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**The American *Lebenslauf*:  
Women's Autobiography in  
Eighteenth-Century Moravian Bethlehem**

Wenn du in das land kommst, so denke nicht an gros Reichthum zu geniessen, sondern vors erste, so nimm deine Kinder in acht, daß sie keinen Schaden kriegen u. von Schlangen gebissen werden oder dergleichen. Zweitens habe ich schon lang gehört, daß überm See eine Gemeine Gottes soll aufgerichtet werden, wie es in den apostolischen Zeiten *und* wenn du davon hörst, so denke nicht, daß du in solcher *und* solcher Religion auferzogen bist . . . sondern halte dich zu ihnen, sie halten viel vom Leiden Christi, sie gehen ab und zu, wenn aber nur 3. beysammen sind, so bleib du bey ihnen, denn es muß wieder so werden, wie es vor alters war.

Anna Fenstermacher, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: date of composition c. 1770. (Italics indicate editorial additions.)

**Introduction**

Just before Anna Fenstermacher departs for North America in 1727 her mother takes her to one side and tells her not to concern herself with gaining great wealth in the new country but rather to look after her children and to watch out for snakes. She also tells her daughter about a congregation of God's people that is to be established across the ocean and advises Anna to seek it out. This conversation is recorded in Anna's *Lebenslauf*, her spiritual autobiography, which is kept in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. To date, very few of these memoirs have been made available to scholarly audiences, mainly because of the difficulty encountered in deciphering German script (the non-Latin

handwriting taught in German schools until the 1940s). The *Lebensläufe* contain fascinating insights into the lives of the women and men who lived in the Moravian communities in North America.

The Moravian *Lebenslauf*, like the personal records of religious groups such as the Quakers, Puritans, and Shakers, provides "a window on the soul" of the early immigrants to North America. To those who search for a peculiarly American identity, these narratives provide the earliest instances of autobiographical writing in the Western tradition on this continent. For example, in the narratives of the early Puritans Patricia Caldwell finds "a genuinely American tone of voice"; in her examination of the Shakers, Diane Sasson expands our knowledge of the spiritual life of nineteenth-century America; and Rufus M. Jones, in his introduction to Luella Wright's study of the Quakers, describes their confessional literature as providing "source material" for the examination of the "inner life" of an epoch.<sup>2</sup>

This essay draws on the *Lebensläufe* of the women who lived in Moravian Bethlehem during the eighteenth century. It will discuss the history and form of the spiritual narrative, the *Lebenslauf*, which these women inherited from the German Pietists and explore the ways in which that form was expanded to fit the exigencies of life in Colonial North America. I have chosen to discuss the women's *Lebensläufe* for two reasons. First, there is only a small extant corpus of women's writing from this period and especially from these classes (artisan and peasant). Second, these women's writings give further weight to the argument that women's autobiography finds its roots in the spiritual narrative. Until recently, much scholarship on the history and theory of autobiography has assumed the writing subject to be male, and this assumption has had a significant effect on the conceptualization of the autobiographical act. Critics such as Georges Gusdorf have claimed that the autobiographer is one who recognizes him or herself as a unique being, not to be repeated in time, and that the autobiographical act is one of bringing together the disparate pieces of life through a single unifying consciousness.<sup>3</sup> The only relationship the male autobiographer appears to need is with himself as both the subject and object of the writing. In sharp contrast to such a model of life-writing, women's studies scholars such as Mary Mason, Patricia Spacks, Estelle Jelinek, and Carolyn Heilbrun have turned to the eighteenth century to examine the earliest form of women's writing—the spiritual confessional.<sup>4</sup> These scholars have argued that the paradigm for women's life-writing is the spiritual autobiography in which the woman defines herself in relation to another being, namely Christ.

The Moravian *Lebensläufe* depict just such a notion of selfhood. In them, women speak to their friend and, through that dialogue, they develop a form of female consciousness that is not based on isolation or separation but rather on connectedness to another person, either Christ or

the members of their community, the *Brüdergemeine*. Furthermore, such a concept of female selfhood provides an important contrastive model to later notions of female subjectivity in, for example, Early German Romanticism. In these autobiographical texts we find women talking about themselves and their lives in a way that explodes the traditional concept of both female subjectivity and spiritual autobiography in the eighteenth century. The *Lebensläufe* open up a whole new panorama of experiences from which one can discover how one set of women felt about coming to America. And, in addition, they make possible an investigation of female subjectivity through the narration of immigrant experiences in a German Pietist form.

### The Moravians

In 1740, German settlers from Herrnhut (Saxony) arrived at the Forks of the Delaware River to found a religious community in North America. For the next eighty-five years, this community was open only to members of the Moravian Church, and, furthermore, for the first twenty-one years, it recognized no private property.

The development of the Moravian communities at Nazareth and Bethlehem is a fascinating chapter in the history of the settlement of Colonial America. It has been minutely followed by Moravian church historians, such as Joseph Levering in his compendious volume *A History of Bethlehem, Pa. 1741-1892* (Bethlehem, PA: Times, 1903). More recently, Beverly Smaby has studied the ways in which the changing economic structure of the community affected the process of secularization.<sup>5</sup> Broader studies of the community are unfortunately few in number. Those studies which do exist have tended to draw on the official records of the community to obtain information about its day-to-day running. But, not only did the Moravians keep minute records of the day-to-day running of the community—documents such as bills, orders, a log of everyone passing through, letters from Herrnhut, and in some cases copies of letters to Herrnhut, and detailed diaries of each of the communal houses—there also exist hundreds of biographies or *Lebensläufe* by members of the Moravian church on the North American continent. These personal narratives complement the more general picture of the community which can be obtained from the official accounts. In them, one can find a fascinating account of the lives—physical and spiritual—of the individual members of the community.

The genre of the *Lebenslauf*, although familiar to the scholar of German Pietism, is practically unknown to the scholar of North American spiritual autobiography.<sup>6</sup> Although it is known that the *Lebensläufe* exist in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, the great difficulty in deciphering German script and translating the antiquated German has limited access

to them. Fortunately, a few individual *Lebensläufe* from Bethlehem have been published in collections, providing what Ruether and Prelinger term "an invaluable source of insight into the nature of Moravian personality and experience."<sup>7</sup> Happily, they have included two American *Lebensläufe* written in English in their volume, enabling readers to witness what they describe as the Moravians' "socio-economic egalitarianism."<sup>8</sup> But, unfortunately, Ruether and Prelinger give only a brief description of these predominantly German immigrants to America and the shortest amount of information about the genre, history, and significance of the Moravian *Lebenslauf*.

Who were these Moravians and what was their religious background?<sup>9</sup> The Moravian Church had been founded in the fifteenth century by one group of the followers of Jan Hus, a Czech religious reformer. The Moravians were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church and, in 1457, were forced to withdraw from the cities to the forests of Bohemia. Although constantly persecuted, these early Moravians left many important writings, including the Kralice Bible (the first translation of the Bible into Czech) and Jan Amos Comenius's pedagogical and theological treatises. In the years known as those of the "Hidden Seed," the followers of Jan Hus were forbidden to practice their faith, their books were burned, and they were forced to become Roman Catholics. They maintained their faith through the preaching of itinerant Protestant ministers, the most famous of whom was Christian David. In the early 1700s, concerned at the plight of the Moravians in Bohemia and Moravia, the latter pleaded with Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf to offer them refuge on his estate in Berthelsdorf in Upper Saxony. Zinzendorf, who had been raised a Pietist, did not object. In 1722, Moravians arrived in Berthelsdorf and immediately began to fell trees in the nearby forests to build houses and thus founded their new community—Herrnhut.

Zinzendorf soon became interested in the writings of these settlers and quickly assumed their organizational and spiritual leadership in what is known as the "Renewed Church." After Herrnhut had been successfully founded as a religious community, other centers were started in the Wetterau (Hesse, Germany), Holland, Greenland, Great Britain, and Ireland. In 1740, the Moravians came to the Forks of the Delaware to found a missionary center on the North American continent in the town that later became known as Bethlehem.

### **The "General Economy" in Bethlehem 1740-62**

During the period known as the "General Economy" (1740-62), Bethlehem was run on communal principles.<sup>10</sup> There was no private property; all land, houses, and factories were communally owned. Women and men, even when married, were strictly segregated, living in

common buildings or "choirs." Children were removed from their parents as soon as they were weaned and placed in the "Nurserie." However, the communal principles of the "General Economy" were abandoned in 1762 as an economic crisis threatened the Moravian Church in Germany. Private property was then permitted, families lived together, and the choir houses remained only for the unmarried and widowed men and women.

Why was such a communal structure implemented? During the period of the "General Economy," the choir system existed for both theological and economic reasons. Bethlehem was founded as a *Pilgergemeinde* or mission center and also as a *Hausgemeinde* or permanent community. The inhabitants of Bethlehem held missionary and spiritual work to be of primary importance and their sole purpose was to promulgate Christianity within North America and also to act as a base for missionaries to the native North American tribes and the West Indies.<sup>11</sup> Within this communal structure of choirs that disrupted the nuclear family, the individual brethren could devote all their energies to the goal of the community: namely, the formation of a steady religious and economic base from which satellite mission communities (both in North America and abroad) could be supported. This meant that there should be no private property in Bethlehem, no monetary wages, and no private households. All members of the community were fed, clothed, and housed according to their needs and the ability of the "General Economy" to support them.

The Bethlehem Moravians supported the communal economic system and when asked in the 1750s whether they wanted to set up their own private households there came the resounding reply "No!" As one of the Single Sisters, Marie Minier, answered:

Ich habe nun schon 12. Jahr der Pflege genossen *und* von einem Brod gegessen *und* bin gekleidet worden, welches mir bis diese Stunde gros und wichtig ist. Ich habe mich einmal dem Heiland *und* seiner Gemeine mit Leib und Seel, gut *und* blut gantz hingegeben, will gerne thun was ich kan *und* vorlieb nehmen wie es die Gemeine hat, denn es ist mir täglich zum Wunder, daß Er so eine große Gemeine bis daher so erhalten hat und können nicht sagen, daß wir je Mangel gehabt haben, glaube Er wird uns auch ferner durchbringen. Ich kan dem Hld nicht genug dancken, daß ich unaussprechliche Gnaden u. Seligkeiten, die Er seiner Gemeine mittheilt so darf mit geniessen, welches mich gar oft schamroth vor Ihm in den Staub beugt, wünsche mir in dieser Welt nichts Größeres, als mein Leben so in der Gemeine zu zu bringen, bis ich auch als eine der seligen Seelen in seinem Arm u. Schoos erbleichen darf.

The strong desire to retain the communal system lay in the relative freedom and independence it afforded those members of society who would normally, in the eighteenth century, have been socially and economically disenfranchised. For example, during the "General Economy," the effects of the choir system were far more drastic on women than on men. Because of the strict segregation of the sexes, each post within the community had to be filled twice.<sup>13</sup> This meant that women attained positions of authority within the community that were unmatched in contemporary society.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, because of Zinzendorf's concept of the "marriage militant," married women gave up their children to the nursery as soon as they were weaned in order to devote all their energies to working with their husband for the church.<sup>15</sup>

An example of a single woman's professional freedom can be found in the person of Anna Seidel née Piesch (1726-88) who, before she married, had accompanied Count Zinzendorf on his travels to the Moravian communities in Europe and North America. At the age of nineteen she formed the Single Sisters' Choir in London (and learned English), and at the age of twenty-one she was made the *Generalältestin* or General Elder of all Single Sisters' Choirs. In 1752 she traveled to North America and visited the various missions and congregations. After a year, she returned to England and then Germany. In 1760, upon the death of Zinzendorf and his second wife, Anna Nitschman, Anna Seidel's life changed completely. She writes,

Nach dem Heimgang dieser 2 lieben Leute, dachte ich mich nunmehr meinen lieben ledigen Schwestern Chören ganz zu widmen, und doppelte Treue und Fleiss anzuwenden, glaubte auch daß es itzt nöthiger sey als sonst. Allein der Heiland fügte es ganz anders, und gab mir ein ganz ander Feld zu bearbeiten. Ich kriegte meinen Plan in America und dazu den lieben Bruder Nathanael angetragen, wir sollten dahin gehen, das dortige Ökonomat und die Güter der Unitat zu übernehmen. Dieser Plan war schon bei Papas [Zinzendorfs] Lebzeiten vor uns bestimmt und so gut wie resolvirt und ich selbst war auch informiert davon.<sup>16</sup>

Anna is instructed to go to North America and take charge of the General Economy in Bethlehem. In order to accomplish this, however, the lot has decided that she is to marry Bishop Nathaniel Seidel.<sup>17</sup> Anna writes, "Nach America ging ich gern, aber in die Ehe zu treten, das kostete sehr viel und es gab manche bitter Schmerzen bis ich meinen Willen in des Heilands Seinen geben konnte."<sup>18</sup> At the age of thirty-four, having held the highest position of authority over the Single Sisters on all continents, Anna has to marry and take over the administration of the Bethlehem

community. As one of the strongest proponents of the Choir system, especially with its positive emancipatory aspect for single women, Anna is disappointed to see the effect of the economic changes on the Single Sisters.

Das erste im Jahr 62 war die umkehr der gemeinschaftlichen oeconomie, welches ein schweres Stück Arbeit war, das meinem guten Mann und mir manche schlaflosen Nächte verursachte, der Heiland. stand uns aber auch in diesen Umständen gnädig bei. Mit meinem lieben ledigen Schwestern Chor allhier stand ich in wahrer Herz Vertraulichkeit die ersten paar Jahre. Mein Verheirathet Seyn störte nichts bei ihnen, noch bei mir, und ich wäre herzlich gern in dem ganze mit ihnen geblieben, aber die Veränderung Ihrer Arbeiten machte auch hierinne eine Veränderung die mir gar sehr schmerzlich wehe gethan hat, doch habe ich mich mit der Zeit auch dahinein schicken lernen durch des lieben Heilands Beystand.<sup>19</sup>

Anna sadly recognizes that women's previous economic equality cannot be maintained within the new nuclear household structure.

But quite apart from the economic reasons, there were also religious reasons for the existence of the choir system. For example, the Moravians prescribed strict gender segregation for the unmarried members, both to help protect them from sexual desire and to promote spiritual life. It was felt that the latter was best developed by living and worshipping with persons of like age, gender, race, and marital status.<sup>20</sup> In Bethlehem there existed choirs for married persons, widows, widowers, unmarried men, unmarried women, adolescent men, adolescent women, boys, girls, and weaned toddlers. In the Single Sisters' Choir, for example, the women ate and slept in large communal rooms; they worked at spinning wheels or embroidered and held frequent religious services, such as the *Singstunde* (service of song) and *Liebesmahl* (lovefeast). The latter ceremony was based on a form of early Christian *agape* in which the participants shared food and drink, sang, and made music. Religious feeling ran high as the members of the congregation prostrated themselves before their friend, Jesus Christ, and exchanged the kiss of peace. In the diary of the Single Sisters' Choir, which was kept by the Eldress Anna Rosina Anders, we read:

Nachmittag hatten wir unser Chor Liebesmal auf unser Sahl wo zu wir auch noch etliche gute Gebete haben Bruder Johan lies uns die Cantata von Anno 47 absingen. es war ein aller liebstes niedliches Liebesmal. unser Chor war weiß angezogen der Sahl war auch recht niedlich gefeiert mit grün und etliche hübsche

Versel es hat aller liebste ausgesehen. abents hielte uns daß theuer Herze Johan Eine unausnehmde schöne 4tel Stunde vor alle abendsmales Schwestern und dann hatten wir auch zugleich daß Fußwaschen es war uns alle wohl ums Hertze dabey. Nach alle Gelegenheiten hatten wir mit alle abendmals Schwestern Ein gar überaus seeliges Abentmal. wie uns dabey zumuthe war und was gefühlt haben läßt sich nicht beschreiben; unser ewiger Mann war unserem Chörlein gar unaussprechlich Nahe. Er lies uns sein nahe Sein, Sein Umarmen und sein Füßen ganz besonders fühlen. es war uns allen innich wohl und so wurde der Tag recht seelig und allerliebste niedlich bescheren.<sup>21</sup>

The Single Sisters' great attachment to this *modus vivendi* is attested to by their all-too-frequent reluctance, like that of Anna Seidel, to follow the recommendations of the lot in marriage.

The implementation of the choir system clearly demanded the cooperation of the community's members. Some other secular communal societies, like the Owenite community at New Harmony in Indiana, were doomed to failure because of a lack of common purpose. In contrast, the success of the Bethlehem community rested in the shared faith of its members.<sup>22</sup> The authority of the community lay not in the hands of any one person, but stemmed from Christ. There were no rulers or ruled but only sisters and brothers who had come together to carry out one task: the service of God. To this end, there was a definite structure of constant supervision with each choir having its own board of stewards (*Diener-Collegium*) that reported to the warden (*Vorsteher*). This structure did produce some tensions within the choir, when some of the members did not wish to follow the authority of the warden. For example, Rosina Brunner (1748-1819) was initially very unhappy in the Single Sisters' Choir, despite having attained her heartfelt wish to enter the Moravian community. She writes in her *Lebenslauf*:

Da ich Erlaubniß erhielt in Bethlehem zu wohnen, wo ich ins Chorhaus der ledigen Schwestern zog. Ich gewohnte bald ein, und wurde auch zu meiner großen Beschämung schon den 7ten Februar 1761 in die Gemeine aufgenommen. –Weil es mir aber an zutraulicher Opferherzigkeit gegen meine Chorpflegerin fehlte, wozu meine unkürlich blöde und schüchterne Gemüthsart auch viel dazu beitrug, so erschwerte ich mir meinen Gang eine lange Zeit gar sehr. Oftmals trug es sich zu, daß ich mich angeregt fühlte, mein Herz vor meiner Chor-Arbeiterin auszuschütten und mich aufmachte zu ihr zu gehen; wenn ich aber bis an ihre Thüre gekommen war, so getraute ich mich nicht hinein zu gehen, sondern kehrte wieder



um. So kam ich endlich in eine große Confusion. Das Chorus war mir zu enge; wozu noch kam, daß die sizende Lebensart mir nicht gefiel noch zusagte.<sup>23</sup>

Very unhappy with life in the Single Sisters' Choir, Rosina experiences a period of great trial and believes herself to be fighting against the evil of her own will. Things get to the stage, she writes,

so daß ich am Ende auf den Gedanken kam mir selber das Leben zu nehmen. –Nun erschrak ich über den Abgrund vor dem ich stand, und an deßen Rand ich mich durch meinen Mangel an Zutrauen zu meiner Chorpflegerin gebracht hatte; und ich faßte Muth mich derselben mit meinem Jammer zu entdecken. Sie suchte mich mit herzlicher Liebe aufzurichten und zu trösten, und bat mich, mit allem meinem Elend mich kindlich und vertrauensvoll zum Heiland zu wenden.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the advice to turn to God, Rosina leaves the Single Sisters' Choir and returns to her parents' home for three years. In the years preceding her marriage she is plagued with visions of evil spirits and doubts about her salvation. After a period of self-examination she reenters the Moravian community, marries Heinrich Brunner in 1773, has eight children, and lives with him for forty-five years in various Moravian farming communities.

### The Shape and History of the *Lebenslauf*

As can be seen from the above extracts, the *Lebensläufe* provide a vivid portrait of the *fides quae creditur*, that is, the life, practices, and theological beliefs of the Moravian community in Bethlehem. The reader can determine how the community was run and what expectations were put upon the individual members all in the common service of God. However, the American *Lebensläufe* also describe the *fides qua creditur* of these Moravian women, that is to say, their living faith. The texts reveal how these women perceived their relationship to Christ and what effect that relationship had on their lives.

Although scholars working with the Quaker journals and Puritan narratives have encountered problems when they have attempted to read the spiritual narratives as documents expressing personal emotions and experiences, the American *Lebensläufe* are rich in personal detail interwoven with secular experiences.<sup>25</sup> Some German scholars, discussing German *Lebensläufe* in the Pietist tradition, have considered them to be rather formulaic, that is to say, they repeat to an extent certain phrases, usually from the Bible, in their descriptions.<sup>26</sup> However, this is not to say

that such documents lack valuable information about the individuals who wrote them. The American *Lebensläufe* are also certainly written according to a standard exemplary life (that of Christ). They depict the spiritual growth of the individual and thus many follow a common pattern: they describe the innocence of childhood; a troubled adolescence; acquaintance with the Brethren; the journey to Bethlehem; acceptance into the community; confirmation and first communion; employment when single; marriage; employment with husband; and final illness.<sup>27</sup> However, throughout all stages of life, the consciousness of individual sinfulness and the desire for redemption permeate all action. As each individual's experience of faith is different and is a response to quite different life events, so each *Lebenslauf* is also a highly personal and frank autobiography.

From 1747 until the present day, each member of the Moravian community has been expected to write an account of his or her life to be read at the individual's funeral. Frequently, the *Lebenslauf* is composed in old age, when its author has the opportunity to look back on life, bearing in mind that its words will only be heard when he or she has died or "gone home." Like Rosina Brunner, women frequently compose their *Lebenslauf* before marriage.

Zinzendorf introduced this practice of writing *Lebensläufe* for two reasons. First, he felt that the deceased individual should have a chance to say goodbye to the rest of the community, just as the members who heard these words would be able to say their farewells also. On 22 June 1747 at the Herrnhag, Zinzendorf reportedly bemoaned the fact that nothing remained of the departed brother or sister but his or her earthly vessel, or *Hütte*. He decided that, from now on, the *Lebenslauf* of the departed person should be read at the service of song, or *Singstunde*, on the day he or she was buried in order that one could wish "ihrem Seelchen ein Vale . . . gleich als wenn man . . . noch zu guter Letzt die Hand gebe und fare well sagte."<sup>28</sup>

Second, Zinzendorf saw these documents as an important part of the history of the Moravian church. Zinzendorf considered religion to center on the individual's *Vergegenwärtigung*, or re-presentation, of Christ's life and death. Through this process, which in the women's *Lebensläufe* exists frequently in the form of a dialogue with Christ, the individual is made highly conscious of Christ's presence in her life, thus making of the *Heiland* or Savior a tangible partner. It is precisely such a model of women's consciousness that we can see operating within these Moravian *Lebensläufe*. Repeatedly, the authors refer to their personal conversations with their "invisible friend," relate the revelations of his love for them, and make almost tangible their "bridegroom."

Zinzendorf, coming from the Pietist tradition, continually stressed the personal value of Christ's passion and death, what he terms the *ita sentio*,

or "es ist mir so," of religious consciousness. By feeling the *Heiland*, it appears that an instance of Christ can be made present through the power of the imagination, through the words of the text and the particularly active role of the creator of that text. Thus, every time a member of the church writes about her relationship to Christ it constitutes a new and fresh image of him. This image of Christ provides not only a *unio mystica* for the sentient subject but also makes of the Savior an active and present force in one's life.<sup>29</sup> For example, Sarah Grube (1727-93) writes the following passage during her final illness:

Ao 1748 bekam ich eine schwere Krankheit, in welcher mir der Heiland vor mein Herz trat, und es war mir, als wenn er leibhaftig vor mir stünde, und mir seine Hände mit den Nägelmaalen zeigte u. sagte: Siehe in die Hände habe ich dich gezeichnet, und versicherte mich, daß alles was er gethan und gelitten habe auch um meinet Willen geschehen sey. O mit was süßer Empfindung konte ich mein Haupt an das für mich mit Dornen gekröntes Haupt nieder legen, und abermal hieß es in meinem Herzen: Es ist vollbracht. Ja, es war mir oft so, als wenn mich der Heiland anblickte und sagte: Du bist allerdings schön und rein, die Antwort meines Herzens war: Lieber Heiland, es ist deine Gerechtigkeit, damit du mich bekleidest hast jezt kan ich glauben, daß du mein Gott und Heiland bist.<sup>30</sup>

Here we can see the implications of Zinzendorf's notion of *ita sentio*. Sarah Grube maintains a personal relationship with the Savior that is different from that of anyone else in the community. Each *Lebenslauf*, as the narration of that relationship, adds another unique piece to the overall picture of the community.<sup>31</sup>

Although the custom of composing a spiritual autobiography is not peculiar to the Moravian Church, the particular form and function of the *Lebenslauf* within the religious community warrant special examination and comparison with contemporaneous spiritual narratives on the North American continent. As a Pietist, Zinzendorf knew the tradition of writing a *Lebenslauf* as it had been revived by August Hermann Francke (1663-1727). Francke's own *Lebenslauf* narrates his trials of atonement (*Bußkampf*) and the sudden awakening that accompanied his successful penance. However, as Reichel points out, such a time of trial followed by a sudden awakening was something that Zinzendorf himself never claimed to have experienced.<sup>32</sup> Zinzendorf, rather than thinking that an awakening could follow a set pattern of introspection and enlightenment, believed that each person's faith is attained and maintained in a different way for each individual. Accordingly, the Moravian *Lebenslauf* is unique as a theological and literary genre in that both the reason for writing the

narrative and the point in the author's life at which this was done distinguish these Moravian texts both from contemporary German Pietist versions and from North American Quaker journals and Puritan spiritual narratives.

Moravian *Lebensläufe* do not contain one single pattern of spiritual conversion that is to be followed; rather they are supposed to depict the truth, whether good or bad, about the individual's life (for example, Rosina Brunner talks frankly about her desire to commit suicide).<sup>33</sup> Nor do the Moravian *Lebensläufe* usually include dreams and visions as moments of possible revelation of the truth. Dreams and visions are, rather, indications of either a troubled soul or imminent grace. Furthermore, the attempted subordination of individuality in the Quaker journal is certainly not found in the Moravian texts. The Puritan narratives were required of the applicant for admission into the community "to convince the elders that the presence of grace was evident in their experience."<sup>34</sup> In contrast, the Moravian *Lebenslauf* can span an individual's entire lifetime as it intermeshes with and illumines the life of the Moravian community. In almost all the *Lebensläufe* both inner and outer lives are described: the personal relationship with Christ, feelings at first communion, the atmosphere in the early, almost experimental, community, parents' reactions (not always positive) to their child's decision to join the Moravian Brethren. They also are full of information about life in Colonial America. They tell of Indian raids, captures, kidnappings, the setting up of the schools, farms, and Indian missions.

There are potentially three versions of any one *Lebenslauf*. There is the original memoir, which was either written by the individual (which is rare) or else dictated to the minister or family member during her final illness. The final moments of the person's life were then added by the scribe. From this "original" version a report was made which appeared in the *Bethlehem Diary*, the official diary of the community that recorded all comings and goings, religious services, births, deaths, and marriages. There could then also be a version included in the *Gemeinnachrichten*, the handwritten "newsletter" that was circulated to all the Moravian communities around the globe.

There can be real differences between the three versions. Comparing the two or three versions that exist, it becomes clear that overtly personal, or what might be seen as superfluous, detail is omitted; particulars which might contradict the accepted picture of the community are deleted; style is improved; and the whole story is sometimes completely rewritten.

### The Language of the Self in the *Lebenslauf*

The *Lebenslauf* is a self-narration; it is an accounting by its author of his or her life with a constant eye on the *Gemütsvorgänge* or the changing

conditions of mind and heart that accompany one's worldly existence. This emphasis on the condition of the self is indicative of a radical shift of perspective in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in Europe. In a recent article, Samuel Preus has observed that the object of interpretation changes in the early modern period from the traditional one, the Scriptures, to become the scrutiny and interpretation of the self. He writes,

that all-embracing biblical framework is becoming too narrow to account for what people are coming to know about space (geographical and cosmic) and time (chronology). The known world is bursting its scriptural containment. The overarching biblical narrative is being eclipsed in favor of new competing narratives . . . .<sup>35</sup>

And what is taking the place of interpretation of the Biblical "mega-narrative"? It is the divination of the individual life whose new hermeneutic "requires us not to ascend to the realm of spirit to read the significance of earthly matters, but rather to descend into the minutest trivia of daily life to show their spiritual meaning."<sup>36</sup> What lends meaning to life is the interpretation of the everyday, how one comprehends the causality and significance of events such as a boat sinking, or a river being too swollen to ford, or the accidental fall down the cellar steps. In the American *Lebensläufe* these secular details become imbued with a meaning that transcends the everyday.

As Ian Watt has claimed, the individual act of self-scrutiny with the aim of enlightenment makes of a religious process a secular narrative: the individual believer positions him or herself outside a text (his or her life) and reads, rather than writes, its process of signification.<sup>37</sup> The spiritual narrative is based upon this move from the predominantly Protestant religious act of the individual's divination of God's word from the Bible as text to the divination of God's will from the events within an individual's life. The hermeneutic that had previously applied to reading the Scripture as sacred text is now applied to interpreting the significance of life of the individual. In this way, all lives are significant, as all are instances of God's will and grace.

One who accepts Preus's description of the "bursting" of the Scripture through the expansion of knowledge of the world in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England can only imagine the challenge that North America posed to the mega-narrative of the Bible. As a transition between the intensely personal confessional of, for example, St. Augustine and the secularized autobiography of the nineteenth century, the American *Lebensläufe* display a fascinating balance between the

introspective contemplation of the relationship between the author and God and a detailed description of life-in-the-world, the "New World."

Accompanying this movement toward self-scrutiny there also occurs a significant shift in the narrative voice in the *Lebenslauf* over the course of the eighteenth century. As Günter Niggel has pointed out in his study of the Herrnhut *Lebensläufe*, in the first twenty years of the practice a definite change from third to first-person narration occurs, transforming the text from a list of dates into an introspective confession.<sup>38</sup>

Fortunately, however, the form of the Pietist autobiography itself requires inclusion of detail of one's secular life in order to demonstrate the action of God's will and grace.<sup>39</sup> Later *Lebensläufe* are also about the individual's spiritual life. For example, Hellmut Reichel, a modern-day Moravian, feels uncomfortable with the claim that nineteenth and twentieth-century narratives are secularized. Unlike many other forms of spiritual narrative that may have metamorphosed into forms of narrative prose such as the novel, the Moravian *Lebenslauf* maintains its function within the Moravian Church. It is still written, read, and published for the world-wide community to read.<sup>40</sup> And its composition continues to pose a challenge. Recently, when asked whether she had written her *Lebenslauf*, one sister in Herrnhut replied, "No, because it is so hard to write about yourself when you know that the words will only be heard after you have gone home."<sup>41</sup>

However, not only did the form of the *Lebenslauf* require the inclusion of secular detail and introspection, thereby ensuring the twentieth-century scholar a fuller picture of the lives of women in the eighteenth century. Zinzendorf's own theory of language, his "Sifting Time" vocabulary, allowed women to express in vivid images their dependence on and love for the *Heiland*. The *Lebensläufe* reveal an idiosyncratic terminology used by the Moravians during what they later termed the "Sifting Time" that lasted in Europe from 1743-50 and in America from 1749-51. During this period a particular devotional vocabulary and practice was developed, most notably at the community in Herrnhag in the Wetterau, which centered on the ultra-realistic depiction of Christ's wounds. Zinzendorf believed that the written word should describe the individual's immediate feeling of religion (*ita sentio*) and that this feeling is most evident in the implementation of vivid and emotive language: for example, Marianne Höht (1737-72) writes of her final promise to kiss the pierced feet of Jesus: "ich dancke dem lieben Heiland für alles was Er an mir als Seiner Elenden durch meine ganze lebens Zeit gethan hat, ich werde Seine Durchborten Füße Küßen für alles langmuth und gedult und viel vergeben."<sup>42</sup> At the end of her *Lebenslauf*, Martha Büninger (1723-52) expresses her heartfelt wish that the Lamb keep her in His bleeding wounds: "Das lämlein wolle uns nur in seinen blutigen Wunden bewahren, das uns nichts Schaden könne bis wir Ihn

sehen und Maale in Händ und Füßen Küssen können. bis zum Kuß seiner Spalten."<sup>43</sup> This "blood-and-wounds vocabulary" is highly sensual and at times almost repugnant in its realism, and indeed not all eighteenth-century women found it attractive. Rahel Edmonds, for example, writes: "[Bruder Rogers] redete sehr viel von unserem Heiland und dessen Blut und Wunden, welches mir törricht schien, weil ich solche Lehre nie zuvor gehört hatte."<sup>44</sup> German scholars, such as Oskar Pfister, have pointed to its obviously sexual overtones and have even accused Zinzendorf of promulgating a "theology of sexuality."<sup>45</sup> One certainly can interpret the enthusiasm of the Single Sisters' Choir for the five wounds of Jesus as a projection of sexual desire. However, according to Zinzendorf, the function of such vocabulary was to arouse in the reader a consciousness of the suffering of Christ and then subsequently gratitude for being saved.

Although Zinzendorf forbade the use of the "blood and wounds" symbolism after 1751, many of the Brethren continued to use such vocabulary. In these *Lebensläufe*, the women frequently claim that they are unable to find the words with which to describe the proximity of the *Heiland* either at their first communion or at their spiritual awakening (*Erweckung*), yet they often express their desire to taste the blood and feel the body of Christ. Thus although the official language of the personal narrative had been "purged" of this vocabulary, it continued to appear in the *Lebensläufe*. For many women, this language served as the only way in which they could express fully their personal relationship with the Savior. This is just one example of the divergence of lived faith from official doctrine.

In addition to this "blood and wounds" vocabulary, the women's relationship with Christ is clearly visible in particular in their frequent description of him as their "bridegroom." For example, the Single Sisters clearly felt that Jesus was very close to them. They depict him as their friend, they speak of their faith and their ability to endure hardship through his love for them. Marie Minier (1732-69) describes her awakened feelings towards Jesus during a communion service. When she writes her *Lebenslauf*, Marie Minier is unmarried, in her mid-twenties, and living in the Single Sisters' Choir. She describes her relationship with Christ as one of utter dependence; she has ecstatic visions and feels his presence with an almost embarrassing sensuality. The vocabulary she uses is typical of the period; Christ is her "friend" and "bleeding Savior," and she feverishly anticipates Holy Communion as a kind of wedding night.<sup>46</sup>

Ich konnte mich mit Leib und Seel, so wie ich war hingeben,  
nichts mehr auf dieser Welt zu wollen, als an Ihm zu hengen:  
denn diese Gnade war so kräftig an meinem Herzen zu spüren,  
daß ich dachte, hier ist nichts mehr für mich; und es war nicht

anders, als wenn der blutige Heiland in seiner MarterFigür leibhaftig vor meinen Augen schwebte. Weil es nun *Abendmahls*-tag war, so konnt ich es kaum erwarten bis ich sein Fleisch und Blut im Sacrament zu genießen krigte und bei dem wirklichen Genuß konnte ich mich kaum besinnen, ob ich noch hier, oder schon im HochzeitSaal wäre. Das war mir ein grosser GnadenTag den ich nimmer Vergeßen will . . . . In der Marterwoche im Jahr 1755 konnte ich mich nicht satt hören noch meditiren über das was mein allerliebster Freund der Seelen in diesen Tagen alles für mich ausgestanden hat. Mein Herz schwimmte mir in Thränen, und es war mir Zum erstaunen, daß der gute Heiland an einer solchen Made wie ich bin so viel Gnade beweisen kann. Denn meine Armuth und viele Gebrechen wurden mir lebendig im Herzen, und es betrübte mich sehr, daß ich meinem so treuen Freund noch nicht nach seinem gleichen Herzen bin, wie es meinem Jungfernstand, der mir sehr gross und wichtig war, gemäß wäre. Ich bat den Heiland mit Thränen, daß er mir die Gnade schencken wolle meine Seele und Hütte keusch zu bewahren, bis in Seinen Arm und Schooß.<sup>47</sup>

At this point the text breaks off and further biographical information is added by a narrator (probably the minister). In 1762, Marie Minier marries David Kunz and moves with him to the various farm communities of Friedensthal, Nazareth, and Gnadenthal. They have three children, two sons David and Jacob, and a little girl who dies at birth. Marie dies in childbirth at the age of thirty-seven.

Marie Minier's description of her relationship to Christ is one found frequently in eighteenth-century women's writings: the woman defines herself in her conversation with another person (here Christ). One scholar of eighteenth-century women's autobiographical writings, Mary Mason, has argued that the original model for women's writing can be found in such spiritual autobiographies as Marie Minier's. The recognition of female self-identity through the consciousness of another, Christ, enables eighteenth-century women to "write openly about themselves."<sup>48</sup> In what appears to be a dialogue with Jesus, Marie Minier finds her voice at a time when society normally silenced it. However, such a dependence on the "Friend" for a voice brings with it its problems. The woman may be in danger of losing herself in the relationship with the Friend. Phrases, such as "I could have given myself heart and soul to wanting nothing more in this world than to depend on him," would suggest that Marie Minier finds her identity only in relation to Christ. Her awareness of her self comes through her relationship with Christ.



However, the secular world outside Bethlehem also plays a major role within the account of women's spiritual growth.<sup>49</sup> Not all the American *Lebensläufe* are as introspective as Marie Minier's. Others contain accounts of Indian raids, travels through the wilds of Pennsylvania, indeed across the world, and detail women's administrative responsibilities in the community of Bethlehem and elsewhere (as we have seen in Anna Seidel's *Lebenslauf*). The integration of secular detail into women's spiritual narratives constitutes a significant departure from the accepted pattern for women's autobiographies in the eighteenth century. Scholars such as Katherine Goodman<sup>50</sup> have maintained that it is only men's, and not women's, spiritual autobiographies within the Pietist tradition of this period that consist of religious confessionals that include accounts of professional careers and adventures in the outside world. But within the American *Lebensläufe* we find women writing all types of autobiography.

One such adventure narrative is found in the *Lebenslauf*, already cited, of Marianne Höht. Born in Alsace, she came to America with her parents at the age of eleven and settled in Philadelphia. Here, she was sent to the Moravian School and learned about the Bible. Her father, however, was concerned that Philadelphia was too sinful a place for his children, so he moved the family up into the wilds of Pennsylvania, over the Blue Mountains, what is today called the Kittatinny. Marianne was about to move to Bethlehem at the age of eighteen, when her family homestead was attacked by Indians. She writes in her *Lebenslauf*:

14 Tage nach dem die Mahone abgebrant abends da wir zu Tische saßen, kamen sie auch und schoßen, mein Vater dachte nicht daß es bey uns wäre sondern Er wolte raus gehn und sehn was *und* wo es wär da er unter die Haus Thüre kam, fiel er ihnen in die Hände, sie ermorteten ihn so gleich, meine Mutter *und* wir Kinder sprangen zur hinter Thüre *hinaus* meine Mutter Sprang ins Wasser *und* wurde erschossen, *und* meine jüngste Schwester wurde auch gleich umgebracht mich *und* 2 Schwestern nahmen sie gefangen mit sich fort.<sup>51</sup>

Marianne is not, on the whole, badly treated by the Indians; after an initial period with a warrior she is taken in by an old woman in the tribe who treats her like her own daughter. She describes those times in the following way: "o wie gut hat es mir gethan, daß ich ein wenig ruhe grigte, meine Schwester welche einen Fransosen gehueratet durft ich auch manchmal im Fort besuchen." However, because her Indian brother is concerned for her moral welfare in the Fort, he comes and fetches her and tells her that she must marry a member of the tribe.

ich sagte nein, ich wolte nicht, sie sagten wenn ich nicht wolte so müste ich sonst machten sie mich Todt. ich lag 8 tage und Nächte im schnee und allem Wetter im Busch, und bettet und seufzete zum lieben Heiland Er solte mir helfen und rathen was ich thun solte, es schien mir ganz onmöglich zu seyn, mich dazu zu resolviren ich dachte ich wolte lieber sterben.<sup>53</sup>

As she is lying in the bush, she prays to her *Heiland* to advise her on what to do and how to resolve to accept her fate. After eight days, she is finally dragged out of the bush and tied to a tree to be burned for refusing to marry an Indian. However, at the moment when the smoke catches in her throat she resolves to accept the path that the *Heiland* has set before her and marries the man. She writes, "er war ein guter mensch, er hatte mich sehr lieb, ich hatte auch einen Sohn mit ihm. Er wünschte mir ofte daß ich wieder bey den weißen Leuten wäre, er wolte mir auch behilflich dazu seyn, nur wolte er daß kind behalten."<sup>54</sup> However, Marianne cannot agree to that,

ich hofte aber doch immer der *liebe* Heiland würde mir bahn machen daß ich noch einmal loß kommen würde, ich hatte mich doch unnter allen schweren umständen an ihn gehalten, Er hat mir auch ofte Trost und Muth zugesprochen, die gewiße Versicherung war in meinem Herzen, Er würde mich doch noch zu der Gemeine bringen.<sup>55</sup>

And this the *Heiland* does. Marianne escapes on a wagon train carrying flour to Lancaster, where she recuperates from her ordeal and then continues on to Bethlehem. The remainder of her life she spends in the widows' choir in Nazareth; her son dies at age five and a half of smallpox and she dies of consumption aged nearly thirty-five. She and her son are buried close to each other in the *Gottesacker*, the graveyard, in Bethlehem.

Such a narrative, composed probably sometime in the 1760s, is full of personal detail and reflective comment in addition to the exciting captivity narrative. Marianne, when held captive by the Indians, prays to her *Heiland* to deliver her. Her decision to marry the Indian could be interpreted not as capitulation but as an acceptance of God's will (the term she uses is "resolvirte"). This pattern is repeated in Susanne Luise Partsch's *Lebenslauf* when she encounters Indians in 1755. She also looks to the *Heiland* to guide her in her action.

Den 18ten. November 1755 krigten wir einen Ruf nach Gnadenhütten an der Mahony in der Brüüdern Wirtschaft, und ich zwar als Köchin zu dienen. Den 24ten. November überfielen die Indianer unser Haus, ich retirierte mich mit den übrigen

Geschwistern oben ins Haus, wie wir da waren, fiel mir ein, wir könnten uns retten, wenn wir uns wagten zum Fenster hinaus zu springen; ich sagte meine Gedanken, worauf Sturtius es wagte und es gelang ihm glücklich. Da wurde ich noch mehr gestärckt es auch zu wagen und hinaus zu steigen; Ich mußte meine Füße auf das Fenster setzen, wo die Indianer in eben der Stube alles zugrunde richteten, aber ihre Augen wurden gehalten, daß sie mich nicht gewahr wurden; von da sprang ich auf die Erde und eilte in den Busch, und da ich nicht wußte, was ich thun sollte (denn ich sahe die Indianer mit Feuer Bränden von einem Haus zum andern laufen, sie alle in Brand zu stecken) so bat ich den Heiland, er sollte mir doch wissen lassen, wo ich hin sollte, da wurde mir so, an die Lecha zu gehen, wo ich einen hohlen Baum fand, unter welchen ich mich bis den nächsten Morgen verkroch.<sup>56</sup>

As we have seen in Marianne Höht's *Lebenslauf*, the *Heiland* is looked to for help and advice. The fact that the Indians do not see Susanne standing on the windowsill is attributed to the *Heiland* having averted their gaze. As she asks for guidance, Susanne writes "da wurde mir so, an die Lecha zu gehen." In feeling the guidance of her *Heiland* Susanne provides us with a perfect instance of Zinzendorf's *ita sentio*. After this ordeal, Susanne returns safely to Bethlehem, recovers from a fever, and leaves for the mission on St. Thomas with her husband. After only a year, she returns to Bethlehem where she dies thirty-two years later.

Margarethe Jungmann (1721-93) was born in the Palatinate and came to the American Colonies in 1726. She wrote her *Lebenslauf* towards the end of her life in the 1780s. After her marriage, she accompanied her husband on travels throughout the Colonies; for example, to Pachgatgoch in New England to work with the American Indian congregation. During the Indian Wars of the mid 1750s the Jungmanns were sent back to Bethlehem for their own safety and were then employed in a number of places, on the farm in Christiansbrunn, in the soap works in Bethlehem, at Wihilusing on the Susquehanna, and finally, in 1769, when Sister Jungmann was forty-eight, to Languntotenunk, in what is today Ohio. The Jungmanns had gone to work with Brother David Zeisberger, the famous Moravian missionary to the American Indian nations. The practice had been developed that Zeisberger would enter into a territory as the first Moravian missionary, establish a small community, and then leave another missionary couple with the work of consolidating the community. The Jungmanns worked with Zeisberger during a period of great conflict between the Native Americans and the colonizers. Margarethe describes one of the encounters in her *Lebenslauf*:

Eines Tags kam der Capitain mit 5 seiner Krieger in unser Haus, wir wußten nicht was er im Sinne habe, er sahe uns an, war sehr freundlich, gab uns die Hand und ließ seine Krieger auch einem jeden die Hand geben, sie hielten sich ein paar Minuten bey uns auf und gingen dann fort, wir hörten hernach, daß sie nach Weeling in den Krieg gehen wollten gegen die weissen Leute, (den nächsten Tag sollten ihnen 50 folgen und so eine Parthie nach der andern und alle durch unseren Ort.) Es kam daher den Geschwistern bedenklich vor, uns länger hier bleiben zu lassen, weil ich die einzige weiße Schwester hier war, und wurde resolvirt daß wir, für die Zeit, nach Bethlehem gehen sollten. Wir mußten also den selben Abend noch unsre Reise durch den Busch antreten, 6 Indianer kriegten wir zur Begleitung mit, einer davon mußte immer eine Meile voraus reiten um zu sehen ob es sicher wäre, wir folgten ihm denn, und kamen den Abend noch 6 Meilen, (erst hatten wir ein wenig Mondschein, darauf wurde es so dunkel, daß wir nicht weiter kommen konnten, sondern unsre Pferde anbinden, und die ganze Nacht da sitzen mußten unter den Bäumen,) wir durften kein lautes Wort zusammen reden, auch kein Feuer machen: das war eine lange Nacht; endlich wurde es Tag, wir brachen auf und reisten bis an die Muskingung-Creek. Wo wir durch sollten: unsre begleiter gingen auch einer nach dem andern hinein, fanden aber zu ihrer Verwunderung, daß sie nicht zu paßieren ware, außer daß die Pferde schwimmen müßten, sie konten nicht begreifen, daß die Creek so angelaufen war in der Jahres Zeit, (es war im August) da es doch lange nicht geregnet hatte, sie resolvirten daher, den Weg zu Land, durch den Busch zu gehen, wo wir wol aus 10 Meilen 20 machen mußten, das ging über Berge, Thäler, Gebüsch und Unkraut, das höher als die Pferde war, so daß wir mit vieler Gefahr durchkamen . . . Die Nacht blieben wir bey Geschwister Schmiks, da kam ein Bote in der größten eil, welchen Bruder David hergeschickt um zu fragen, ob wir glücklich hier angekommen wären, er war sehr erschreckt, als er gehört, daß die Krieger mit etlichen Gefangenen und Scolps den selben Weg zurück gekommen, den wir haben gehen wollen. Nun wurde es uns klar, warum wir nicht haben können die Creek paßieren, wir dankten dem lieben Heiland für diese wunderbahre gnädige Bewahrung.<sup>57</sup>

The stream, too swollen to ford, is interpreted as a sign of God's protection. Had Sister Jungmann and her husband crossed the stream and followed their intended path they would have encountered the Indian warriors and probably have met their death.

## Conclusion

Margarethe Jungmann's experience of the *Heiland* is very different from that of Marie Minier. Whereas the former led a life about which one could almost claim that the gender of the personal pronoun is irrelevant,<sup>58</sup> the latter describes a model of consciousness that is clearly gendered. In this context, it is interesting to note that Margarethe Jungmann's *Lebenslauf* is composed at least twenty years after Marie Minier's and yet displays very little of the later bourgeois notion of gender. Similarly, Marianne Höht's *Lebenslauf* is composed in the late 1760s and combines "Sifting Time" vocabulary with an adventure narrative.

These significant differences point to the central importance of the individual's different experiences of lived faith in the act of writing the American *Lebenslauf*. Rather than generalizing about how all women might have written at one particular point in time, the modern reader should recognize the significance of divergence from accepted patterns. In her study, Beverly Smaby draws on the most standardized *Lebensläufe*, the ones in the *Bethlehem Diary* or in the *Gemeinnachrichten* and she purposely avoids including *Lebensläufe* that are written in the first person singular and that include personal detail. Rather, as she is attempting to establish the expected behavioral norms of the community, she selects those biographies that are the most schematic.<sup>59</sup> In so doing, Smaby unfortunately ignores the significance of these women's personal narratives to the history of women's writing on this continent. As a social scientist, she has little use for the intellectual background of the Pietist *Lebenslauf* as a genre and disregards the fact that the American Moravian women are living and writing about modes of existence and consciousness that male thinkers in eighteenth-century Europe have theorized out of existence for women.

These short extracts from the *Lebensläufe* of Anna Fenstermacher, Anna Seidel, Rosina Brunner, Sarah Grube, Martha Büninger, Rahel Edmonds, Marianne Höht, Marie Minier, Susanne Partsch, and Margarethe Jungmann demonstrate well the variety and richness of experience that women enjoyed in their lives in Colonial Pennsylvania. In contrast to the spiritual narratives that have caused some German scholars to claim that these texts are purely formalistic, lacking any personal comment by their authors, we see a fascinating interweaving of spiritual introspection and secular experience.

The American *Lebensläufe* are written to depict the spiritual growth of the individual. However, as I hope to have shown above, this growth is not described only in terms of introspection or the slavish adherence to the imposed patriarchal form of the *Lebenslauf*. The combination of the Pietist concept of the individual's close relationship to Christ, the

particular social structure of the Bethlehem community in the 1700s, and the challenges of living and proselytizing in Pennsylvania, makes these women's spiritual narratives unique in the eighteenth century. Whereas it was usually the men who wrote professional or adventure biographies and women spiritual narratives, in these American *Lebensläufe* we find a rare mixture of all types of autobiography. Marie Minier's narrative is highly personal and introspective; Anna Seidel's is about her career; Marianne Höht's and Susanne Partsch's resemble more the adventure narratives. However, in all Moravian women's texts, as in all Moravian lives, Christ is represented as a friend, a companion in times of trouble, a bridegroom, or a *Gesprächspartner*. Despite the seeming passivity, or selflessness, that this relationship with the Savior might invoke, the female self is experienced as recognizing an absence and a presence of God, a recognition that constantly awakens a need for redemption and also, by necessity, a consciousness of female selfhood.

As one moves on in intellectual history to the gender theories of the German Romantics and the theory of Ideal Womanhood in North America it is important to bear in mind that women did, at one point in the eighteenth century, have a consciousness of themselves that was not defined only in opposition to the male as a complement. Although in a secular age it might be hard to accept the notion that a religious group enabled women to live relatively independent lives, it is clear from these American *Lebensläufe* that the Moravian church, for a short period of time during the General Economy, did precisely that. Not only did these women live unusual lives but they also wrote about them in a way that is unmatched by their contemporaries.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 36.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Caldwell; Luella M. Wright, *The Literary Life of the Early Friends 1650-1725* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Diane Sasson, *The Shaker Spiritual Narrative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiography of Women Writers," in Olney, *Autobiography*, 207-35; Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Female Rhetoric," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 177-91; Estelle Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography*:

*From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne, 1986); Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Beverly Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem: From Communal Mission to Family Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> For an investigation of Pietist women's *Lebensläufe* in Germany, see Jeannine Blackwell, "Herzengespräche mit Gott: Bekenntnisse deutscher Pietistinnen im siebzehnten und achtzehnten Jahrhundert," in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen: Vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Beck: München, 1988), 1:265-89. In this article, Blackwell draws on the published collections of narratives in volumes such as Johann Reitz's *Historie der Wiedergeborenen* (1717) to come to the conclusion that the imposed form of the *Lebenslauf* actually limits women's self-scrutiny and self-expression. Of significance here is, of course, the editorial policy exercised by Reitz, that is, his purpose in the *publication* of these particular personal documents. Blackwell recognizes this limitation in her statement, "Die potentielle Kraft dieser Bekenntnisse wurde aber schließlich dadurch gebrochen, daß sie von der Ermahnung und Erläuterung, von der 'Predigt' des männlichen Herausgebers oder Erzählers umrahmt wurde" (Blackwell, 268).

<sup>7</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether and Catherine Prelinger, "Women in Sectarian and Utopian Groups," in *Women and Religion in America*, eds. Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary Keller (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 2:298.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> For a complete history of the church, see J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum 1722-1957* (Bethlehem, PA: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, Moravian Church of America, 1967); and, for a more specific examination of the eighteenth century, see Gillian Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> For a full description of Bethlehem during this period, see Helmut Erbe, *Bethlehem, Pa: Eine kommunistische Herrnhuter-Kolonie des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Ausland und Heimat Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft, 1929).

<sup>11</sup> "1) In America soll eine *Pilger-* und *Orts-gemeine* seyn; und der kleinen *Gemeinlein* sind so viel zu machen, als nöthig und möglich ist. 2) die *Pilger-gemeine* hat ordinarie ihr *Rendevous* [sic] in *Bethlehem*—zieht aber als eine *Gnadenwolcke* herum, nach dem sie der *Wind des Herrn* treibt, und macht alles fruchtbar. 3) Doch soll auch in *Bethlehem* eine *Haus-gemeine* seyn, die dortige *oeconomie*, zum *Dienst der Pilger-gemeine* und ihrer *Absichten*, wahrzunehmen, und in *loco* zu bleiben, wenn diese auf eine *Zeitlang locomovirt*." August Gottlieb Spangenberg, Spangenberg folder 1, 1-a, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>12</sup> *Nachricht von der gemeinschaftlichen Haushaltung in Bethlehem, Zusammengeschriebene kurze Erklärungen von Zahlreichen Brüdern und Schwestern*, R.14 A 41a, MS, Archiv der Brüder-Unität, Herrnhut, Germany. All quotations from unpublished sources are exact transcriptions of the original documents. Italics indicate editorial additions.

<sup>13</sup> As Erbe says, "Alle Ämter werden doppelt . . . besetzt. Die Frau steht also in seelsorgerischer Hinsicht gleichberechtigt neben dem Mann und ist auch Mitglied der Konferenzen. Und zweitens wird die Ehe in Bethlehem nicht auf Grund persönlicher Zuneigung geschlossen, sondern entscheidend ist allem, ob die beiden Partner die nötigen Fähigkeiten zur Erfüllung des Pilgerberufes mitbringen." Erbe (n. 10 above), 36.

<sup>14</sup> In her recent examination of the demographic changes in Bethlehem from the period of the General Economy until the 1820s when the community was no longer exclusive, Beverly Smaby discusses at some length the effect the communal structure had on the women. She writes, "The eradication of nuclear family life and the separation of the sexes had an enormous effect on the lives of the Moravian women. Male and female roles were much more symmetrical than in any other colonial society, including the Quakers." Smaby (n. 5 above), 13. For an examination of the importance of women to the Pietist movement, see Richard Critchfield, "Prophetin, Führerin, Organisatorin: Zur Rolle der Frau im

Pietismus," *Die Frauen von der Reformation zur Romantik*, ed. Bärbel Becker-Cantarino (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980), 112-37.

<sup>15</sup> According to Smaby, during the General Economy women were able to breast feed their babies, have them with them on journeys and at work, and also continue in their profession for the *Gemeine* (Smaby, 148).

<sup>16</sup> Anna Seidel, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>17</sup> In the early Moravian church marriage partners were determined by the use of lot. The names of those men and women deemed by the Elders to be suitable for marriage were submitted to the lot and when the result was known the individuals were given the opportunity to decline the choice of the lot.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Seidel, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See Smaby, 10. Smaby points out that the effect of the Choir system was to encourage spiritual growth, deemphasize ties with one's immediate family, and increase the individual's emotional dependence on the *Heiland*, Savior.

<sup>21</sup> 4 May 1750. *Diarium der ledigen Schwestern angefangen den 14. November 1748*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>22</sup> For an examination of the role of gender in the failure of the Owenite communes, see Carol A. Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communités* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Kolmerten lays blame for the failure of these utopian experiments at the feet of the continued bourgeois ideologies of gender and class that wealthy participants and the founder, Robert Owen, brought with them into the communities.

<sup>23</sup> Rosina Brunner, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> As Shea has pointed out in reference to the New England religious communities' writings, the author's form of expression can be somewhat repetitive in her choice of language. See Daniel B. Shea, Jr., *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 40. I would, however, agree with Mary Anne Schofield that beyond the prescribed narrative shape and language of the spiritual narrative, women find a voice not usually granted them within their society. See Mary Anne Schofield, "'Women's Speaking Justified': The Feminine Quaker Voice, 1662-1767," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6 (1987): 61-77.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Bernd Neumann, *Identität und Rollenzwang: Zur Theorie der Autobiographie* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1970), considers the narratives to be utterly devoid of personal comment and to be written purely in the interests of the increasing imperialism of Protestantism.

<sup>27</sup> Smaby analyzes the *Lebensläufe* by constructing a flow diagram of the major decisions and stages in life cycles in the period of the General Economy and then seventy years later. Based on examination she makes the interesting claim, "Gender distinctions, though less important than age, had also become more important for the later biographies than for the earlier ones. Gender distinctions govern only four percent of the topic boxes on the earlier flow chart and fifty percent of those on the later one." Smaby (n. 5 above), 142.

<sup>28</sup> *Jüngerhausdiarium* 1747, 22. Juni, as quoted in Hellmut Reichel, "Ein Spiegel der Frömmigkeit und des geistlichen Lebens: Zur Geschichte des brüderischen Lebenslaufes," *Brüderbote* 464 (März 1988): 4.

<sup>29</sup> For a fuller investigation of Zinzendorf's theology, see Bernhard Becker, *Zinzendorf im Verhältnis zu Philosophie und Kirchentum seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1886).

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Grube, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>31</sup> The *Lebensläufe* were considered to be so important by one Moravian church historian, Johannes Plitt, that he suggested compiling a collection of them for each epoch of the church. However, this was never done.

<sup>32</sup> Reichel (n. 28 above), 5.



<sup>33</sup> Zinzendorf apparently insisted upon this fact: "Die *Lebensläufe* müssen nichts als lauter Wahrheit besagen. Sonst verschricks den Jünger [Zinzendorf], und gibt keinen süßen Geruch." *Extract von den Ratskonferenzen von 1753*, as quoted in Reichel (n. 28 above), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Shea, "Spiritual Autobiography," (n. 25 above), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel J. Preus, "Secularizing Divination: Spiritual Biography and the Invention of the Novel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (1991): 454.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

<sup>38</sup> Günter Niggel, *Geschichte der deutschen Autobiographie im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977). Niggel dates the earliest occurrence of a first-person-singular Moravian narrative in 1752. He claims that early *Lebensläufe* consisted of only a list of dates (Niggel, 62-63). Niggel also claims that the shift in narrator is accompanied by an increased secularization of the originally spiritual narrative, a process traced from a sociological perspective by Smaby (n. 5 above).

<sup>39</sup> "Die pietistische Autobiographie hat . . . von Anfang an die Neigung, die äußeren Daten des Lebens nicht nur als unerläßliches (chronologisch-topographisches) Gerüst zu sehen, sondern dem weltlichen Leben mit und neben der religiösen Geschichte Raum zu gönnen, oder gattungstypologisch gesprochen: die traditionellen Modelle der religiösen Konfession und der Berufsautobiographie hypotaktisch oder auch schon gleichberechtigt nebenordnend zu verbinden." Günter Niggel, "Zur Säkularisation der pietistischen Autobiographie im achtzehnten Jahrhundert," in *Prismata*, ed. Dieter Grimm et al. (Pullach bei München: Verlag Dokumentation, 1974), 166.

<sup>40</sup> Its significance within modern-day society may be judged by the appearance in the German Democratic Republic of Beate Morgenstern's novel *Nest im Kopf* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1988), which tells the story of the atheist granddaughter revisiting her hometown of "Gotteshut" (Herrnhut) and listening to the *Lebensläufe* of her female relatives. Through this act of reception, Anna, the young sceptic, listens to the stories of others' lives and contrasts them sharply with her own perceptions of the Moravian life.

<sup>41</sup> The *Lebenslauf* maintains its function of individual witness and testimonial within the Moravian Church. As Siegfried Bayer points out, "Wie wichtig dieses Selbstzeugnis ist, wird deutlich, wenn bei einem Begräbnis in der Brüdergemeinde kein *Lebenslauf* vorhanden ist. Es entsteht eine Lücke, und es ist schwer für die Angehörigen und den Gemeinhelfer, diese Lücke auszufüllen, weil zum Wesen und zur Würde des Menschen auch seine Fehlbarkeit gehört und darüber kann man im Angesicht Gottes und der Gemeinde nur selbst etwas sagen." Siegfried Bayer, "Zeugnis und Vermächtnis an die Gemeinde: Die Bedeutung des Lebenslaufs in der Brüdergemeinde," *Brüderbote* 464 (1988): 9.

<sup>42</sup> Marianne Höht, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>43</sup> Martha Büninger, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>44</sup> Rahel Edmonds, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>45</sup> Oskar Pfister, *Die Frömmigkeit des Grafen Ludwig von Zinzendorf: Eine psychoanalytische Studie* (Neudeln, Liechtenstein: 1925; rpt. 1970).

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of the language of the "Sifting Time," see Jörn Reichel, *Dichtungstheorie und Sprache bei Zinzendorf: Der 12. Anhang zum Herrnhuter Gesangbuch* (Bad Homburg, Berlin, Zürich: Gehlen, 1969).

<sup>47</sup> Marie Elizabeth Kunz, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>48</sup> Mason (n. 4 above), 210.

<sup>49</sup> According to Becker, Zinzendorf refused to recognize a separation between the secular and religious and rather considered that the secular had to be infused with the religious: "Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt behauptet er [Zinzendorf], die Religion bestehe nicht in Worten, sondern im Sein und Haben, sie sei nichts Erdachtetes, sondern etwas Gegebenes, nichts Gelerntes, sondern etwas Wesentliches, eine Natur. . . die Religion muß das praktische Sichaussleben des Menschen beherrschen." Becker (n. 29 above), 57-58.

<sup>50</sup> Katherine Goodman, *Dis/Closures: Women's Autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914* (New York: Lang, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> Marianne Höht, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Susanne Partsch, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>57</sup> Margarethe Jungmann, *Lebenslauf*, MS, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

<sup>58</sup> Smaby makes precisely this claim in her analysis of the early *Lebensläufe*. See Smaby, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Smaby states her purpose in the following fashion: "[the biographies] were intended as evaluations of the lives of people who had just died as well as devices for teaching Moravians by example how they should behave. Both of these purposes suggest that the biographies idealized the lives of their subjects and cannot be depended upon to reflect actual behavior. But since this study focuses not on actual behavior but upon behavioral rules or norms, idealized biographies are the perfect source." Smaby (n. 5 above), 129.