, "that the direction [of the Lot] that we have regarding Nain was completely not reflected by the [leadership in Bethlehem], . . . and in the whole region the Indians shall not be taken on any longer."

Finally, in late September, the report of Bethlehem's missionary conference arrived, stating the Americans' view of Nain. Before this happened, however, the Unity leadership moved to solve the issue, as well as others that had begun to divide the two settlements, by sending a representative from the Unity Directorate on an extended "visitation" to North America. The instructions accompanying David Nitschmann, a principal Moravian leader from Europe on the visitation in 1765/66, demonstrate the difficult situation in which Bethlehem found itself. It could not follow Herrnhut's instructions to found new missions and survive in Pennsylvania; it could not violate the Lot and remain in good standing with Herrnhut. Nitschmann's instructions reiterated, verbatim, earlier comments that the Lot "regarding Nain was completely not reflected" by leaders in Bethlehem, and they further noted that the disassembling of Nain's physical structures that had followed cut them "very near."

Nitschmann's visit was successful, and the Herrnhut-Bethlehem relationship rebounded. Bethlehem's Moravians made it clear that denominational ties were of paramount importance to them, even as those ties were fundamentally imperiled by the sheer challenge of continuous communication across the Atlantic ocean in a century plagued by nearly constant war. Herrnhut's leaders apparently recognized the difficulty of Bethlehem's situation. In subsequent years, the North American mission field all but dropped from Herrnhut's attention, as the Unity looked more directly to those places that were still within the British Atlantic. Bethlehem,

on the other hand, began to follow the direction of other "congregation towns," such as Herrnhut and Salem. The most significant changes to Bethlehem both came at the direction of leaders in Herrnhut: the dissolution of the town's communal economy in 1762 and the loss of authority over the Unity's Caribbean missions in 1764. As Bethlehem became more like other Moravian towns, it became something the mission outpost had never been, but it also became more distinctively "Moravian" and more completely invested in denominational identity. Bethlehem, deprived of its missionary core, was on its way toward becoming the town that Judith Sargent Murray and John Adams found.[16]

CONCLUSION

The Moravians were not unique in this journey. As other historians have pointed out, the second half of the eighteenth century was one more marked by religious institution building than by the elimination of denominational boundaries that had been hoped for by Zinzendorf or, in a very different way, by the proponents of Britain's international Protestant politics.[17] The Moravians' story is more dramatic than many others; they were the eighteenth century's most successful missionaries and the most reviled religious troublemakers. This makes their eventual taming and containment all the more striking and all the more useful. The Moravians' engagement

16. Engel, *Religion and Profit*, 194–95.

17. See, for example, Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186–204. Butler also stresses the importance of denominational growth in the period after the Great Awakening in his seminal article "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305–25, and in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also Mark Häberlein, "Reform, Authority, and Conflict in the Churches of the Middle Colonies, 1700–1770," in David K. Adams and Cornelis A. van Minnen, eds., *Religious and Secular Reform in America: Ideas, Beliefs, and Social Change* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 1–28. Mark Noll stresses both the ecumenical impulses within evangelicalism and argues that the period between 1745 and 1770 was an era of conservative denominational growth in the British American colonies in *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004). John B. Frantz discusses the aftermath of revival and denomination building among German settlers in the colonies in "The Awakening of Religion among the German Settlers in the Middle Colonies," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 33, no. 2 (April 1976): 266–88. See also Michael J. Coalter Jr., "The Radical Pietism of Count Nicholas Zinzendorf as a Conservative Influence on the Awakener, Gilbert Tennent," *Church History* 49, no. 1 (1980): 35–46; and C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

in the Atlantic points to two key conclusions about the role of religion in the eighteenth century. First, the same political and social forces that propelled international religion compelled its contraction. The British eagerly sought out leadership in the Protestant world and welcomed all likely Protestant settlers into their empire. In the process they grew an empire with such a hopelessly complicated religious establishment that anxiety, rather than ecumenism, was the norm. In that environment, religious wall building was inevitable. Second, the geographical scope of the Atlantic world was itself a factor that shaped the development of religious communities. This is particularly true of the Moravians who invested so deeply in the ties that bound the Unity together. It was a source of pride and, importantly, a source of opportunity and profit. The economic and cultural dynamism evidenced in the Moravian story was replicated many times over, and the incredible story of expansion in the western Atlantic demonstrates its long-term consequences. Other groups also grappled explicitly with the positive and negative consequences of such distance. Presbyterians embraced the idea of a global prayer concert, seeing the geographic spread of evangelical Christianity as prophetic and providential. Anglicans, on the other hand, expressed fury at the disabilities faced by their co-religionists in America and demanded imperial reform. Those demands were an important step on the way to revolution.

Perhaps that is the ultimate, and least surprising, conclusion. The dynamism of religious forces in the British Atlantic ultimately overreached and forced an era of contraction, limitation, and definition. The international Protestantism that Britain led was a thing of the past by 1775, as was the boisterous ecumenism of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Bethlehem, the physical embodiment of both these trends, was left to itself and to a much quieter Moravian denomination.