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Interchangeable Bodies: International Marriage and Migration in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church

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This article investigates the extent to which the theology and structure of marriage within the German Moravian Church functioned to connect and grow the Church as an international network across the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century. Specifically, it argues that Moravian conceptions of marriage facilitated intentional international partnerships that led to the relocation and migration of many European women as Moravian missionaries throughout the eighteenth century. In some instances, early Moravians lived in sex-segregated communal housing and viewed sexual intercourse as a sacred unification with Christ, free of human desire. Part of the Moravian impetus to be “everywhere at home” required preventing individual congregational differences in order to create a larger international community. If the Church aimed to view all brothers and sisters as productive bodies to serve the growth of the community, then these bodies needed to be interchangeable and unrooted to a specific space. The premeditated practice of intermarriage between congregations meant that there were not individual groups that practiced the Moravian faith, but rather a singular global church family. Based on an analysis of Moravian missionary women’s memoirs, this article begins to delve into the social and geographic mobility available to these eighteenth-century women through a nonnormative marital structure.

Keywords: Missionary Activity; Marriage; Early Modern Migration; Women in the Atlantic World; Moravian History

I. Introduction

In 1767, Bishop Benjamin Latrobe, leader of the Fulneck congregation in Yorkshire, England, created a list of women he thought suitable for “translocation” from Yorkshire to various Moravian settlements across Germany, North America, and the

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Caribbean.¹ In it, he wrote a short entry describing the temperament and household skills of the Single Sister, or unmarried woman, Esther Wilson. In his opinion, Wilson “may become a useful sister [as she] can spin and sew and is handy.” He noted she was a thirty-one-year-old woman who had a “tender connection with her Saviour, but is a bit [haughty].” Of the nearly twenty women described in Latrobe’s letter, Esther Wilson was one of the few who was selected to leave the Fulneck congregation.² Her memoir, distributed as part of the Moravian community newsletter in 1775, described her travel to eastern Saxony to marry Johann Gottlieb Klose.³ The two served as missionaries to the enslaved Africans of the Caribbean, but Wilson was unable to return to Europe before her death at the age of forty. The memoir, part of which is presented in the first person, was entirely written in German script, a language which Wilson may have only learned in the last five years of her life. The biographical details of her wedding, widower, and dying days come only after a lengthy first-person discussion of her conversion to and struggles with the Moravian faith. Wilson’s international marriage rather late in life, as well as her apparent lack of children, provide entry to discuss the purpose of marriage within the Moravian Church mission system. Her seven-year-long migration from Yorkshire to Germany to the Caribbean was made possible due to the intersecting networks of European imperialism and the Moravian Church but was ultimately bound by the institution of marriage.

The radical and nonconformist structure of Moravian Church communities provides the space to historicize the presumed static nature of eighteenth-century marriage. Marriage in its hegemonic form, including cohabitation in the procreative family, has become so persistent in popular imagination as to obscure potential variants of the institution. Understanding the lives of Moravian women missionaries requires confrontation with a nonnormative marital structure and reflection on the purpose of the marital institution for both the individual and the community during the eighteenth century. Moravian women missionaries entered into marriages to men they did not know and with whom they sometimes did not share a language. These marriages at times continued without cohabitation or regular procreative intercourse in accordance with the Moravian theological concept of *Streiter Ehe*, the belief that the emotional and sexual components of marriage are “circumscribed for the communal/religious purpose” of the Church.⁴ These women undoubtedly experienced what it meant to be a wife and partner differently than their Catholic, Lutheran, or

¹ Benjamin Latrobe to the Directory, Yorkshire, England, 8 May 1766, Die Britischen Gemeinden, R.13.B. No 8.a.1, Unitäts-Archiv der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität, Herrnhut, Germany (hereafter cited as UA): “Having received with thankfulness the agreeable answer of the dear Directory to what we wrote concerns our single sisters’ choir, touching on the translocation of some out of their midst . . . it was accordingly taken into considering in a pfeleger conference of the sister and a testimony briefly given of each.”

² I have located the memoirs of almost half of the other women mentioned. Most, such as Mary Meyers and Mary Rhodes, died as single sisters in Fulneck. Ann Foss married but never left England. See “Meyers, Mary,” 1771, Gemeinnachrichten, GN 1771.B.XII (L3.8) Ex. A, UA; “Rhodes, Mary,” 1775, Lebenslaufe, LL.R.22.138.106, UA; and “Foss, Ann,” 1790, Lebenslaufe, LL.R.22.138.54, UA.

³ “Klosin, Esther,” 1775, Lebenslaufe, LL.R.22.147.14, UA. I will refer to these Moravian women using their maiden names, or birth names, in order to simplify the naming formats throughout this piece.

⁴ A. G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 149–150. Roeber emphasizes that *Streiter Ehe* is a uniquely Zinzendorfian concept. Moravian missionaries were required to be married, with both marital partners contributing to the overall growth of the church community.

Calvinist counterparts.⁵ Theology did not necessarily belie belief or practice, but the internalized purpose of marriage within a faith community had critical bearing on the lived experience of women in a highly religious early modern society.⁶ A close reading of British and German memoirs uncovers a vibrant narrative of women's migration and proselytization alongside their often nameless husbands. This article foregrounds the memoirs with a critical explanation of Moravian marital theology which is followed by a dissection of the intertwined lives of three Moravian women missionaries: Esther Wilson, Anna Rebstockin, and Maria Meyerin. In so doing, it demonstrates the variation of marital relationships in the eighteenth century and the mobility central to Moravian women's experience of marriage.

Marriage within the Moravian Church served as a process of exchange and growth. Recent literature has described the eighteenth-century Moravian Church as a global community with standardized practices which structured the worship and daily lives of its adherents.⁷ Part of the realization of being "everywhere at home" meant the movement and exchange of members across congregations, typically through marriage and missionizing.⁸ If the Church aimed to view all brothers and sisters as productive bodies to serve the growth of the community, then these bodies needed to be interchangeable and unrooted to a specific place. Latrobe's letter, prompted by an order from the Elders of the Moravian Church, is an unusually transparent example of intentional international partnerships. Surely these women could have been married within their local congregation at Fulneck, but the premeditated practice of intermarriage between congregations meant that there were not individual groups that practiced the Moravian faith, but rather a singular global church family. Women like Wilson, Rebstockin, and Meyerin were uprooted from home, language, and nationality to become part of the Moravian migration across oceans and continents. The institution of marriage, regardless of how it was theologically conceived, in practice helped to connect and grow the Moravian Church as an international network across the Atlantic world. Since marriage was a prerequisite for missionary travel, it was a tool for social and geographic mobility as much as it was a sacrament freighted with theological meaning.

This work builds on the burgeoning scholarship of the Moravian Church from the last few decades.⁹ The Moravians' extensive record keeping and expansive mission field

⁵Moravian practices of sex-segregated living and nonsexual marriage were not new. Houses for devout laywomen as well as men existed across the European continent throughout the medieval and early modern periods, particularly in Spain and the Low Countries. Laypeople sometimes entered into spiritual marriages devoid of sexual contact. See John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

⁶Christine Peters, "Gender, Sacrament, and Ritual," *Past & Present* no. 169 (November 2000): 64.

⁷Gisela Mettele, "Constructions of the Religious Self: Moravian Conversion and Transatlantic Communication," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 2 (2007): 7–36; Gisela Mettele, "Identities across Borders: The Moravian Brethren as a Global Community," in *Pietism and Community in Europe and North America*, ed. Jonathan Strom (Leiden: Brill, 2015); and Peter Vogt, "'Everywhere at Home': The Eighteenth-Century Moravian Movement as a Transatlantic Religious Community," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 1 (Fall 2006): 7–29.

⁸Vogt, "Everywhere at Home," 7.

⁹The Moravian Church Archives, Bethlehem, led by Paul Peucker, compiles a list of all publications on the Moravian Church in English. These lists give some sense of the emerging scholarship on the Church and the various topics trending among its scholarship. See Andrew Heil, Paul Peucker, and Lanie Graf, "Overview of Publications on the Moravian Church in English, 2000–2010," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 9 (Fall 2010): 89–121; and Thomas J. McCullough, "Overview of Publications on the Moravian Church in English, 2011–2015," *Journal of Moravian History* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 139–168.

make it an engaging topic of study for scholars of Atlantic and global history. Recent studies, such as those by Aaron Fogleman and Paul Peucker, shed light on the period of radical mysticism during the 1740s known as “The Sifting Time.”¹⁰ These studies have led to an increased attention to gender and sexuality within the Moravian Church, with such contemplation often pointed toward Zinzendorf’s theology and men’s sexuality. At the same time, Katherine Faull has spent the last decades expanding our understanding of memoir creation and the daily life of adherents within the choir structures in colonial Bethlehem. Her work on women’s memoirs and the database Moravian Lives has been invaluable to this project.¹¹ Several scholars, such as Jon Sensbach, Elisabeth Sommer, Katherine Carté Engel, and Katharine Gerbner, have interrogated the Moravians’ connections to the larger Atlantic world, including international trade, the Atlantic slave network, and the American Revolution.¹² Working from these valuable contributions, this paper aims to shed light on the experience of European women within the Church, a group largely forgotten because of the archival purges of the early nineteenth century.¹³ The archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Herrnhut, Saxony are a treasure trove of material on the eighteenth century. The Moravians left their fingerprints on many parts of Atlantic and world history, yet the individual experiences of women are often forgotten.

II. Who Are the Moravians?

The Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine,¹⁴ known more commonly in the English-speaking world as the Moravians or simply the Brethren, are a German-based religious group that operated as part of the larger Pietist movement in eighteenth-century Europe and the Americas.¹⁵ Originally from Bohemia and Moravia in central Europe, they claim descent from the followers of Jan Hus. The Moravians were nearly eliminated

¹⁰Paul Peucker, *A Time of Sifting: Mystical Marriage and the Crisis of Moravian Piety in the Eighteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); and Aaron Fogleman, *Jesus is Female: Moravians and Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹¹Katherine Faull has translated a post-Zinzendorf publication that established norms throughout the Moravian congregations as well as several Moravian women’s memoirs. She also established a digital humanities project through Bucknell University for the transcription of eighteenth-century Moravian memoirs: www.moravianlives.org. See Katherine Faull, *Speaking to Body and Soul: Instructions for the Moravian Choir Helpers, 1785–1786* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); and Katherine Faull, *Moravian Women’s Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750–1820* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

¹²See Jon Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Elisabeth Sommer, *Serving Two Masters: Moravian Brethren in Germany and North Carolina, 1727–1801* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000); Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

¹³Paul Peucker, “Selection and Destruction in Moravian Archives Between 1760 and 1810,” *Journal of Moravian History* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 170–215.

¹⁴I will refer to this group as the “Moravian Church,” the most commonly used designator in English-language scholarship. Various other names include the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, the Unity of the Brethren, and the renewed Unitas Fratrum.

¹⁵The term Pietism encompasses a large number of religious groups which emerged in the eighteenth century in the Germanic principalities and the Netherlands, emphasizing individual piety and intentional Christian living. See Doug Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, but a few members fled to Saxony during the 1720s and established themselves as tenants on the lands of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Both Zinzendorf and his grandmother were active in Pietist circles. Zinzendorf studied under some of the premier theologians at the Universities of Halle and Wittenberg. Although the Moravian Church developed against the backdrop of Pietism and must be understood within that larger context, Craig Atwood and others argue that the Moravians were not Pietist. In fact, Moravian theology surrounding music, mysticism, and sexuality caused Zinzendorf to break from the Lutheran Pietist movement.¹⁶ With Zinzendorf's shelter and soon leadership, the Moravian Church was renewed as a denomination in 1726 and quickly expanded to establish towns and missions throughout most of the Atlantic world. In many ways, Moravians were largely ecumenical: they did not profess a distinctive creed, but rather acknowledged the validity of both Luther's Small Catechism and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Particularly by the end of the eighteenth century, the Moravian Church became just another small denomination in the larger plurality of Protestant expansion.¹⁷ However, during their initial period of rapid growth in the early and mid-eighteenth century, they did differ from other denominations in several important ways.

As they moved through the eighteenth-century world, the Moravians took with them their peculiar communal organization divided by gender, age, and marital status. While they often traveled in small missionary bands, the Moravians established several settled, closed congregations known as *Ortsgemeine* in Germany, England, and the North American British colonies, most notably in Bethlehem, Herrnhut, and Herrnhag in Hesse, near Frankfurt. These congregations represented the ideal Moravian communities the Church wished to replicate throughout their mission holdings. Nearly every eighteenth-century missionary spent time in either Herrnhag, Herrnhut, or Bethlehem, preparing and training for the mission field. In these closed communities, men and women lived separately from each other as single brothers or sisters of the congregation in separate religious communities called "choirs." In the congregations at Bethlehem and Bethabara, North Carolina, even the married couples lived separately in Married Sisters and Married Brothers Houses. These choirs served as the basis for Moravian religious life; congregants worshiped and lived within their separate group, mixing with the rest of the community only in carefully controlled situations. Men and women sat divided by sex during worship services, and the church leaders aimed to limit contact between them outside of worship. In her analysis of the Moravian congregation in Bristol, England, Madge Dresser noted that according to the ruling of the Elders Conference in 1774, "it was a 'Bad and offensive affair' for young people to be seen walking out in each other's company."¹⁸ Historian Paul Peucker has discovered in some documents and blueprints of Moravian communities that, at least in the communities at Bethlehem and Herrnhut, Zinzendorf's marital theology required sexual relations to take place within a designated room in the meeting house.¹⁹

¹⁶Craig Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁷Craig Atwood outlines this shift toward ecumenicalism, arguing that the turning away from Zinzendorf's controversial theology following his death led to stagnation and the ultimate decline of the church. Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 19.

¹⁸Madge Dresser, "Sisters and Brethren: Power, Propriety, and Gender among the Bristol Moravians, 1746–1833," *Social History* 21, no. 3 (October 1996): 319.

¹⁹Paul Peucker, "In the Blue Cabinet: Moravians, Marriage, and Sex," in "Moravians and Sexuality," special issue, *Journal of Moravian History* no. 10 (Spring 2011): 6–37.

In the Ortsgemeine, and particularly in Bethlehem, the Moravians established schools for both boys and girls, which served in part as care facilities for missionary children. Moravian missionaries often moved between several posts; in order to simplify their travel, they delivered their children into the care of the closed congregations.²⁰ Even in the decades following the collapse of the communal system in Bethlehem and other Moravian congregations, married couples still often left their children at a young age in the care of Moravian children's houses and boarding schools. This is evident in numerous travel narratives and memoirs of Moravian missionaries. Sister Mary Oliver's spiritual memoir, or *Lebenslauf*, written partially by her husband, records one instance of installing a child at a communal home, in this case in one of the Moravian congregations in England. Brother Oliver wrote, "In 1764, our Saviour gave us a little son. [Sister Oliver] joined with me in heart and mind to give him up to our Saviour. In 1768, we went with our little Abraham to the Children's Oeconomy in Fulneck."²¹ Brother and Sister Oliver continued on from Fulneck as missionaries to the Moravian congregation in South Wales, where Mary ultimately died in 1775. During the course of their missions, the pair had three children, all of whom were sent to live in Fulneck. For Mary Oliver, and others like her, her call to her mission posts and her duty to the Moravian Church were paramount. Placing children at Fulneck, Herrnhut, or Bethlehem was an expectation for those who served as missionaries and did not represent abandonment or a lack of maternal care. Indeed, many women from the upper class and nobility at this time would also have sent children away or relegated their care to others. Consolidating the care and raising of children fits within the pattern of the Church's drive for communalism and economizing labor. Very few women missionaries mention their children at length in their memoirs and typically only when referencing visiting them at an Ortsgemeine or reuniting with them after leaving the field.

Crucial for this study, the Church authorities also played a large role in arranging marriages, particularly for missionaries. Arranged marriages were far from unusual for this time period, particularly for the upper and noble classes, but those marriages were typically contracted between families or with the help of a third-party matchmaker.²² The salient difference in this instance is the way Moravian marriages were arranged by an institution, often across boundaries of language and nationality. The

²⁰Early colonial Bethlehem was home to an Infant's House as well as Little Girls' and Little Boys' Choirs. These houses were run by the Church and typically employed other married couples to serve as surrogate mothers and fathers to the children housed there. Anna Rebstockin's memoir notes that she served in the Children's Choir when she arrived at Bethlehem in 1749. "Mackin, Anna," 1774, *Gemeinnachrichten Beilagen*, B1774. X. III. LL. 2, Moravian Church Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as MAB): "Den 12th May 1749 langte ich glücklich in New York an, und bald darauf in Bethlehem, wo ich wieder zu Kindern kam." Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

²¹"Oliver, Mary," 1776, *Gemeinnachrichten*, GN 1776 B.6 (I.3) S.7.Ex. B, UA. Oeconomy was a term the Moravians used for community, the implication being that it was a communal family which involved both fellowship as well as productivity/sustenance in communal economic activity.

²²The literature on arranged marriage and marriage contracts is vast. Since so much historiography of the early modern period focuses on elite families, contractual and diplomatic marriages are particularly well-studied. See Alexander Cowan, *Marriage, Manners, and Mobility in Early Modern Venice*, *Historical Urban Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). On "love marriages," see Allan Tulchin, "Low Dowries, Absent Parents: Marrying for Love in an Early Modern French Town," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 713–738. See also Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses*; and Philip Reynolds and John Witte Jr., eds., *To Have and to Hold: Marrying and its Documentation in Western Christendom, 400–1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

church used various structures to legitimize these arranged marriages. One of the most unusual elements of the early Moravian Church was a process known as “the Lot.”²³ Only things that passed the Lot could go forward, whether that was a marriage proposal or building project, and to marry without approval by the Lot would require leaving the church altogether. Both men and women could submit their desire to marry to the congregational leaders.²⁴ A man could even suggest a woman he would prefer to marry. Ultimately, the congregational leaders would put the question of a couple’s betrothal “to the Lot.” They prayed about whether the couple should be married and then drew a slip of paper reading either “yes,” “no,” or blank. A blank slip indicated that the answer was not necessarily no, but not at this time. Anti-Moravian pamphleteers spread rumors that Moravians told adherents who they must marry, yet the now-published “Instructions for Choir Helpers” outline that women were always free to reject a proposal of marriage.²⁵ Arranging marriages according to a public Lot drawing allowed the community to demonstrate their reliance on God and his apparent direction for the community.

This version of Moravian communal structure occurred in its most complete form in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania during the first half of the eighteenth century. Most other communities involved some derivative of this model, with single brothers and sisters always living in sex-segregated housing. In the early boom of Moravian expansion, the Church held most closely to this format, which can be observed in the large housing structures in their settlements throughout Europe and the Americas. The Moravian Church ceased to operate in the true choir system in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when they moved to become less controversial and eliminated the more radical and mystical elements of their theology.

III. Marital Theology

The Moravian Church thrived from approximately 1730 until the death of Zinzendorf in 1760. In this brief period of time, the church expanded rapidly yet existed as a fairly closed and insular society. As noted above, the experience of being a Moravian was all-consuming—the church served as family, home, and occupation for its adherents, particularly the missionaries. Therefore, it is critical to understand the foundation of Zinzendorf’s marital theology in order to grasp how and why these women moved across Europe and the Atlantic.

In the 1740s, the Church toyed with more mystical elements of Christian theology, which revolved heavily around bodily experiences of sexuality. In his 1742 manuscript known as “The Seventeen Points of Matrimony,” Zinzendorf wrote the following: “Whosoever during that holy solemnity [the sexual act within marriage] would think of any Lusts or such like feelings, with such it would be the same thing, as if one

²³Derrick R. Miller, “Moravian Familiarities: Queer Community in the Moravian Church in Europe and North America in the mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Moravian History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 73.

²⁴Bedford Choir Helpers, “The Moravian Labourers Conference at Bedford,” 30 September 1746, in *The Bedford Moravian Church in the Eighteenth Century: A Selection of Documents*, ed. Edwin Welch, vol. 68 (Bedford: Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service, 1989). The notes from the Choir Helpers meetings from the years 1745 to 1748 include decisions regarding petitions to marry or partake in communion. For example, on page 82: “Martha Clagget says she wishes to be thought of by the Brethren for marriage, and thinks she shall not get better at Mother Okely’s. We were not pleas’d at her forward behavior while the Brethren and Sisters were here. She could like to go to Germany.”

²⁵Katherine Faull and Jeannette Norfleet, “The Married Choir Instructions (1785),” in “Moravians and Sexuality,” special issue, *Journal of Moravian History* no. 10 (Spring 2011): 69–110.

would go to the Sacrament with the intention of getting drunk or tasting a good sort of wine.”²⁶ This treatise was neither published nor intended to be distributed beyond the members of the Moravian Church, but handwritten copies have survived in both English and German. In the same year, Zinzendorf published *The Manual of Doctrine*, a question-and-answer format catechism, as an outreach mechanism to eradicate rumors of unseemly sexual practices within the Moravian Church.²⁷ In response to the question, “Are fleshly Lusts inseparable from Marriage?” Zinzendorf responded that “everyone knows how to possess his Vessel in Sanctification.”²⁸ The outward-facing document does not reveal the intense focus on sexuality present in Zinzendorf’s other writings, but rather deflects to a vague notion of respectability. These two different answers delineate how Moravian marital theology was held tightly within the Church. The true expectations of Moravian sexuality were often not fully known to the adherents until their wedding night. In an anti-Moravian tract from 1751, an ex-Moravian wrote that the Church was “so full of secrets regarding marriage, that the honest Brothers and Sisters did not know the truth of it until they were already led into the barn like dumb sheep for the slaughter.”²⁹ Although this might overstate the lack of knowledge adherents had regarding marriage, it is fair to note that certainly elements of the marital theology were kept from adherents until after they said their wedding vows.³⁰

The air of sexual licentiousness stemmed perhaps from the openness with which Moravians spoke of mystical theology within the congregation. Particularly during the 1740s, Moravians described their relationship with Christ in lurid terms. Concerning her relationship with Christ, Rosina Römer of the Fulneck congregation wrote in 1800, “My chief concern is to have my dear Saviour near to my heart in his bleeding and dying form . . . My greatest distress is not to feel always my heart panting and longing for him, and my eyes run oftentimes over for desire to have a heart melting for love to him.”³¹ She, and others, used the language of sexual longing to describe their relationship with Christ. Even those who never married, like Römer, were taught to

²⁶Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, “Untitled Copy of the Seventeen Points,” 1742, Chor der Eheleute, R.4. C.1.No9, UA: “Wer aber in puncto dieser allein um Gottes willen anzustellenden Solemnität an Lust und Empfindung denken wollte, der kann sich ohngefähr so vorstellen, als wenn ers bei der Handlung des H. Abendmahls aufs Saufen oder ans Kosten des Weins anstellen wollte.”

²⁷Heinrich Joachim Bothe, *Zuverlässige Beschreibung des nunmehr ganz entdeckten Herrnhutischen Ehe Geheimnisse* [. . .] (Berlin, 1751). Bothe, an ex-Moravian, published an anti-Moravian pamphlet that alleged that the Church Elders controlled marriages as well as observed and controlled sex within the marriage.

²⁸Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *A Manual of doctrine: or, a second essay to bring into the form of question and answer as well the fundamental doctrines, as the other* [. . .] (London, 1742), 188.

²⁹Bothe, *Zuverlässige Beschreibung des nunmehr ganz* [. . .], 4: “Ich fühlte so gleich in meinen Herzen, daß ich Dich und Deine Ehe-Schäzel einer nöthigen Arbeit überheben könnte. Ich weiß, ihr send so voller Geheimnisse, besonders aber wegen der Ehe, und Du hast mit Deinen Ehe-Schäzeln nicht so viel Zeit übrig, sie einem jeden insbesondere zu offenbaren, so, daß es den redlichen Bruder und Schwestern nicht eher erfahren, bis sie mitten drinne sind, da sie denn wie das dumme Bieh in den Stall hinein geführte werden.” Another ex-Moravian named Jean-Francois Reynier also published several open letters accusing the Church of making him share his wife in order to be baptized. See Aaron Fogleman, *Two Troubled Souls: An Eighteenth-Century Couple’s Spiritual Journey in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

³⁰Faull, *Speaking to Body and Soul*, 130–131.

³¹Rosina Römer was born in Augsburg in 1726, joined the Moravian congregation in Herrnhag in 1741, and became a deaconess in the Fulneck congregation in 1756. She remained single her entire life. “Roemer, Rosina,” 1800, *Lebenslaufe*, LL. R.22.138.110, UA.

express their desire for Christ in this manner. Römer's memoir contains this language in 1800, long after the period of radical mysticism known as "The Sifting Time," yet it refers to time she spent in Herrnhag in the 1740s, the heart of the mystical experiment. Some Moravian scholars argue that these descriptions fell out of favor after the death of Zinzendorf, but these memoirs show their continued use. Atwood argues that the use of particular liturgies in the post-Zinzendorffian era reveals that not all of this verbiage was an aberration of "The Sifting Time" but rather an enduring part of Moravian theology. Römer's words, and their uncensored inclusion in her 1800 memoir, point in the same direction.³²

Zinzendorf penned "The Seventeen Points of Matrimony" as well as *The Manual of Doctrine* during "The Sifting Time." These two writings provide the clearest understanding of both the religious and social functions of marriage within Moravian communities. For eighteenth-century Moravians the sexual act in marriage constituted the sacrament. This sacrament was to be performed without lust or sexual desire, something that in practice caused young couples much anxiety.³³ The sexual union of a man and a woman, allowed only in the marriage bed, was an act equivalent to partaking in the Lord's Supper, and thus might be best termed the "sexual sacrament." In the later "Instructions for the Married Choir Helpers," the church elders dictate that if a couple had participated in Holy Communion that day, they had already partaken of the body and blood of Christ and did not need the intimate communion with him that the marital union offered.³⁴ This indicates that they placed these sacraments on equal footing in that they both provided a personal union with Christ, whom Moravians often referenced as their "Bleeding Bridegroom."

Moravian theology conceived of the sexual sacrament as a personal union of the believer with Christ in which the spouse, in that moment, was a physical representation of Christ. In Zinzendorf's depiction, both husband and wife could experience Christ through their spouse, meaning that men and women were equally seen as the believer and representation of Christ. On an individual level, their place in the Church was not thought to truly begin until they experienced this sacrament. Zinzendorf writes, "The Disciples of Jesus Christ must begin their Marriage from the first moment . . . whereby the Church begins to be a Church, viz.: by the forgiveness of sins, bestow'd upon them by the Holy Ghost in the blood of Jesus, which is followed afterward by the holy Anointing."³⁵ In this sense, the adherent was not conceived of as a full member of the Church unless they had partaken in the sacramental sexual union with Christ. Furthermore, the married couple constituted a little church within the Church that would not be formed until the consummation. Marriage legitimized the sexual union and represented the metaphorical marriage of Christ and the Church, but the ultimate theological purpose of the marital union was to participate in the sexual sacrament, not necessarily tied to any procreative imperative.

³²Craig Atwood, "Understanding Zinzendorf's Blood and Wounds Theology," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 1 (Fall 2006): 31–47.

³³"Letters, 1739–1743," Chor der Eheleute, R.4.C.II.9.5, UA. In the approximately forty letters, newlyweds described their practice of the sexual sacrament to Bishop Nitschmann. Zinzendorf stated in 1756 that the letters "give a complete illumination into marital grace and way of thinking."

³⁴Faull and Norfleet, "The Married Choir Instructions (1785)," 77.

³⁵Zinzendorf, "Untitled Copy of the Seventeen Points": "Jesu Jünger müssen ihre Ehe gleich, oder mitten drinnen, da anfangen, wo die Gemeinde angefangen wird, bei der Vergebung der Sünden, die ihnen der heil. Geist im Bluet Jesu zeigt, und sie darnach salbet." There are references to anointing oil and balms, a combination of spiritual and physical climax culminating in male ejaculation.

Given the denial of lust and Zinzendorf's relation of sex to communion, the sexual sacrament thus conceived was hardly considered as a sexual act between two people. Instead, a more fitting term for the participant in the Moravian sexual sacrament is "spouse/Christ" to decipher this particular moment in time in which the spouse is both human and the physical manifestation of the Savior. Far more than a Catholic blessing of Holy Matrimony, sexual union with the spouse/Christ operated on a principle similar to transubstantiation. Just as in the Catholic sacrament of Holy Communion the bread and wine become, for a moment, the literal body and blood of Christ, so does the spouse during the moment of union become the Savior.³⁶

The idea that sex was a sacramental and transubstantiated act with the marital partner reinforced Zinzendorf's imperative that everyone, if possible, should marry in order to fully understand the mysteries of the sexual sacrament and take part in the fullness of Moravian spiritual life.³⁷ In an address to the Single Sisters of Herrnhut in 1747, Zinzendorf stated that "the actual profession of a Single Sister when she is in the Congregation is to enter into marriage."³⁸ In a slightly more extreme fashion, the ex-Moravian pamphleteer Jean-Francois Reynier claimed that when he joined the congregation at Marienborn in 1739, he was told that unmarried congregants were only "half people."³⁹ It is unclear to what extent either of these professions were true or particularly enforced. Most Moravian women in the early eighteenth century converted in their mid-twenties after leaving their parents' houses. Most married women's memoirs indicate they were married around their mid-thirties. Some were older and never married, remaining Single Sisters for their entire lives. However, it is clear that the model of Moravian expansion depended on both conversion and marriage. The rapid growth of the early Moravian Church relied upon the availability of mobile bodies, most clearly the image of the married missionary couple. Zinzendorf's marital theology worked in tandem with his vision for church expansion. Marital theology thus clearly forms one part of the impulse to marry, but it does not explain why so many of those marriages took place across cultures and continents. The memoirs left behind by Moravian women can begin to shed light on that process.

IV. Navigating the Moravian Memoir

Before we can begin to understand the Moravian Church through its extant documents, it is worth examining the creation of the archive itself. The Moravian Church produced thousands of pages of writings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, all heavily controlled by church leaders. The Church established an official archive in the late eighteenth century. By 1801, it was subjected to purges and restructuring by church-appointed archivists. The purges removed nearly all references to women's

³⁶Benjamin Latrobe wrote in a letter to Zinzendorf after the night of his wedding that he wished "that His corpus shall continue to be near us as it was yesterday when our bodies were joined together and made us both more and more like Him." Benjamin Latrobe to Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, Yorkshire, England, 30 July 1756, Chor der Eheleute, R.4.C.1.No15, UA.

³⁷Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Masculinity of Martin Luther," in *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 83 (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2008).

³⁸Beverly Smaby, "Gender Prescriptions in Eighteenth-Century Bethlehem," in *Backcountry Crucibles: The Lehigh Valley from Settlement to Steel*, ed. Jean R. Soderlund and Catherine S. Parzynski (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 2007), 94.

³⁹Scott Paul Gordon, *The Letters of Mary Penry: A Single Moravian Woman in Early America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 5.

leadership in the early church as well as many references to the period of radical mysticism in the 1740s.⁴⁰ The remaining documents create a specific image of the early Moravian Church. Even the documents written by laypeople largely follow a narrative script regarding spiritual conversion and transformation, omitting most personal affect. Any discussion of the Brethren and its adherents during this period must proceed based on an understanding that the archive is heavily curated and does not necessarily reveal the whole truth of this period.

Despite its constructed manner, the Moravian archives have much to offer to historians of religion and gender. As part of their spiritual development within the Church, every member wrote a memoir which was published upon their death, including the women.⁴¹ The archives hold hundreds of memoirs written by women of various ages, nationalities, economic statuses, and geographical locations. While the majority are written in German, others are in English or Dutch. Yet very few of these memoirs have been studied in depth, particularly within the European context.⁴² Prior to the rebranding of the *Journal of Moravian History* in 2006, Moravian historiography concentrated largely on the male theologians and leaders of the movement. While recent developments in the literature include social and cultural histories of average adherents, the experience of women within the Church is largely uncovered. Women's memoirs in particular have been both metaphorically and physically set apart—while men's memoirs were often included in the primary Church newsletter, the bulk of women's narratives were placed in addendums, packaged away in loose-leaf files.⁴³

This project uses Moravian women's memoirs as its basis. I approach these documents carefully, knowing that they are simultaneously the product of a person's lived experience as well as a specific construction of church doctrine. The similarities among these documents—birth into a religious household, fall from childhood innocence, and salvation through Moravian community—belie a carefully honed script developed under a patriarchal theology. This narrative follows Lutheran Pietist leader Hermann August Francke's descriptions of *Bußkampf*, or repentant struggle. The generally accepted stages of *Bußkampf* are "1) awareness of sins, 2) anxiety over one's sins, 3) doubts, 4) desire for salvation, 5) struggling in prayer, and 6) sudden enlightenment and certainty concentrated in a violent conversion struggle."⁴⁴ While Moravian *Bußkampf* as presented in the memoirs do not seem to have these same themes of violence, the repetition of this series of unnamed steps across decades and continents makes clear that there was a generally expected and perhaps socialized way of expressing conversion and growth. Yet occasional departures from this format reveal the humanity of the woman who wrote it. In the barest of senses, the biographical information contained in these memoirs can help create a network of early modern women. In examining Moravian women's memoirs, this project begins to tell a story of cultural exchange and migration through the avenue of marriage. Yet while names and locations alone can provide structure for network analysis, it is the brief glimpses of these

⁴⁰Peucker, "Selection and Destruction," 170–215.

⁴¹Katherine Faull, "Girl Talk: The Role of the 'Speakings' in the Pastoral Care of the Older Girls' Choir," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 6 (Spring 2009): 77–99.

⁴²The exception is the abovementioned work by Katherine Faull and Scott Paul Gordon.

⁴³In a few cases, the files I requested were still wrapped and packaged from archival restructuring in the 1800s.

⁴⁴Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 31.

women's humanity only available through memoir that encapsulates the lived experience of the early modern Moravian Sister.

V. Three Missionary Lives

It is difficult to discern exactly how many Moravian women migrated across Europe and the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. The memoirs are scattered throughout the archive according to the year in which they were posthumously published and, although the Moravians were admirable record keepers, the total numbers were constantly shifting in accordance with births, conversions, death, and desertions. Some scholars estimate that in total, the Church comprised about 30,000 members from its beginnings to around the mid-nineteenth century. This certainly does not make it representative of the early modern women's experience, as the Moravians were on the leading edge of Protestant missionary activity. Yet highlighting the lives of women who participated in these channels of migration can move the story of European women's experience beyond assumed knowledge of familial migration or indentured servitude. The following stories of three Moravian women missionaries in the eighteenth century provide an example for this group's patterns of widespread movement throughout Europe and the Atlantic world.

In the archive, the memoirs of Esther Wilson, Anne Rebstockin, and Maria Meyerin lie relatively close to one another, separated only by a file folder or two representing an intervening year's newsletter. Their proximity in record corresponds to their proximity in death: although they were born in different years and in different parts of Europe, all three women died in the early 1770s in the Caribbean. The records of their lives, their spiritual memoirs, were distributed in consecutive years in the addendums to the Moravian newsletter, *Gemeinnachrichten*.

Esther Wilson was born in Yorkshire in April 1735 and raised in the Church of England. Her entire family joined the Moravian Church in 1739 when the Brethren came to Leeds. Like many Moravian spiritual memoirs, Wilson identified an early discontent with her religious upbringing, even as a child of four. She wrote that whenever she was naughty, her mother would "take [her] alone and tell [her] that [she] was grieving God and that God could not love [her] as [she was] and [she] could not love Him."⁴⁵ In contrast, the visiting Moravian Brethren preached a God that was close by and kind, leading her to officially join the community at Fulneck in 1749.⁴⁶ In 1751 she came to live in the Single Sisters' House at Fulneck at the age of sixteen and in 1755 was granted access to Holy Communion. She lived in the Single Sisters' House in Fulneck for another eleven years before Benjamin Latrobe included her in his list of women proposed for mission service. His reference was evidently positively received, as Wilson traveled from Yorkshire to Herrnhut in 1767. Her memoir recalls that she had two near-death experiences, one of them being a severe storm while at sea en route from London to Hamburg. As a testimony to her faith in this prescriptive document, her husband describes her leading prayer in the cabin of the ship, calming

⁴⁵"Klosin, Esther": "Wann ich war unrechts tat, nahm sie mich allein und sagte mir, daß ich den I Gott betrübte, ich sollte nicht so tun, fasten würde Gott mich nicht lieben können, und ich könnte Ihn nicht lieben."

⁴⁶The Moravian Church had a long process for accepting members into their full community. Most converts attended Moravian services for some span of time (often close to ten years) before coming to live in one of the Ortsgemeine. Later steps toward full participation included joining a choir house and participating in communion.

even the captain who was sure they would all be taken by the devil. She survived this trip and arrived in Herrnhut to begin working in the Children's House as she had done in Fulneck. In 1770, she married Johann Gottlieb Klose, originally from Silesia in present-day Poland.⁴⁷ The two immediately traveled to their mission post in Carmel, Jamaica, arriving in 1771. Klose describes a second near-death experience in which Wilson persevered through a fifty-two-hour labor in what appears to be her first and only pregnancy. Her child was stillborn and Wilson suffered from chronic illness and decline from that time until her death in 1775. Yet in her four years in the Jamaica colony, Wilson worked closely with enslaved populations, converting several women and bringing them to the Moravian mission settlement.⁴⁸

While Wilson spent the majority of her life in British Moravian congregations, Rebstockin and Meyerin came from different areas of the German principalities. Rebstockin's memoir is both longer and contains more of her personal voice, in part perhaps due to her longer lifespan. Anna Rebstockin was born in Gelnhausen near Frankfurt in October 1720. She was raised Lutheran and, unlike Wilson, she did not convert with her family. Rather, Rebstockin describes a tumultuous upbringing struggling between faith and family. As a teenager, she became engaged to a young man, yet felt that this "worldly" relationship was tearing her away from Christ. She wrote that she "became so unhappy that [she] could neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep."⁴⁹ Rebstockin ultimately broke off this engagement and described that process as her first step in her personal relationship with Christ. Gelnhausen was quite close to the Moravian Ortsgemeine at Marienborn and Herrnhag, and in 1741, Rebstockin became acquainted with the Brethren. She recalls a vivid incident in 1742 in which she "went to Marienborn, but [her] father soon came to drag [her] home."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Rebstockin was determined to return to Marienborn as she "had a promise from the Savior that [she] belonged with the Brethren."⁵¹ Unrelenting in her desire to join the congregation in Herrnhag, in 1743 she joined the Moravian congregants at the Ronneburg.⁵² It took a further four years for her to graduate into full membership and participate in Holy Communion with the congregation in 1747.⁵³ Afterward, she was permitted to live in the Single Sisters' House.

⁴⁷Klose wrote the majority of Wilson's memoir. He returned to Europe shortly after Wilson's death and spent the remainder of his life in Gnadenfrei, a Moravian settlement in Silesia. He died in 1797. "Klose, Johann Gottlieb," 1797, *Gemeinnachrichten*, GN.1798.TL4.IV.II.1 507–522, UA.

⁴⁸Compassionate Moravian theology did not prevent them from holding slaves, even as they endeavored to convert the enslaved population. Numerous Black and indigenous women are listed among the baptismal records in both the Caribbean and Bethlehem, and some went so far as to leave their own spiritual memoirs. See Gerbner, *Christian Slavery*; and Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival*.

⁴⁹"Mackin, Anna": "Als ich in meinen 13t Jahr einen Knaben versprochen hatte, ihn, wenn wir erwachsen sein zu heiraten wurde ich darüber so unruhig, dass ich weder essen, noch trinken, noch schlafen konnte."

⁵⁰"Mackin, Anna": "1742 zog ich nach im April nach Marienborn, allein mein Vater Holte mich bald wieder ab."

⁵¹"Mackin, Anna": "Ich kriegte jedoch die Versicherung vom Heiland, daß ich zur Gemeinde gehöre."

⁵²The Ronneburg is a thirteenth-century castle near Hessen that was owned by the Counts of Ysenburg-Büdingen. Zinzendorf was granted access to it in 1736 and it was used to house adherents both before and after the construction of nearby Herrnhag. Rebstockin stayed at the Ronneburg for a year before entering the congregation at Herrnhag.

⁵³"Mackin, Anna": "1743 in May zog ich auf die Ronneburg, diente daselbst in der Wirtschaft, und wurde folgenden Jahres in die Gemeinde aufgenommen, ich kam darauf nach Marienborn. 1747 den 1st

In 1748, Rebstockin received the call to go to Pennsylvania along with eleven other single sisters. On May 12, 1749, their group docked on Staten Island in New York and soon after arrived in Bethlehem. At this time, her first-person narrative ends and the rest of her memoir is presumably written by her husband. Rebstockin worked as a helper in the Children's House until her marriage to Johann Martin Mack in 1753. She was the second of Mack's four wives; he and his first wife, Joanna, had been charged with establishing missionary outreaches to the Delaware Indians, work which Rebstockin continued with him. Mack was a prominent Moravian bishop who arrived in Pennsylvania during the initial Moravian explorations in the 1730s. His four marriages reflect in part the Church's commitment to supplying male missionaries with a "helpmate" in their work, particularly since missionary wives were often charged with nursing and ministering to female populations.⁵⁴ From 1753 until her death in 1772, Rebstockin and her husband traveled widely between missionary posts near Lancaster, Pennsylvania and down to the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix in the Caribbean. They had some unknown number of children who were raised in the Children's House at Bethlehem, but her narrative does not dwell on her pregnancies or children. She died in 1772 at the age of 52, surrounded by her husband and cared for by enslaved converts.

Finally, the memoir of Maria Meyerin is not found among the addendum pages of other recently deceased members. Her memoir was sent as part of a report from the mission field from Antigua, penned by her husband.⁵⁵ Consisting of only four short pages, it reveals yet another path taken by Moravian women during the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ Meyerin was born in the small village of Dornheim in present-day Hesse to a Lutheran family in 1723. Very little information is given about her childhood in contrast to the other memoirs. When Brother Conrad Lange, a prominent Moravian missionary, came to the area around 1749, Meyerin endeavored to join the Moravians at Herrnhag in order to become part of the community. Crucially, at this time Herrnhag dissolved both due to backlash from the radical theology of "The Sifting Time" as well as an enforced exile by the Barons of Ysenburg-Büdingen. Brother Lange and his companions were on their way to the congregation in Bethlehem. Most unusually, Meyerin joined their group and traveled to Holland on their way to New York, not yet an official member of the Church. In 1751, she arrived in Bethlehem and moved into the Single Sisters' House. By 1753 she was formally inducted into the congregation and made her first communion with the Brethren in 1754. Shortly thereafter, she married Peter Braun from Kreuznach in present-day Rhineland-Palatinate.⁵⁷ Their marriage resulted in three sons, one of whom died in infancy. The other two sons were living at the boys' boarding school at Nazareth Hall in Pennsylvania at the time of Meyerin's death. Meyerin and Braun spent fifteen years caring for Moravian children in many settlements throughout Pennsylvania before receiving their mission assignment to Antigua in 1769. For the first year, Meyerin

Januar gelangte ich zum erstmaligen Genuss des heiligen Abendmahls mit der Gemeinde und bald nachher kam ich ins Mädgenhaus."

⁵⁴Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses*.

⁵⁵The Antigua mission was very small and ultimately unsuccessful. At the time of Maria Meyerin's travels, the mission consisted of only one other married couple.

⁵⁶Peter Braun, "III Extract aus dem Diario der Neger-Gemein in St. John auf Antigua von 28ten Juli 1771 bis Ende Febr 1772," 1772, No VII Beilagen zur 27ten Woche, MAB.

⁵⁷Braun was the leader of the unsuccessful Antigua mission. He returned to Pennsylvania and died in Bethlehem in 1800. "Braun, Peter," 1801, *Gemeinnachrichten*, GN.1801.TL.4.II.2.70-87, UA.

worked in the one-room mission, preaching to enslaved women and forming relationships with nearby plantation owners in order to allow missionaries room and board. However, after one year she grew sick. After a long illness, Meyerin died in 1772. Braun includes a long description of her funeral, itself a remarkable (and controversial) procession in which her body was carried by five enslaved Moravian congregants. She was buried in the same grave as Sister Molly Waters (died 1760), the wife of Samuel Isles, the Moravian missionary who first attempted a congregation in Antigua.

The records left behind by Wilson, Rebstockin, and Meyerin are representative of many Moravian memoirs from the eighteenth century. They usually range from three to seven handwritten pages in length, although some more unusual women might exceed twelve or more.⁵⁸ In each of these three, their husbands wrote considerable portions of the narrative and in the case of Maria Meyerin, nearly all of it. For missionary wives, this was not unusual, as the mission posts in the Caribbean were so small that typically their husbands were the ones sending reports from the missions, including deaths, back to the church leaders at Bethlehem and Herrnhut.⁵⁹ Importantly, each of the memoirs ends with an extended description of the woman's illness and death. This is similar across both men and women's memoirs. The death narrative often encompasses nearly half of the length of the total document, showing the relative importance of suffering well and emphasizing the eventual rest found in the arms of the Savior.

However, it is not only their physical memoirs that are similar. Rebstockin, Wilson, and Meyerin led very similar lives, despite their widespread origins. They all converted to the Church, as was extremely common during the Zinzendorffian period of church expansion. Each volunteered or was called to travel far from home in order to live in an established Ortsgemeine, either Bethlehem or Herrnhut.⁶⁰ All three women were employed in the Children's House at their respective congregations, charged with taking care of the children of other missionaries. It was not until after spending years with the Moravians and entering into Holy Communion that any of these women married, each in their early to mid-thirties.⁶¹ And while Meyerin and Rebstockin both had children, those children were raised in Bethlehem, left behind once the mission call came. Finally, they are all united by their deaths in the Caribbean, chronic illness taking each of them in short succession.

⁵⁸Memoirs left by the original Bohemian refugees who found shelter at Herrnhut were typically longer, often with long narratives of their flight from Catholic persecutors. Other lengthy memoirs were left by early missionaries to Russia, Latvia, and Estonia, recording perilous imprisonments at the hands of Russian military officers.

⁵⁹Many unmarried women's memoirs are completed by their choir helper—the woman in charge of the spiritual care of the community of single women.

⁶⁰There is evidence that Meyerin and Rebstockin lived in the Single Sister's House together in Bethlehem. They are both recorded in the Choir Diary in overlapping years. For Maria Meyerin present at communion, see "Bethlehem Single Sister's Diary," 1752, BethSS_26_1006, MAB; for Anna Rebstockin's marriage announcement, see "Bethlehem Single Sister's Diary," 29 January 1753, BethSS_1_1040, MAB.

⁶¹Europeans had a later average age-at-first-marriage compared to other areas of time. This also led to a relatively low fertility rate for women, since they did not marry until far into their fertility window. See Bridget Hill, "The Marriage Age of Women and the Demographers," *History Workshop* (Autumn 1989): 131; and Bart Van de Putte, Frans Van Poppel, Sofie Vanassche, Maria Sanchez, Svetlana Jidkova, Mieke Eeckhaut, Michel Oris, Koen Matthijs, and Jay Teachman, "The Rise of Age Homogamy in 19th Century Western Europe," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 5 (December 2009): 1234–1253.

Despite their differences in personality or location, marriage served as an important moment in each of their lives. Each of these women married within an *Ortsgemeine*, which served as a meeting place for young Moravians en route to the mission field. These women were long-standing members of the Church, particularly Wilson who was raised largely within its fold. Yet none of them married until they traveled to either Bethlehem or Herrnhut and until there was specific need for them to travel beyond those walls to an outlying settlement. In this way, marriage can be seen as a graduated membership that allowed travel beyond the main channels of the Church. Single women could travel to the larger settlements, but only married women moved into the tributaries of mission expansion. Rebstockin's marriage announcement included the names of two other couples married in the same ceremony.⁶² Joint marriage ceremonies were not atypical among the Moravians and generally indicated a group of people set off for the mission field. These women's marriages marked not only a change in their status in the church and the beginning of their lives as wives, but a change in their occupation within the church, from settled worker to missionary.

There are sparks of difference throughout their narratives, glimpses of their personality. Rebstockin's insistence on joining the congregation against the wishes of her family, sneaking away in the night to Marienborn, and living in a deserted castle in order to follow this life all portray a fervor or drive that is easy to imagine. The depiction of Wilson's composure on board a ship in distress indicates not only a pious woman but a strong, charismatic leader who could keep calm in the midst of crisis. Meyerin, whose memoir contains the least personal voice, still set forth on a life apart from home and family, not first by joining a German congregation but by immediately embarking on a transatlantic journey. Even in their conformity to the script, they each indicate that they were not merely women swept along by an emergent religion, but actors who again and again chose their place within the church, charting their path toward the Caribbean.

VI. International Marriages

The lives of Anna Rebstockin, Esther Wilson, and Maria Meyerin show that, while prevalent in the scholarship and records of the Moravian Church, Zinzendorf's marital theology does not tell the whole story of marriage within the Church. The sexual sacrament was only one piece of life within the community, despite its importance. It is also unclear exactly how often the sacrament would even occur. Spouses in the largest *Ortsgemeine* did not cohabit and it seems as though they did not perform the sexual sacrament on the same day they partook in communion. As such, it is possible that this act was only a very small part of the day-to-day lives of adherents. Moravian marriage must then be understood in terms of the individual and the community separate from its sacramental definition.

For an individual, marriage meant rising to a higher level within the Church and more fully understanding its teaching. Information about sexual intercourse was heavily restricted to the extent that newly married men and women were given instructions regarding their marital duty only after their wedding ceremony and before the act of consummation.⁶³ Single men and women lived apart from married peoples, separated

⁶²"Bethlehem Single Sister's Diary," 29 January 1753: "Würde in Gegenwart aller Abendmahls Geschwister die Rebstockin mit Br. Martin Mack, die IngerHeyde mit Br. Schmirk und die Magdalena Meyerhofin mit Br. Weber getraut."

⁶³Faull and Norfleet, "The Married Choir Instructions (1785)."

by their knowledge of the sexual sacrament. Entering into marriage meant leaving the group within the congregation that a brother or sister had lived and worked with for a considerable time. For example, Esther Wilson lived as a Single Sister for nearly twenty years before entering into marriage and leaving that community. Apart from rising in the Church, marriage still also meant joining lives with another person. For many Moravian converts, this could mean marrying someone of a completely different background, either ethnically or socially. Some Moravians from western Germany, the Netherlands, or England were sent to Herrnhut to marry partners.⁶⁴ Others traveled across the Atlantic to the Pennsylvanian settlements before marrying someone they had never met, like Anna Rebstockin. In this the Moravians were not especially unique; during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many women of various nationalities migrated across the Atlantic to marry male settlers in the American colonies. However, the Moravian structure of intentional and intercultural marriage operated a bit differently because it was church-directed and intended as a graduation in preparation for missionary service.

Latrobe's letter from Fulneck is a rare insight into the decision-making process of moving young women across continents and oceans. His short entries describing each woman move the concept of international arranged marriages from abstract to reality. These were real women with a variety of skills and temperaments, each distilled down to a paragraph. Of Sara Birkhead, Latrobe wrote that she was "not of a very strong constitution, but not unlikely for a hot climate." Esther Robinson was "a Weaver, but can do all kinds of household work, is of a good constitution and diligent." Young Ann Crowder could "do all kinds of household and dairy work, is here a spinner, is of a good strong constitution."⁶⁵ Upon first glance, these kinds of entries humanize these women from past, providing an opportunity to gauge the labor needed in a communal household and the makeup of the workforce in the Moravian mission settlement. But the itemizing and packaging of each woman into a list of traits also tidies them into discrete boxes, creating a ready-made Moravian woman worker ready for deployment, complete with a "tender connexion to her Saviour."⁶⁶ Latrobe creates the sense that all of these women are movable assets for the Church to select and match to whomever they wish. For a few of these women, his brief descriptions were their marriage proposal to an unknown man thousands of miles away in Saxony. Esther Wilson, Mary Meyers, and Sarah Steinhauer—all mentioned in Latrobe's list—left behind German-language memoirs. All born in Yorkshire, they married German men before proceeding to the Caribbean and North America. None of them returned to England.

What, then, was the purpose in facilitating international marriages? Why was it important to the Church that women left their home congregations to serve as helpers to men they had never met and with whom they at times did not even share a language? The construction of marital theology as well as Latrobe's concentration on labor skills reveal, at least in part, the answer to this intentional movement of women across cultures. Zinzendorf's marital theology, as lived out in the choir system, creates an archetype of marriage that is passionless, companionate, and somewhat physically distant. It requires marital partners that are devoted less to each other than they are to the larger

⁶⁴The twenty women from Yorkshire proposed in Benjamin Latrobe's letter to the Council of Elders were offered for marriage to brothers in the Herrnhag congregations or the American settlements. Benjamin Latrobe to the Directory, 8 May 1766.

⁶⁵Benjamin Latrobe to the Directory, 8 May 1766.

⁶⁶Benjamin Latrobe to the Directory, 8 May 1766.

Church family. Latrobe's rote listing of skills highlights this extent to which women, and perhaps adherents more broadly, were considered for international marital migration, not for their compatibility with a potential spouse, but their usefulness to the larger project of Church expansion. Marriage was a means by which the Moravian Church could move people, particularly women, and craft a more cohesive community.

Moravians were not strictly separatists like other eighteenth-century revival groups. They set up congregations among other populations, integrated themselves into the plantation system in the West Indies, and participated in the larger social life of the countries in which they existed. Yet they quite clearly wanted to create a universal Moravian kinship that allowed them to be "everywhere at home." International marriage and migration were an intricate and necessary part of binding together the Church community. As seen in marital theology, many barriers existed to full participation in the Church. Converts progressed through a slow series of steps, first by attending meetings and then becoming a part of the Brethren. Even after technically joining the Church, it could be many years before a person appealed to participate in Holy Communion, and still later before they were permitted to marry and enjoy the full participation in the sexual sacrament.⁶⁷ This series of initiations created a hierarchy or a separatism that existed in tandem with their centrality. Moving people across the world and across cultures reinscribed this separation from the world. As the Moravian Church expanded into different cultures, it became necessary to facilitate marriages between those different segments of the Church in order for them to retain a central "Moravian-ness" and not develop their own independent identities as Moravian Churches in Pennsylvania or Yorkshire.⁶⁸

Given all of this, the question remains: why were women more likely to leave their homeland to join a husband? The Moravian Church deployed its power of moving men across their settlements, but most memoirs show that women moved to marry men, not the other way around. Like many other early modern settler colonial projects, the Moravian Church sent men ahead to establish relationships and create the beginnings of their settlements on their "frontier." Women followed after or alongside more male missionaries. It appears as though in the eighteenth century non-German women were more likely to marry German men than German women to marry men from a non-German Moravian settlement. There are likely two reasons for this. First, German men were more likely to be ranked highly within the Church and sent as international missionaries. Zinzendorf's marital theology posits women as "helpmates" to their husbands. In order to create a cohesive Moravian Church, elevating non-German women through marriage to high-ranking German bishops or missionaries accomplished the merging while still maintaining a level of separation or hierarchy. The second likely reason for women's marital migration are the differences in remarriage policies between men and women. In an era where women often died young in childbirth, compounded by high death rates due to disease in the West Indies, high-ranking bishops and missionaries were likely to have a least one wife precede them in death, as in the case of Martin Mack. Particularly after the death of Zinzendorf in 1760, women did not hold office within the Church structure. In contrast to male missionaries and bishops who established churches, wrote reports, and preached

⁶⁷Bedford Choir Helpers, "The Moravian Labourers Conference at Bedford," 82.

⁶⁸Elisabeth Sommer shows in her research on revolutionary-era Moravian congregations in North Carolina that as the Moravian congregations entered their second generation, removed from the authorities in Germany and the original fervor of Church expansion, the desire to join an emerging American sensibility proved stronger among young people than the importance of following Church doctrine. Sommer, *Serving Two Masters*.

in public, Moravian women were replaceable, interchangeable persons who performed the daily, yet impersonal labor as described in Latrobe's tidy entries. Perhaps, then, it was easier to move women in a way that benefited the Church.

None of this is to say that Moravian women did not want to migrate or did not enjoy their time as wives and missionaries within the Church. The information left behind in their memoirs leaves very few clues as to their personal convictions. Most likely, these kinds of recollections will be nearly impossible to find. Yet Moravian women were not merely pawns in a larger system. It is likely that most were aware that joining the Moravian Church meant migrating outside of their home congregation. Maria Meyerin, for instance, agreed directly to a long-distance migration from Hesse to Pennsylvania without even entering a German congregation. Many may have considered this an impetus to join; it is quite clear from memoirs left by Anna Rebstockin and Sarah Steinhauer that they repeatedly attempted to join the congregation, doing so intentionally and with the knowledge that they were separating from their families. The Moravian Church offered women opportunities that were hard to come by elsewhere in the Protestant world at the time. They could live apart from their parents in an all-female monastic-like community, spending their days working for the community as laborers or teachers. They could also migrate, moving across the world to better both themselves and the Church. Two premises can be true at once: that the Moravian Church's expansion required movable female bodies and that Moravian women participated knowingly and enthusiastically in this movement.

VII. Conclusion

From their reemergence as humble refugees in the 1720s, the Moravian Church arose as one of the most pervasive religious groups in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. By the 1740s, they boasted fledgling congregations in Pennsylvania, Georgia, North Carolina, the West Indies, Greenland, and Britain. This kind of rapid expansion demanded (wo)manpower in order to maintain settlements, particularly in the Caribbean, where European settlers often met early ends. The practice of Moravian marital theology may have challenged the Church's ability to self-reproduce; a rough sampling of women's memoirs show that women married after joining the Church typically had three to four children, while married couples who converted together often record having upwards of seven children. Regardless, the rapid fifteen-year expansion of the Church did not allow time for natural reproduction of church members to fulfill demands for colonization. The Moravians relied on converts to complete the work of settlement and missionizing. In turn, they also relied on marriage as a method to move mostly women from place to place, cementing their identity as Moravian adherents above congregational identity. The result was an ever-widening circle of conversion and intermingling among congregants from across the Atlantic world.

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