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## Jesus as Guardian Spirit: The Formation of Moravian Delaware Christianity

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JESUS AS GUARDIAN SPIRIT

The Formation of Moravian Delaware Christianity

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

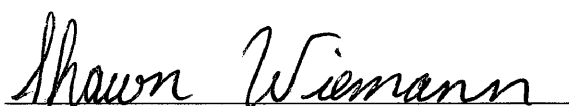
Shawn Wiemann

2003

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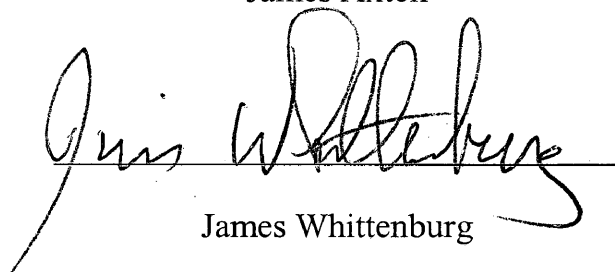


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Approved, June 2003



James Axtell



James Whittenburg



Kris Lane

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the spiritual lives of Delaware Indians living at Moravian missions located in Pennsylvania and Illinois from the mid eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. American Indians dealt with the new Christian religions they encountered in many ways, just as they dealt with all of the other changes brought about by European contact. One of the ways Indians dealt with Christianity was by accommodating it as best they could, choosing elements that proved useful or provided spiritual strength, and incorporating it into their lives.

During the eighteenth century, the Delawares were hit particularly hard by disease, displacement from their traditional lands, and the alcohol trade. These factors destabilized many of their traditional communities, and generated a spiritual crisis among many Delawares. Some Delawares dealt with that by reinvigorating their own traditional belief systems, while others incorporated a new source of sacred wisdom found on the frontier provided by a Christian sect known as the Moravians. The Moravians' spiritual message proved compatible with fundamental aspects of traditional Delaware religion, making the accommodation of Moravian Christianity easier for men and women who chose to incorporate it. These connections were strengthened through the use of language, since Delawares insisted that the missionaries preach to them in Delaware. The Moravians paraphrased and adapted words, phrases, and concepts into forms the converts could understand and would accept. It was Christianity filtered and understood through the Delaware language and spiritual mindset, which created Delaware Moravianism in the process. Institutional practices at the missions and the skills of gifted missionaries created a supportive environment and sense of community for Delaware converts, which were increasingly hard to find in their traditional communities. The Moravians enjoyed a great deal of success among the Delawares as a result, with three to four hundred Delawares living at the missions during most of the eighteenth century.

The Delaware Indians who freely went to the Moravian missions and willingly stayed there did so out of a genuine interest in incorporating Moravian Christianity into their spiritual lives. Although Delaware converts accommodated Christianity, it was always on their terms and in ways they understood. They remained fully in control of the situation, and as long as the Moravians met their spiritual and social needs, the Delawares remained.

Frontier racism and violence shattered that success, physically and spiritually, as the American Revolution caused one of the worst massacres in the history of the North American frontier. Many Delaware converts, feeling betrayed by missionaries and their promises of faith, abandoned the Moravians. At the same time, a new group of nativist Indian preachers sprang up. These Indian men

and women blended Christian themes with traditional rituals, creating a spirituality that was new, but entirely Indian in nature and design. As the frontier became increasingly racialized, these nativist preachers advocated the doctrine of separate creation of Indians and whites. Despite the violence and rise of nativism, some Delawares continued to practice their Christian faith, retaining their identity as Moravian Indians.

## **Jesus as Guardian Spirit: The Formation of Moravian Delaware Christianity**



## Introduction

God is Red. With that one statement and attention-grabbing title, Vine Deloria, Jr. examined Christianity's impact on the lives of North American Indians with less than encouraging results. Deloria claimed that traditional Christianity could not provide Indians with the proper spiritual tools needed to deal with the Western world. Christianity simply presented a world-view different from, and therefore incompatible with, world-views in Indian spirituality.<sup>1</sup> Deloria's viewpoint in *God is Red* is controversial, but it is also simplified. The relationship between Christianity and the Indians was, and is, far more complex than Deloria's argument suggests.

Indians dealt with Christianity in many different ways. Their reactions to it "depended on the fit of the two groups at various points and in various places" as a result of previous experience. Some Indians, like the Hopis, vigorously resisted conversion to Christianity and maintained their traditional belief systems.<sup>2</sup> Other Indians developed syncretic religious traditions, blending

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<sup>1</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (Golden, Col.: North American Press, 1992), 3, 61.

<sup>2</sup> James Lockhart, "Receptivity and Resistance," *Of Things of the Indies: Essays Old and New in Early Latin American History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 138, 307.

elements of Christianity with their own traditional beliefs to produce something new, yet still completely “Indian.”<sup>3</sup> The best-documented example is the religion of Handsome Lake, which combined traditional Iroquois ceremonies and concepts with Christian moral precepts. While syncretism was not always successful, the continued practice of Handsome Lake’s religion today is a testament to just how powerful and appealing it was for many Indians.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the traditional, and traditionally based, alternatives, other Indians worked to incorporate Christianity into their lives. These Indians willingly settled at missions for the opportunity to hear the Christian message.<sup>5</sup> Indians incorporated Christianity to varying degrees because it provided “a comparatively better answer to the urgent social and religious questions at that particular juncture in their cultural history.”<sup>6</sup> Missions provided Indians with an opportunity to maintain some group cohesion after their traditional communities were blasted by European disease, warfare, and land acquisitions. They provided an arena where Indians could learn more about how Europeans acted, which increased their chances for survival. In their attempts to “improve” the Indians, missionaries taught them how to read, write, and speak European languages. Those same

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 126-28.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 251-53; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 282.

<sup>5</sup> James Clifford, “Identity in Mashpee,” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 303.

missionaries also wrote down native languages and instructed their Indian speakers in the use of those written forms. In doing so, they provided Indian converts with the “practical as well as intellectual skills” they needed “for contending with their new world,” a world increasingly dictated along European modes of thought.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Indians joined missions to acquire some of the white men’s spiritual power or manitou.<sup>8</sup> By accepting Christianity, mission Indians hoped to gain access to the spiritual power available to whites, thereby drawing spiritual strength to themselves.

The Moravians were one Christian group that attempted to meet that need. Creating missions in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia, the Moravians sought to bring the Indians “the good tidings [of the Bible]...and to teach them the way to salvation.”<sup>9</sup> The Moravians established missions among the Delawares of the Pennsylvania and Ohio regions between 1740 and 1810. At the height of their missionary activity, the Moravians maintained a Christian Delaware population of 300-400 individuals. The majority of these Moravian Delawares were Munsees,

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<sup>6</sup>James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 49, 120.

<sup>7</sup>James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 306.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians, from its Commencement, in the Year 1740, to the Close of the Year 1808*, (Philadelphia: M’Carty & Davis, 1829), v.

who, along with the Unamis and Unalachtigos, composed the three linguistic/lineage branches of the Delaware nation.<sup>10</sup>

The Moravians' appeal to the Delawares rested on their theological message and interpretations of God, the Holy Spirit, and, especially, Jesus Christ. The Moravians' spiritual message proved compatible with certain aspects of traditional Delaware religion, making the acceptance of Moravian Christianity easier for men and women who chose conversion. Institutional practices at the missions and the skills of gifted missionaries created a supportive environment and sense of community. In this environment the conversion process, while still slow and difficult, became easier to bear. Frontier racism and violence shattered that success physically and spiritually. Many Delaware converts, feeling betrayed by missionaries and their promises of faith, abandoned Moravian Christianity. Despite the violence and hatred, other Delawares continued to practice their Christian faith, retaining their identity as Moravian Indians.

Recent scholarship by Jane T. Merritt and Maia Conrad has shown that while the religious life of the Moravian Delawares differed from traditional

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<sup>10</sup> David Zeisberger, *Diary of David Zeisberger, A Moravian Missionary among the Indians of Ohio*, trans. and ed. by Eugene F. Bliss (Cincinnati: Robert Clark & Co., 1885), 2 vol., 1: 34; Kenneth G. Hamilton, ed., *The Bethlehem Diary, Volume I, 1742-1744* (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh Litho, 1971), 30-31; Frederick C. Johnson, *Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian and Indian Occupancy of the Wyoming Valley, 1742-1763*. Reprinted from *The Papers of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society*, 1894. (Wilkes-Barre, Pa: 1904), 3; William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 20; Maia T. Conrad, "Struck in their Hearts": David Zeisberger's Moravian Mission to the Delaware Indians in Ohio, 1767-1808" (Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, Dept. of History, 1998), 223; Jane T. Merritt, "Kinship, Community and Practicing Culture: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Pennsylvania, 1700-1763" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1995), 10; Ives Goddard, "Delaware," in *Northeast*, vol. 15, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 214, 225.

Delaware religion, the majority of the converts' *secular* lives maintained a strong continuity with traditional Delaware economic and social practices.<sup>11</sup> The real impact of mission life was made, obviously, in the spirituality of Delaware converts. For this study, social relations are important only in how they aided or obstructed the converts' religious processes. The decision to embrace Christianity was ultimately an individual one, and those Delaware men and women who joined the Moravian missions did so for their own reasons and benefits.<sup>12</sup> But the events these Delawares experienced, as individuals *and* as communities, affected the number of conversions.<sup>13</sup> Understanding why Delawares would, or would not, accept Moravian Christianity is essential to understanding how converts became Christian Indians. A distinction must be made between the Delaware Moravianism of the missions and other Indian syncretic religious traditions. Moravian Delaware Christianity was syncretic in its own way, but it was different from other Indian syncretic traditions. The religions of Handsome Lake and other nativist preachers contained Christian elements, but they were always "Indian" at their cores. What Moravian Delawares practiced at the missions was Christianity interpreted through Indian eyes, thoughts, and voices. The Moravians' success with the Delawares rested upon two factors: the religious analogies missionaries

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<sup>11</sup> Conrad, "Moravian Mission," 109, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Axtell, *After Columbus*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Duane Champagne, "Change, Continuity, and Variation in Native American Societies as a Response to Conquest," in William B. Taylor and Franklin Pease G. Y., eds., *Violence, Resistance, and Survival in the Americas: Native Americans and the Legacy of Conquest* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 215.

and converts created and fostered, and the language that conveyed those ideas.

The Delawares at the Moravian missions were Christians, but the Christianity they practiced was certainly Indian in content and style.

## Chapter I

### Communities and Conversions: Jesus as Guardian Spirit

While every Indian community had separate dealings with whites, Indians shared common, disastrous experiences that sprang directly from colonization. Missionaries, Moravian or otherwise, were on the front-lines. They felt that the extreme hardships suffered by the Indians robbed them of “much of the honourable and virtuous qualities which they once possessed, and added to their vices and immorality.”<sup>14</sup> While most Indians did not subscribe to the idea that they were immoral, they agreed that something was increasingly wrong with their societies.

Disease, displacement, and drink formed an unholy trinity for the Delawares and other Indian communities in the Eastern Woodlands. Diseases such as smallpox were the most immediately damaging, and missionaries took stock of how disastrous epidemics were to Indian communities in population and group dynamics. Seeing the Europeans’ resistance to the diseases that killed so many of their people, Indians wondered if “by embracing Christianity the contagion would cease.”<sup>15</sup> For all their good intentions, missionaries were also

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<sup>14</sup> John Heckewelder, *History, Manners, and Customs of The Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876), xxiv.

<sup>15</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 112.

opportunists and realized that such social upheaval created openings for Christianity. Groups and individuals turned to missionaries for answers and spiritual cures, since their own curative methods did not work effectively against the European microbes. Missionaries seized the opportunity to comfort and preach to the Indians.

The Delawares experienced the pressure of displacement early in the European colonization of North America. Originally located along the coastal Atlantic region from modern Delaware to New Jersey, the Delawares faced European encroachments throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By 1750, almost the entire Delaware population was pushed into the Pennsylvania and Ohio regions.<sup>16</sup> Delawares sold their land slowly and methodically in an attempt to retain as much as they could for as long as possible.<sup>17</sup> While this strategy bought the Delawares some time, it only served as a delaying tactic. Subsequent migrations into Pennsylvania made the Delawares vulnerable to more powerful groups in the region, especially the Pennsylvania colonial government and the Iroquois. As a result, the Delawares adopted a skillful negotiating tactic. They accepted the designation of “peacemakers,” which (theoretically) accorded them a respected status among the other Indian groups in the region. The Iroquois

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<sup>16</sup>Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 14; William W. Newcomb, Jr., *The Culture and Acculturation of the Delaware Indians*, Anthropological Papers, Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, No. 10 (Ann Arbor: 1956; reprint 1970), 84-85.

<sup>17</sup>Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 303; Robert S. Grumet, “An Analysis of Upper Delawaran Land Sales in Northern New Jersey, 1630-1758,” in *Papers of the Ninth Algonquin Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, Dept. of Linguistics, 1978), 25-35.



referred to the Delawares as “cousins,” while other Pennsylvania Indians referred to them by the prestigious title of “grandfather.”<sup>18</sup> With this honored position, the Delawares earned a strategic negotiating position in the area and increased their chances for survival.

In their pursuit of land, whites were not above using deceit and coercion. Surveyors and settlers would then pass off any questionable dealings by producing a deed.<sup>19</sup> The 1737 Walking Purchase was but one example of this type of trickery. The treaty, which the Delawares signed with James Logan, an agent of the Pennsylvania Provincial Council, called for the Delawares to surrender 1,200 square miles of land from the Delaware to Susquehanna rivers. The Delawares claimed that the colonists improperly conducted the survey, and took their dispute to Pennsylvania authorities. Their appeals were rejected, and the Pennsylvania government and the Iroquois each pressured the Delawares to comply with the sale. The Iroquois offered Delawares land in areas under Iroquois control, but this resettlement did not last long. The Delawares were forced to relocate again in July 1742, when the Iroquois signed a treaty with the Pennsylvania government. The Delaware migration into western Pennsylvania and Ohio continued.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Heckewelder, *History*, 56-58; Regula Trenkwalder Schonenberger, *Lenape Women, Matriliney and the Colonial Encounter: Resistance and Erosion of Power (c.1600-1876): An Excursus in Feminist Anthropology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), 238-42.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 128-45.

<sup>20</sup>C. A. Weslager, *The Delaware Indian Westward Migration: With the Texts of Two Manuscripts (1821-22) Responding to General Lewis Cass's Inquiries About Lenape Culture and Language*,

In order to protect what they could, many Indians formed alliances with competing white governments. These Native/European alliances often brought Indian groups into conflict with one another, especially during the wars between France and England. Tense situations often exploded into self-perpetuating violence among Indians and whites on the frontier. Indian losses in warfare, on top of heavy trade debts, resulted in more treaty concessions that forced Indians to give up more of their lands.<sup>21</sup>

As the stress from epidemics and evictions took their toll, alcohol abuse became prevalent. Alcohol did not start as a destabilizing force; Indians willingly participated in the alcohol trade as another economic avenue in which to interact with colonists and obtain goods they wanted. Indians also constructed rules and situations where drinking was appropriate.<sup>22</sup> The mood-and-perception altering properties of liquor meant that it found a place in Indian rituals and ceremonies. Intoxication gained a role in mourning rituals among the Eastern Woodlands Indians, as the Moravian missionary David Zeisberger recounted in October 1768. While staying in the town of Zoneschio Zeisberger noted how several of the townswomen became drunk one night. The women explained to Zeisberger that

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(Wallingford, PA: Middle Atlantic Press, 1978,) 18; Conrad, "Moravian Mission," 5-6; Merritt, "Kinship," 15-16.

<sup>21</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 83-84.

<sup>22</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 111; David Zeisberger, *History of the Northern American Indians*, Archer Butler Hulbert and William Nathaniel Schwarz, eds., (Ohio State Historical Society, F. J. Heer Printing Co.: 1910), 79; Peter C. Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 68.

“they were obliged to drink for the dead” as an important part of their ritual, which was why they could not offer or share any of the alcohol with their guests.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that Indians created these “culturally approved” ways of drinking, Indians lacked the long history that colonists had of “solving the problems of drunkenness.” The alcohol trade caused severe long-term economic damage as Indians became indebted to traders. Indians who wanted alcohol drove themselves deeper into poverty by trading their most valuable furs and skins to alcohol traders, and were thus unable to buy the clothing, tools, and other utilitarian items their families needed. The “problems of drunkenness” were especially difficult since many Indians believed that the only purpose alcohol served was to achieve complete intoxication, as a means to altered perception. Moravian missionaries were extremely frustrated with this phenomenon, since they felt that such reckless abandon with alcohol prevented Indians from making a rational choice to convert. One Moravian missionary in the 1740s bluntly stated that “when [an Indian] is drunk, he looks like a Devil.”<sup>24</sup>

The real danger of complete intoxication lay not in whether potential converts made a rational choice when deciding to convert, but in how Indians interacted with each other in such states. Incidents of Indian-on-Indian violence

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<sup>23</sup>*Moravian Mission Records among the North American Indians from the Archives of the Moravian Church, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania* (New Haven, Conn.: Research Publications, 1978), 40 microform reels, reel 8, box 135, folder 7: 24. Hereafter abbreviated as *MMR*; Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 76, 78; For information on eastern woodland burial practices and how they changed during the colonial period, see James Axtell, “Last Rites: The Acculturation of Native Funerals in Colonial North America,” *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 110-28.

<sup>24</sup>Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 68, 87, 96-98; *MMR*, reel 1, box 111, folder 2, item 5: 10.

became increasingly common during drinking binges. While Indians recognized the dangers such violence brought upon their communities they found themselves in a difficult position to deal with it. Indian men and women who committed violent acts when they were drunk were typically exonerated of any crime they committed. It was believed that the alcohol, not the individual, was responsible for the violence, so the individual could not be held accountable for actions that they, in essence, did not commit. This social perception of alcohol severely handicapped internal efforts within Indian communities to stop people from drinking. It also stood in contrast to the colonists' perceptions of alcohol and violence, which placed the blame squarely on the individual, regardless of intoxication. Colonial laws were designed not to stop people from drinking, but to punish men and women who "violated commonly held beliefs about the proper way to drink it [liquor]." These differing views regarding the relationship between alcohol and the individual helped fuel the stereotype of the "drunken Indian" among many colonists, which portrayed Indians as wild, lecherous, and violent when drunk.<sup>25</sup>

Reform-minded Delawares and missionaries petitioned colonial officials to stop unscrupulous white traders from selling alcohol to the Indians in an attempt to stop the damage done to their communities.<sup>26</sup> Yet as long as a demand existed

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<sup>25</sup> Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 13, 19, 79-80, 93-95.

<sup>26</sup> Zeisberger, *History*, 79, 90; *The Bethlehem Diary*, I: 200; Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 119; Lawrence Henry Gipson, ed., *The Moravian Indian Mission on White River-Diaries and Letters May 5, 1799, to November 12, 1806* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indian Historical Bureau, 1938), 65, 79.

among the Indians, traders continued to sell it. Indians saw the damage inflicted on their already shaken communities and frequently “determined that no one should ever bring spirituous liquors into their towns again.” The demand for liquor proved too strong to control and such resolutions were frequently broken, “perhaps by the very ones who had counselled the prohibition.”<sup>27</sup> Despite the setbacks, reform-minded Indians challenged the alcohol trade throughout the later half of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries as a means of social and cultural preservation. While these temperance movements were not always or necessarily connected to Christian teachings, some Delawares turned to Moravian missionaries for help. The Moravians recorded one such instance in 1744 when three Delaware families arrived at their settlement in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The families asked to join the mission, “because a trader had come to them with rum, and they do not want to drink rum any more but have decided to seek conversion.”<sup>28</sup> Another Moravian Delaware, a man by the name of Thomas, expressed quite clearly what attracted him to the Moravians when he was harassed by colonists with whom he used to trade.

See! My friend!, when I come to this place (the Moravians’ town of Bethlehem) with my skins and peltry to trade, the people are kind, they give me plenty of good victuals to eat, and pay me in money or whatever I want, and no one says a word to me about drinking rum—neither do I ask for it! When I come to your place with my peltry, all call to me: ‘Come, Thomas! Here’s rum, drink heartily, drink! It will not hurt you.’ All this is done for the purpose of cheating me. When you have obtained from me all you want,

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<sup>27</sup> Zeisberger, *History*, 90; Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Mancall, *Deadly Medicine*, 102; *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 200.

you call me a drunken dog, and kick me out of the room. See! This is the manner in which you cheat the Indians when they come to trade with you.<sup>29</sup>

Disease, displacement, and drink generated what Gregory Dowd called “a debate over the efficacy of sacred power” in the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> In those times of social stress, Delawares reevaluated their traditional religious system. A Creator or Great Spirit formed the world and provided the “creative energy of all things.” Delawares made offerings to the Creator “in gratitude for past favors and to request the continuation of divine good will.” The Creator was attended by several agents, beings with less power than the Creator but still possessing strong spiritual energy. These beings, known as *manitou*, looked after the earth. *Manitou* not only referred to the Creator’s attendants, it denoted anyone or anything possessing great spiritual power. An afterlife existed in the traditional Delaware system. Where individuals ended up after death depended on their actions in this life. If they committed misdeeds, they wandered this realm as spirits. If they led a good life, they traveled to a realm much like this one, except there they enjoyed all of life’s benefits without any of its hardships.<sup>31</sup>

Traditional Delaware religion was not based on a complicated set of doctrines or dogmatic obedience to Scripture. It was more concerned with the

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<sup>29</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 267.

<sup>30</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 100-102, 212-214; Schonenberger, *Lenape Women*, 185-86; Newcomb, *Culture and Acculturation*, 59, 64-67; Herbert C. Kraft, *The Lenape: Archeology, History, and Ethnography* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1986,) 162-62, 174; Conrad, “Moravian Mission,” 47, 53.

spiritual concepts that directly affected the individual. At its heart, traditional Delaware religion embodied the principle of free will. Human beings invoked spiritual power for good or evil; it was their choice. While the Great Spirit was important, the primary focus of Delaware religion was the individual's personal relationship with his or her guardian spirit.<sup>32</sup> Delawares obtained a guardian spirit through a vision quest, a ritual associated with rites of passage such as puberty.<sup>33</sup> Guardian spirits provided assistance and spiritual benefits for the activities of daily life: men's spirits ensured success in hunting and warfare, while women's guardians gave them greater skills with medicinal herbs. These visions were extremely important because a powerful vision granted the recipient significant spiritual authority. Dreams and visions were considered messages from the spirit world, so a powerful vision was taken very seriously. If blessed with such a vision, a man or woman could be called upon as an interpreter of dreams or a healer, either medical or spiritual, highly respected positions among the Delawares.<sup>34</sup> After receiving a guardian spirit the recipient created a medicine bundle to be worn at all times and filled it with objects that the spirit

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony F. C. Wallace, "New Religions Among the Delaware Indians, 1600-1900," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12 (Spring 1956), 3; Kraft, *Lenape*, 176-78, 184-86; Newcomb, *Delaware Culture and Acculturation*, 60-62; Zeisberger, *History*, 125, 132-33; Schonenberger, *Lenape Women*, 195-96; Gladys Tantaquidgeon, *A Study of Delaware Indian Medicine Practice and Folk Beliefs* (Harrisburg, Pa: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1942,) 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 245.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49, 51-52.

recommended. The medicine bundle subsequently provided the wearer with spiritual protection.

As Indians continued to lose lives and livelihoods, they wondered if their traditional concepts of the sacred had failed them and began to look for new answers. Some Indians found those answers by reworking and reinvigorating their own native ceremonies. Others found answers by turning to a new source of sacred wisdom that lay in the missions along the edges of the Indian-white world. In this period of “rethinking, reforming, revitalizing, and reinventing,” Christianity was only one of several choices for the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands in the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

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The Moravians, or *Unitas Fratrum*, were a Protestant sect that originated in the German province that gives them their name. The Moravians were lucky in that they enjoyed the patronage of a wealthy benefactor, Count Nicholas Louis von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf held the honorary title of *der Jünger*, the Disciple, and acted as the group’s financial backer and temporal leader from 1722 until his death in 1764.<sup>36</sup> As with all proselytizing Christians, Zinzendorf and the Moravians believed that their version of God’s Word was the correct one. They

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<sup>35</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 43-44.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel B. Thorp, *The Moravian Community in North Carolina: Pluralism on the Southern frontier* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 14; Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 13, 34; Craig Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People: The Adoration of the Holy Spirit in the Eighteenth-Century Brüdergemeine,” *Church History*, 68: 4 (December 1999), 904.



felt it was their sacred duty to bring God's Word to heathens everywhere.<sup>37</sup> With this in mind, Zinzendorf ordered missions opened throughout the world.

Missionary work became a highly-respected profession among the Moravians, with close to thirty-six percent of their menfolk undertaking missionary work in 1759.<sup>38</sup>

The Moravians entered the American mission scene in 1735 and built their first mission in Georgia. Unfortunately, imperial disputes between England and Spain made the area around the mission a potential battle zone, and the Moravians left Georgia in 1739.<sup>39</sup> Despite the failure of the Georgia venture, Zinzendorf and the Moravians still desired a North American missionary program. Momentarily failing to gain a foothold in the South, they shifted their attention northward. In 1742, the Moravians established the settlement of Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. From there they coordinated missionary activities throughout central and western Pennsylvania, establishing new missions and spreading their message to the Delawares and other Indian communities. These mission towns included Shamokin, Nescopeck, Waphallopen, Buchkabuchka, Meniolagomekah, and Gnadenhütten.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 16.

<sup>38</sup> Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, *An Account of the Manner in which the Protestant Church of the Unitas Fratrum, or United Brethren, Preach the Gospel, and Carry on their Missions among the Heathen* (London: H. Trapp, 1788,) 53-55, 58, 106-07, 122-24; Gillian Lindt Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967,) 159.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Count Zinzendorf*, 3.

Moravian missions were designed to be conversion centers for everyone living around them, and missionaries strove for fluency in several languages to accomplish this task. The missions were located on the Pennsylvania frontier, an area increasingly occupied by Scots-Irish settlers. The first major wave of Scots-Irish immigration alone, which lasted from 1718 to 1729, brought thousands of Ulster men and women to American shores. More than two-thirds of those participating in that first wave went to Pennsylvania. Over 80% of this group were able to pay their own way to America, and most of these made the passage with their families in tow. All told, over one hundred thousand men and women crossed the Atlantic from Ulster to the American colonies between 1718 and 1775. This was by far “the single largest movement of any group from the British Isles to British North America during the eighteenth century.”<sup>41</sup>

Pennsylvania became the primary destination for Scots-Irish Presbyterians for three basic reasons. Pennsylvania’s policy of religious toleration was accentuated by the fact that America’s only presbytery at the time met in Philadelphia. Extensive economic ties between Ulster and Philadelphia, particularly due to the linen trade, made sure that many ships leaving Ulster went to Philadelphia. Finally, missionaries, ships’ captains, promoters, and agents promoted the colony. Most of these immigrants made their way into the

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<sup>40</sup> *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 30-31, 129; Jane T. Merritt, “Mission Community Networks and the Christian Indians Diaspora in Pennsylvania” (colloquium paper presented for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va, March 23, 1999.), map 1.

Pennsylvania frontier, especially the Blue Mountain region, and began rebuilding their lives and communities. In response to this massive migration, many missionaries in Pennsylvania learned English in case the opportunity arose “to give our English neighbors and the Irish an opportunity to hear us.”<sup>42</sup> Conversions of white neighbors were welcome, but the primary objective in Moravian missionary work was always the conversion of the Indians.

Moravian Christianity was not a religion obsessed with doctrine. The Moravians were pietists and believed that the personal relationship men and women shared with Jesus Christ was the heart and foundation of their faith. This gave Moravian Christianity a strong emotional, revivalist, and individualistic character. These intensely personal elements were countered by equally strong desires for community and fellowship between all church members. Believers exalted in their own relationships with the Divine even as they shared their revelry with like-minded men and women. These individual and communal tendencies were best expressed in what became the Moravians’ motto: “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland’s Ulster Scots, America’s Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1, 65, 67, 78, 91-92, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Merritt, Kinship, 14; *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 28; Griffin, *People with No Name*, 91-92.

<sup>43</sup> Rev. Edwin W. Kortz, “The Liturgical Development of the American Moravian Church,” *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 18: 2 (1962), 278; Jacob John Sessler, *Communal Pietism Among Early American Moravians* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933,) 138; Elma E. Gray, *Wilderness Christians: The Moravian Mission to the Delaware Indians* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1956; New York: Russell & Russell, 1973), 23; Aaron Fogleman, “Jesus is Female: The Moravian Challenge in the German Communities of British North America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series. 60: 2 (April 2003), 304.

The Moravians started their missionary program during an extremely vibrant era of religious activity. The Moravians referred to the era from 1738 to 1753 as the “Sifting Period.” Under Zinzendorf’s guidance the church explored aspects of gender and spirituality as they took the examination of Jesus’s life, suffering, and death to new levels. Adoration of Jesus’s blood and wounds during the Crucifixion acquired even greater mystical significance, since it was through the shedding of Jesus’s blood that one’s sins were forgiven. Jesus’s blood was “absolutely central to the ideas of personal redemption and regeneration,” and became the focus of Moravian spiritual contemplation as well as emotional and artistic expression.<sup>44</sup>

Religious art and imagery became vitally important since visual contemplation invoked intense emotional responses from believers. In this way the iconography surrounding Jesus Christ was just as important to Moravians as it was to Roman Catholics. During the Baroque period, which lasted roughly from 1550 to 1750, Catholic images of Christ became especially ornate and detailed. This was done to create a stronger connection, both symbolically and empathetically with the viewers. The image of Christ offered the believer “the prospect of sacred presence,” where “the body participated in an integrated devotional practice of imitating Christ, of imagining him in one’s own body.”<sup>45</sup> It

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<sup>44</sup> Fogleman, “Jesus is Female,” 298, 308; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 11-13; Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” 886.

<sup>45</sup> David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1998), 66.

was this visceral and emotional reaction that Moravians sought when contemplating the image of Christ. Pictures of the Crucifixion were placed throughout the missions. Responses ranged from unparalleled gratitude and ecstatic joy to a subtle sensuality.<sup>46</sup> These emotions were invoked through song as well as sight. The Moravians considered music and divine worship to be inseparable and believed that the truths of Christianity were “best articulated in poetry and song.”<sup>47</sup> Hymnals and instrumental pieces of music thus had an honored place in Moravian services. The entire community participated in a specially designated service held at the close of each day: the *Singstunde*, or evening song service.<sup>48</sup> This rich musical tradition ensured that services were vibrant and joyous events in which the entire congregation actively participated. In one of the most popular hymns at the Indian mission, missionaries and converts sang of how they “covet the warm Blood above all Things,” with men and women praying for the blood to “Cover and go through me!” The importance of the Crucifixion was highlighted again in such verses as “That is my Delight, both by Day and Night, when before my Eyes...I can paint a Lamb Slaughtered on the Stem.”<sup>49</sup> The adoration of Jesus’s blood and sacrifice was a truly sensory experience.

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<sup>46</sup> Fogleman, “Jesus is Female,” 324.

<sup>47</sup> Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” 899.

<sup>48</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 418; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, 99-100, 103-04, 108-09, 114-15; Thorp, *Moravian Community*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> *MMR*, reel 35, box 331, folder 2: 6, 8.

The Moravians' interpretation of Jesus's side-wound during the "Sifting Period" was equally steeped in mysticism and metaphor. According to Zinzendorf, the side-wound became a "womb" at the moment of Jesus's death. Through this "womb" a "spiritual birthing" took place for all of humanity. This portrayal of any aspect of Jesus as metaphorically female was but one part of a dramatic "regendering" of the Holy Trinity.<sup>50</sup> Traditionally, the Trinity was all-powerful and all male: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and Savior, and the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit was a somewhat ambiguous entity, it was definitely not female. During the "Sifting Period," the Moravians disempowered God the Father. God became more of a "grandfather" or benevolent overseer as His role of Creator was reassigned to Jesus.<sup>51</sup> Jesus took on new dimensions that accompanied his new role as Creator. Being biologically male, Jesus served as "the husband of all human souls." However, Jesus acquired metaphorically female characteristics when the Moravians said that his side wound was the "birthplace of all souls." Moravian artwork even portrayed the wound as a form of vagina to further illustrate this connection.<sup>52</sup> Missionaries and converts connected with this

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<sup>50</sup> Fogleman, "Jesus is Female," 300; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, 144-45, 150; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 10-11, 14; Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion, Preached in Fetter Lane Chapel in London in the Year 1746*, ed. and trans. George W. Forell (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1973), 8-9.

<sup>51</sup> Fogleman, "Jesus is Female," 298.

<sup>52</sup> Fogleman, "Jesus is Female," 302, 307; Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures*, 8-9; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, 144-45; Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 10-11, 14.

“female” aspect of Jesus when they sang “Dearest Side-Hole!...O thou art the most beloved of all other Wound-Hole Springs.”<sup>53</sup>

The Holy Spirit changed into a universal “mother” during the “Sifting Period.” Zinzendorf believed that no previous explanations grasped the Holy Spirit’s true essence because the language used to describe it was too abstract and vague. The Holy Spirit nurtured men and women reborn in the faith and preserved Christians from sin. “Mother” was the term that best explained the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christians. Zinzendorf vigorously promoted the maternal Holy Spirit concept for over thirty years. Hymnals, litanies, and even a festival, the *Mütterfest*, all honored the “maternal” Holy Spirit.<sup>54</sup>

The maternal Holy Spirit concept was in many ways tied directly to Zinzendorf, and when he died most of the maternal imagery faded into the theological background. Disagreement had always existed among Moravian leaders on how far they should incorporate the Mother metaphor; many Moravian elders worried about giving such credence to a powerful female role, even if it was only metaphorically female.<sup>55</sup> Despite official hesitancy, the Mother concept was accepted within the Moravian community itself. The *Mütterfest* was extremely popular, and over thirty-seven percent of the hymns used by the Moravians

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<sup>53</sup> *MMR*, reel 35, box 331, folder 2: 8.

<sup>54</sup> Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” 887, 889-90, 893-95, 900, 903.

<sup>55</sup> Fogleman, “Jesus is Female,” 302.

referred to the Spirit as “Mother” in the mid-eighteenth century. The Mother concept lasted with the Moravians at Bethlehem well into the 1770s, long after the Delaware missions were established. The missionary David Zeisberger for example, instructed mission Indians to give thanks to the Holy Spirit for the “true and motherly care” shown to them by that entity.<sup>56</sup> The “Sifting Period” undoubtedly influenced Moravian missionary work with the Delawares, as the regendered hymns and imagery used at the missions suggests.<sup>57</sup>

The Moravians were not the only Christians seeking Indian converts, and Delawares intrigued by Christianity had other missionaries from which to choose. The Moravians’ appeal rested on the similarities between Moravian Christianity and traditional Delaware religion. Missionaries stressed these similarities in their work with converts. Moravian Christianity translated cross-culturally more easily than a faith like Congregationalism, which called for a deep reasoning and understanding of Scripture.<sup>58</sup> It was not that Moravians wanted uneducated converts. Rather, Moravianism at its heart focused on the more personal expressions of faith; education only aided that personal experience. Missionaries stressed the important religious issues of sin and redemption and attempted to educate their converts, but they always connected it to the emotional experience.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 346.

<sup>57</sup> Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” 899, 904.

<sup>58</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 51.

<sup>59</sup> *MMR*, reel 8, box 141, folder 14: 44; folder 16: 6.



Moravian Christianity and traditional Delaware religion each had a supreme deity that took a benevolent interest in the creatures of this world. Believers offered prayers of thanksgiving out of gratitude and in hope that good fortune would continue. However, this is where the connection between the Moravians' God and the Delawares' Great Spirit ended. The Great Spirit was the Creator in the Delaware belief system, but God was now something different for the Moravians. The Moravians were in the midst of the "Sifting Period" when they began the Delaware mission, a time when God the Father/Creator changed into God the benevolent "Grandfather." Jesus was the Creator for the Moravians. This was the connection missionaries stressed, as they equated Jesus the Christian Creator/Redeemer with the Delaware Creator.<sup>60</sup>

Zinzendorf's "regendering" of the Trinity, his metaphorical reassigning of gender roles, made understanding the Trinity easier. By assigning the roles of "Grandfather," "Mother," and "Son" to the higher powers, Zinzendorf simply imposed a family model on the Trinity. It was easier for missionaries to explain this familiar dynamic to potential converts who may have never heard of the Trinity. It also saved missionaries from the potential difficulty of explaining how three male entities could be separate personae and yet still one in the same.

The strongest similarity between Moravian Christianity and Delaware religion was that each centered on the individual's relationship with a higher power. For the Delawares that relationship existed between an individual and his

or her guardian spirit, which provided good fortune and spiritual strength. Instead of traditional guardian spirits, Moravians offered the Delaware converts Jesus Christ. As pietists, Moravians stressed an individual's personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It was then easy for the missionaries to equate the converts' relationship with Jesus to the relationships with their old guardian spirits and for the converts to understand that relationship. The prayers Moravian Delawares offered to those guardian spirits were instead directed with gratitude toward Jesus "for all the goodness we had enjoyed from him."<sup>61</sup> Jesus, in essence, became the ultimate guardian spirit, one who brought redemption, spiritual strength, and good fortune to his followers and the world. Converts adopted Christianity when they accepted Jesus Christ and the ceremonial importance that accompanied him. But when Moravians presented Jesus Christ to Delawares by equating Jesus to Delaware guardian spirits, it was Christianity adapted for a Delaware audience and cast in a decidedly Indian mold.

Missionaries stressed almost daily that Jesus "had taken our flesh and blood" and become a man to complete his work.<sup>62</sup> This theme is itself nothing new to Christianity, but it is still a powerful psychological tool. The idea that a deity would not only assume human form but *become* a human being served to connect followers to that deity. The Moravians attempted to make Jesus a tangible

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<sup>60</sup> Fogleman, "Jesus is Female," 300; Heckewelder, *History*, 100-102, 212-14; *MMR*, reel 8, box 141, folder 15: 28.

<sup>61</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 265; Christopher P. Gavalier, "The Empty Lot: Spiritual Contact in Lenape and Moravian Religious Beliefs," *American Indian Quarterly* 18: 2 (Spring 1994), 218-20.

reality for their Indian converts in the hopes that converts could more easily relate to him. All the Moravian missionaries did this to varying degrees, although some took this concept further than others. David Zeisberger went so far as to stress the racial similarities between Jesus and the Indians, telling converts that Jesus “had a brown skin like the Indian, & certainly did not resemble the nations of white people.”<sup>63</sup> Jesus was not only spiritually similar, he was physically familiar.

Zeisberger’s comparison stands out because he is the one that stressed the racial connection, not the Moravian Delaware converts. Images of Jesus and other holy figures (such as the Virgin Mary) enjoyed substantial popularity throughout much of Christian history. The tendency to depict those figures as members of the artist’s own race has also been a part of that visual tradition.<sup>64</sup> White, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic Christians have all depicted Jesus as a member of their own race, instead of as a first-century Palestinian Jew. Assigning one’s racial identity to these Christian figures was just another way that Christians could connect with Jesus. The point is that such a depiction typically originated within the community in question. In Zeisberger’s case, a white man is actively promoting the idea that Jesus was racially similar to Indians, but the Delaware Moravians did not seem all that concerned with the comparison. This may have been connected to the fluid adoption traditions of many Eastern Woodland

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<sup>62</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 173, 251, 313.

<sup>63</sup> *MMR*, reel 20, box 173, folder 1: 2.

<sup>64</sup> Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 35.

Indians, where Indians would adopt members of other groups (including whites) into their families and clans without much regard for ethnicity or previous allegiances. The important thing was how those new members were successfully incorporated into the group, and what those new members could provide them.<sup>65</sup>

This apparent lack of interest among Moravian Delawares to portray Jesus as racially similar to themselves may speak more to the accommodating nature of Delaware spirituality. Perhaps for Delawares interested in incorporating Moravian Christianity, what mattered most was not Jesus's ethnicity, but the spiritual power he could provide them.

Zeisberger's comparison is ultimately unsuccessful due to the increasingly racialized climate of the eighteenth century. It was during this time that the general perception whites in British North America had of Indians as "unenlightened whites" shifted to one of Indians as "inherently inferior redmen."<sup>66</sup> This perception was not universal but was increasingly common, especially along the North American Anglo-Indian frontier. Indians, too, were thinking along increasingly racialized lines of thought, as they "challenged European claims to power by asserting a racial identity." These challenges ran the gamut from political to spiritual, as some Indians used race as an argument against

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<sup>65</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 192-93.

<sup>66</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review*, 87: 4 (Oct. 1982), 919.

conversion.<sup>67</sup> Zeisberger's comparison not only demonstrated the growing racial distinctions concerning the Indians, it was an attempt by Zeisberger to diffuse the racial rejection of Christianity that some Indians were using. If missionaries could convince potential converts that Jesus was racially similar to them, then such a concept could lessen the idea that Christianity was only suited for white people.

Zeisberger was one of, if not the, best missionaries the Moravians had with the Indians, but he could not undo the growing racial tensions along the frontier. Even the most dedicated proponents for Christianizing the Indians faced skepticism from other whites regarding the "expectations of the Indians' civil and theological redemption."<sup>68</sup> Comparing Jesus to Indians during a time when more and more people thought of Indians as racially inferior was actually quite daring when seen in this context. Yet the fact that such a racial parallel never became a widespread tool used by other Moravian missionaries to encourage Indian conversions, and that most Indians tended to use race as more of an argument against conversion, proves how pervasive this racial awareness had become along the North American Anglo-Indian frontier.

Moravians in Germany did not portray Jesus as a guardian spirit, nor did they need to remind themselves of his Semitic heritage to understand his importance. When they referred to him as the Savior, they knew exactly what that

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<sup>67</sup> Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to be Red," *American Historical Review*, 102: 3 (June 1997), 637-38.

<sup>68</sup> Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin," 936; For a specific episode of such skepticism, see Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 264-66.

meant with no translation. That missionaries presented Jesus the way they did, and that Delaware converts responded to that presentation, was significant. It demonstrated the missionaries' dedication to their assignment, since they willingly portrayed Jesus in new ways to gain converts. Most importantly, it showcased the responsibility of converts in the conversion process. Although they accepted and incorporated Moravian spiritual ideas, Delaware converts did so in terms they wanted and understood. They did not blindly absorb whatever the missionaries told them. This was an important step in the creation of an Indian Christianity.

In Jesus, the Moravians “combined the Delaware roles of guardian and sacrifice into one figure, as the source of spiritual strength and resistance.”<sup>69</sup> The missionaries constantly invoked the image that epitomized Christ's sacrificial role: the Crucifixion. The hymns and litanies dedicated to Christ's suffering on the Cross were provocative, and frequently referenced the more dramatic visual representation of the crucified Christ. When converts saw the image, “children and adults wept.” For the Delawares who “saw pictures of his sufferings,” as well as listened to the gospel, Christianity became easier to understand.<sup>70</sup>

The sight of Jesus bravely enduring his suffering and covered in blood understandably attracted the attention of Indians, who marveled at “how many wounds he has, how much blood flows forth! . . . his sweat ran like blood from his

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<sup>69</sup> Conrad, “Moravian Mission,” 77-78, *MMR*, reel 8, box 141, folder 12: 17, folder 13: 34, folder 17: 24-25, 47.

<sup>70</sup> *MMR*, reel 19, box 171, folder 8: 14-15, folder 11: 4-5.

body.”<sup>71</sup> Delaware converts were obsessed with the image because it resonated with Indian views concerning blood and the body. Blood was a powerful, spiritually charged substance and the body was a focus of spiritual energy. This was why menstruating women were separated from the men in their village. Men feared that their own power would be damaged if they interacted with women in direct contact with such potent forces. The spiritual power inherent in body and blood was what made ritual torture a very real prospect for warriors. If captured by an enemy, warriors demonstrated their power by enduring the torture stoically.<sup>72</sup> It is no surprise, then, that one of the most popular mission hymns exalted this very tradition, as converts sang of how “Happy makes me my Creator, Mediator, when I see Him sweating, thirsting, crying, bleeding.”<sup>73</sup>

The Moravians’ own obsession with the spiritual power of blood made them particularly suited for proselytizing to the Indians. Missionaries glorified what was, in essence, the ritualized torture of Jesus Christ every time they celebrated the Crucifixion. Christian Delawares and missionaries repeatedly expressed their spiritual devotion in terms of blood. Several converts talked of how “their hearts were washed with the blood of Christ.”<sup>74</sup> Others “felt the

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<sup>71</sup> *MMR*, reel 40, box 3500, folder 16.

<sup>72</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 6; Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 36.

<sup>73</sup> *MMR*, reel 35, box 331, folder 2: 7.

<sup>74</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 173.

blood,” or were “right hungry after the Savrs. Blood.” The convert Augustus and his wife expressed similar sentiments. Augustus felt that his “Heart again hungers very much after the Flesh & Blood of our Savr.” His wife agreed, and said that “her Heart lov’d the Side Hole very much, & wish’d to sink yet deeper into it.”<sup>75</sup> Missionaries and converts at Shekomeko wrote the words *Blood Region* above their doors, with the hope that “no damage can befall us” under that spiritual protection.<sup>76</sup> Jesus on the cross, in direct contact with extremely powerful spiritual forces, was the physical embodiment of spiritual strength. This understanding of Jesus as sacrifice and guardian spirit only strengthened the Indian Christianity of Delaware converts at the missions.

The Moravians expected neophytes and converts to adhere to certain standards once they joined the mission. Alcohol was forbidden, the Sabbath was to be observed, and traditional religious ceremonies were forbidden. Indians received and were addressed by Christian names, and were dissuaded from painting their bodies in traditional ways.<sup>77</sup> Christian names marked the beginning of their introduction to white ways, as the missionaries slowly began teaching the Indians German and English.<sup>78</sup> This acquisition of a new name was a familiar event for converts, since renaming ceremonies were an established tradition

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<sup>75</sup> *MMR*, reel 26, box 211, folder 19: 1; Merritt, “Kinship,” 64.

<sup>76</sup> *MMR*, reel 1, box 111, folder 2: 8.

<sup>77</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 76; Gipson, *White River*, 506; Conrad, “Moravian Mission,” 176.

<sup>78</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 129.



among the Delawares. Delaware children received names at birth, but took on a new name when they reached adulthood, one that reflected the transition to maturity.<sup>79</sup> As Delaware men and women entered this new phase in their spiritual lives, it was not surprising for them to receive a name that accompanied that transition.

Missionaries were involved in every step of the conversion process, and realized that Indian converts were at first unsteady in their new faith. Moravians criticized their Quaker counterparts for their “half-hearted” attempts at conversion, believing that the Quakers gave the Indians too much freedom too soon.<sup>80</sup> The Moravians felt that if they were too lenient with the Indians and left them to their own devices before the Indians fully understood Christian tenets, the risk of backsliding was high.

While missionaries were involved with their converts’ spiritual lives, the converts participated in decisions affecting the mission community. Leading converts received the prominent distinction of “assistants” or “national helpers.” These men and women interviewed potential new converts, helped run the missions and maintain order, and most importantly, counseled their fellow converts in spiritual and emotional matters. Delaware assistants were a vital link between the missionaries and the converts. The missionaries saw assistants as

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<sup>79</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 141; Kenneth G. Hamilton, “Cultural Contributions of Moravian Missions Among the Indians,” *Pennsylvania History* 18 (Jan. 1951), 12-14.

<sup>80</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 449; Axtell, *After Columbus*, 107.

proof that Indians could accept Christianity in a meaningful way. For their fellow converts, assistants offered a different kind of comfort. As men and women who had incorporated Christian beliefs, they acted as guides for their fellow converts. Assistants provided encouragement and emotional support in the form of a familiar face, one of their own. They showed that it was possible for Delawares to be Christians as well as Delawares.<sup>81</sup>

The connections between Christ and the faithful, and between the men and women of the church, generated a strong communal spirit.<sup>82</sup> Moravians created communities wherever they went, and missionaries brought their wives and children along with them for that express purpose. This encouraged Indian converts of both sexes and all age groups to enter the missions. Families promised a level of safety and community stability that was not found in a military or trading outpost. The presence of Moravian families created a supportive atmosphere that disease and alcohol eroded in traditional Indian communities. The Moravians heard countless stories like the one told by a young Delaware man and his wife. The couple wished to join the mission and convert “because they are tired of the weaknesses and wickedness of the heathen Indians” who drank and committed other acts of violence.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *MMR*, reel 8, box 141, folder 12: 2, 9-10, folder 13: 1, 34, 40, folder 16: 9-10, folder 17: 3; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 292-94, 313, 388-89, 413-14, 417, 425, 451, 459-60, 2: 142, 241-42, 291, 513.

<sup>82</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 52.

<sup>83</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 131.

The choir system was an institution that attempted to create a spiritual family and kinship through God.<sup>84</sup> Paradoxically, dividing the mission community created this spiritual/communal kinship. The Moravian congregation, white and Indian alike, was divided into organizations (choirs) based on age, sex, and marital status. There were choirs for each prominent stage in life: infants, little boys, little girls, older boys, older girls, single brethren, single sisters, married people, widows, and widowers. Married people were not separated by gender, a reflection of the Christian tradition joining man and woman as one in the covenant of marriage. Each group met several times a week, to pray and work communally.<sup>85</sup> Choirs had their own special holidays and songs along with those celebrated by the entire community at general services. The choirs' functions were as religious units, but for the children they served an educational purpose as well. Children, particularly the young boys, were instructed to use the youthful Jesus "as their model and example." As a boy, Jesus was "obedient and subject to his parents, ...and went into the temple, listened, and inquired about the Scriptures."<sup>86</sup> All of these were viewed by the missionaries as exemplary qualities that they wished to instill in their young converts.

Choirs functioned as peer groups and the same groupings were found in all Moravian communities. Brothers and sisters could always count on their peer

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<sup>84</sup> Merritt, "Mission Community Networks," 5.

<sup>85</sup> Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 77-78, 81-85; Georg Neisser, *A History of the Beginnings of the Moravian Work in America*, trans. William N. Schwarze and Samuel H. Gapp (Bethlehem, Pa: Moravian Archives, 1955), 144-45.

groups for support. If converts traveled from their home mission to another Moravian community, they could expect someone in the same peer group to provide aid and shelter. The peer groups also performed a supervisory role within the missions. They made sure that converts kept their dedication to their Christian lifestyle and teachings by watching for any transgressions. Transgressions were any return to what the Moravians considered “heathenish” practices, drinking and traditional religious ceremonies being high on the list.

Transgressors were reprimanded, but the Moravians were careful in how they addressed the issue with the Indians. In his work with the Delawares, David Zeisberger noted that the “Indians dislike having their evil conduct or acts uncovered and held up to them.” If missionaries were overly critical, they risked losing converts. Missionaries had to be understanding, though firm, when dealing with cases of backsliding.<sup>87</sup> If the converts showed remorse, they were not expelled from the community. The Moravians took remorse as an encouraging sign because it meant that their converts were internalizing the missionaries’ teachings.<sup>88</sup> Instead, the transgressors’ fellow converts and teachers confronted them about what happened, sometimes publicly, and offered

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<sup>86</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 255.

<sup>87</sup> Zeisberger, *History*, 120.

<sup>88</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 207.

support to the transgressor as they returned to their religious teachings.<sup>89</sup> When one Delaware convert started drinking again, he “bitterly lamented the corruptness of his heart and the compulsion he still felt to drink to excess.” The man turned to his teachers and Indian brethren for help, which they willingly gave when they saw how sincere he was in seeking repentance.<sup>90</sup>

While missionaries accepted single individuals, they felt especially relieved when Indians arrived with their relatives. Having kin go through the conversion process with them made it easier for Indian men and women. This in turn made the missionaries’ job easier because it reduced temptations to leave the mission.<sup>91</sup> Significant levels of trust were needed between missionaries and converts if proselytizing stood any chance of success. That trust could only be built and maintained in a stable, supportive environment.

Women were vital in cultivating close “kin” relationships. Delaware society was matrilineal, and it was through the extended kin networks of women that Delaware families and communities connected with one another.<sup>92</sup> This value of women exposed the double standards and the opportunities for women at the missions. Zinzendorf, for all of his “regendering” of sacred deities, still

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<sup>89</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 327-28; Thorp, *Moravian Community*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 188.

<sup>91</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 148-49.

<sup>92</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 76, 100, 190-191; Schonemberger, *Lenape Women*, 150-51, 168, 210, 213-214.

believed that women should play a subordinate role to men in the community.<sup>93</sup>

While technically given a subordinate status, women retained a valued and respected role in the Moravian church community. The same sexism that prevented women from reaching the highest levels of community leadership prevented men from privately counseling female parishioners. Women could not be denied private counsel since doing so would prevent them from fully exploring their relationship with God. Moravian women were thus allowed to preach and teach in their communities, which caused a “relative duplication of community offices along gender lines.”<sup>94</sup>

The private connections between Moravian and Delaware women became quite deep. Missionary wives like Margaret Jungmann and Susanna Zeisberger provided female converts with “an extended network of female kin to draw upon for support.”<sup>95</sup> Moravian and Delaware women formed “sisterly” relationships, and helped one another with issues of childbirth, child care, marriage, and daily activities, as well as spiritual matters. These close kin relationships were further cemented when the Moravians introduced the concept of godparenting to Delaware converts.<sup>96</sup>

The number and frequency of religious services and ceremonies further distinguished Moravian missions from other groups. Community services were

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<sup>93</sup> Merritt, “Mission Community Networks,” 5.

<sup>94</sup> Fogleman, “Jesus is Female,” 327-28; Atwood, “The Mother of God’s People,” 897.

<sup>95</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 102; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 136-40.

held daily and weekly, and every choir had its own special services as well.<sup>97</sup> Attendance was expected at all these services, since the converts could only learn about the life and suffering of Jesus Christ through constant exposure and education. Dedicated record-keepers, the Moravians created detailed accounts of conversion rates, daily activities, and the types of religious services they held each day. The Moravians held as many as six different ceremonies in a single day, three services being the minimum. Fewer services were held on weekdays, while the most services were held on Saturdays, the day Moravians observed the Sabbath.<sup>98</sup>

Perhaps the ceremony the Moravians were best known for was the “love feast.” The love feast was a communal event where the members of the congregation came together to “share food and drink in the manner of the primitive Christians.”<sup>99</sup> At the love feast Moravians reaffirmed their commitment to God, their community, and their mission “to announce the Gospel to those poor blind heathen.”<sup>100</sup> The communal and thanksgiving aspects of the love feasts mirrored certain Delaware ceremonies. One such ceremony centered around individual Delaware families, where all the relatives and kin gathered together

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<sup>96</sup> Merritt, “Kinship,” 104; Merritt, “Mission Community Networks,” 6, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 75; Spangenberg, *Account*, 92; Sessler, *Communal Pietism*, 98-99, 112, 118-19, 125-28.

<sup>98</sup> Adelaide L. Fries, ed., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 11 Vols., (Raleigh, NC: Edwards Broughton Print Co., 1922-1954), 1: 418.

<sup>99</sup> Chester Davis, *Hidden Seed and Harvest: A History of the Moravians* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wachovia Historical Society, 1959), 22.

every two years to conduct a sacrifice and prayers of thanksgiving for the benefit of the family.<sup>101</sup> However, it was probably the Delaware's Big House Ceremony that held the greatest similarities with the Moravian love feasts. The Big House Ceremony was an annual event that brought Delaware communities together in a twelve-day festival that gave thanks and praise to the Creator for a plentiful harvest and all other benefits.<sup>102</sup> While love feasts occurred more frequently than the Big House Ceremony, the prayers of thanksgiving given at both ceremonies were rooted in similar feelings of gratitude and praise of sacred powers.

During the song services and love feasts morale was at its highest among the missionaries and the Indians. The Moravians noted that for the Christian Delawares attending these services, "the Spirit of God worked in the hearts of the Indian brethren and sisters...for they were all peaceful and happy."<sup>103</sup> The use of music was especially appealing to the Delaware converts, who had their own long-established musical tradition.<sup>104</sup> Christian Delawares could still express their emotions and gratitude through song, which they did often, even though they were singing to the Christian God.<sup>105</sup> What was important was that Christian

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<sup>100</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 178-79.

<sup>101</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 154, 161, 259; Schonenberger, *Lenape Women*, 150-51.

<sup>102</sup> Zeisberger, *History*, 100, 136-139; Heckewelder, *History*, 100, 212-14; Kraft, *Lenape*, 162-63, 174.

<sup>103</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 139.

<sup>104</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 208.

<sup>105</sup> *MMR*, reel 19, box 171, folder 6: 14.



Delawares still had that outlet available to them, which made it easier to make the transition from one sacred power to another.

The synchronicity between the love feasts, the Big House Ceremony, and all of the other traditions illustrates what James Lockhart termed “double mistaken identity,” or mutual misunderstanding. This process was at the heart of the cultural interactions between European and indigenous groups, “in which each side of the cultural exchange presumes that a given form or concept is functioning in the way familiar within its own tradition and is unaware of or unimpressed by the other side’s interpretation.”<sup>106</sup> It was easy for Moravians and Christian Delawares to presume that these ceremonies functioned in familiar ways since they centered on participants giving praise and gratitude to sacred powers in a joyous communal setting. However it is misleading to say that the parties involved were unaware that these connections existed, simply because it served the interest of both groups to be aware of them. The missionaries constantly looked for avenues into these Indians’ lives as a way to gain converts, and purposefully made connections between traditional Delaware spiritual beliefs and practices and Moravianism to achieve that goal. At the same time those Delawares interested in Moravian Christianity consciously looked for specific aspects of this new faith that appealed to them, and that paralleled their traditional beliefs, to make the incorporation of Moravianism into their lives easier.<sup>107</sup> What

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<sup>106</sup> Lockhart, “Double Mistaken Identity: Some Nahua Concepts in Postconquest Guise,” *Of Things of the Indies*, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Lockhart, “Double Mistaken Identity,” 113.

is debatable is whether or not the missionaries and the Moravian Delawares were unimpressed by the other side's interpretation. Since the missionaries' primary goal was conversion, they clearly saw any connections made between the faiths as a means to an end. The Moravian Delawares felt the same way. Converts accommodated and integrated these new ceremonies and traditions as a way to access the spiritual power Christianity offered, but did so only because the functions these traditions performed were familiar to them.

Missions were held together by personalities as much as by faith; put another way, effective leadership made the difference between a successful mission and a failed endeavor. Personality, or more accurately charisma, was actually more important than faith in the beginning of a mission community. While the Moravians' message attracted Delawares to the missions, it was the missionaries who kept the converts there while they internalized their new faith. As the conduits and proponents of this new Christian behavior, missionaries needed to lead by example.

Good missionaries built a strong rapport with their converts by learning the converts' language and by working with them on personal levels. Missionaries had to be more than just teachers and preachers. In a way, they needed to be friends with the converts. Missionary wives like Margaret Jungmann, Johanna Schmick, and Margaretha Grube were leaders in the female mission community *because* they developed close personal bonds with Delaware women, making the

incorporation of Christianity easier for those converts. David Zeisberger embodied the most effective missionary qualities, and his mission, from 1767 to 1808, was arguably the most successful Moravian Delaware venture because of it. The converts at his mission followed him wherever he went, from Pennsylvania to Ohio and eventually Canada, where the mission remained after his death. Zeisberger's converts were so loyal because his charismatic and commanding presence, combined with his general approach, created a supportive atmosphere. Zeisberger spoke fluent Delaware, which immediately earned him some level of trust from his converts. He encouraged their active participation in the mission by establishing education programs and by giving them some authority. Zeisberger personally trained several assistants who could preach and spread the word on their own if needed.<sup>108</sup> Zeisberger's assistants were so well respected that other missionaries requested them if they had trouble communicating with the Delaware converts in their missions.<sup>109</sup> All of Zeisberger's actions demonstrated that he was completely sincere about his faith and his mission, which made that faith more attractive to converts.

Ceremonies and organizations were important in the Indian conversion experience, but nothing could take the place of language. There were two linchpins to the Moravians' success with the Delawares: religious analogies and

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<sup>108</sup> *MMR*, reel 19, box 171, folder 6: 41-42; Spangenberg, *Account*, 36-40, 45, 50, 93; Newcomb, *Delaware Culture and Acculturation*, 52-53, 86; Schonemberger, *Lenape Women*, 2-3, 113, 247-49; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 435-36.

<sup>109</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 380-81.

language. The two were intricately connected. The Moravians' emphasis on languages facilitated their success among the Indians, for the mastery of Indian languages opened up numerous opportunities for conversion. No matter how well versed in English or German the first generation of Christian-Indians became, their native tongue was always the language they had complete mastery of and could communicate the most effectively through.<sup>110</sup> If the Indians were to be reached spiritually, the Moravians needed to communicate through native languages. Moravian missionaries learned Delaware, Mahican, and Iroquoian languages in the course of their work. The Moravians paralleled the Jesuits' work with the Hurons and Algonquian groups of Canada, not to mention missionaries throughout Latin America since the sixteenth century, in this regard.<sup>111</sup>

Language gave the Christian-Delawares their strongest leverage when dealing with missionaries because it gave Indian converts a position of control. Technically the strongest leverage Indian converts had was their ability to leave the missions, and Indians who became bored or disinterested in the Moravians did leave. However, most Delawares stayed at the missions because they *wanted* to be there. They wanted to hear what the Moravians preached, so leaving was not an easy option.

The Indians made it clear from the beginning that they preferred to converse in their own language, and they expected their preachers to be fluent in

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<sup>110</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 129.

<sup>111</sup> Axtell, *After Columbus*, 104.

that language. Not wanting to lose potential souls for Christ, the Moravians mandated that “A brother should go and live among the Indians to learn their language, so that we would be able to converse with them when they visit.”<sup>112</sup> This order, given in 1742, set Moravian policy when dealing with the Delawares, and it was advised that any missionary traveling through their country had at least some grasp of their language.<sup>113</sup>

The fluency of preachers in their local language was taken as a sign of trust and security on the Delawares’ part. A fluent preacher cut out unnecessary third parties, and the Indians learned from bitter experience not to trust third parties when dealing with whites. Delaware converts preferred “to have their teachers speak with them in their own language” to prevent any attempts at trickery and to diminish the chances of misinterpretation.<sup>114</sup> Missionaries demonstrated their sincerity by taking the time to learn their converts’ native language, and the best missionaries were without a doubt the ones who mastered Delaware. David Zeisberger owed his success to his abilities as a preacher and to his fluency in his converts’ language. When Zeisberger preached to the Delawares in his congregation, in fluent Delaware, he commanded their respect and complete attention.<sup>115</sup> Mastery of an Indian language guaranteed that more people would

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<sup>112</sup> *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 38.

<sup>113</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 319.

<sup>114</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 114.

<sup>115</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 299; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 173.

understand the missionaries' message. Once that happened, the chances for new converts increased.

As the Indians learned German and/or English and the missionaries learned Delaware, face-to-face communication outside church services became easier and more frequent.<sup>116</sup> Missionaries frequently paid visits to Delaware converts in their homes, which allowed for stronger bonds between men and women in the community.<sup>117</sup> Margaret Jungmann built such close bonds with the Delaware women in her town because she spoke fluent Delaware, and could easily discuss religious as well as mundane matters with converts.<sup>118</sup> Once this exchange of languages happened, the comfort level between missionaries and converts rose. Familiarity encouraged friendships, and friendships between the Moravians and their Indian brethren only tied the community together in deeper, more personal ways.

Languages contain grammatical forms and expressions that are unique to the cultures that produce them, making the Delaware language as unique as the culture from which it derived.<sup>119</sup> The Delaware language acted as a cultural depository, preserving the fundamental concepts, oral traditions, and histories of Delaware culture. By emphasizing their own language converts preserved an

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<sup>116</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 210.

<sup>117</sup> Merritt, "Mission Community Networks," 6; Merritt, "Kinship," 100, 104; *MMR*, reel 8, box 141, folder 13: 34; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 195, 307, 341, 424-25, 440.

<sup>118</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 136-40.

<sup>119</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 129-30.

intrinsic part of their Indian culture. Converts also maintained important links with family and friends who chose not to convert by placing an emphasis on their native language. Delawares living at the missions still considered themselves Delawares because they maintained their language and familial connections, even when given Christian names and praying to the Christian Savior on the Cross.

Language also served as one of the principal vehicles through which the converts' new Indian Christianity formed. This process began when converts saw the compatibility between their traditional religious system and the Moravians' Christianity. As missionaries explained what Moravianism offered converts, they heard those explanations in Delaware. This intensified the converts' exposure to Christianity. This balancing act became distinctly visible in the translation of Christian Scripture and hymns into Delaware. The translated texts served as physical representations of the Christian Indian process and represented a significant stage in forming an Indian Christianity for converts.<sup>120</sup>

Translated texts were equally valuable to missionaries because they supplemented their preaching activities. If a missionary failed to clearly explain a religious message to his Indian congregation, he could turn to a translation of the Scriptures. The absence of translated texts made the missionary's job more difficult, especially if he was not fluent in Delaware himself.<sup>121</sup> If missionaries

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<sup>120</sup> Thomas McElwain, "The Rainbow Will Carry Me": The Language of Seneca Iroquois Christianity as Reflected in Hymns," in Christopher Vecsey, ed., *Religion in Native North America* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1990), 83.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

could not adequately respond to the Indians' questions, frustrations ran high and the chances for conversions decreased.

Missionaries not only taught converts European languages, they tried teaching Delawares how to read and write in Delaware. If a convert learned how to read, the translations "gave the converts the spiritual freedom...to have direct access to the gospel for their personal use."<sup>122</sup> Once they could read the texts for themselves, converts generated more questions about their faith. These questions led to greater self-examination, which only strengthened the personal relationship converts had with Jesus. Converts not only read the Scriptures and other texts, they sang hymns (in Delaware) outside of church services and discussed their meanings on their own time, with the missionaries and amongst themselves.<sup>123</sup>

The Moravians found that direct translations from German or English to Delaware were virtually impossible due to basic linguistic differences. The Delaware language was steeped in metaphors and descriptive phrases that had no counterparts in German or English. Similarly, there were words and phrases in German and English that had no counterparts in Delaware. Missionaries had to be creative in their translations yet still maintain a high level of accuracy lest the meaning of the translation be lost. The Moravians dealt with this translation problem by paraphrasing certain words, phrases, and expressions in their hymns

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<sup>122</sup> Conrad, "Moravian Mission," 75; *MMR*, reel 20, box 173, folder 6: 1, reel 19, box 171, folder 11: 5.

<sup>123</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 61, 255; 2: 77, 471, 490, 511; *MMR*, reel 19, box 171, folder 7: 41, folder 11: 5, reel 20, box 173, folder 1: 56, folder 6:1, reel 35, box 331, folder 2; Merritt, "Kinship," 62.



and prayers.<sup>124</sup> Using Delaware expressions that closely conveyed the original meanings of the replaced passages, the Moravians expressed their fundamental message in ways that still connected them to their original meaning. For example, the word “holy” was translated into “quite clean” or “without sin.”<sup>125</sup>

The Delaware translation of The Lord’s Prayer is the best example of this paraphrasing solution. In English, the Lord’s Prayer begins with “Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.” The Delaware language had no word for “hallowed” and no specific phrase for “Thy Will be done.” With paraphrasing, the Delaware translation begins like this: “Thou our Father there dwelling beyond the clouds, magnified or praised be thy name. Thy kingdom come on thy thoughts, will, intention, mind, come to pass here on the earth, the same as it is there in heaven or beyond the clouds.”<sup>126</sup> The difference in words and phrasing is apparent to anyone familiar with the original prayer. Despite the differences, the paraphrasing provided a remarkably close translation of the prayer’s central message.

The paraphrasing solution raises the question of whether or not Delaware converts received as “legitimate” an interpretation of Moravian Christianity as the missionaries would have liked. For all of the Moravians’ efforts to attract Delaware converts by emphasizing the fundamental similarities between the two

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<sup>124</sup> Vecsey, *Religion*, 83.

<sup>125</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 129-30; Kenneth Gardiner Hamilton, *John Ettewein and the Moravian Church during the Revolutionary Period* (Bethlehem, Pa: Times Publishing Co, 1940), 260.

<sup>126</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 424-25.

belief systems, the missionaries still sought to bring “civilization” to the Indians through Christianity. The educational program implemented at the missions was ultimately aimed at making the Delaware converts more “European” in their Christianity, by giving them Christian (i.e. European) names and teaching them European languages. The implication of the missionary program was that the converts would eventually integrate the traditional European view of Moravian Christianity. However, missionaries understood that accommodating the first generations of Delaware converts was necessary in including those new followers into the Moravians’ community of believers. Whether or not neophytes heard Christian prayers in Delaware was secondary to the fact that they *understood* the fundamental message of the prayers, especially in the crucial early stages of incorporating Moravian Christianity into their lives. If that meant translating everything into Delaware, then that is what it took. The Moravians’ motto, “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity,” epitomized the early stages of the Delaware missions and translations in this regard. As long as the converts understood the fundamentals of the faith, the missionaries were content.<sup>127</sup> Any other later advances made with the Delawares hinged on that fact, so that was the missionaries’ main priority.

Moravian Delawares did not object to the translations because they had no reason to, they insisted that the Moravians provide them and it made accommodating Moravianism easier. This was a favorable position for converts to

maintain, and they did so by constantly demanding that missionaries focus their interpretations through the Delaware language. While missionaries tried to teach them European languages, Delawares interested in Moravianism insisted that principle communication always be in their native language, allowing them to keep their interpretive advantage.

Translating and paraphrasing prayers and hymns benefited the Delaware Moravians because these expressions of Christian joy showed that it was possible to balance the two traditions. Indian ideas could adapt and incorporate Christianity, while at least one form of Christianity could be interpreted and understood from an Indian spiritual perspective.<sup>128</sup> Circumstances made it difficult for Christian-Indians to maintain this balance in real life, but the existence of the Christian-Indian prayers and hymns proved that such a balance was possible. The texts, like the Delaware converts who heard and spoke those words, proved that Christianity reached the Indians in an Indian-influenced form. The Moravians brought the Word of God to the Delawares, but God spoke with a Delaware accent.

In 1789, forty-six year old John Heckewelder became involved in a heated exchange with another man over the merits of proselytizing to the Indians. Heckewelder praised the Christian-Indians at the Moravian missions. He pointed to them as conclusive proof that efforts to convert and civilize the Indians could

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<sup>127</sup> Korts, "The Liturgical Development of the American Moravian Church," 278.

<sup>128</sup> Vecsey, *Religion*, 83.

actually succeed. If success was a real possibility, civilizing and Christianizing the Indians was worth the time and effort.<sup>129</sup>

Heckewelder won his argument that night, but neither he nor his opponent really considered the toll civilization and Christianization would have on their converts. The Moravian Indians enjoyed a “universally excellent” reputation until circumstances conspired against them.<sup>130</sup> The Delawares who accepted the Moravians’ invitation faced trials that rivaled those of Job. But when Indians asked to hear the Christian message, they did so hoping that Christianity would fill a need in their lives. Whether that was a spiritual need, a desire to stop drinking to excess, or simply the chance to rebuild their communities, the need existed. Many Indians looked for answers elsewhere, but for a significant number of Delaware men and women the Moravians offered a way to retain some measure of power, control, and stability in a rapidly changing world. All of the comparisons, compromises, and translations that took place at the missions demonstrated that Moravian Christianity could be interpreted and understood through a Delaware spiritual mindset. The question then becomes one of sincerity, and whether Delaware conversions could be considered “legitimate.” The significant number of Moravian Delawares throughout the eighteenth century strongly suggests that, for those involved, the perceived benefits for staying outweighed the benefits of leaving. At the very least, for the Delaware men and women who went to the

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<sup>129</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 264-66.

<sup>130</sup> Gray, *Wilderness Christians*, 153.

missions and chose to remain, their acceptance could be considered nominal, if not more so in some cases. The Moravians offered the Delawares who chose to join them a way to maintain group cohesion, to learn practical skills for contending with their rapidly changing world, and a new avenue of spiritual power with which to tap into. However, even though mission Delawares accepted the Moravians' help, they did so on their own terms and forced the Moravians to be accommodating themselves. Moravian Delaware men and women incorporated and accommodated the Christian message, but it was a Christianity presented in Indian language and understood from an Indian perspective.

## Chapter 2

### **White Violence and the Legacy of Gnadenhütten: Disillusionment along the White River**

In her work on the Moravian Delawares, Elma Gray wrote that converts “admired the courageous missionary who dared everything to be kind, who called them brothers and talked to them of a God of Love, the Light of the world, the Savior of men’s souls, mightier than their own Great Spirit.” They hoped that “Christ, the Moravians’ Savior, who had blessed these happy men and women and had made them His children, might do the same for them.”<sup>131</sup> Gray captured the essence of Moravian missionary zeal, yet there was a darker side to the conversion process that such encomia failed to capture. A new convert’s heart may have filled with joy when accepting his or her faith, but nothing proved stronger than a bitter and disillusioned ex-convert. Moravian missionaries at White River discovered this in the first decade of the nineteenth century. A disgruntled missionary wrote in 1804 that “On the whole, we find that those who were formerly baptized are usually prejudiced against the Word of God and have no desire to hear it, being entirely lost to heathenism.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Gray, *Wilderness Christians*, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 273.

The opinions expressed by Gray and the missionary could not be more different, yet both describe the Moravian Delawares. The contradiction is striking considering all the factors that made Moravian Christianity appealing to Delaware converts. A religion based on pietism, skilled and dedicated missionaries, and the adaptive use of theology and language created an environment centered around a community of believers who each maintained a personal relationship with the Divine. While it is impossible to determine the converts' exact range and depth of beliefs, the sheer number of Delawares who joined and remained part of the Moravian missions throughout much of the eighteenth century stands as testament to the fact that something worked for them. On the surface at least, and much deeper for some converts, Delaware Moravianism was truly an Indian Christianity, due to its interpretation through the Delaware language and consistently drawn parallels between the fundamental concepts of the two belief systems (personal relationship with a higher being, the spiritual power of blood, etc.). For Moravian Delawares who incorporated Christianity, the missions presented a chance for community stability and spiritual power that the upheavals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries eroded in their traditional communities.<sup>133</sup> For a time, Moravianism seemed to fulfill some of the needs of Delaware converts, or at least gave them an opportunity to do so. As long as Moravianism did that, the converts would remain at the missions.

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<sup>133</sup> Axtell, *After Columbus*, 55.

While the Moravian missionaries had many institutions that made the process easier for their Delaware converts, backsliding occurred “out of an understandable desire to cling to familiar cultural habits.” Yet for those Delawares who stayed at the missions, their decision to incorporate Christianity was genuine.<sup>134</sup> At the White River mission, however, an almost palpable sense of bitterness existed among the Delawares. Those “formerly baptized” Delawares were men and women who lived at the missions and believed in the message, but then experienced something that shattered their belief in the Moravians and their Christian faith.<sup>135</sup> In examining the factors that led to that renunciation, the darker side of the conversion experience is exposed.

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White violence on the Pennsylvania frontier had a dual influence for Christian Delawares. Violence drove converts away from the missions just as it displaced them from their lands and the slower violence of the alcohol trade drove them to the missions. Arising as it did out of the convoluted and tempestuous relationship between white settlers, Moravian missionaries, and the Indians, converts and “heathens” alike, violence thrust a lasting spiritual legacy upon the Moravian Delawares.

The Indian-white frontier could be very dangerous for everyone living there, and incidents of individual violence were too numerous to count. While

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 54, 107.

<sup>135</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 273.



individual incidents figured into the personal decisions of converts to leave the missions, the impact of violence can be seen in three major episodes. The intricate details of these episodes, while important, are not the primary concern. The messages they sent to Christian Delawares are, however, paramount. In each incident, Christian Delawares at the Moravian missions paid a heavy price. Unfortunately for the natives, the price was unwarranted and undeserved. Converts found themselves the victims of violence not intended for them specifically but for all Indians in general.

The official position at Bethlehem was to focus proselytizing efforts on the Indians, but opportunities to preach to English-speaking neighbors on the Pennsylvania frontier were welcome should they present themselves.<sup>136</sup> The situation in the field was far more difficult than the official mandate suggested. Missionaries frequently commented on the difficult task of preaching to the Indians when frontier whites were themselves less than ideal Christian role models. Drinking, gambling, and hard living were common. John Heckewelder wrote that “there are white people, who by far exceed the Indians in villanous and cruel acts, advising and trying to persuade those Indians who have embraced Christianity to desert the cause.”<sup>137</sup> It was difficult enough to convince Indians that Christianity was the correct path without other whites, who also called themselves Christians, setting a “bad example.” Missionaries were extremely

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<sup>136</sup> *Bethlehem Diary*, 1: 22.

<sup>137</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 307, Griffin, *People with No Name*, 107, 110.

critical of this hypocrisy, and said of whites who spoke disparagingly of their Indian converts that “there are heathen of all nations.”<sup>138</sup>

White settlers on the Pennsylvania frontier, predominantly Scots-Irish in descent, competed with Delawares and other Indians for land and resources. This competition intensified after 1740, when migration from Ulster to Pennsylvania resumed on a large scale. Unlike the first wave of Scots-Irish immigrants, the majority of whom managed to pay their own way across the Atlantic, fewer people in this second migration had the money necessary to purchase fares. Many of these people made the voyage by becoming indentured servants and after serving their terms continued migrating further into the Pennsylvania backcountry to improve their fortunes.<sup>139</sup> The massive scope of the Ulster migrations alarmed established Pennsylvanians who had preconceived notions of the “Irish.” These new “Irish” settlers were seen as an uncouth rabble of lazy drunks, prone to acts of violence.<sup>140</sup> The hard-living so common on the frontier only served to reinforce this stereotype as the migration westward continued.

Constant competition for land and resources, coupled with cultural misunderstandings, distrust, and violence, led to many settlers developing an intense hatred for all Indians, regardless of their adherence to Christianity. Colonial officials in Philadelphia feared that the incessant push for land would

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<sup>138</sup> *MMR*, reel 19, box 171, folder 11: 5.

<sup>139</sup> Griffin, *People with No Name*, 159, 162.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

drive Indians into alliances with the French or simply with one another against the colony.<sup>141</sup> Pontiac's uprising in 1763 only intensified the hatred of frontier settlers and confirmed the worst fears of colonial officials. Shawnees, Mingos, Senecas, and non-Christian Delawares in western Pennsylvania and Ohio joined the uprising, causing settlers to band together in mutual defense and revenge. The Quaker government in Philadelphia was slow to act on the settlers' behalf. Settlers believed that the government had abandoned them to the Indians, so they acted on their own, retaliating against any Indians they could find. The settlers did not see this as unwarranted or unreasonable, they saw themselves as fighting for their rights and survival since the Quaker government seemed unwilling to fight for them.<sup>142</sup> This indiscriminate thirst for vengeance caused the slaughter of the Conestoga Indians, who were peaceful Christian-Indians and not part of the uprising, by the "Paxton Boys." Scots-Irish settlers from Paxton (Harrisburg) attacked the Conestoga village on December 21, 1763, burned it down, and bludgeoned to death six of the residents. The remaining fourteen Conestogas, who had been hunting during the attack, were taken to the Lancaster jail for their own safety. It did not help. Sixty Paxton Boys showed up at the jail thirteen days later,

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<sup>141</sup> Earl P. Olmstead, *David Zeisberger: A Life among the Indians* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 116; Griffin, *People with No Name*, 166.

<sup>142</sup> Olmstead, *David Zeisberger*, 112; Gray, *Wilderness Christians*, 40; Griffin, *People with No Name*, 171-72.

and murdered the remaining fourteen Conestogas. The savagery of the attack was staggering; men, women, and children were shot and hacked to pieces.<sup>143</sup>

The indiscriminate brutality of the Paxton Boys horrified Moravian authorities at Bethlehem. Hearing reports that a mob of blood-crazed and Indian-hating whites was marching eastward, and fearing for the safety of the Christian Delawares and other Indians in their charge, the Moravian Mission Board ordered the converts taken to Philadelphia for their own protection.<sup>144</sup> David Zeisberger, along with other Moravian missionaries and their wives, accompanied the Christian Indians. They reached Philadelphia in January where the colonial government, after trying to send them to New York, agreed to give them shelter.<sup>145</sup> Their reception in the seaport was less than pleasant as crowds and street orators, sympathetic to frontier settlers, angrily took to the streets.<sup>146</sup> Government officials prevented large-scale violence from breaking out against the Moravian Indians, and the converts stayed in Philadelphia for over a year. The converts' greatest suffering resulted not from the mob but from a smallpox epidemic in which fifty-six converts died.<sup>147</sup> On February 26, 1765, the Christian Indians were given permission to return to Bethlehem. On March 18 of that year, several Christian

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<sup>143</sup> Paul A. W. Wallace, *Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckewelder* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), 418.

<sup>144</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 74.

<sup>145</sup> *Pennsylvania Colonial Records*, 16 vols. (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns, 1851-53), 9: 122.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 9: 75-76.

<sup>147</sup> Bishop George Henry Loskiel, *History of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Indians in North America* (London: Brethren's Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel, 1794), 228.

Indians sent a letter of gratitude to the governor. The letter acknowledged that “we were indeed in danger of our lives, but you protected and defended us against our enemies...Your kindness, protection and benevolence will never be forgotten by us...As long as we live we shall remain true friends to the English.”<sup>148</sup>

The Paxton crisis demonstrated that Christianity did not guarantee Indians protection from the intense hatred of white settlers toward *all* Indians. This was a racial and cultural hatred that grew out of a need for the settlers to “define themselves with, over, and in spite of others.” As obstacles to the settlers’ progress and during Pontiac’s War, threats to their lives, Indians were the perfect foil. It did not matter that the Christian Indians were innocent of violence; they were Indians, and that became reason enough. It was difficult for the Moravians to counter this racialized hatred because anyone close to the Indians was also suspect in the settlers’ eyes.<sup>149</sup>

The converts’ forced evacuation from their missions did not generate an exodus of believers from the faith. Their experience after the Paxton episode, while traumatic, was not damaging to their Christian experience. Moravian Delawares were not the direct victims of the Paxton Boys, and they witnessed first-hand the concern their missionaries had for their well-being. If the

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<sup>148</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 91-92.

<sup>149</sup> Michael Zuckerman, “Identity in British America: Unease in Eden,” in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 152; Kathleen Brown, “Native Americans and Early Modern Concepts of Race,” in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 95; Clifford, “Identity in Mashpee,” 289.

Moravians were concerned about frontier settlers not being good role models for the Christian Indians, then the actions of Zeisberger, and Johanna Schmick, Margaretha Grube, and their husbands more than compensated. The dedication and personal attention of these missionaries helped the converts keep their faith. In their letter to Governor Joseph Galloway, the Christian Delaware representatives acknowledged this fact outright, giving thanks that “we have been allowed to have our teachers with us during these heavy trials, who have instructed us daily in the word of God.”<sup>150</sup> The Christian Delawares were spared the worst violence of 1763-65, but the indiscriminate hatred unleashed against all Indians during that period would surface again.

When the American Revolution reached the Moravians and the Christian Delawares, it was just as devastating to them as it was to every other Indian group on the frontier. Like every Eastern Indian group, they had to choose sides in the conflict. The Moravian missionaries and Christian Delawares sided with the Americans, but still paid dearly for their choice. The missionaries paid for being mediators between white Christians and Christian Indians on the frontier.<sup>151</sup>

David Zeisberger’s group was captured by the British during the war and held at Detroit on charges of spying for the Americans. In Zeisberger’s case, the charges were true, but Zeisberger’s close relationship with the Moravian Indians already

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<sup>150</sup> Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 91.

<sup>151</sup> Louise A. Breen, “Praying with the Enemy,” *Empire and Others*, 115.

made him suspect in the eyes of many whites.<sup>152</sup> In Western Pennsylvania and Ohio, the Revolution was also an Indian war, and any person with ties as close as Zeisberger's was viewed with suspicion no matter which side he chose. Even though the Moravians were pro-American, that did not endear the Christian Delawares to white rebel settlers.

Their allegiance to the American cause made the Moravian missions targets for raiding parties conducted by Britain's Indian allies. In mid-August 1781, three hundred pro-British Shawnee, Wyandot, Ottawa, Chippewa, and non-Moravian Delawares attacked the missions at Gnadenhütten, Schonbrunn, and Salem. At Gnadenhütten, the Wyandot leader Pomoacan gave what would be a prophetic warning to the Christian Indians there. Assessing their precarious situation on the frontier between the northern Indians and Anglo-American settlers, Pomoacan warned that

Two powerful and mighty spirits or gods are standing and opening wide their jaws toward each other to swallow, and between the two angry spirits, who thus open their jaws, are you placed; you are in danger, from one or from the other, or even from both, of being bruised and mangled by their teeth.<sup>153</sup>

Pomoacan's warning not only applied to the political situation of living on the frontier. The warning had strong nativist overtones and contained a message for the Christian Delawares to renounce Moravian Christianity and fully embrace

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<sup>152</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 11.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 4.

their Indian heritage and spirituality.<sup>154</sup> The Moravian Delawares could only get hurt by standing between the Indian and white worlds. Taken in this context, the warning had added significance. By trying to embrace Christianity at the missions, even an Indian interpretation of it, Pomoacan believed that the Moravian Delawares complicated their lives in a dangerous and unnecessary way. No matter how Christian they became, whites would always and only see them as Indians, “inclined always to support those of their own kind.”<sup>155</sup>

In March 1782, Pomoacan’s warning came true in a scenario that echoed the massacre of the Conestoga Indians. Eighty to ninety American militiamen under the command of Colonel David Williamson methodically slaughtered ninety-six Christian Delawares, mostly Munsees, in the Moravian mission town of Gnadenhütten. The militia did not discriminate: they killed men, women, and children, and “they burned the dead bodies, together with the houses, which they set on fire.”<sup>156</sup>

The massacre at Gnadenhütten marked a clear break in the Moravian work with the Christian Delawares. There was the practical loss, which by itself was devastating enough, since Gnadenhütten was one of the major mission towns in Pennsylvania. Gnadenhütten was founded by missionaries and Christian Indians in 1746 about forty miles northwest of Bethlehem. Within ten years of its

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<sup>154</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 83.

<sup>155</sup> Breen, “Praying with the Enemy,” 116-17.

<sup>156</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 78-81.



founding, the settlement grew from 197 to 1,382 acres. The Indians and missionaries built eighteen log homes, twelve “Indian cabins,” a blacksmith shop, a grist mill, a saw mill, a store house, a barn and stable, a bake house, a kitchen and wash house, and a meeting house.<sup>157</sup> Gnadenhütten thus served as a major site for the religious accommodation of Pennsylvania Delawares to Moravian Christianity.<sup>158</sup> The destruction of the mission was a tremendous loss, since the success of Gnadenhütten was also symbolic of what the Christian Indians were trying to do: build new lives for themselves through an Indian Christianity.

The massacre was also devastating demographically. There were 300-400 Christian Delawares living in the missions at the height of Moravian success. In one attack a third of the Moravian Delawares were killed.<sup>159</sup> The conversion process was slow and delicate, dependent on time and the building of trust between the missionaries and converts. The loss of so many converts at once was staggering. It required a substantial amount of time to recover the demographic losses. Eventually, the Moravian Delaware population stabilized at about two hundred converts. But the population was never what it was before 1782.<sup>160</sup>

More important than the demographic loss was the message the massacre sent to the Delawares and all other Indians. It proved once and for all that most

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<sup>157</sup> William C. Reichel, *Memorials of the Moravian Church* (Philadelphia, 1870), 1: 222-23; Merritt, “Mission Community Networks,” 4.

<sup>158</sup> Merritt, “Mission Community Networks,” 2.

<sup>159</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 34.

<sup>160</sup> Conrad, “Moravian Mission,” 223-26, displays convert demographics in a series of charts.

white Americans, or “Long Knives,” did not make distinctions when it came to Indians.<sup>161</sup> The massacre showed that no one was safe, even the Christian Indian allies of the patriot cause. No amount of piety saved the Christian Delawares from being slaughtered. They were still just dirty Indians in the minds of frontier whites.

The differences in the Christian Delawares’ experiences at Gnadenhütten and their experiences with the Paxton Boys were profound. Their forced evacuation during the Paxton crisis, while difficult and frightening, was only a side effect of white violence. The massacre at Gnadenhütten brought that racialized hatred squarely against the Moravian Delawares. Their missionaries could not protect or comfort them as they did before. The massacre irrevocably damaged one of the major appeals Moravian Christianity offered to converts, that of a stable, safe community. Adopting white religion, even to the transformative degree that the Christian Delawares did so, could not guarantee a stable community that offered protection from white violence.

The missionaries faced the difficult task of explaining why such a tragedy could occur if Jesus truly loved his followers. The massacre shocked all of the Christian Delawares, but for the converts who lost friends and family it was devastating. Many left the missions, despondent over their loss, and some even blamed the Moravians themselves. Zeisberger wrote of how some Indian families came to the mission and “accused us white brethren of writing to Pittsburgh, and

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<sup>161</sup> Heckewelder, *History*, 143.

of making the Virginians [a general term used to identify all white Americans, not just Virginians] the proposition to bring them upon Gnadenhütten.” “I think that they are the cause,” said Anton, a convert who lost all his children in the massacre, “they have betrayed us.”<sup>162</sup>

While the Moravians were not responsible for the massacre, they did not protect their converts in the way they promised. Missionaries had to explain to converts how a loving Savior permitted such horror against innocent people. Christians struggled with this question for centuries and still struggle with it to this day. Moravian Delawares never experienced racial hatred so pointedly directed towards them and in such a brutal way than before the massacre, so the question was frighteningly new. Later missionaries tried to avoid the question by ceasing to preach the section of the gospel that said that God knows everything that will happen and that God can “guard them from bodily harm.” This became standard mission practice after 1803, because such a concept “would only bring fear and uneasiness to the congregants.”<sup>163</sup> Editing the gospel did not help. The converts lived in a world that increasingly defined them only by their ethnicity, not their faith. The question of why Jesus would let bad things happen to good people acquired a new significance after the massacre.

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<sup>162</sup>Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 115, 291-92; *MMR*, reel 20, box 174, folder 4: 16; Conrad, “Moravian Mission,” 69.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*

The destruction of Gnadenhütten and the slaughter of its inhabitants was the true turning point in the conversion of Delawares to Moravian Christianity. The Moravian Delawares and missionaries who remained rebuilt their communities after the massacre and the war ended. Some moved to Canada to do so, after they were given shelter by the British authorities.<sup>164</sup> The Moravians managed to recoup some of their demographic losses, but the high point of Moravian Christianity among the Delawares had passed. The Moravian attitude toward white settlers on the frontier plummeted even further. Before the massacre, Moravian missionaries denounced frontier whites as being poor Christian role models. Afterwards, missionaries possessed an almost palpable disdain for them. “Thus have we always with the white people more trouble and plague than with the Indians,” Zeisberger wrote on September 8, 1788, “they are such a stupid folk.”<sup>165</sup>

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The true impact of the massacre was not fully seen until the Moravians’ next major mission attempt among the Delawares sixteen years later. The Moravians still worked with Delawares during that period, but only within established missions or extensions of those missions. White River was important because it was the first substantial attempt at an entirely new mission since Gnadenhütten. In 1799, the Moravians were given permission to open a new

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<sup>164</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 90; Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 346-57, 362.

<sup>165</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 445.

mission among the Delawares living along the White River in what is now Illinois.<sup>166</sup> In a statement to Governors Harrison and St. Clair, the missionaries informed them of their objectives: preach the gospel to the Indians; establish schools and industry among them, as well as sobriety; and instruct them to live a quiet and peaceable life in godliness and honesty.<sup>167</sup> On May 25, 1801, the missionaries arrived at White River and began their work ministering to the seven Delaware and four other Indian towns in the surrounding area. Reassuring the Indians that they came to teach and preach, not to generate conflict or to bring alcohol, the Moravians were able to generate some interest among the Indians. In 1802, at the height of their White River endeavor, the Moravians had twenty-three Delaware converts at the mission.<sup>168</sup>

Despite the brief high point, the White River venture quickly became a prime example of how *not* to run a mission program. Disillusionment set in almost immediately. After a high of twenty-three converts in 1802, the number of converts dropped to thirteen the following year.<sup>169</sup> The missionaries felt the loss so keenly that one of them, Brother Kluge, expressed concerns that the few converts they had would die or revert to their “heathen” ways before any new

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<sup>166</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 10-11.

<sup>167</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 63.

<sup>168</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 102-104, 109, 206.

<sup>169</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 271.

converts could be gained.<sup>170</sup> The number of Christian Delawares at the mission dropped again in 1804, with only four Delawares living at the mission.

Disheartened by their failure, the Moravians abandoned White River on September 15, 1806 and reached Bethlehem on November 12 of that year.<sup>171</sup>

The disastrous White River endeavor clearly demonstrated that many Delawares had developed a negative perception of Moravian Christianity. There were many reasons for the failure of the mission. Part of the blame falls on the shoulders of the missionaries themselves, who were not skilled in building the necessary rapport with their potential converts. The White River missionaries did not possess the skills of David Zeisberger, Margaret Jungmann, or John Heckewelder. Their failure was most evident in their weak attempts to learn Delaware. Over seven years, White River missionaries John and Anna Kluge and Abraham Luckenbach repeatedly expressed their difficulties in learning Delaware. Kluge became so frustrated that he frequently requested from his superiors more translated texts to help him in his work.<sup>172</sup>

Translated texts were powerful tools in the hands of missionaries who knew Delaware, but Kluge requested them because he and the other missionaries lacked a proper knowledge of the language. He needed them more for himself than for the Indians he attempted to convert. This lack of linguistic skills and

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<sup>170</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 520.

<sup>171</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 306, 454, 464-65.

<sup>172</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 469, 472-73, 516.

charismatic leadership abilities became blatant in September 1805, when David Zeisberger sent four Delaware assistants he had personally trained to help at White River. One of the four went by the Christian name of Charles Henry. Henry formed an instant rapport with the White River neophytes. He was a fellow Delaware and a devoted practitioner of the faith. Charles answered their questions and talked to the neophytes about what the faith meant to him. The few converts living at the mission by that time could not have been more excited by this. The White River Delawares approached the missionaries, and told them to “keep this Indian here...*for we understand everything he says*”[italics mine].<sup>173</sup>

Henry simply fulfilled his role as an assistant, but compared to the constant failure of the White River missionaries he stood as a testament to the strength and importance of language in creating Indian Christianity. Charles and the other assistants presented Moravian Christianity in a clear Delaware voice which impressed the converts, something the missionaries could not do. Before the massacre, language was essential in the conversion process. After the massacre it became even more important because the Moravians needed every positive tool at their disposal. The White River missionaries’ linguistic ineptitude denied them one of their most powerful tools at a time when they needed it most.

The missionaries blamed their failures on the “poor quality” of their potential converts, men and women who they felt did not put enough effort into

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<sup>173</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 380-81.

the process.<sup>174</sup> The missionaries even chastised the baptized Indians who accompanied them to White River.<sup>175</sup> The major criticism leveled against them was that they “do not deny themselves strong drink.” Everyone, missionary and Indian alike, knew full well the dangers of alcohol abuse among the Indians. When the Christian Delawares continued drinking alcohol, it made the missionaries less credible in the eyes of non-converts. The Moravians’ success with the Indians rested on the promise that they could create a better and more stable community. When converts drank, it became “a stumbling block to the unbaptized, because they say Christians are no better than they are.”<sup>176</sup>

On August 21, 1804 a small party of interested Delawares came to the mission. As it had at so many other Moravian outposts, the image of Christ on the cross immediately drew their attention. The visitors asked if the Moravians would paint pictures describing their message, so that “the Indians could see everything for themselves and would be much more deeply impressed.” The Moravians refused to do this, saying that the Words were enough.<sup>177</sup> By saying that the Words were enough, the missionaries overestimated their own abilities. Words might have been enough if it were David Zeisberger preaching at White River, because he was fluent in Delaware and commanded the attention of his audience.

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<sup>174</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 472-73.

<sup>175</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 349.

<sup>176</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 173, 491.

<sup>177</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 308; J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957* (Bethlehem, Pa: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, Moravian Church in America, 1967), 60, 98.



Unfortunately the White River missionaries never had Zeisberger's skills or charisma, and their words usually failed them.

That the missionaries believed words were enough to explain their message is strange considering the importance of visual imagery in Moravian Christianity. More important, it is odd that the missionaries would not expand on the visual elements to the converts, considering their effectiveness at other missions. It was after all the *visual* image of Christ, in all of his bloody and sacrificial glory, that attracted the visitors' attention. The date in which the episode occurred might be significant. It was a long time after Zinzendorf's death and the end of the "Sifting Period." The Moravians were attacked by other Christian groups during the "Sifting Period" for their "heretical" views regarding Jesus' metaphorical feminine aspects and the regendered Trinity. After Zinzendorf's death, some of the more extreme elements of this highly experimental period were pushed into the background by more conservative Moravian leadership.<sup>178</sup> The reluctance on the part of the missionaries to fully use the visual imagery at White River was likely part of that conservative trend.

If the Moravian authorities were truly concerned with the success of this new mission, the question arises as to why they did not remove the troubled missionaries and assign individuals possessed of the necessary skills and experience to the fragile community. What prevented them from doing so was their economic situation. Basically the Moravians' economic success in their

central community of Bethlehem actually limited the number of available missionaries. In the early years of the American endeavor, the socio-economic situation was flexible enough for “a considerable interchange of personnel” to take place. Missionaries would go out to preach and then return to pursue a trade in Bethlehem, and then other artisans or farmers with the desire might in turn go and preach in some distant community for a time. But as the economy expanded, diversification and specialization of labor increased to the point where this type of labor interchange became less desirable and less feasible. Missionary work became the domain of professionals, which greatly reduced the number of available missionaries. There simply were not enough missionaries to spare.<sup>179</sup>

The desire of White River Delawares to hear the Moravian message declined precipitously on the whole, and the ineptitude of the missionaries only exacerbated the already tense situation. Brother Kluge discovered this when he asked a Delaware man if he had ever heard the Word of God preached by the Moravians. The man responded “Yes; but I never bother about it.” When Kluge pressed the man for a further explanation, he was told that “Many Indians received it and believed, but many too, lost their lives on the Muskingum [the Indian name for the river on which Gnadenhütten was located].”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Fogleman, “Jesus is Female,” 302, 313-14.

<sup>179</sup> Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, 200-201.

<sup>180</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 278.

In the years following the massacre, Moravian Delawares struggled with the loss of so many of their Indian brethren. Debates began among the Delaware converts as to whether or not the Moravians, by trying to teach them white ways, were to blame for the massacre. While the Moravians themselves were not responsible for the slaughter, there was a deep feeling of betrayal among many converts.<sup>181</sup> The missionaries who claimed to love them as brethren failed to protect the Christian Delawares when they most needed protection. This feeling of abandonment weighed heavily upon the converts and caused many to abandon the Moravian faith. The words of one Delaware at White River summed up these feelings when he told the missionaries that

We do not want to make the same mistake they made in Gnadenhütten, where they remained and sang hymns, and killed no one. Nevertheless, they were murdered by the white people in spite of the fact that the teachers assured them that they would not be hurt by the white men.<sup>182</sup>

The missionaries bore the brunt of this anger and resentment because many of the Delawares who lost family and friends in the massacre migrated to the White River region to live with Delawares in the surrounding towns. The missionaries quickly discovered that many of the apostates could not be persuaded to return to the faith. “Those who in former times lived in the Indian congregations,” wrote one missionary, “are the worst enemies of the Word of

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<sup>181</sup> Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 291.

<sup>182</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 249.

God.”<sup>183</sup> This was an honest assessment. Former converts voiced their dislike for the Moravians in their home communities and discouraged other Delawares from going to the mission. The Moravians learned that “a woman who was baptized by the Brethren on the Muskingum is constantly telling them [the Delawares] that the Brethren merely want to make the Indians tame.” This would leave them all vulnerable to whites, who “might kill them as had been done in Gnadenhütten.”<sup>184</sup> This fear of becoming “tame” by living at the missions reached a level akin to paranoia. Everything the missionaries encouraged converts to do was subjected to the criticism of making the Indians “tame,” even the singing that had once been such an important part of the Moravian Indians’ lives.<sup>185</sup> After Gnadenhütten, becoming “tame” and vulnerable were the greatest fears for the Delawares on White River. To protect themselves, they lashed out at the missionaries, the most convenient target.

Apostates did more than speak negatively to their fellow Delawares about the Moravians. Occasionally they were openly hostile, telling the missionaries that the area around White River was Indian land, that the missionaries had no place there, and that they should go back “to the white people from where you came from.”<sup>186</sup> Most ex-converts and non-converts did not resort to such blatant

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<sup>183</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 439.

<sup>184</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 141.

<sup>185</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 155.

<sup>186</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 169; Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 303.

threats. Instead, they preferred to express their anti-Moravian sentiments to those few Indians who went to the missions.

The greatest influence non-mission Delawares had on their mission counterparts came from simple proximity. The Moravians knew about the temptations that arose when Christian Indians lived too close to “pagan” Indians, especially if those non-Christians were kin.<sup>187</sup> Kin within the mission were an asset, kin on the outside were a threat. At White River the close presence of so many “heathen” Delawares provided converts with a powerful incentive to leave the mission. These “heathen” Indians not only offered the mission Indians cultural familiarity, they were openly hostile to the Moravians. “They have too many heathen friends,” one missionary remarked, “it would be better for such people who are not better grounded in the faith to live in an Indian congregation where there were none but believers around them.”<sup>188</sup> This was wishful thinking on the part of the missionaries, since none of the potential converts would have abandoned their friends and kin. Family and friends outside the missions provided those few Delawares who were at least nominally interested in converting tangible links to their Delaware heritage. They provided feelings of comfort and familiarity that neophytes were loathe to give up, especially after the Moravians’ image as promoters of a stable social order had been undermined.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Gray, *Wilderness Christians*, 129-31; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 1: 124, 134.

<sup>188</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 343.

<sup>189</sup> Axtell, *After Columbus*, 107; Gipson, *White River*, 243.

The interactions between neophytes and non-Christian Delawares never ceased until the missionaries abandoned White River. The connections between new converts and their Indian heritage manifested itself in different ways. Catherine, a Delaware convert, had fallen ill and tearfully confessed to the missionaries she believed it was because she had been secretly committing “heathen” acts.<sup>190</sup> Catherine was one of the few new converts who had internalized enough of the Moravian faith to express guilt for her “transgression,” but most of the converts did not even go that far. Their feelings about the Moravian faith were more fluid than the missionaries liked, but neophyte Christian Delawares were operating within what were for them standard practices.<sup>191</sup> Funerals provided the most dramatic examples of this phenomenon. In 1803, one of the mission Delawares died and his fellow converts “dressed him according to their heathen custom, and had laid him on a board.”<sup>192</sup> That particular funeral was mildly controversial, but was nothing compared to the near-riot that broke out over the funeral for the convert Mary. The Moravians wanted to give Mary a “proper Christian funeral” and bury her in God’s Acre, their private cemetery. Mary’s “pagan” relatives flatly refused. They insisted on giving Mary a traditional Delaware burial and threatened any Moravians who tried to stop them. In the

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<sup>190</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 199.

<sup>191</sup> Axtell, *After Columbus*, 55.

<sup>192</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 213.

interest of peace, a compromise was reached: Mary was given a traditional Delaware burial in the Moravian cemetery.<sup>193</sup>

The missionaries must have considered this a disgraceful compromise, and only consented as a way to keep the peace (and possibly spare their lives). For the Delawares the funeral episodes exemplified two important facts. They showed that the converts were accommodating in their views regarding faith; that just because they adopted Moravian Christianity for their own ends they were not willing to abandon all of their traditional Delaware customs. Even more telling, it proved that for the families of the converts there was no doubt which heritage took precedence.

Delaware ceremonies were the biggest draws for the few converts at the missions to journey to the non-Christian villages. Several attended a Delaware ceremony intended “to promote long life” in April 1803 against the advice of the missionaries.<sup>194</sup> At these ceremonies, ex-converts and non-converts took the opportunity to warn the few mission Delawares about the dangers of living among the Moravians. “You allow yourselves to be enslaved by the white people,” they said, “for you are not permitted to come to our sacrifices, dances, and jollifications.” White River’s Christian Delawares would “thus forsake everything which our and your grandfathers taught us” by going to the Moravians.<sup>195</sup> This

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<sup>193</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 356-57.

<sup>194</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 220-21.

<sup>195</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 219.

invocation of their ancestral bond and heritage was powerful leverage the mission Delawares found hard to resist. As a result, most of the neophyte Moravian White River Delawares abandoned the mission and went to live with their non-Christian neighbors and kin.<sup>196</sup>

The greatest challenge the Moravians faced at White River was spiritual. Missionaries encountered a dramatic burst of activity from native prophets and preachers. These nativist prophets developed a spirituality built around accessing sacred powers through a return to Indian ritual. Only by doing this could Indians purge themselves of the corrupting influences brought by whites, influences Indians held responsible for their woes. While these prophets claimed to return to “traditional Indian practices,” they drew upon both Indian and Christian religious influences to create this nativist spirituality. While not entirely “traditional,” this nativism was undoubtedly “Indian.”<sup>197</sup>

The Moravians knew of the existence of these native prophets for years. Neolin, the Delaware Prophet, aided Pontiac during his uprising in 1763 and enlisted many Indians to the cause with his nativist spirituality. Other Delaware men and women also received messages from God and sacred powers telling them to revive ritual practices in order to regain spiritual power.<sup>198</sup> But at White River

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<sup>196</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 163, 224, 229.

<sup>197</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 2, 18.

<sup>198</sup> Charles E. Hunter, “The Delaware Nativist Revival of the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Ethnohistory*, 18:1 (Winter 1971), 39-49; Alfred A. Cave, “The Delaware Prophet Neolin: A Reappraisal,” *Ethnohistory* 46:2 (Spring 1999), 265-290; James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 308; Zeisberger, *Diary*, 2: 447.



the nativist impulse was particularly strong, and many Delawares experienced their own visions or listened to the messages of those who did.<sup>199</sup> One of the most dramatic prophets the missionaries worried about was a Delaware woman, a reminder that sacred powers for the Indians knew no gender boundaries. The woman had been baptized at an earlier mission but later rejected the Moravians, and preached that two spirits had given her a message. The spirits warned the woman that “God is not satisfied with you Indians...You Indians will have to live again in olden times, and love one another sincerely.”<sup>200</sup> The fusion of Indian and Christian elements is clearly visible in the message: the spirits visit the woman and tell her that the Indians must return to traditional ways in order to regain peace and stability, at the same time conveying the message that it was God who sent them. Prophets like the Delaware woman were especially dangerous to the Moravian missions. They acquired enough Christian principles to satisfy their needs, and then presented them in an unabashedly Indian manner to make them more palatable to their fellow Indians.

The greatest concern was directed toward another Indian preacher, Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet. Tenskwatawa was a drunkard until he had a near-death experience that changed his life. He had a vision of being pulled out of his body and then given a tour of Heaven and Hell. In what seems like an Indian version of *The Divine Comedy*, Tenskwatawa observed the punishments of Indians

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<sup>199</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 339, 531.

<sup>200</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 333.

who committed crimes against their communities and the heavenly rewards for those Indians who promoted a strong social order by returning to Indian lifestyles.<sup>201</sup> Here again Christian and Indian influences combined in Tenskwatawa's spiritual nativism. While Hell fit the general Christian description, Heaven was a decidedly Indian place.

The Moravians at White River first heard about Tenskwatawa in December 1805, and his influence and popularity among the Delawares surrounding White River spread quickly.<sup>202</sup> The Shawnee Prophet's nativist message soon took root in the Indian communities of the area, and Tenskwatawa's followers consolidated more power through witch hunts designed to weed out political and spiritual enemies.<sup>203</sup> Witch hunts were nothing new to the White River region. The Moravian Indians were the victims of one two years earlier. Brother Joshua, a Delaware convert who journeyed to White River with the missionaries, was accused of witchcraft by non-Christian Delawares and killed in 1803.<sup>204</sup> Tenskwatawa's arrival brought about a resurgence of witch hunts in the area, which helped solidify him and his ideology to a position of power. Previous experience had taught everyone, Indian and missionary alike, that Tenskwatawa and his followers were to be taken seriously.

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<sup>201</sup> R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983), 28-29. Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 126-29.

<sup>202</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 392, 402, 413.

<sup>203</sup> Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 137.

<sup>204</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 231.

The ideology of a separate creation for whites and Indians was the strongest appeal of Tenskwatawa's and the other prophets' messages. As Indians lived on an increasingly "racialized" frontier, they used the concept of the racial "other" as often as white settlers, and for many of the same reasons. Both Indians and frontier whites each viewed the other as competitors for land and resources, and both feared the violence that the other could inflict. Frontier whites used racial distinctions to assert that they were culturally and biologically superior to all other groups. With separate creation, Indians addressed racial distinctions by "designating innate, divinely ordained differences between peoples" in a manner that embodied the idea of "separate but equal." Indians had a lifestyle perfectly suited to their own racial and cultural needs and backgrounds, while whites had their own. It simply did not make sense for Indians to adapt white lifestyles and religions for their own use because separate creation legitimized these racial and cultural distinctions. According to this system of thought Africans had a separate creation too, but the strongest appeal for Indians came from the separation between themselves and whites.<sup>205</sup>

The idea of separate creation quickly became a serious obstacle for the White River missionaries. References concerned with the spread of this separatist ideology increased dramatically in the missionaries' journal during their final three years at White River. Missionaries faced an increasingly difficult battle as they tried unsuccessfully to convince the Indians that nativist preachers would "bring

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<sup>205</sup> Zeisberger, *History*, 133; Heckewelder, *Narrative*, 104; Gipson, *White River*, 419; Shoemaker,

you with their teaching ever deeper into degradation and keep you away from God.”<sup>206</sup> But by saying that God created Indians, whites, and Africans independently of each other, the Indians adopted sacred justification for their own way of life. “To each He gave His particular mode of life and the method of worshipping Him,” one Delaware told the missionaries, “therefore the Indians have to keep to their mode of life and customs.” There was no need for Delawares to learn white ways or white religion because “had God desired that we should have the teaching of the white people, He would have given it to our fathers too.”<sup>207</sup>

The universal message of Christianity, the idea that all people were united under God, became increasingly hard for Indians to accept as white settlers repeatedly exhibited un-Christian behavior. After the massacre, apostates wanted nothing to do with the Moravians or any whites, so they embraced this ready-made separation between themselves and white people. Separate creation gave Delawares another standard by which to hold white people accountable. In 1806, the last year of the White River mission, a missionary was preaching about the importance of the crucifixion to some Delawares. In the middle of his speech, a follower of Tenskwatawa’s retorted, “Granted that what you say is true, He did not

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“How Indians Got to Be Red,” 637.

<sup>206</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 344.

<sup>207</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 256-57, 344-45.

die in Indian land but among the white people.”<sup>208</sup> If whites killed the man they believed was the Son of God, then they certainly could not teach Indians how to be good Christians. With the increasing popularity of native prophets and separate creation among the White River Delawares, the Moravian missionaries realized that their mission had failed and returned to Bethlehem.<sup>209</sup>

It was spiritual nativism that sealed the Moravians’ fate at White River. The Christianity Moravian Delawares practiced had a distinct Indian influence, but it was still Christianity. Nativist spirituality was something different. No translations or paraphrasing were needed to get Indians to understand or accept it. While it was influenced by Christian teachings, it was always at heart a re-formulation of Indian sacred powers and concepts. Zeisberger had used Jesus’s Semitic heritage in an attempt to connect him with the Indians on a personal level.<sup>210</sup> However, since no Indians actually saw Jesus except for his image on the cross, they had to trust that the missionaries were telling them the truth. Trust was harder to find after Gnadenhütten. Native prophets were living, breathing, flesh-and-blood men and women who listeners immediately identified as Indians. Theirs was a spirituality for Indians and by Indians.

The disaster at White River was simply the culmination of several negative influences that discouraged Delawares from joining the Moravians and

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<sup>208</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 438.

<sup>209</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 464-65.

<sup>210</sup> *MMR*, reel 20, box 173, folder 1: 2.

encouraged other converts to abandon them. While the decision to join a mission was always an individual one, the horrors inflicted on Christian Indians undeniably drove many Delawares out of the missions and damaged the Indian Christianity converts created at the missions. The anger and resentment Christian Delawares felt at being abandoned at Gnadenhütten proved to many that Christianity could not save them from white violence. If Moravians could not provide Delawares with the kind of secure communities they needed, then most saw no point in staying. This fueled the anger of apostate Delawares against the White River missionaries and created an environment ripe for nativism. While the nativism of the Indian prophets was unquestionably Indian in its nature, a syncretic element existed as well. More Delawares refused to live as the Moravians wanted them to live. However, they took what Christian teachings they found appealing and made them their own, without becoming Christians themselves.

## Conclusion

The Delawares' relationship with the Moravians was long and complicated. The Moravians called close to four hundred Delawares brothers and sisters in one of the most successful missionary programs in the eighteenth century. The massacre at Gnadenhütten, one of the worst atrocities committed on the frontier, left ninety Christian Delawares dead and marked a precipitous downturn in Moravian missionary success. Disillusionment and nativism drew many Moravian Delawares from the faith they had once accommodated. But the story of the Moravian Delawares did not end after the massacre or along the banks of the White River. The White River program, while a casualty of the changing spiritual and political landscape, was not the final stage for the Moravian-Delaware missionary program. Zeisberger's mission survived the turmoil surrounding the massacre and carried on well into the nineteenth century, as did other Moravian mission towns.<sup>211</sup> Neither the massacre nor the White River debacle fully eliminated the Moravian Delawares or the Christianity they practiced. The converts who remained with the Moravians did so because they believed in the message they received and created in the mission towns.

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<sup>211</sup> Conrad, "Moravian Mission," 223-26.

The story of the Moravian Delawares once again raises Vine Deloria's argument in *God is Red*. Deloria's argument that Christianity presented a spiritual world view too different for Indians to use appears legitimate, given what happened at Gnadenhütten and the subsequent embrace of nativist spirituality by many Delawares.<sup>212</sup> Christianity did not protect the converts at Gnadenhütten and could not easily explain why "Christian" whites committed such an atrocity against people who shared a belief in the same Savior. The nativist challenge at White River proved incredibly strong as Delaware apostates found solace with Indian preachers. Nativist prophets delivered a decidedly Indian spiritual message and adopted the frontier's increasingly racialized attitude for themselves with the ideology of separate creation.

There is one major flaw in Deloria's argument so far as the Moravian Delawares are concerned. If Christianity was as unreliable as Deloria's argument suggests, the Moravians would presumably have lost *all* of their Delaware converts after the massacre. Yet they did not. The Delaware towns around White River were filled with nativist alternatives, yet not every Moravian Delaware fell in with the nativists. The success or failure of the Moravian missions depended on the confluence of many factors. During the high point of Delaware/Moravian interaction in the eighteenth century, the missions were staffed with personnel who for the most part possessed the appropriate mix of charisma, dedication, and flexibility to present their faith to interested Delawares. Christian Delawares saw

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<sup>212</sup> Deloria, *God is Red*, 3, 61.



incorporating Moravianism into their lives as a way to limit the social devastation that colonialism wrought upon their traditional communities and regain spiritual power. The fundamental connections they drew between Moravian Christianity and their traditional belief system made accommodating Moravianism easier since it could be filtered through their preexisting spiritual world in a fairly cohesive manner. The massacre at Gnadenhütten simply marked a dramatic and devastating shift in factors. The racial, political, and social changes that preceded and followed the massacre deprived the Moravians of one of their strongest appealing elements, the promise of stability and protection against the damaging aspects of colonialism. The failure of that promise, combined with what some Delawares saw as a betrayal of trust on the Moravians' part, made certain converts (especially those who had lost loved ones in the massacre) abandon the Moravians. The increasingly racialized Anglo-Indian frontier bolstered the nativist position because it reinforced the notion that accommodation was just too difficult, and ultimately, worthless.

Despite the nativist turn the White River mission may have ended differently had it been staffed with missionaries like David Zeisberger and Delaware assistants like Charles Henry, men and women who could build the necessary rapport with Delawares interested in Moravianism. The heightened sense of interest and activity during the visit of Delaware assistant Charles Henry

in 1805 stands as a testament to that possibility.<sup>213</sup> It just so happened that while White River was without a charismatic white or Indian Moravian leader, the nativist cause underwent a particularly powerful resurgence with the rise of Tenskwatawa. Still, even with as bad as the situation became at White River, a few mission Delawares retained their Christian faith and one, the convert Joshua, even died because of it.<sup>214</sup> Delaware missions and Delaware Christians survived even after Gnadenhütten and White River, events which according to Deloria's theory should have ended such places and peoples.

If the world views of traditional Delaware religion and Moravian Christianity had not been so compatible, the Gnadenhütten massacre would not have been so devastating nor the apostates so bitterly angry. The number of converts, or at least the number of people interested in conversion, would not have been as high as it was for such a significant portion of the eighteenth century. Even nativist revivals were affected by the Christian world view, for prophets like Tenskwatawa, Neolin, the Delaware woman at White River, and the Seneca Handsome Lake took what they found useful from Christianity and incorporated it into their Indian spirituality. Compatibility could and did exist, in many forms and states, it just was not always nurtured. The truth is that despite "colonial racism, disease, lawlessness, and hypocrisy...the initial effectiveness of the Christian mission program cannot be denied for those Indians faced with accommodation or

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<sup>213</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 380-81.

<sup>214</sup> Gipson, *White River*, 231.

annihilation.”<sup>215</sup> When Delawares went to Moravian missions they did so of their own free will. They wanted the stable community and the spiritual power that the Moravians offered, but it was always the Delawares’ choice to stay. Delawares stayed and prayed at the missions because they found value in the message preached by the Moravians. Moravian Delawares adopted and adapted the beliefs, ceremonies, and symbolism of Christianity upon their conversion of their own free wills and for their own reasons.

While the Moravians were proud of their work with the Delawares, the experiences of Moravian Delawares reflected the “complex realities of cultural change, resistance, and translation.”<sup>216</sup> Those realities played out in the conversion process. Moravian missionaries and Delaware converts each participated in that adaptive process. Although the Moravians preached that Christianity was the only true path to salvation, they did so in a fluid manner that was more syncretic than perhaps even they realized. Missionaries intentionally and continuously emphasized the similarities between Moravian Christianity and Delaware religion, namely the personal relationship between the individual and a higher being and the spiritual power of blood, as a tactic to gain converts. But in doing so, they themselves laid the foundation for the Indian Christianity that developed at the missions. Converts, missionaries, and communities that maintained that foundation survived even the brutality of the Gnadenhütten

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<sup>215</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 53.

<sup>216</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 303.

massacre and the new wave of nativist preachers. In its failure, the White River mission demonstrated just how important and essential that flexibility was to the Moravians' success.

The converts were the major force behind the creation of Delaware Moravianism. Delawares interested in Christianity chose the Moravians because of the promises of stability at the missions. Those same converts insisted that their missionaries preach in Delaware and stayed with the Moravians when they discovered key similarities between the two religious traditions. It was those fundamental connections (the individual's relationship with their higher power/guardian spirit, the importance and spiritual power of blood, etc.) that made Moravianism compatible with Delaware religion in ways that other Christian sects, like Congregationalism or Presbyterianism, were not. Delaware converts were "Christian," but their Christianity was adapted to fit their needs, interpreted through their own language, and understood from their traditional religious backgrounds. For Delaware converts, Jesus was Creator, guardian spirit, and blood sacrifice, the physical manifestation of spiritual power. They listened to sermons, sang hymns, and participated in Christian ceremonies, all of which were spoken and sung in the Delaware language. Translating Christianity through the Delaware language exposed more Delawares to the Moravians' message, but the translations only gave that message an even more distinctive "Indian" quality. The Moravian Delawares were Christian Indians because to them God really *was* Red.

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