

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENCOUNTERS: METHODIST-MORAVIAN

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In surveying eighteenth century encounters (dare we say close encounters of a rare kind?) of Methodists and Moravians, this digest of the original paper is limited to six clearly identifiable experiences which pinpoint the essence of two vital eighteenth century institutions. One is sorely tempted to present a work of edification, extolling the harmonious relationships present in Wesleyan-Moravian ties. The facts of history, alas, will hardly permit it. We see here not only corporate and institutional life, but personalities behind the movements. If Lynn Harold Hough was correct in assuming that all great leaders are egotists, these convergences provide more than adequate data for clinical evaluation. Usually starting most amicably, the encounters frequently conclude with altercations between personalities and concepts. Yet in the relationship—heated though it may have become—there was growth, deepening of perception, and clarification and sharpening of ideas.

The Voyage of the *Simmonds*

John Wesley's ties with the Moravians are first observed aboard the *Simmonds*, Friday, October 17, 1735: "I began to learn German, in order to converse (a little) with the Moravians, six-and-twenty of whom we have on board, (men who have left all for their Master, and who have indeed learned of Him, being meek and lowly, dead to the world, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost)." This *Journal* entry was corroborated by diary notations for the same day.¹ The party which had previously set out about 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, October 14th, "took boat for Gravesend, in order to embark for Georgia."² The voyage itself required but two months, but due to interminable delay, passengers were crowded aboard ship for almost four months—close quarters indeed.³

Why was it that within three days Wesley was setting his mind on learning German? He had already recognized something in these Mora-

¹Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), I:110.

²*Ibid.*, I:109.

³See James W. May, "Benjamin Ingham's Mission to Georgia" in *Historical Highlights*, Volume 3, December 1973, Number 2.

vians that gripped his attention.⁴ We have a study in contrasts. John Wesley was a product of his age: an ordained priest of the Church of England, an Oxonian M.A., a rational intellect which had been inherited along with his Puritan sense of moral responsibility, and a deep Anglican piety. For good or ill, Wesley was a man of logic—he had been so since childhood. It was this pragmatic Wesley, so greatly influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment, who was likewise a man in pilgrimage. He had an authentic faith, yet certain elements persistently eluded him. What did this Moravian band possess? He was determined to find out.

Monday, October 20th found Wesley with David Nitschmann, Bishop of the Moravians, along with Van Hermsdorf and Andrew Döber. These began to learn English, and Wesley was delighted. “Oh may we be not only of one tongue, but of one mind and of one heart!” The following day, “From nine to twelve I commonly learned German,” and at seven “I joined with the Germans in their public service.”⁵ His diary for November 6th carries a notation that a sermon was transcribed and “a new book (*Pietas Hallensis*, by A. H. Francke)” was begun with brother Charles and others in that elect company of Englishmen—Benjamin Ingham and Charles Delamotte.⁶

Sunday, November 23rd proved to be critical. “At night I was awakened by the tossing of the ship and roaring of the wind, and plainly showed I was unfit, for I was unwilling to die.”⁷ It was the beginning of a series of violent gales. Obviously, Wesley disliked turbulence, and the nerve-shattering pitching of the vessel convinced him the end was at hand. Nonetheless, rigid discipline required study, and on the 15th of January, 1736, Wesley was looking into “the famous *Theologica Germanica*, which Luther made so popular.”⁸ Throughout the voyage the four Englishmen became an *ecclesiola* in transit, carefully following instructions prepared by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for all its missionaries. Wesley wrote Dr. John Burton, “we have an *appearance* at least of Christianity.”⁹ Hanging over Wesley’s head was the fear of continued storms, and on January 23rd, “In the evening another storm began . . . I could not but say to myself, ‘How is it that thou hast no faith?’ being still unwilling to die.” The diary mentions at six p.m. he and three others sang a German hymn. More storms on the 25th and when calm did descend, “(. . . I endeavoured to prepare myself for another storm.)”¹⁰ During this

⁴See Richard M. Cameron, *The Rise of Methodism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp. 92, 369 note. 11.

⁵*Journal*, I:112-113.

⁶*Ibid.*, I:116.

⁷*Ibid.*, I:122-123.

⁸*Ibid.*, I:137.

⁹See May, p. 10.

¹⁰*Journal*, I:140-141.

stressful, prolonged ordeal, the English passengers shared Wesley's fear. A child, privately baptized, was brought for public reception into the church. Several hours were spent with General Oglethorpe, "confirming one another in calm submission to the wise, holy, gracious will of God."¹¹

At seven that evening Wesley "went to the Germans." He had perceived the seriousness of their behavior and their humility, demonstrated by their assuming servile duties—which the English refused—taking no pay, saying "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." In the midst of a psalm "the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces." The English began a "terrible screaming." The Germans looked up but did not stop, they "calmly sang on."¹² Not only was there calmness, but song. In years to come, Moravian singing and Moravian hymns would have potent influence on the Wesleys and the Methodists, especially paeans on the blood of Jesus—from "Blood and Wounds" theology.

"I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.'" Wesley concluded:

From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, (and found myself enabled to speak with them in boldness and to) point out to them the difference in the hour of trial between him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not. At twelve the wind fell. This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.¹³

Wesley had seen Moravian piety. Not only was there no outward appearance of fear nor of the greater concern for death itself. The Enlightenment had not provided an antidote for the terror of mortality. Yea, even the *Book of Common Prayer*, for all its beauty and solemnity, did not speak to Wesley's existential need. About seven, on the 29th, "we fell in with the skirts of a hurricane."¹⁴ There was wind of brute force, along with rain, lightning, and the sky became so dark the sailors were unable to see the ropes or furl the sails. It was a Shakespearean/Wagnerian scenario!

The Georgia Sojourn

At last the protracted, horrendous voyage ended. On Wednesday, February 4, 1736, "About noon the trees (of Georgia) were visible from the mast, and in the afternoon from the main deck." That evening Wesley read the Lesson, "A great door and effectual is opened (1 Corinthians

¹¹Ibid., I:142.

¹²Ibid., I:142-143. Regarding singing, see John L. Nuelsen, *John Wesley and the German Hymn*, trans. by Parry, Moore, and Holbrook (Calverley, Yorkshire: A.S. Holbrook, 1972).

¹³*Journal*, I:143.

¹⁴Ibid.

16:9).¹⁵ Three days later, Saturday the 7th, Wesley engaged in conversation with August Gottlieb Spangenberg, who told the Oxford don “several particulars relating to their faith and practice and discipline, all of which were agreeable to the plan of the first ages, and seemed to show that it was their one care, without desire of pleasing or fear of displeasing any, to retain inviolate the whole deposit once delivered to the saints.”¹⁶

These words delighted Wesley. Why was he so enthralled by primitive Christianity? More and more the Moravians impressed him as embodying the primitive Church. After all, he wanted to preach to the Indians—his avowed purpose in coming to Georgia—because they would help him understand the power of the gospel in the context of its being preached in ancient times. The following day another exchange took place. Like Augustine’s anticipated encounter with Faustus the Manichee, this was Wesley’s opportunity to plumb the depths of Moravian faith. Unlike Augustine’s experience,¹⁷ this dialogue proved to be fruitful beyond all expectations:

(Sun. 8. —I asked Mr. Spangenberg’s advice with regard to myself)—to my own conduct. He told me he could say nothing till he asked me two or three questions. ‘Do you know yourself? Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?’ I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, ‘Do you know Jesus Christ?’ I paused, and said, ‘I know He is the Saviour of the world.’ ‘True,’ replied he; ‘but do you know He has saved you?’ I answered, ‘I hope He has died to save me.’ He only added, ‘Do you know yourself?’ I said, ‘I do.’ But I fear they were vain words. (After my answering, he gave me several directions, which may the good God who sent him enable me to follow!)¹⁸

First there had been questions and answers amid the storm at sea, now the interview with young Spangenberg—who was Wesley’s junior by one year. It required “two disillusioning years and the wise ministrations of another Moravian leader”¹⁹ for Wesley to realize the full meaning of the conversation.

The following afternoon, as they waited for the boat to take Spangenberg and his people to Savannah, he and Wesley talked. It was Spangenberg’s turn to tell his story of the first eighteen years “without the fear of God” and his being sent to the University of Jena where he learned languages and “vain philosophy.” Wesley asked, “Whether he was to go next? He said, ‘I have some thoughts to go to Pennsylvania (where are about one hundred of my countrymen driven by persecution out of

¹⁵Ibid., I:145-146.

¹⁶Ibid., I:151. See F. Ernest Stoeffler, ed., *Continental Pietism And Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976) for a splendid picture of Pietism.

¹⁷See Warren Thomas Smith, *Augustine: His Life and Thought* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), p. 38.

¹⁸*Journal*, I:151.

¹⁹See Cameron, p. 97.

their own country, who have neither means of subsistence where they are nor money to transport them to Georgia . . .) But what God will do with me I know not. I am blind. I am a child. My Father known; and I am ready to go wherever He calls.' ”²⁰ By the 17th most of the Moravians had gone with Spangenberg to Savannah and there appears a lonely note in Wesley’s diary—he manifestly missed them. By the 24th, however, Wesley made the transfer to Savannah. The following day, “Mr. Delamotte and I took up our lodging with the Germans. We had now an opportunity, day by day, of observing their whole behaviour. For we were in one room with them from morning to night, unless for the little time I spent in walking.” Such cramped quarters would certainly have tested the nerves of even the most godly, but the Moravians came through. “They were always employed, always cheerful themselves, and in good humour with one another; they had put away all anger, and strife, and wrath, and bitterness, and clamour, and evil-speaking; they walked worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, and adorned the gospel of our Lord in all things.”²¹

Wesley thoroughly enjoyed this fresh interpretation of the primitive Church, and so noted in his diary. It was the experience of Saturday the 28th that proved to be the copestone: the ordination of Anton Seiffart as Bishop of Georgia:

They met to consult concerning the affairs of their church; Mr. Spangenberg being shortly to go to Pennsylvania, and Bishop Nitschmann to return to Germany. After several hours spent in conference and prayer, they proceeded to the election and ordination of a bishop. The great simplicity, as well as solemnity, of the whole, almost made me forget the seventeen hundred years between, and imagine myself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not, but Paul the tent-maker or Peter the fisherman presided, yet with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.²²

This was primitivism at its best! Here was a scene for which an eighteenth century Anglican might ardently pray. The Established Church had become encrusted with all the perquisites of wealth, power, and officialdom. The Moravians wanted none of it. They told General Oglethorpe that they would not take up arms to defend the colony against Spanish or Indian attack—only their oxen might be used to transport logs, nothing more. They were free spirits in their unencumbered world. Wesley was charmed with their unhurried exchanges on the mystics, singing in German, and walking in the German garden. Again, singing. In 1737 Wesley would produce his own hymnbook.²³ The first edition of the *Hymn Book of the Congregation in Herrnhut* had been published in 1735, and

²⁰ *Journal*, I:155.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I:168-169.

²² *Ibid.*, I:170-171.

²³ *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*. (Charles-Town, Printed by Lewis Timothy. 1737).

we may be sure copies had been brought to Georgia.²⁴ More "hidden seeds" were being planted in his fertile brain. It was the illness of one Moravian which prompted Wesley to speak to Nitschmann, who blandly smiled, "He will soon be well; he is ready for the Bridegroom."²⁵ Again, it was the Moravian view and acceptance of death.

On Monday, March 15th, Wesley and Delamotte moved into the parsonage. Nevertheless, they continued to be with the Germans for early morning prayers. Wesley spent hours reading Francke. While Wesley was thus engaged in Savannah, Ingham was experiencing an encounter with the Moravians at his Indian school at Irene. A Moravian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Rose, had been formally set apart to work with Ingham, and Moravians had erected a building. Ingham thought the Moravians "the holiest society of men in the whole world." February of 1737 saw Ingham return to England to enlist help for the Georgia mission, carrying letters from the Moravians to the Trustees. Unfortunately, he did not return to Georgia. His affinity with the Moravians was increasingly obvious.²⁷

Wesley was experiencing difficult days. Miss Sophy entered the picture; there were misunderstandings with the colonists. Throughout, Wesley maintained his bond with the Moravians. In desperation regarding Sophy, Wesley consulted Töltschig, and there was prayer and the casting of lots. March 4, 1737, "I accordingly made three lots. In one was writ 'Marry'; in the second, 'Think not of it this year.' . . . Mr. Delamotte drew the third, . . . 'Think of it no more.' Instead of the agony I had reason to expect, I was enabled to say cheerfully, 'Thy will be done.'"²⁸ The remaining months in Georgia were painful. Prayers at Moravian homes in Savannah strengthened a tired, unhappy Wesley. Finally, on Friday, December 2, 1737, "finding there was no possibility of preaching to the Indians, I left Savannah."²⁹ Throughout the Georgia experience there had existed a kinship with the Moravians. Why did Wesley feel he could turn to them? Was it the "worldly monasticism" of the Moravians which had such impact on the "worldly monasticism" of the Methodist *ecclesiola*?

January to May, 1738 in England

The year 1738 found John Wesley in England, a discouraged man. February 7th, in London, Wesley met Peter Böhler, along with Schullius,

²⁴See Nuelsen, p. 27.

²⁵*Journal*, I:180.

²⁶*Ibid.*, I:217.

²⁷See May, pp. 12-15. Also L. Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1873), pp. 69-84.

²⁸*Journal*, I:325. Also see Clifford W. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist* (London: The Epworth Press, 1957), p. 33.

²⁹From *A Short History of the People Called Methodists* in *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1872), XIII:307.

Richter, and Neisser, just arrived from Germany. "Finding they had no acquaintance in England, I offered to procure them a lodging, . . . And from this time I did not willingly lose any opportunity of conversing with them, . . ." ³⁰ Wesley and Böhler set out for Oxford on the 17th, and there was serious conversation. Insisted Böhler, "*Mi frater, mi frater, excoquenda est ista tua philosophia.* 'My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away.' " ³¹ Devoutness had to replace logic and philosophical inquiry. Cameron put it, "repentance and remission of sins must be *felt*; the new birth must be *experienced* as the beginning of a life of devotion." ³²

On March 4 John was back at Oxford; Charles was recovering from pleurisy. Böhler was standing by, and he joined John at church on Sunday. John was "clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved." His immediate thought was, "Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?"

I asked Böhler whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, 'By no means.' I asked, 'But what can I preach?' He said, 'Preach faith *till* you have it; and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith.' ³³

What did Böhler mean? The usual response, like that of Robert Southey, has been shock — something disingenuous, almost hypocrisy — preaching a foreign experience. Bishop Francis J. McConnell is perhaps near the mark: a person can be convinced that "religious experience in any phase is most desirable" ³⁴ without claiming to have attained it personally; he used Christian Perfection as an example.

John Wesley proceeded in dogged resolve. "Accordingly, *Monday* the 6th, I began preaching this new doctrine, although my soul started back from the work." ³⁵ Wesley and Böhler met in London on April 22nd. "I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith," noted Wesley, "namely, that it is . . . 'a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven and he reconciled to the favour of God.'" It was the "*instantaneous work*" that he could not comprehend, "how this faith should be given in a moment." On the 23rd, "I was beat out of this retreat, too, by the concurring evidence of several living witnesses." All Wesley could do was cry, "Lord, help Thou my unbelief." ³⁶ Böhler contended that Wesley should not refrain from teaching this glorious possibility. "No; do not hide in the earth the talent God hath given you." ³⁷ As Wesley prepared to return to Oxford, Böhler

³⁰ *Journal*, I:437.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I:440.

³² Cameron, p. 135.

³³ *Journal*, I:442.

³⁴ Francis J. McConnell, *John Wesley* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1939). p. 60.

³⁵ *Journal*, I:442.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I:454-455.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

walked a few miles with him, exhorting him “not to stop short of the grace of God.”³⁸ And to think, these extraordinary conversations were in Latin!

In London, Charles’ painful illness had recurred; John returned to the city. The “little society” began May 1st; later it was transferred to Fetter Lane. Böhler’s advice was behind the eleven “fundamental rules” of the society. On the 4th Böhler left London to embark for Carolina. “Oh what a work hath God begun, since his coming into England!” said John Wesley. Böhler’s letter to Wesley—in Latin—warned “Beware of the sin of unbelief.”³⁹

The May 21st experience of Charles Wesley, “I believe! I believe!” was followed by May 24. John reconstructed the setting. “When I met Peter Böhler again,” recalled Wesley, “he consented to put the dispute upon the issue which I desired, namely, Scripture and experience.” Wesley continued:

I was now thoroughly convinced; and, by the grace of God, I resolved to seek it unto the end, (1) By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon *my own* works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up; (2) by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in Him, as *my* Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.⁴⁰

The experience concluded, at Aldersgate Street. Possibly it was William Holland who read Luther’s “preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*.” Wesley wrote:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.⁴¹

Wesley’s experience of grace was a reality; it would require a lifetime to complete and fulfill, but phenomenal beginning it was. And a Moravian had played so singular a part.

The Summer Trip to Herrnhut: 1738

Within a matter of weeks John Wesley was on his way to Germany, along with Ingham and Töltschig, to discover the secret of Moravian godliness. Wesley’s *Journal* becomes the typical tourist’s notebook. Cologne was “the ulgiest, dirtiest city I ever yet saw with my eyes,” and the cathedral “which is mere heaps upon heaps: a huge mis-shapen thing,

³⁸Ibid., I:457.

³⁹Ibid., I:461-462.

⁴⁰Ibid., I:471-472.

⁴¹Ibid., I:475-476.

which has no more of symmetry than of neatness belonging to it."⁴² He had come to Germany to explore that penetrating understanding of God's redeeming love. A huge, unfinished cathedral held scant interest.

On Tuesday, July 4th Wesley reached Marienborn, where Zinzendorf resided. When banished from his estates at Berthelsdorf (which included Herrnhut), the Count made his way to "a tumble-down old castle comparable to the ruined Foundery" in Marienborn. There he established schools for poor children—feeding and clothing them at his own expense. He formed a Moravian settlement, "forty students from Jena, most of whom became ministers in Europe or in missions to the heathen." Those accompanying Zinzendorf to Marienborn were called the "Pilgrim Congregation."⁴³

Upon arrival, Wesley "was so ill that, after talking a little with Count Zinzendorf, I was forced to lie down for the rest of the day." He continued:

The family at Marienborn consists of about ninety persons, gathered out of many nations. They live for the present in a large house hired by the Count, which is capable of receiving a far greater number; but are building one about three English miles off, on the top of a fruitful hill. 'Oh how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!'⁴⁴

A story—in Benham's *Memoirs of James Hutton*—is that on July 4th, Ingham was admitted to Holy Communion. Unhappily, "when the congregation saw Wesley to be *homo pertubatus*, and that his head had gained an ascendancy over his heart, . . .—they deemed it not prudent to admit him to that sacred service."⁴⁵ On the 6th, "The Count carried me with him to the Count of Solms," noted Wesley, "where I observed with pleasure the German frugality."⁴⁶ An "anecdote"—possibly apocryphal—told by John Hampson, is that Zinzendorf, who regarded Wesley as his pupil, accordingly made him work in the garden. Some hours later the lordly Count appeared in his carriage and commanded a dirty, sweating Wesley to accompany him to visit a neighboring noble. "Wesley naturally wished to wash his hands and to put on his coat; but his preceptor forbade him, saying, 'You must be simple, my brother!'"⁴⁷ (Are Benham and Hampson simply saying the Count attempted to break the pride of the meticulous Oxford M.A.?)

Wesley describes lodging "with one of the brethren" chatting in English and Latin. "And here I continually met with what I sought for, viz. living

⁴²Ibid., II:7-8.

⁴³Ibid., II:10, see note 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., II:10-11.

⁴⁵Ibid., II:11, note 1. Also Daniel Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton* (London: 1856), p. 40. Also Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley As Seen By Contemporaries and Biographers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), II:68-69.

⁴⁶*Journal*, II:12. Is this the basis for Hampson's "anecdote?"

⁴⁷Tyerman, I:198. Also see *Journal*, II:11, note 1.

proofs of the power of faith: persons saved from inward as well as outward sin by 'the love of God shed abroad in their hearts,' and from all doubt and fear by the abiding witness of 'the Holy Ghost given unto them.'" The Count preached on the 9th, and later that week a conference "for strangers" was held, where a man from Frankfort asked, "Can a man be justified, and not know it?" Whereupon, "the Count spoke largely and scripturally upon it."⁴⁸ Intercession-day was observed with innumerable strangers on hand. By Monday the 17th it was time to leave "having stayed here ten days longer than I intended . . . , I proposed setting out for Herrnhut; but . . . I stayed till . . . the 19th."⁴⁹

John Wesley had met the Count; fair or not, it was Zinzendorf who would establish in Wesley's mind a paradigm for the Moravian ideal. The two make an interesting contrast. Zinzendorf was Wesley's senior by almost three years. Wesley stood 5' 3" and was ever the trim, lithe individual. Zinzendorf was of medium height and in mid-life was inclined to corpulence. Both men were good looking and exuded an air of confidence. As a school boy Zinzendorf had founded the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed and was referred to as "a knight of Jesus Christ." Wesley dominated a group of younger lads at Charterhouse, "Better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven."⁵⁰ Few leaders in church history have been so greatly loved by their followers, and so avidly defended, protected, their characters embellished, and the aura of sanctity so carefully tended. Later, Wesley would refer to the Count, symbol of the *Unitas Fratrum*, even scoffing at the vanity, even arrogance of the Count's letter of introduction to the Archbishop of Canterbury. We see an honest clash of personalities. The Count responded to the inner urge, Wesley to a distant ideal; "Zinzendorf to the emotional impulse within him, Wesley to the vision of perfect holiness."⁵¹

Wesley departed Marienborn and continued through several communities. At Halle the Orphan House was a marvel. "Six hundred and fifty children, we were informed, are wholly maintained there; and three thousand, if I mistake not, taught. Surely, such a thing neither we nor our fathers have known as this great thing which God has done here!"⁵² In the future, both Wesley and Whitefield would employ this concept for childrens' homes, and there could be no better model.

"At three in the afternoon I came to Herrnhut, about thirty English miles from Dresden."⁵³ He had reached the fountain-head! Each suc-

⁴⁸*Journal*, II:12-13.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, II:14.

⁵⁰See Tyerman, I:20.

⁵¹See Towlson, pp. 82-83. Also see A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf The Ecumenical Pioneer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 17-18.

⁵²*Journal*, II:17.

⁵³*Ibid.*, II:19, dated Tuesday, August 1.

ceeding day witnessed: a love feast, Bible Conference, conversations with Martin Döber, an impressive Lutheran service, then the dramatic custom of unmarried men joining in a parade, with musical instruments, closing with prayer. Wesley described the funeral of a child, and asked the father, "How do you find yourself?" The response, "Praised be the Lord, never better. He has taken the soul of my child to Himself." There were visits with Christian David, who preached, and "he chose the very subject which I should have desired."⁵⁴ There was an irenic atmosphere, and the visit lasted almost the whole of August. It was heaven upon earth.

September 17, 1738 found the traveler in the scepter'd isle, and glad to be home. "I began again to declare in my own country the glad tidings of salvation." He likewise expressed mixed reactions to Marienborn and Herrnhut, putting his finger on indications of self-righteousness; a personality cult built around Zinzendorf.⁵⁵ During the autumn of 1738 Wesley wrote a number of letters to the Herrnhut community and to individuals. What was the role of the Count? His September 27-28 letter *To the Moravians*, began "I cannot but rejoice in your steadfast faith . . . But of some other things I stand in doubt, which I will mention in love and meekness." Among the doubts:

Do you not wholly neglect joint fasting?

Is not the Count all in all? Are not the rest mere shadows? Calling him 'Rabbi'? Almost implicitly both believing and obeying him?

Is there not something of levity in your behaviour? Are you, in general, serious enough?

Are you zealous and watchful to redeem time? Do you not sometimes fall into trifling conversation?

Do you not magnify your own church too much? Do you believe any who are not of it to be in gospel liberty?

Are you not straitened in your love? Do you love your enemies, and wicked men, as yourselves?

Do you not mix *human* wisdom with *divine*? Joining worldly prudence to heavenly?

Do you not use cunning, guile, or dissimulation in many cases?

Are you not of a close, dark, reserved temper and behavior?

Is not the spirit of secrecy the spirit of your community?

Have you that childlike openness, frankness, and plainness of speech so manifest to all in the apostles and first Christians?⁵⁶

Wesley learned, from the Moravians, that faith should be fearless; his candor was more of rudeness than fearlessness. In his letter of October 14-30, he expressed deep appreciation to the Count and Countess for their "many kindnesses" and he expressed a desire to return "were it

⁵⁴Ibid., II:20-25.

⁵⁵See Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 15.

⁵⁶Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 25, *Letters I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 566-567.

only to give them that fruit of my love, the speaking freely on a few things which I did not approve, perhaps because I did not understand them."⁵⁷ He had seen much, and learned more. The revival was about to begin in Britain, and the Moravians had significant input. But it was to be a Wesleyan, not a Moravian Revival!

Fetter Lane

January 1, 1739 was the occasion for a love feast at the Fetter Lane Society, with John Wesley and some sixty others. "About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground."⁵⁸ This was the "high-water mark of Methodist and Moravian fellowship."⁵⁹ Soon, however, deterioration became patently clear. Why?

Two theological/devotional terms play no small part: enthusiasm and quietism. Enthusiasm, in the eighteenth century, connoted fanatical conduct rising out of superstition or false claims to divine inspiration. One deeply concerned family was the Hutton household, living next door to Samuel Wesley, Jr. in Westminster. Young James Hutton, under John Wesley's influence, had joined the Moravians. On June 6, 1738, Elizabeth Hutton — James' mother — wrote an urgent letter to Samuel, Jr., regarding his brother John who "seems to be turned a wild enthusiast, or fanatic."⁶⁰ James Hutton, along with John Wesley, had become leaders in the Fetter Lane society after Böhler's departure for America. As time passed, the issue became not the dreaded enthusiasm (which Wesley disliked and denounced), but quietism, or stillness. From the Moravian point of view, Wesley's faith was inadequate. He continued to have doubts; he insisted on using all "the means of grace" as essential in the Christian life. For the Moravians, there were no degrees of faith. To them, Wesley was still floundering amid his works-righteousness. Hutton wrote to Zinzendorf, March 14, 1739/1740, "John Wesley being resolved to *do* all things himself, and having told many souls that they were justified who have since discovered themselves to be otherwise, and having mixed the works of the law with the Gospel as *means* of grace, is at enmity against the Brethren."⁶¹

Hutton was now speaking of the quietism which Wesley could not accept. The one who desired assurance found it by rejecting all forms of

⁵⁷Ibid., I:573-574.

⁵⁸*Journal*, II:121-122.

⁵⁹See Towlson, p. 77. Also John S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies* (London: The Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 194-200.

⁶⁰See Heitzenrater, II:66.

⁶¹Ibid., II:69.

human achievement: churchgoing was unnecessary, neither were the sacraments. At Fetter Lane "the conflict between Moravian quietism and Anglican synergism"⁶² resulted in a Moravian position, in Wesley's mind, which amounted to a fatal antinomianism. For the Moravians, any attempt to earn assurance by good deeds "would be self-defeating."⁶³ Hutton told Zinzendorf his opinion of Wesley, "I desired him simply to keep to his office in the Body of Christ, i.e., namely, to awaken souls in preaching but not to pretend to lead them to Christ."⁶⁴

Fetter Lane next moved from Hutton's leadership to that of the young German, Philip Molther, recently ordained by Zinzendorf for mission work in Pennsylvania. Molther went so far as to suggest that Mrs. Turner had no faith at all; he "advised her, till she received faith, to be 'still,' ceasing from outward works."⁶⁵ He was appalled at the "sighing and groaning and whining and howling." He was able to touch many of Wesley's close associates; even Charles might be won over. Gentle Thomas Bray, in whose home Charles had his "spiritual birthday" on May 21st, castigated "the folly of people that kept running about to church and sacrament, 'as I,' said he, 'did till very lately.'"⁶⁶

The conflict culminated in John Wesley's manifesto of July 20, 1740. He made two major points in his attack on the Moravian position. "The sum of what you asserted is this:"

1. That there is no such thing as *weak faith*: That there is no justifying faith where there is ever any doubt or fear, or where there is not, in the full sense, a new, a clean heart.
2. That a man ought not to use those ordinances of God which our Church terms 'mean of grace,' before he has such a faith as excludes all doubt and fear, and implies a new, a clean heart.

Wesley concluded, "I then, without saying anything more, withdrew, as did eighteen or nineteen of the society."⁶⁷

Wesley and the Moravians parted, keeping separate rather than engaging in continued controversy. A few years saw contention — "the Battle of the Books." Wesley labeled Moravians "with Antinomianism," and the Brethren attacked Wesley's "doctrine of Christian perfection."⁶⁸ There was also the clash: "Wesley's suspicion of Zinzendorf's autocracy . . . and Moravian suspicion of Wesley's passion for power."⁶⁹

⁶²See Outler, p. 16.

⁶³Stanley Ayling, *John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 122.

⁶⁴Heitzenrater, II:69.

⁶⁵*Journal*, II:312.

⁶⁶*Ibid.* Also see Ayling, p. 122.

⁶⁷*Journal*, II:370.

⁶⁸Towlson, p. 173.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 117.

An important discussion between Wesley and Zinzendorf at Gray's Inn Walks, September 3, 1741 — diligently recorded by Wesley, in Latin, "to spare the dead" is requisite reading for all who would seek to understand the two men. Time will not permit an assessment of that confrontation, a meeting which deserves a full study in itself. Let it simply be said that Wesley's *Journal* entry, and the material recorded, constitute major theological/doctrinal/personal insights for Methodists and Moravians.⁷⁰

The Coke-La Trobe Dialogue

In 1785 there came a possible rapprochement between Methodists and the *Unitas Fratrum*.⁷¹ It was sparked by Charles Wesley's attempt to thwart any move by Thomas Coke — who had just returned from America and the new Methodist Episcopal Church — to create such a church in Britain. Charles sought out Benjamin La Trobe in London, President of the Moravian Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel. Immediately La Trobe wrote, on October 25, 1785, to Herrnhut, to Johannes Loretz, a Swiss who upon Zinzendorf's death assumed the status of "Senior civilis."⁷² La Trobe observed, "now he [Charles Wesley] wishes that *the Brethren might be of the use* they were originally intended for, *to nurse these souls* who are truly awakened and who adhere to the *Church of England*."⁷³ Loretz advised caution, November 27th, "The Wesleyan scheme comes from the Brethren, from Zinzendorf himself, viz., that we would not take people from the Church of England but build them up within the Church . . . our Diaspora work." La Trobe and Charles had a number of conversations — neither wanted the Methodists to withdraw from the Established Church (unfounded fears as far as Coke was concerned).

La Trobe was dumbfounded when he received a letter, December 23rd, from Coke himself, suggesting "why cannot the United Brethren and the Methodists unite."⁷⁴ A breakfast meeting was planned for January 4, 1786 at Fetter Lane.

Courtly Dr. Coke expressed hope the day was at hand for uniting "as the two bodies seem to agree in doctrine and discipline." La Trobe, "Yes, it was a pity we separated."⁷⁵ After discussion on national churches and Wesley's ordinations for America, Coke insisted La Trobe admit, "Whether I believe there could be a Union?" La Trobe was alarmed, things

⁷⁰*Journal*, II:487-500.

⁷¹See Warren Thomas Smith, "Attempts At Methodist And Moravian Union: 1785-1786" in *Methodist History*, January 1970. Also William George Addison, *The Renewed Church of the United Brethren 1722-1930* (London: SPCK, 1932).

⁷²See J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, 1967), pp. 187-188.

⁷³Addison, p. 197.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 205.

were moving too rapidly. Coke requested another meeting and the two “parted very friendly.”⁷⁶

Charles had suggested La Trobe meet John Wesley face to face. In reporting to Loretz, January 11th, La Trobe said, “I told him candidly I could not seek an interview . . . for his Brother’s method of publishing the conversations he had with anyone, . . .”⁷⁷ More letters were exchanged. Coke and other Wesleyan preachers had extended an invitation. Loretz stated, February 17th, the seven principles necessary before union could be considered:

- i. Agreement concerning the Diaspora plan.
- ii. Liberty to form “little societies for those who are fitted for them.”
- iii. Maintain “our principles and customs” for our people, and exclude those who do not abide by them.
- iv. Maintain communications with the Brethren.
- v. Methodists cannot partake in the training of our ministers.
- vi. No upsetting of our plan “in the work of souls.”
- vii. “We cannot supply methodist [*sic*] chapels with ministers, still less, administer the sacraments in them.”

Lortz’s point: if union was to be considered “we shall have further considerations to put forward. We are not meant for a great company; only men whom the Lord has chosen are our members. . . . Our relationship (*Verbindung*) is and must remain individual in character and is based on the gracious call of every individual member of the community.” He emphasized, “their [Methodist] real purpose is as ecclesiastical union with us, . . . that we . . . help them thereby to a legitimate and legal ordination and constitution.”⁷⁸

Meetings continued; letters were exchanged. Following his return from the Channel Islands, Coke met with La Trobe and on parting La Trobe “bade Coke read the history of the Brethren.” More breakfast get-togethers followed at New Chapel House, centering on what direction Methodism would take following Wesley’s death. On July 7, 1786, La Trobe sent Loretz letters from Coke concerning more proposals.

Before another meeting between Coke and La Trobe could be arranged—or a disconcerting session with John Wesley—La Trobe died, “sincerely lamented.” Charles Wesley wrote a moving tribute, “Rest, Happy Saint.”⁷⁹ With La Trobe’s passing, the contemplated merger of the Methodists and the *Unitas* came to a halt. In light of the proceedings, we cannot help asking: was union ever a viable option?

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 206. Coke sent his “Sermon on the Godhead of Christ” and La Trobe responded with “Abstract of the Book of Common Prayer” by Franklin.

⁷⁷Addison, p. 206.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 210-211. The seven principles are here given in digest.

⁷⁹Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 375.

Conclusions

“What have Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church,” asked Tertullian, “the heretics and the Christians in common with each other?”⁸⁰ Might the same be asked of Methodists and Moravians?

In part, the explanation of barriers comes from two nationalities. John Wesley, *pace* Schmidt’s superb biography, was not German.⁸¹ He was as English as 4:00 tea, as Yorkshire pudding. Attempts to make him a disciple of the Lutheran tradition leave much to be desired. Wesley was of Oxford, not Wittenberg.

Zinzendorf, for all his years in England and extensive travel abroad, remained Teutonic in spirit and personality, and in spite of genuine humility, never forgot his titled background. There remained a strong hint of lofty condescension in his dealings with Wesley. And Wesley, though not to the manner born, always maintained an aristocratic air.

In 1744 the Methodists in Britain made an interesting notation in the Conference proceedings:

Q. 1. Can we unite any farther with the Moravians?

A. It seems not, were it only for this reason, they will not unite with us.

Yet at that very Conference, another question was raised “Q. 13. How shall we fix the Watch-Nights, Letter-Days, and Love-feasts till we meet again?”⁸² Patterns and practices which have spiritual value endure, are shared, and become part of tradition, even though union appears not possible. It is sad that encounters of the eighteenth century closed as they did. History does not move always to our liking or choosing.

The latter part of the twentieth century has been a time of ecumenicity – and it should be! The question, however, cannot be avoided: what is best for the Kingdom of God? It may be that more ultimate good came from two separate streams, Methodist-Moravian, each vigorous and growing, than an unwanted, forced union which lacked fire and spirit. From eighteenth century encounters, the twenty-first century may learn the true meaning of ecumenism, and the prayer of Our Lord, “that they may be one.” (John 17:11).

⁸⁰*De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7, 10-14.

⁸¹Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962-1972), Vols I, II, and II, Part 2.

⁸²See *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, No. 1. (London: Published for the Wesley Historical Society, 1896). Also see Cameron, pp. 360, 383-384.