MORAVIANISM AS AN AMERICAN DENOMINATION

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In her book, *Moravians in Two Worlds*, written in 1967, Gillian Gollin explores the founding and development of Herrnhut, Germany and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Why was it, she wonders, that since both towns were founded by the Moravians to incarnate their religious convictions, the towns developed in such different ways? "Herrnhut today is a small settlement in East Germany . . . with a population of less than 2,000 and an economy in which crafts, handed down over generations, still predominate. . . . Contemporary Bethlehem is a sprawling industrial city in the eastern United States, with a population of over 75,000 and an economy tied to one of the corporation giants of the American steel industry." Her own study is a fascinating account of how the two communities developed so differently, despite the similarities of their earliest days.

The questions which intrigued Gollin provide a conceptual framework for this paper. How was it that two religious movements, Moravianism and Methodism, which shared so much in terms of their common roots and their eighteenth century encounters, have developed in such different ways? Both movements had uniquely gifted leaders, both saw themselves as involved in a renewal of a moribund religious establishment, both preferred to speak more of the experiential rather than the intellectual aspects of the Christian faith. Yet, both the Methodists and the Moravians have developed into distinctive denominations in America.

The United Methodists have achieved the distinction of being one of the largest Protestant denominations in the country. The unofficial figures for 1983 set the membership at about 9,340,000, a slight drop from the year before. The official figures for 1983 for American Moravians show a total of 54,623, and also reflect a slight drop from 1982. Even allowing for the fact that the shepherds may be counting the sheep in different ways, the relative size of the two denominations remains one of their most distinctive points of difference.

There are, of course, undoubtedly other points of difference between the contemporary Methodists and Moravians. But the issue of size does play its role if only in the sense that much more is known about the development of American Methodism and much more has been written about it than has been recorded about American Moravianism. My specific task is to deal with the Moravians in America, so I find it appropriate to now consider the way the American Moravian experience has been treated by a number of American church historians.

The Moravians and the Church Historians

The attitude of many historians who write about the general development of American religious life is summed up in the question once posed in conversation by the late Sydney Ahlstrom of Yale University: “Oh, a Moravian—what ever happened to the Moravians after Zinzendorf?” Their general answer seems to be, “not much!”

The last twenty-five years have witnessed the publication of a number of significant scholarly studies seeking to comprehend the totality of American religious life. This trend started in 1960 when Clifton Olmstead published his History of Religion in the United States. His account of the Moravians, “the most remarkable of the German sectaries,” is a very full one but it carries the story from Moravian beginnings in Europe only up to the eve of the American revolution. To his credit, however, he does make note of one other development in the Moravian story, to which we will return later.

In 1972 Ahlstrom himself published his monumental work, A Religious History of the American People. He begins his account of American religious life with a description of the early fifteenth century Council of Constance since he sees there a conflict among various understandings of religious authority which would not be resolved until much later in America. Among these was the authority of the Bible, championed by “John Huss, the patriot reformer of Bohemia, whose spiritual descendants three centuries later would be evangelizing the Indians in Pennsylvania.” His specific account of the Moravians occurs much later and concentrates on their activities in the colonial period. A concluding summary paragraph has to cover the rest of the story:

The Moravians never succeeded in entering American life as an influential church movement, despite the unique way in which they blended churchly and sectarian tradi-
Moravians Write Their Own Story

American Moravians, writing the history of their own tradition, have also devoted a large amount of effort to describing the events of the eighteenth century though some have also expressed dissatisfaction with the legacies of that era.

In 1894 J. Taylor Hamilton wrote about the Moravians in Volume VIII of “The American Church History Series,” a twelve volume set of denominational histories published under the auspices of the American Society of Church History. Six of his twelve chapters, representing the majority of his pages, are devoted to the eighteenth century, up to the 1780's.

Harry Emilius Stocker published *A Home Mission History of the Moravian Church in the United States and Canada (Northern Province)* in 1924. Most of the book is devoted to the period after the Revolution up to his own day. He does cover the earlier colonial period in summary

8Ibid., p. 243.
12Harry Emilius Stocker, *A Home Mission History of the Moravian Church in the United States and Canada [Northern Province]* (The Special Publication Committee of the Moravian Church, 1924).
fashion in order to make the story complete, and in order to describe policies and actions of those days with which he completely disagreed. In many places he launches a vigorous attack against Zinzendorf’s perception of the colonial American scene. The colonial Brethren who followed the patterns laid out by the Count are likewise condemned for their total inability to grasp the reality of their situation. “Unfortunately,” he writes, “the early Moravians failed to discern the times . . . and the Moravian Church learned nothing from the outcome of the American Revolution.”

The most recent attempt to tell the whole story of the modern Moravians around the world in a comprehensive fashion appeared in the work, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957*, which was published in 1967. Author Kenneth G. Hamilton had taken an earlier work by his father, J. Taylor Hamilton, and revised and updated it to carry the story through mid-twentieth century. A quarter of the volume is devoted to “The Moravian Church Under Zinzendorf, 1722-1760.” Technically the book is an example of the positivist school of historiography and occasionally reads more like a chronicle than like a history. The Hamiltons rarely step out from behind the mass of facts they have collected to venture an interpretation, so their comments about the immediate post-Revolutionary scene are all the more intense. They wrote:

Had (early American Moravians) . . . enjoyed freedom of action even measurably comparable to that of Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, or Samuel Seabury and William White, how different might have been the future of the Moravian Church in America. But just when the Methodist and Protestant Episcopal Churches were making provision for logical expansion in America, the tendency to ultracentralization in the Moravian Church caused it to ignore the opportunities presented in this land.

All of this tends to remind me of a former student who once remarked, “Oh, well, after Zinzendorf, it’s been all down hill!” While we cannot allow quite so subjective a judgment to stand, it does suggest that we have to reckon with the Count if we are to understand how the Moravian Church in America has evolved into what it is today.

**Zinzendorf’s Legacies**

The Rev. John Wesley and Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf both visited America in the course of their careers. Unlike Wesley, Zinzendorf was at the height of his career and influence when he arrived. As

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13Ibid., pp. 13, 37.
15Ibid., p. 228.
a consequence his influence has had a far more long-reaching effect upon American Moravianism than Wesley has had upon American Methodism.

The unique personality of Zinzendorf and his benevolent dictatorship among the Moravians are well known. However, the era of Zinzendorf's leadership, from the late 1720's until 1760, saw the formation of three distinctive though interrelated forms of outreach: settlement congregations, missions, and the diaspora. All three played their role in the formation of the American Moravian Church.

The town of Herrnhut, Germany, developed by Zinzendorf and the early settlers on his estate, became a virtual symbol for world-wide Moravianism and for a particularly joyful understanding and practice of the Christian faith. Love of the Savior who through his cross reconciles all God's children to Him and to one another was expressed in the happiness of the redeemed believer. Settlements modeled after Herrnhut were established by the Moravians in Europe, England, and colonial America. The towns of Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Lititz in Pennsylvania, Hope in New Jersey, and Salem in North Carolina, for example, were all established on this pattern.

Settlement congregations were economically self-sufficient exclusive communities in which only members of the church resided, and all property was in the hands of the church. Strengthening of the spiritual life was to occur within these communities through such institutions as the "choir," or group living system, by which means individuals lived communally with their peers: single brothers, single sisters, widows, widowers, and so on. The system was based on Zinzendorf's psychological insight that we comprehend the meaning of Christ for us in different ways depending upon our age or sex. The devotional exercises within the "choirs" were expected to enhance one's spiritual experiences. The settlements were expected to provide examples of piety to other Christians.

The settlements were also expected to provide a 'home base' from which foreign missionaries and itinerant evangelists would go forth and a place which these wandering servants of the Lord could call home.

The Moravians began their first distinctive "foreign" missionary outreach in 1732 when they answered what they felt to be a divine call to spread the good news of Jesus to those people in the West Indies who had never heard that message. Thus an impressive "foreign" missionary enterprise was begun. Such activity soon became a hallmark of the Moravians and was a very central part of their activity in America. Like the Wesleys in Georgia, the Moravians had a wish to reach beyond their own ethnic confines in ministry to the Native Americans. The Moravians eventually did undertake an extensive outreach of this type. The work originally begun in the Berkshire region of New York and Connecticut eventually moved in successive stages as far west as Kansas and Oklahoma. The northern boundary of the activity was in New Fairfield, Ontario, Canada,
where in 1903 the Moravians turned over their last Native American mission property to the Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada. A revived interest in such outreach led to the establishment of a congregation among Native Americans at Morongo in southern California in 1890 which was integrated into the structure of the American Moravian Church in 1956.

As a third form of outreach, the diaspora embodied a concept expressed in I Peter 1:1-2: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the dispersion on Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you" (RSV). The word "diaspora" is here translated "dispersion" and the germ of the diaspora idea of outreach is found in these two verses. The traditional pietists, who were so influential on the young Zinzendorf, had long argued that a way to renewal of the church was through organizing small groups of believers within existing congregations. The members of these groups would meet, often in homes and with lay leadership, to read the Bible, sing hymns, pray and share religious experiences. These groups would provide a nucleus of renewed Christians who would eventually revitalize the congregation and then the church and the world.

The Count fashioned this concept into the third method of outreach for the emerging Moravian Church. The presupposition behind the operation of the diaspora was the existence of the state church. Under that arrangement one particular denomination was the only legal religious body in the land (the Lutheran Church for Zinzendorf, the Anglican for Wesley). You became a member of it at birth, your local congregation was determined by where you lived; you supported it through involuntary taxes and the clergy were virtual civil servants. Diaspora workers labored within the framework of the state church and their group members attended worship and received the sacraments at the parish church. The goal was to awaken Christians, not to recruit members for some sort of new denomination. And, of course, it needs to be remembered here that neither Zinzendorf nor Wesley ever consciously set out to establish a new denomination!

**Moravians in America: the Colonial Era**

The Moravians began to arrive in the eastern seaboard colonies in 1735, relative late-comers to colonial America. The virtual organizer of the American Moravians was the energetic Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, about whom John Wesley spoke so highly after their meeting in Georgia. A university-trained Lutheran theologian who later became a Moravian bishop, Spangenberg was the most important Moravian leader of the era, after Zinzendorf. He outlived the Count by thirty-two years, was the virtual organizer of the American Moravians, and later would write the first official biography of Zinzendorf, the first Moravian theology text, and
the first manual of instructions for missionaries. Spangenberg strove to interpret Moravianism to the larger world.

The Moravians brought with them their three ideas of outreach. Settlements were begun and they did become the bases from which “foreign” missionaries went to remote areas of the world and also from which diaspora workers set out among the heathen closer to home. Preaching places were established from Maine to the Carolinas.

For awhile the Moravians were able successfully to adhere to their views as to how outreach should be done. Diaspora workers resisted the temptation to organize their hearers into Moravian congregations. Indeed, records of newcomers in some of the settlements were maintained according to their denomination of origin. Zinzendorf spent slightly more than a year in the colonies and, in Pennsylvania, attempted to organize the German Protestants into a sort of national church which he hoped would avoid the transferral of old, European denominational forms to the new world. He was unsuccessful. Indeed, recent studies have claimed that in the case of the German Lutherans and the Schwenkfelders, it was Zinzendorf’s activity which spurred them on to seek their own American denominational identity.

Despite some early difficult times, the economies of the settlements prospered generally and provided the needed material base for the various forms of outreach.

The upheavals accompanying the Revolutionary War brought their share of difficulties to Moravian areas. But the real threat to the survival and growth of the American Moravians, and to the emergence of an American Moravian Church, came not from internal American sources, but from policies already being formulated by European Moravians.

**Moravians in America: the Post-Revolutionary Era**

Zinzendorf died in 1760 and his death provoked the type of crisis among the Moravians which is usually associated with the removal of the charismatic leader. There was no real functioning system of authority in place to succeed him. As a confessional form of government did emerge, the new leaders also found themselves confronted with a financial crisis. The Count was not an accountant and had frequently confused his own personal funds with those which could be said to be church monies.

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Olmstead, in his survey of American religious life, is one of the few general historians to spot what happened next:

Among those denominations that maintained ties with European religious bodies prior to the Revolution, the Moravians alone remained dependent upon the centralized authority in Europe after the completion of American independence. In 1769, the General Synod at Marienborn had ruled that Moravian congregations in Britain and America were to be regarded as subordinate to it and that they were to be controlled by boards known as Provincial Helpers. This principle was reaffirmed by the General Synod which met at Herrnhut in 1782. The fact that the Moravians were dominated by European ideas and practices proved decidedly detrimental to their progress in a new nation.\(^{18}\)

He also notes that these Provincial Helpers were to be responsible to the Elders' Conference, the supreme governing board of the church located in Germany, rather than to the congregations within their several jurisdictions: “The loss of representation or self-government at the very time when the colonies were gaining independence would constitute a crippling blow to the Moravian Church in America.”\(^{19}\)

It is at this point that the story of the American Moravians begins to depart from the general ecclesiastical history of the new nation. While other denominations present in America began to rearrange their affairs in light of the new situation and struck out on their own, the Moravians seemed to have moved backwards! Crises in leadership, financial difficulties, a commendable sense of loyalty to Brethren and Sisters in Europe and Great Britain, a fundamental lack of understanding of the new American situation—all these, and perhaps other reasons, played into the formulation of a policy which in retrospect can only be said to have delayed the birth of a genuinely American Moravian Church for a considerable number of years. The American Moravians were moving into a period of rigid European domination and even the question about whether the settlement, or the diaspora pattern, or something else, would be adequate for outreach in America was not settled until nearly a century later.

In October, 1768, Bishop Matthew Hehl presided over a Synod of the American Moravians in Lititz, Pennsylvania. The Americans would not meet in a legislative synod again until 1849, eighty-one years later.\(^{20}\)

From time to time after that various “official visitors,” usually German bishops, appeared to convey the wishes of the church administration to the American Moravians. Their audiences now usually consisted of ministers only, rather than gatherings of clergy and lay representatives of congregations as had been the case earlier. Their message reminded the Americans that the settlement congregations were to be the norm. Those souls who listened to itinerant diaspora preachers were considered

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\(^{18}\) Olmstead, p. 233.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 136.
\(^{20}\) Hamilton and Hamilton, p. 222.
to be in various stages of preparation for enjoying the fulness of the Christian life. They would enjoy these full benefits when they moved into settlement congregations. But in order to join, their request for membership had to be approved by the lot. The Moravians, along with many pietist groups of the era, had long followed the use of the New Testament custom of sometimes submitting important decisions to the lot after prayer. But now the approval of the lot became mandatory not only for applications for communicant membership, but also for the approval of the marriage between two members. Policies such as these, as well as other approaches of the time, severely retarded growth of the Moravians in America.

Some of the difficulties of attempting to organize congregations in adherence to these rules are suggested in the rather lengthy record of a ministers' conference, again held at Lititz, in 1790. In general, the Brethren complain that it is difficult to attempt to enforce the settlement regulations in their varied circumstances. Also, if one could construct two columns, one labeled "society members" and the other "communicant members of the congregation," the statistics would read like this:21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Society Members</th>
<th>Communicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graceham, Md.</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster, Pa.</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, Pa.</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldman's Creek, N.J.</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island, N.Y.</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The report contains reference to other localities, but the trend is clear.

What the report does not mention, but what other sources seem to suggest, is that often, in this post-Revolutionary era, many of those "society members" finally chose not to submit their membership request to the lot or to accept the other particular regulations of Moravian church membership. Rather, they frequently joined the Lutheran, Reformed, Episcopalian, and even Methodist churches which were springing up around them.

The Moravian leadership of the era undoubtedly did what they felt they were called to do and they did insure the survival of the church and its continued witness. But it would seem to be a fair judgment to say that, for the time being at least, such policies threw American Moravians out of step with religious and cultural trends in their own country.

**Moravians in America: The Nineteenth Century**

This situation, of course, could not last forever. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, American Moravians, along with the British

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21Ibid., n. 71, pp. 661-662.
Moravians, were agitating for change. They made their wish for independence known to the European authorities, but as Hamilton summarizes, "the suggestions . . . caused concern to the church authorities . . . who were convinced that the American congregations took delight in doing away with all existing regulations so as to replace them with novel ones."  

Slowly, but steadily, the "novel" regulations continued to be developed and the contemporary American Moravian Church began to emerge. The form of the church today is actually the result more of nineteenth century developments than it is of its better known colonial era.

There are now in America two autonomous Provinces, although they cooperate in jointly sponsoring a number of activities. This structure was initially the result of geography rather than ideology. With the acquisition of land in North Carolina in 1753, the way was opened for the creation of a Moravian settlement in that area which would prove to be the center of regional outreach much as the other settlements were in the north. Distance and difficulties of travel allowed Pennsylvania and North Carolina to develop as separate Moravian centers.

By the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of constitutional changes in the European Moravian Church, a distinctly American structure began to emerge. The Provincial Helpers now became known as the Provincial Elders' Conference (or, the PEC). This was an elected administrative board of the Province, responsible to the congregations of the Province which sent their representatives to Provincial Synods. The first PEC was organized in the south in 1849 and the north followed suit in 1855. One American Province with a northern and southern district was in existence by 1857 and it evolved into two distinctive American Provinces (Northern and Southern) by 1899. This basic pattern remains unchanged today. Both Provinces have experimented from time to time with district sub-divisions. At the moment, the Northern Province, through its four districts, covers Moravian work in the northeast, the upper mid-west, as far south as southern California and Arizona and as far north as Alberta, Canada. Southern Province work encompasses Moravians in North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida.

From time to time, the suggestion has been made that the two Provinces should merge. The proposal for merger was last approved by the Northern Province Synod in 1970 and then narrowly defeated by the Southern Province Synod the next year. The issue has again been raised in a recent issue of the denominational magazine, *The North American Moravian*, which is itself an inter-provincial publication.  

22Ibid., p. 233.
differences in theological viewpoint keeping the Provinces apart. However, since the committee personnel included neither historians nor sociologists, they were not able to identify the real causes of continued separation!

The basic geographical distribution of American Moravians today is also the product of nineteenth century developments. Throughout that century immigrants poured into this country. Among the many Germans and Scandinavians who came were people who knew of the Moravians in Europe and had had various contacts with them, including diaspora connections. In the early 1850's the northern Moravians began to organize and finance a home mission program to minister to the new arrivals. Efforts were made to establish congregations among those who remained in the east—in New England, New York state, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. But the most concentrated effort was directed toward those who settled in a large arc in the midwest. That arc began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, stretched north to the Door County, Wisconsin, peninsula and then westward to North Dakota. Near the end of the nineteenth century that arc was extended west and north into Alberta, Canada.

With a structure developed, the PEC began to assign home missionaries and from 1858 on, new congregations in the midwest began to be organized and have their delegates seated at Provincial Synods. The home missionaries of the era were outstanding individualists and possessed much stamina. The names of such as John Frederick Fett, Andrew Michael Iverson, Niels Otto Tank, John Gottlib Kaltenbrunn and Martin Adam Erdmann were as influential in their days in the development of American Moravianism as Spangenberg was in his.

There were old world issues that had to be worked out in America and new American phenomena that had to be dealt with. For the Moravians, one piece of old world business was the question of how to do outreach—settlement, or diaspora, or some other way. The issue was still very much alive as late as 1853 when a conference of Moravian ministers assembled at Hope, Indiana, and issued a "Unanimous Declaration of Principles," in which they wrote:

[The Church's] activity has thereby been limited, her energies crippled, her spiritual life well nigh extinguished; for we deem it a principle deeply grounded in the eternal truth of God, that Christ's people can only flourish, in proportion as they work for the salvation of others. Thus while other denominations have filled our young country with churches and preachers, we have for the last fifty years scarcely retained our own. Yes, and while our church in Germany through her diaspora work, and in England, by awakening an interest in our extensive missionary effort, has existed to some purpose, it would be difficult for anyone to point to the great good we have done in this country. In our opinion we declare freely, though sadly, the Brethren's Church in America has been, comparatively speaking, pointless and fruitless. We therefore protest against the view of our Church so often put forth, that it is not a distinct and independent church, but rather a society within the Church. Political necessity has caused the assumption of that character in Europe; no such necessity exists here.24
The debates continued but decisions were also being made. By the mid-1850's the old settlement congregations had lost the last remnants of the old ways through their decisions to end the practice of exclusive church ownership of land and businesses in their communities. They became secular communities and only in the twentieth century did they attempt to turn their colonial heritage into a tourist asset. The failure of the mid-nineteenth century attempt by the rather flamboyant Niels Otto Tank to establish a Moravian settlement in Green Bay, Wisconsin, on land presented by William B. Astor, was perhaps the last attempt to found a settlement congregation in America.

Other home missionaries, particularly if they were not native born Americans, tried for awhile to work along diaspora lines but they soon came to recognize the inappropriateness of that approach and began to organize their societies into Moravian congregations. As the years passed, second generation Moravians began to move west and by 1878 when the congregation at Goshen, North Dakota was organized, the Moravian understanding of church extension had become thoroughly Americanized. The method was for a settled ministry and organizational structure to follow former members who had moved on into new territory.

The Southern Province remained numerically small and geographically compact until well after the Civil War. As southern Moravians moved west, congregations were established in southern Indiana and elsewhere.

The American Moravian map was not substantially altered until the mid-twentieth century when the Northern Province began expansion efforts in the southwestern United States. The Southern Province likewise began expansion in its old territory and also planted congregations in Florida.

One can find several other themes which emerge from the nineteenth century Moravian experience and which depict the Americanization process of the church. One of particular interest in this context is the encounter of the midwestern Moravians with American revivalism. The midwest Moravians were not immune from such national trends as the Second Great Awakening and Methodist camp meetings. Sometimes congregations were nearly split between those who opposed and those who endorsed the "new measures." Sometimes these practices were criticized as being too "Methodistical."

The records of the times reveal an interesting phenomenon. Frequently, the reports contain what seems to be a contradiction. While lambasting Methodists and Baptists for being "fanatical," "enthusiastic," "excitable," and just plain "too noisy," they described their own revival services. The home missionaries write about conversions, freely-wept tears,

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24 "Unanimous Declaration of Principles of the Western Ministers' Conference of the Moravian Church, Assembled at Hope, Indiana," *Moravian Church Miscellany*, IV, (June, 1853), pp. 375-376.
25 Stocker, p. 198.
heart-felt prayers and deep emotional experiences. Although they use the language of revivalism, they were describing a particular kind of piety which marked Moravians in the late nineteenth century. It can best be called quiet or controlled emotion. Simply put, one could have an extremely intense spiritual experience but not make a lot of noise about it. There might be silent tears but the experience might be so overwhelming as to preclude an audible expression of it. John R. Weinlick, the Moravian historian, once described the situation thus—when a revival came to town the Methodists would hold a preaching service on the town square while the Moravians would go to the church and hold a prayer meeting. The impetus and the goals might have been the same, but the methods quite different. One may attribute the difference to the supposed emotional repression characteristic of the Teutonic and Scandinavian peoples or, more probably, see here a type of piety which had not yet been eroded in the face of increasing pressure from a more common American variety.

Moravians in America: The Twentieth Century

As one approaches a discussion about the twentieth century American Moravians, it is instructive to consider the question, "When did the Moravian Church become an American denomination?" We find a clue toward an answer in the earlier observation of Ahlstrom about how the Moravians uniquely blended churchly and sectarian traditions. Indeed, as we have tried to indicate, the Moravians do not neatly fit the church/sect typology developed by sociologists of religion. Rather, for American Moravians, the issue of denominational identity seems to be tied into institutional independence and a coming to terms' with American religious life. These milestones were reached through the series of events which I have described as illustrative of American Moravian life in the late nineteenth century. In other words, the American Moravians became an American denomination about one hundred years after the organization of the Methodists in America!

This long delayed process of maturation has imposed a particular burden upon twentieth century Moravians. The issue was once stated in provocative fashion by Weinlick when he wondered whether a biological law had application to institutions as well—if an organism does not grow in its youth, it cannot expect to enjoy that growth at a later age. Should American Moravians attempt to 'catch up' to larger, older denominations or should they be content to concentrate on developing whatever their unique small-scale contributions might be? The historical record for the twentieth century thus far would suggest that the American Moravians wish to defy biology and play catch up!

In terms of institutional form, the bureaucratic agencies have tended to multiply in both Provinces. This has been caused by the desire, repeatedly endorsed by various Synods, to provide a full range of church
activities and programs for all members. In 1936 the Inter-Provincial Board of Christian Education was formed and in 1949 came the Inter-Provincial Board of Foreign Missions (now the Board of World Mission). Over the years the Provinces have agreed to the support of educational institutions, camp and conference centers, retirement communities for the elderly and all those activities which seem to characterize the program of any “main line American Protestant denomination.”

Indeed, the Moravians have quite consciously used that ‘mainline’ label as a way to describe their theological and social stance. ‘Mainliness’ implies ecumenicity and the Moravians of both Provinces have been active participants in ecumenical agencies from the beginning of the century, including both the National and World Councils of Churches. Synods have thus far rejected the resolutions which occasionally are introduced calling for withdrawal from such bodies.

Denominational fund drives were introduced in the twentieth century as a way to fund much of this activity. They were instrumental in aiding in the establishment of new congregations particularly during the national revival of the 1950’s and are being sought for a similar program in the 1980’s.

At the beginning of the century, American Moravians sent their delegates to Germany to sit as members of an international board administering the “mission fields.” That arrangement collapsed after World War I and after a series of other arrangements, the Americans now find themselves in fraternal relationships with a number of autonomous Provinces which comprise the international Moravian Unity. The Americans now also have the unusual experience of media attention as a result of their long relationship with the Moravian Church of Nicaragua.

At the beginning of the century the clergy were all male. The great majority attended both Moravian College and Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Now the clergy are both male and female (although the women may still encounter difficulty in placement in parish ministry) and the majority of the clergy take their undergraduate degree elsewhere before attending Moravian Theological Seminary.

And the list could go on. The list of concerns of any major denomination in America would look quite similar to the Moravian list and each concern would have individuals and groups within the American Moravian Church concentrating effort upon that issue.

In summary, what have the general church historians missed by devoting most of their attention to the colonial Moravians? Later chapters of the story reveal the Moravians sharing in the heartaches and joys of the great nineteenth century immigration era. The contemporary era finds that the Moravians, like the Methodists, have developed into a distinctive denomination. But they still struggle with the issue of how to appreciate their history and also how to overcome it.