

# THE RENEWED UNITY OF THE BRETHREN: ANCIENT CHURCH, NEW SECT OR INTERCONFESSIONAL MOVEMENT?

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The origins of the Renewed Unity of the Brethren – ‘Moravianism’ in common English parlance – are of more than normal complexity. Regarded by some, though not all, of its original adherents as a rebirth of the old Unity of the Brethren, a body which had succumbed to the violent pressure of the Counter Reformation in its old heartlands of Bohemia and Moravia, it was attacked by its orthodox opponents either as a new sect with no right to toleration in the Holy Roman Empire, or as ‘indifferentist’, i.e. as denying the ultimate importance of confessional loyalty on the way to salvation. By its principal champion, Zinzendorf, it was usually prized as an interconfessional movement, but even he had no scruple in accepting an Act of the British Parliament on behalf of his followers in America in 1749 based on the claim that the Unity was ‘an antient apostolical and episcopal church’.<sup>1</sup> For each of these views there was some solid evidence, since the Renewed Unity arose from the conjunction of three distinct elements. There were German-speaking Protestant emigrants from Bohemia and Moravia; there was a much larger number of religious refugees of other sorts attracted by the toleration which became available at Herrnhut; and there was Zinzendorf himself who bought the Berthelsdorf estate on which they settled, and who came to pursue his own religious objectives through the heterogeneous flock he found he had gathered. Amid so many shifting sands it is well to begin by sketching the complex progress of the Count himself.

Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) was the grandson of an Austrian Protestant nobleman, who in 1661 had joined the great emigration of the Protestant aristocracy, and the son of a privy councillor in the service of Saxony. Dying less than two months after Nikolaus was born, his father’s principal legacies to the boy were a connexion through his mother, Charlotte Justine, Baroness of Gers-

<sup>1</sup> Report of Committee to House of Commons, 14 March 1748. In Archiv der Brüder-Unität DDR-8709 Herrnhut, Oberlausitz (cited below as Herrnhut MSS), R 13 A 24 no.22.

dorf, with the restless aristocracy of Upper Lusatia,<sup>2</sup> and the tradition of a family which had grown great in the struggle against the Turks,<sup>3</sup> but had finally put confessional solidarity with the Protestants ahead of service with the Habsburgs or the defence of Christendom against the heathen. From the beginning, the young Zinzendorf was marked by traditions of piety which had grown up in East and South-East Europe,<sup>4</sup> and to the end he was concerned with the settlement of most of the frontiers of the Protestant world, with Silesia, the Baltic, Georgia and Pennsylvania alike. In 1704 his mother married the Prussian Field Marshal Dubislav Gneomar van Natzmer, and left the boy to be brought up at Gross Hennersdorf in Upper Lusatia by another widow, his grandmother, Henriette Catherine von Gersdorf, née Friesen. As a business-like blue-stocking possessed of all manner of languages she, like her new son-in-law, was intimately associated with the Pietist clans pushing the new university and charitable institutions at Halle. As a Friesen she was in the thick of the aristocratic resistance to the centralizing policies pursued by the Electors of Saxony, now kings of Poland. She shared the family view that new methods, administrative, educational and religious, were needed to put the enserfed Slavonic populations of Lusatia, the Sorbs and Wends, to rights. Material for this was supplied from Halle.<sup>5</sup> Devout but shrewd, she was a model of the aristocratic political commitment on which, much against her will,<sup>6</sup> Zinzendorf was eventually to turn his back; but Upper Lusatia and his grandmother were to leave an indelible mark upon him, an independence of mind and spirit. A supporter of Halle, Henriette was not a slavish adherent of Halle Pietism.<sup>7</sup> Spangenberg declared that Zinzendorf, who but for the untimely deaths of his father and grandfather would have been

<sup>2</sup> Valuable family trees of the Zinzendorf family are to be found in *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, i, 204ff; reprinted in the Olms reprint of the works and other materials of Zinzendorf, published in Hildesheim, 1962–77, and cited below as *Zinzendorf Werke*. Here 3 *Zinzendorf Werke*, i.

<sup>3</sup> *Zinzendorf Werke, Hauptschriften*, i. viii–ix.

<sup>4</sup> E. Beyreuther, 'Zinzendorf und der deutschen Osten', *Jahrbuch der Schlesischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Breslau*, 7 (1962), 132 (Repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 764). Silesian Pietist noblemen were known to pray in the field in broad daylight. H.W. Erbe, *Zinzendorf und der fromme hohe Adel seiner Zeit* (Leipzig, 1928), 27 (Repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 399).

<sup>5</sup> On the von Gersdorf family and their part in religious reform see Walther von Boetticher, *Geschichte des Oberlausitzischen Adels und seiner Güter, 1635–1815* (Görlitz, 1912–23), i. 424–608; Christian Knauth, *Derer Oberlausitzer Sorbwenden umständliche Kirchengeschichte*, ed. R. Olesch (Cologne/Vienna, 1980); A. Mietzschke, 'Lusatica aus dem Anfang des 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*, xvii: 2 (1941), 123–42.

<sup>6</sup> A strongly drawn portrait of Henriette Katherine von Gersdorf is given in Gerhard Reichel, *Die Anfänge Herrnhuts. Ein Buch vom Werden der Brüdergemeine* (Herrnhut, 1922), 10–29.

<sup>7</sup> At one time she knew Hochmann, the revivalist; she supported the chiliast Petersen with money. Zinzendorf said of her, as he might have said of himself, 'she knew no distinction between the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed religions'. Otto Uttendorfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik* ([East] Berlin, 1950), 22–3. On the theological peculiarities of the Upper Lusatian aristocracy generally see *Ausführliche historische und theologische Nachricht von der Herrnhutschen Bruderschaft* (Frankfurt, 1743), 17–18, 187 (Repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xiv.)

brought up in court society at Dresden, loved both the natural and political peculiarities of Upper Lusatia.<sup>8</sup> And as late as 1753 a German tourist in London was surprised to hear him preaching at the Fetter Lane chapel in 'a quite simple and common Upper Lusatian dialect'.<sup>9</sup>

In his official biography of Zinzendorf,<sup>10</sup> Spangenberg felt committed to producing a portrait of a boy of quite unusual religious virtuosity and to support it by legends and by the only other material available to him, viz. Zinzendorf's own recollections of his youth, preserved long afterwards in publications and addresses. There seems no doubt that Zinzendorf early conceived a lively personal devotion to his Saviour,<sup>11</sup> sustained by an affection for the old Lutheran hymnody. He claimed that at the age of five he was persecuted for laying claim to a dependence on the Saviour it was supposed he could not have, and that an unflattering portrait of him was transmitted to Halle which he could never live down.<sup>12</sup> But later testimony about Halle is all coloured by the world-wide contest between Halle and Herrnhut which began in the 1730s. Cranz, the official historian of the Brethren, did his best to obliterate altogether the Hallesian background to their history and thus achieved a smoother transition from what he called the ancient to the modern history of the Brethren than the facts warranted. Zinzendorf was impressed by the preaching he heard at Halle and still more by the sense of being at the hub of a world-wide movement of grace.<sup>13</sup> He learned a healthy distrust of children's revivals (prominent as these were to be in the awakening at Herrnhut), but out of a revival movement he gathered a circle of friends who were to form his Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed, his international and interconfessional mission to the whole church.<sup>14</sup> His poems suggest that he combined a sort of Bernardine Christ-mysticism and the contemplation of the sufferings of the Saviour with an impulse to conversion.<sup>15</sup> From Halle he proceeded to Wittenberg where he was certainly an odd fish. With much exaggeration he later claimed that he left 'with Wittenberg theory and Halle practice'.<sup>16</sup> In fact a good deal of his time there was spent in experimenting with 'things indifferent', dancing, billiards, balloons, and, worst of all, one of his fundamental

<sup>8</sup> A.G. Spangenberg, *Leben des Herrn Nicolaus Ludwig Grafen von Zinzendorf und Pottendorf* (cited below as *Leben Zinzendorfs*) (Barby, 1773–75); repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, i. 178.

<sup>9</sup> E. Vehse, *Geschichte der Höfe des Hauses Sachsen*, pt. 7 (being vol. 34 of his *Geschichte der deutschen Höfe seit der Reformation*) (Hamburg, 1854), 71.

<sup>10</sup> See n. 8 above.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 33n.

<sup>12</sup> A.G. Spangenberg, *Apologetische Schlusschrift* (Leipzig/Görlitz, 1752), 654 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Ergänzungsband*, iii).

<sup>13</sup> Spangenberg, *Leben Zinzendorfs*, i. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard Reichel, *Der 'Senfkornorden' Zinzendorfs: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis seiner Jugendentwicklung und seines Charakters* (Gnadenfeld. n.d.), 30, 207 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 174, 351).

<sup>15</sup> Uttendorfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> N.L. von Zinzendorf, *ΠΕΡΙ ΕΑΥΤΟΥ Das ist: Naturelle Reflexiones* (n. pl., 1746), 11 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Ergänzungsband*, iv).

aristocratic traits, gambling.<sup>17</sup> Finally, however, he did form an Order of the Slaves of Virtue on the model of the English SPG which rejected 'things indifferent' entirely,<sup>18</sup> and made serious contact with Luther himself at least once.<sup>19</sup> The Grand Tour was more educational. Holland opened his mind to the possibilities of religious toleration, one of the great themes of his life thereafter.<sup>20</sup> A stay in Paris improved his acquaintance with the religious struggles of the Jansenists, Mme Guyon and Fénelon, and brought him the friendship of Cardinal de Noailles, who was later a member of the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed<sup>21</sup> and godfather to two of his children.<sup>22</sup> It brought also an exaggerated impression of the money to be made out of Law's Bubble.<sup>23</sup> He returned from his journey convinced that God had his true followers in every confession and that he would on no account adopt a party standpoint.<sup>24</sup> He had come round to the mystical outlook of the radical Pietist, Gottfried Arnold.

Between 1721 and 1727 Zinzendorf obtained an independent position and, most importantly, in 1722 married Erdmuthe Dorothea, Countess Reuss of Ebersdorf. Erdmuthe Dorothea was very much Zinzendorf's second choice as a wife.<sup>25</sup> But she proved an admirable helpmate in his labours and travels, possessed a much better head for business than he had, and brought him invaluable financial assistance in his early years. The marriage, moreover, connected Zinzendorf with a family which was central to that network of intermarried imperial courts which did so much to sustain the Pietist enterprise.<sup>26</sup> His wife's grandmother had been a highly prized friend of Spener; and the Ebersdorf court was in the inner circle of the Halle policy-makers with its connexions across the Empire from Silesia to the Wetterau. More immediately, Ebersdorf offered a pattern of Christian existence of the sort for which Zinzendorf was now looking. It was not a parish in its own right. The castle congregation easily separated from the parish church, inviting preachers of their own like the revivalist Hochmann von Hohenau.<sup>27</sup> The important positions at the Ebersdorf

<sup>17</sup> Spangenberg, *Leben Zinzendorfs*, i. 62–3, 78–9. See further in my paper on 'Zinzendorf and Money', *Studies in Church History*, xxiv (1987), 283–305.

<sup>18</sup> Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 29–30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> On this see Sigurd Nielsen, *Intoleranz und Toleranz bei Zinzendorf* (3 vols., Hamburg, 1952–60).

<sup>21</sup> Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 33–6.

<sup>22</sup> *Zinzendorf Werke, Ergänzungsband*, x. cxxiv.

<sup>23</sup> Otto Uttendörfer, *Alt-Herrnhut: Wirtschaftsgeschichte und Religionssoziologie Herrnhuts während seiner ersten zwanzig Jahre, 1722–42* (Herrnhut, 1925), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Herrnhut MSS, R 20 A 17.

<sup>25</sup> Erich Beyreuther, *Der junge Zinzendorf* (Marburg a. d. Lahn, 1957), 212–22.

<sup>26</sup> On this group see Friedrich Wilhelm Barthold, *Die Erweckten im protestantischen Deutschland während des Ausgangs des 17. und der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts, besonders die frommen Grafenhöfe* (repr. from *Historisches Taschenbuch*, 1852–53, ed. F. von Raumer, Darmstadt, 1968): also Erbe, *Zinzendorf und der fromme hohe Adel*.

<sup>27</sup> For whom see Heinz Renkewitz, *Hochmann von Hohenau (1670–1721): Quellenstudien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (repr. Witten, 1969).

court were filled by Christians without respect to sect or party, and they cohered harmoniously in the castle congregation on the basis of a common love of the Saviour. This model deeply impressed Zinzendorf and was what he wanted to reproduce when he built a house for himself and his wife at Herrnhut.<sup>28</sup> As it transpired, the Ebersdorf *ecclesiola* eventually joined the Renewed Unity of the Brethren.

Zinzendorf's personal development towards a philadelphian reconciliation of mysticism, pietism and orthodoxy was not at all interrupted by events on the estate at Berthelsdorf which he purchased from his grandmother; but it encountered strains of its own. There is no question that he suffered severe intellectual doubts.<sup>29</sup> These, combined with his personal devotion to the Saviour, though allowing him to take communion peacefully, would often cause him to shake for twenty-four hours before or afterwards.<sup>30</sup> Like many of the original Halle generation, he was at first strongly attracted by Leibnitz.<sup>31</sup> But he had difficulties with philosophy in general and system in particular.<sup>32</sup> He came to feel that forcing religion into a fine-spun rational harmony was no substitute for faith; it made faith harder by creating the impression that belief was a mathematical problem.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the world was evil as well as irrational; Christian perfection was not, in the mathematical sense, knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Some relief in this quandary was provided by that stormy petrel of the early Enlightenment, Pierre Bayle, whom Zinzendorf studied assiduously in 1727 and came to admire.<sup>35</sup> The moral drawn by the Count from Bayle was the divorce both in style and substance between philosophy and theology:

I believe and teach: philosophy has nothing to do with theology: our metaphysical, physical, mathematical ideas ought not to be, and must not be, mixed in theology whether we want to help or hinder theology . . . Let people clarify their minds with

<sup>28</sup> Beyreuther, *Der junge Zinzendorf*, 226–8; Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> N.L. von Zinzendorf, *Büdingische Sammlung* (Büdingen, 1742–45), footnote to Preface, n.p. (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Ergänzungsband*, vii). Zinzendorf referred to the same experience in the *Teutsche Sokrates* (1732 ed.), 209–10 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Hauptschriften*, i) and in a letter to Liborius Zimmermann in 1728. *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, v. 202 (repr. in 3 *Zinzendorf Werke*, ii). See also *ibid.*, i. 151 and the later entries quoted in Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 74–5.

<sup>30</sup> Spangenberg, *Apologetische Schluss-Schrift*, 452; Spangenberg, *Leben Zinzendorfs*, i.52n.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Baumgart, 'Leibnitz und der Pietismus: Universale Reformbestrebungen um 1700', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, xlviii (1966), 364–86; *Zinzendorf Werke, Hauptschriften*, iii, xiii; Zinzendorf, *Der Teutsche Sokrates*, Preface, first footnote (n.p.).

<sup>32</sup> N.L. von Zinzendorf, *Die an den Synodum der Brüder in Zeyst . . . gehalten Reden* (n. pl., 1746–47), 179–80 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Hauptschriften*, iii).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 246–7.

<sup>34</sup> N.L. von Zinzendorf, *Londoner Predigten* (London/Barby, 1756–57), i. 341–2: ii.337 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Hauptschriften*, v).

<sup>35</sup> Spangenberg, *Leben Zinzendorfs*, iii. 467; Ludwig Carl Freiherr von Schrautenbach, *Der Graf Zinzendorf und die Brüdergemeine seiner Zeit* (Gnadau/Leipzig, 1851), 86 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, ix); Erich Beyreuther, 'Die Paradoxie des Glaubens: Zinzendorfs Verhältnis zu Pierre Bayle und zur Aufklärung', *Studien zur Theologie Zinzendorfs: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Neukirchen, 1962), 201–34; Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Mystik*, 86; *Teutsche Sokrates*, 252 n.6.

philosophy as long as they like, but tell them as soon as they wish to become theologians they must become children and idiots . . .<sup>36</sup>

This view had its perils during the 'time of sifting' in the 1740s. But for the moment it protected faith and the Living God<sup>37</sup> on two fronts, against a mechanistic view of the universe and against the Orthodox insistence on the literal inspiration of the Bible. Zinzendorf developed, but never abandoned, the religious objectives which he pursued in the 1720s. Originally they had nothing to do with those of the Moravian refugees brought on to his estates from 1722 onwards by Christian David.

David was a characteristic product of the Habsburg attempt forcibly to recatholicize Bohemia and Moravia. He was the son of a Czech father and a German mother, both poor and both strict Catholics. He had, however, a speculative mind and pronounced independence of character. At the age of twenty, having been in touch with secret Protestants, he underwent a severe spiritual struggle in which he almost became a Jew,<sup>38</sup> but ended with firm Protestant convictions. Conversion was followed by emigration to a Protestant land, an experience which taught David that there were innumerable German Protestants who could see no hope of survival except in the guarantees of the Treaty of Westphalia and who did not want to know about the problems of Protestant minorities in the Habsburg family lands where they had no internationally guaranteed rights. He was directed to Görlitz, one of the six towns of Upper Lusatia, where there had been a town fire and where there was plenty of work for carpenters. There he met a sympathetic soul in the parson Melchior Scheffer, who was involved in planning and financing Zinzendorf's philadelphia on the Berthelsdorf estate. He also met Johann Schwedler, another connection of the Count, whose church at Niederwiesa had been built on the northern, Saxon, bank of the Queis to provide a refuge for the churchless Protestants in Silesia. He was a man of unrivalled repute for his pastoral and political care of the Silesians, not to mention his nine-hour sermons.<sup>39</sup> Christian David could not be restrained from making the perilous journey home,

<sup>36</sup> N.L. von Zinzendorf, *Jeremias, ein Prediger der Gerechtigkeit* (2nd. ed., Frankfurt/Büdingen, 1741), 100 (repr. in *Zinzendorf Werke, Ergänzungsband*, i).

<sup>37</sup> Zinzendorf's concerns here were very similar to those of Johann Christian Edelmann, who after a brief flirtation with Moravianism went over wholesale to Enlightenment. See my forthcoming paper 'Johann Christian Edelmann: A Rebel's Progress', *Religious Rebels*, ed. S.P. Mews; Walter Grossmann, *Johann Christian Edelmann: From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment* (The Hague/Paris, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> As Czech Protestantism came under the hammer and lost touch with institutionalized Protestantism it fell apart and followed strange courses. A sect of Israelites arose who came close to Judaism, near Neu Bydžov after 1720; apocalyptic had its devotees, and, especially in East Bohemia, deism. Rudolf Ričan, *Das Reich Gottes in dem Böhmischem Ländern: Geschichte des tschechischen Protestantismus* (Stuttgart, 1957), 148.

<sup>39</sup> For a biography of Scheffer see *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica*, iii. 389-413. On Silesia, Gerhard Meyer, *Gnadenfrei: Eine Herrnhuter Siedlung des schlesischen Pietismus im 18. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg, 1950), 12-14.

where he found that the secret Protestants with whom he was in touch were responding to the revivalist preaching and inflammatory politics of Steinmetz and his coadjutors at the grace church in Teschen, not far away in Upper Silesia.<sup>40</sup> Revivals were breaking out amongst those who could no longer bear with the equivocations involved in the secret practice of the faith,<sup>41</sup> and thoughts were turning to the possibility of emigration to lands where there was liberty for Protestants, thoughts which in the 1730s culminated in a vain attempt to get out a train of 30,000. David's contacts were limited to three villages, Sehlen, Zauchtental and Kunwald, which were peculiar in that before the Thirty Years War they had been strong centres of the generally weak German branch of the mainly Czech church of the Brethren.<sup>42</sup> It was from these obscure villages that the first handful of refugees who were to leave an indelible mark on the history of Protestantism were brought by David, via Schwedler in Niederwiesa and Scheffer in Görlitz, to Berthelsdorf in 1722.<sup>43</sup> Zinzendorf was away, but Heitz, his Swiss estate manager, saw the possibilities of creating a craft village for the refugees, so he settled them at the far end of the estate, around the main road from Zittau to Löbau. On 17 June 1722, Christian David felled the first tree for the first house in what became the village of Herrnhut.

Herrnhut grew rapidly, its population reaching 300 in 1727 and 600 by 1734, despite the fact that, two years earlier, the Saxon government had stopped the inflow of Moravian emigrants.<sup>44</sup> But, from the first, the new settlement grew up in an atmosphere of crisis, both external and internal. The external threat came from the Emperor's determination to stop the leakage of labour by migration under the banner of religious liberty. The agent of the Emperor's threats was the generally client government of Saxony which in this matter had the willing assistance of the Saxon church. For now that the dynasty had turned Catholic, the Lutheran church in Saxony clung more than ever desperately to its rights as an establishment and had no love for the religious toleration now obtaining on the Berthelsdorf estate. Moreover, the pastors throughout Upper Lusatia felt the ground quaking beneath their feet. Apart from their old suppressed

<sup>40</sup> For this story see my paper, 'Power and Piety: The Origins of Religious Revival in the early Eighteenth Century', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, lxiii (1981), 231–52.

<sup>41</sup> David Craz, *Alte und Neue Brüder-Historie* (Barby, 1772), 107–10 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xi).

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Theodor Müller, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer der alten Brüderkirche* (Leipzig, 1900), 1–2 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 7–8).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the way later Moravian refugees were passed from hand to hand by the Pietist nobility of Silesia before arriving, sometimes after a decade, in Herrnhut. *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, vi (1912), 187 (repr. in 3 *Zinzendorf Werke*, ii).

<sup>44</sup> Uttendorfer, *Alt-Herrnhut; Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder. Quellen zur Geschichte der Brüder-Unität von 1722 bis 1760*, ed. H.C. Hahn and Hellmut Reichel (Hamburg, 1977), 61–110.

Slavonic minorities, the Sorbs and Wends, the area was now full of footloose immigrants from Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary, some German, many Slav, and when Schwedler and other revivalist preachers were abroad, they would assemble in their thousands from every quarter.<sup>45</sup> Public order and every notion of a parochially-based church were at stake.

Moreover, the Herrnhuters suffered divisions of their own, in addition to the grinding poverty of a new start. Though well-known figures among them, including Christian David, were tradesmen, the bulk were peasants who had had to forsake everything in order to escape. Of the first 300 settlers at Herrnhut, only half were Moravians, and most of the rest were artisans of every kind – weavers, shoemakers, potters, tailors, turners and the rest. The disparity of origin, social character and religious belief could only be increased by Zinzendorf's own recruiting campaigns in Silesia.<sup>46</sup> And religion itself proved a divisive factor even among the Moravians. As the Lutheran Orthodox polemicists were not slow to point out, the old Unity of the Brethren had stood nearer to the Reformed than to the Lutheran churches. And the key figure among the Moravians who had no roots in the old Unity, Christian David, became enamoured of the predestinarian doctrines of the Count's Zürich-Reformed manager, Johann Georg Heitz.<sup>47</sup> Disputes which followed led not merely to Heitz's return to Switzerland, but to David's building a new house well out of the village. The Moravians divided into a Lutheran party, which supported the Count and Richard Rothe, the pastor he presented to the living at Berthelsdorf, and an anti-church group, led by Christian David<sup>48</sup>, wishing to separate itself from the parish.

Given the external threats to Herrnhut, nothing could have been more embarrassing to the Count than the emergence of separatism. He came back to reside on the estate, imposed a village constitution, and a religious constitution which should be co-ordinated into the church-structure of the province. One of its first features was the bands in which the settlers could share their religious experience.<sup>49</sup> The lay office of elder was revived, and David was chosen as one of the twelve. Soon afterwards, he was elected by lot one of the four Senior Elders (*Oberältesten*). But it was no longer possible to save the day in Herrnhut by seignorial action alone. For religious revival was in the

<sup>45</sup> Erich Beyreuther, *Zinzendorf und die sich allhier beisammen finden* (Marburg a.d. Lahn, 1959), 155; Cranz, *Brüdergeschichte*, 143; Arend Buchholtz, *Die Geschichte der Familie Lessing* (Berlin, 1909), i, 91, 98, 109–14.

<sup>46</sup> Meyer, *Gnadenfrei*, 46–70.

<sup>47</sup> Heitz was the unnamed Calvinist mentioned in the reminiscences of Christian David collected by John Wesley. *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (2nd. ed., London, 1938), ii.31. See also Beyreuther, *Zinzendorf und die sich allhier beisammen finden*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–8.

<sup>49</sup> On the history of these see Gottfried Schmidt, 'Die Banden oder Gesellschaften in alten Herrnhut', *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, iii (1909), 146–207 (repr. in *3 Zinzendorf Werke*, i).



air, originating in Silesia, spreading in Upper Lusatia, concentrated in the Moravians' own parish by the increasing resonance of the preaching of Richard Rothe. Christian David was harrowing opinion by asking what use it had been for him to risk his life bringing souls out of Popery if they were to be entangled in Lutheranism and thus made doubly children of hell.

The emotional temperature was being raised by the visits of inflammatory preachers like Johannes Liberda, the old Czech preacher at Teschen, and Schwedler. Overspill at the parish church at Berthelsdorf reached the point where services had to be duplicated at Herrnhut. News came of great awakenings in Silesia, and signs and wonders began to appear in Herrnhut – 'great grace was among them and in the whole district'. Christian David began to hold men's Bible classes; there were all-night prayer-meetings on the Hutberg. It needed only one more sign of the recent revivalist past, an intense spirit of prayer among the children (as in Silesia a generation before), to precipitate one of the most remarkable of all religious revivals.

Within the limits of an essay it is not possible to relate the extraordinary chain of events which began with the conversion of the eleven-year old Susanne Kühnel and generated an amazing spirit of prayer among the whole community, the Herrnhut diary<sup>50</sup> carrying self-conscious echoes of the great events in Silesia twenty years before. In this high-pressure awakening the community at Herrnhut, which had been on the verge of disintegration, pulled itself up by its bootstraps, discovered a usable past and created a remarkable future. Separatism was not yet over in Herrnhut; but there was now no difficulty in getting acceptance for the elaborate arrangements which Zinzendorf made for mutual edification and pastoral oversight. David Cranz, the Brethren's historian, artlessly records:

When soon afterwards they received Johann Amos Comenius's history and church order of their forbears in Buddeus's<sup>51</sup> edition from the Town Council library at Zittau, they found to their joy that their organization, in its inmost being, conformed closely to the church discipline and order of their fathers. So they resolved to stand by it now and in the future. Several times afterwards, and especially in 1728 and 1731, the question arose amongst them whether for the sake of peace and to avoid defamation and persecution, they should not abandon their peculiar institutions. But the Moravian Brethren always rejected this and pressed forward the more zealously completely to reestablish the old constitution of the Brethren.<sup>52</sup>

As the kings of Prussia met their match with the Czech emigrants, Zinzendorf met his match with the Germans. He would have to realize

<sup>50</sup> The Herrnhut diary between May and August 1727 is printed in *Zinzendorf und die Herrnhuter Brüder*, 95–108; Beyreuther, *Zinzendorf und die sich allhier beisammen finden*, 206–7.

<sup>51</sup> Buddeus left a philosophy chair at Halle to enter on a distinguished period as professor of theology at Jena, in 1705. His influence was at least not hostile to the revivals which developed there, revivals in which both Zinzendorf and Spangenberg had a hand.

<sup>52</sup> Cranz, *Brüder-Historie*, 142, 147.

his philadelphian ideals through their objectives, and it was his particular genius to divert them into a mission to the universal church. Despite the confusion in Zinzendorf's mind, confusion between him and the Moravians, confusion between the Moravian and non-Moravian Herrnhuters, confusion among the Moravians themselves, and confusion between them and their parish minister, there had so far been very little interference with Herrnhut from the outside. This was partly because Upper Lusatia possessed no consistory of its own and partly because the Dresden theologians, who might have regarded its statutes as deviating from Lutheran symbols, were a long way off and lacked the machinery to intervene.

Events far beyond Herrnhut had precipitated the original emigration, however, and others were now to put a stop to the movement and bring in not only the Saxon church but also the Saxon government. On 15 August 1731 the Imperial ambassador in Dresden lodged a written complaint from the Emperor against Zinzendorf's practice of tempting away his subjects, claiming that Herrnhut sheltered twice as many as in fact it did.<sup>53</sup> This was altogether more serious than the Emperor's previous interventions. For Charles VI was now alarmed at the turn of events in Salzburg which led to the emigration of 30,000 Protestants from that province the following winter, while in September 1732 chronic peasant discontent in Bohemia issued in open rebellion. This outbreak, in which religious and economic grievances were blended, was exploited by Liberda, the former Czech preacher at Teschen, now the minister of a Czech congregation in Berlin, who had a house at Herrnhut. He had been conspiring with the king of Prussia to get up a train of 30,000 Czech Protestants, using the Hennersdorf estate, the property of Zinzendorf's neighbour and aunt, as a staging post. The Czech rebellion was a disaster, and Henriette von Gersdorf had Liberda imprisoned as soon as he returned to Hennersdorf.<sup>54</sup> But the Emperor had reason to be more than ever importunate on the always sensitive subject of the loss of labour.<sup>55</sup> The Saxon Privy Council therefore forbade Zinzendorf to receive any more Moravian emigrants. Although a commission which they sent down to the village reported

<sup>53</sup> This letter is printed in Gudrun Meyer, 'Herrnhuts Stellung innerhalb der sächsischen Landeskirche bis 1737', *Unitas Fratrum*, ii (1977), 42–3 n.50A. Propaganda against Herrnhut had also been forthcoming from the Emperor's Jesuit missionary among the Schwenkfelders, Fr. Carl Regent, *Unpartheyische Nachricht von der in Lausnitz überhandnehmenden . . . neuen Sect der so-gennanten Scheffernaner und Zinzendorffianer*. . . (Breslau, 1729); (repr. in *2 Zinzendorf Werke*, xiv).

<sup>54</sup> On Liberda and these events see Eduard Winter, *Die tschechische und slovakische Emigration in Deutschland im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zur Geschichte der hussitischen Tradition* ([East] Berlin, 1955), 104–13. After three gaol-break attempts, the king of Prussia 'sprung' Liberda and his gaoler, and they returned to Berlin in 1737.

<sup>55</sup> Zinzendorf believed that he had been a victim of a local eddy of the larger whirlpool. A crowd of Bohemian (i.e. Czech) refugees in a very poor state of health turned up against his will at Herrnhut, and after being given medical assistance were sent on their way. This he thought had been magnified by his enemies into a breach of the requirement to accept no more refugees. *Naturelle Reflexiones*, 132; *Büdingische Sammlung*, iii. 653. 67.

in relatively favourable terms, Augustus the Strong banished Zinzendorf and, on account of his 'shocking and grave behaviour', required him to sell his estates.

The crisis, however, fizzled out. On 1 February 1733, Augustus the Strong died, and, in a display of clemency, his successor temporarily suspended the sentence of exile. The Count sold his estates to his wife, and only the Silesian Schwenkfelders, who had sought refuge at Herrnhut, were expelled.<sup>56</sup> But at once negotiations began for bases abroad, first in Denmark, then in Georgia in case Herrnhut should become untenable. The Moravians had no option but to become a missionary body. The Count took two other defensive measures. He obtained from the theology faculty at Tübingen the opinion that, presupposing an agreement in evangelical doctrine, the Moravians might keep the institutions and discipline they had possessed for 300 years and might also 'maintain their connexion with the evangelical church', a position of institutional pluralism which he believed Luther had provided for in the *Deutsche Messe*. Zinzendorf also divided the colony at Herrnhut into two parts. The first was to consist of exiles from Moravia only. They were to adhere strictly to their peculiar institutions and hold themselves ready for migration at any time. The others could adhere to the Moravian constitution if they wished, but could expect to stay in Herrnhut. All these events were calculated to strengthen the Moravian sense of separateness. When in 1735 David Nitschmann was consecrated bishop by Jablonsky to lead the second group of Moravian settlers to Georgia, a step had been taken which was calculated to convince others as well as Moravians that the Brethren were now an independent church. Nor did the Lutheran orders acquired by Zinzendorf himself do anything to strengthen impressions to the contrary.

The next crisis was a Saxon affair; but it had international consequences. One of the effects of the great revival of 1727 upon a province stuffed with refugees was the beginning of a large-scale diaspora work based on Herrnhut. This aroused a good deal of complaint from the clergy.<sup>57</sup> The final spur to government action, however, was applied by Baron von Huldenberg, the British envoy extraordinary to the Imperial court at Vienna. In 1733 he inherited property in Upper Lusatia and made a scene about Moravian activities in the Bautzen parliament. This time the Dresden government acted decisively. They reactivated the banishment order against Zinzendorf

<sup>56</sup> On these events see Mayer, 'Herrnhuts Stellung', 32-5; Müller, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer*, 44-5 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii.50-1); Herrnhut MSS, Johannes Plitt MS, *Neue Brüdergeschichte* 159; Ferdinand Körner, *Die kursächsische Staatsregierung dem Grafen Zinzendorf und Herrnhut bis 1760 gegenüber* (Leipzig, 1878), 14-24.

<sup>57</sup> Even in 1742 the Orthodox press reported that the clergy of Upper Lusatia had much to suffer from the Herrnhuters, who came swarming in with the complaint that 'Luther was indeed a good man, but the Lutherans of today were damned wretches [*Luderaner*] and stank like beasts [*Luder*]'. *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica*, viii, 936: *Unschuldige Nachrichten* (1735), 241-2.

while he was in Amsterdam, so that he could not give evidence before a second commission sent down to Herrnhut in 1736 – a commission on which the Count had no friends and which was part of a general move against conventicles.<sup>58</sup> The final outcome was a royal decree of 1737 which tolerated the Brüder-gemeine at Herrnhut provided they adhered to the Augsburg Confession, avoided conventicles and did not intrude into strange parishes. But the Saxon government would have no further truck with the Count.<sup>59</sup> All he could do was to move the Moravians proper, under the name of the Pilgrim Congregation, off to Marienborn in the Wetterau, leaving Herrnhut peopled by Lutherans, and abandoning its diaspora work to half a century's decay. Moreover, the settlements in the Wetterau were never anything but independent of the local established (Reformed) churches. Against Zinzendorf's will, the general concession granted soon afterwards by the Prussian government for new settlements to be established on its territories, subjected the Moravians to no consistory, i.e. regarded them as a dissenting body. The negotiations successfully carried through the British Parliament by Zinzendorf's agents in 1748–1749 for the grant of special privileges in America, began from the premise 'that the church known as the *Unitas Fratrum* is an ancient, apostolical and episcopal church', deriving its doctrine from the Greeks, and recognized by the Synod of Constantinople as recently as 1740. What they sought was the toleration and privilege not of a spiritual movement within Anglicanism or Lutheranism, but of an independent church.<sup>60</sup> This was, of course, a worse rub in Germany than in England. Baumgarten, the transitional theologian, did not mince the matter: 'the Moravian Brethren did not belong to the evangelical church, but must be reckoned a fourth religion of their own in the German Empire', and hence were not entitled to toleration under the Westphalia settlement.<sup>61</sup> Zinzendorf could only reiterate 'my basic principle, according to which the societies of the Brethren must in perpetuity never become a separate religious body or, at least, if they do, forsake all connection with me and mine'.<sup>62</sup>

The problem clearly was that the Moravians were not prepared to forego what they believed to be their traditions, imperfectly

<sup>58</sup> On all this see F.S. Hark, 'Der Konflikt der kursächsische Regierung mit Herrnhut und dem Grafen von Zinzendorf, 1733–38', *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde*, iii (1882), 12–25; Zinzendorf, *Naturelle Reflexiones*, 135; Körner, *Die kursächsische Staatsregierung*, 27–31; *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica*, iii. 381.

<sup>59</sup> Körner, *Die Kursächsische Staatsregierung*, 35–56; Hark, 'Der Konflikt der kursächsischen Regierung', 26–64; Martin Greschat, *Zwischen Tradition und neuem Anfang: Valentin Ernst Löscher und der Ausgang der Lutherischen Orthodoxie* (Witten, 1971), 322–4.

<sup>60</sup> Meyer, 'Herrnhuts Stellung', 38; Spangenberg, *Leben Zinzendorfs*, iv. 958, 969–70, 1104; Herrnhut MSS, R 13 A 24 no. 22. Even in 1737 during the Georgia negotiations Archbishop Potter had agreed that the Brethren were 'a true apostolic and episcopal church which held nothing contrary to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England'. *Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica*, iii. 450.

<sup>61</sup> Muller, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer*, 83 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 89).

<sup>62</sup> Zinzendorf, *Naturelle Reflexiones*, 127.

understood and remembered as they were, while Zinzendorf was not prepared to surrender his original philadelphia ideal. Both needed toleration, and toleration was easier to appeal for in German conditions on the basis of the Count's principle. Even so, he had the vexation to find that neither the orthodox nor the Hallesian defenders of Lutheran traditions were prepared to accept the view which he shared with Spener, that Luther himself had provided for the existence of community institutions of the sort he had created at Herrnhut within the Lutheran church. His one way out of the dilemma was to establish what he called 'Tropuses' or institutionalized movements within the Lutheran, Reformed or English churches. However, it would be flattery to describe even Zinzendorf's views of the Tropuses as ambivalent. He could say: 'we have the lovely Tropus-business as a poison from which the Saviour has prepared a medicine',<sup>63</sup> or again:

as to that ill conclusion: So then you are a church by your own choice? We answer as a weighty doctor concerning church matters in Germany has put into our mouths, No, we are only one of ye societies in ye church . . . By means of Tropuses in ye hands of understanding divines, there will be more obtained than by all apologies whatever . . . ye Moravian church nevertheless abides by itself having her own form & without any other's direction. The Ord[inary] declared that this was none of our own inventing, but within these 26 years, he only follows ye thread & now sees afterwards ye reason & views of our Sav[iou]r.<sup>64</sup>

The result of constant pressure from his enemies was that, with every year, the Moravian church seemed to become a more distinct body and, in the first instance, to put down secure roots, not within the bosom of the historic Reformation confessions, but in those lands where the state was prepared to tolerate dissenters, namely in the Wetterau, in Holland, in Prussia and Sweden, in Britain and the American colonies. The Renewed Unity of the Brethren was neither the 'antient apostolical and episcopal church' of the application to the British parliament, nor the new eclectic sect envisaged by Bengel, nor the rump, either Lutheran or Calvinist, of the Orthodox propagandists, nor Zinzendorf's philadelphian ideal. But it contained something of each, and it still contains a large dual membership with the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands of the sort which no longer subsists between English Methodism and the Church of England. Moreover, a crucial part in its revival had been played by the preaching and propaganda of Halle, a fact which neither side now wished to recognize.

The Moravians' critics on both right and left scored a good many

<sup>63</sup> Müller, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer*, 101 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 107).

<sup>64</sup> This rather awkward translation was made for the English Moravian community and is to be found in MS in the archives in Moravian Church House, Muswell Hill, London. MS Gemeinhaus Diary, 11 Nov. 1748.

points and missed the mark mainly in trying to prove too much. J.G. Carpzov, Superintendent at Lübeck, held that in the first period of their history the Brethren

were *Wycliffites*, in which at the beginning they still cherished many popish errors . . . in the second [from Luther to the end of the seventeenth century] they were complete Calvinists as they united openly with them in the assembly at Sandomir;<sup>65</sup> in the third [period of the early eighteenth century they were] *Innovators* whose religious pretexts were created outwardly according to the condition of each country and people where they stayed, but were inwardly filled with many fanatical, enthusiastic, Weigelian, Behmenish and Quakerish opinions.<sup>66</sup>

In the nature of the case, 'with the long discontinuance of public worship, Protestant schools and preachers . . . their children's children became less informed in evangelical doctrine, cooler in their Christianity, more neglectful in devotional exercises'.<sup>67</sup> Nor did the long history of emigration justify what Zinzendorf had made of it. In an interesting personal reminiscence, Carpzov admitted that

may be some of them came every year to enjoy holy communion into Upper Lusatia, especially to Pirna, Dresden and other Chur-Saxon places where Bohemian services were held. I myself well recollect having heard this form often in my youth, when the preacher M. Rühr at Dresden conducted the Lutheran service in the Bohemian church and tongue. In the summer-time he had many travelling communicants out of Bohemia. Yet it cannot be said whether they were Lutheran or Brethren or co-religionists of both kinds, who found edification and strength in the pure religion wherever it could be found nearest.<sup>68</sup>

Many of them may have been descendants of the old Moravian Lutherans, but, whether they were or not, 'their service, doctrine and confession in Saxony were never other than according to the Confession of Augsburg'. Certainly the old Moravians knew nothing of the indifferentism or syncretism of the new.<sup>69</sup> Many of these charges reappeared from the left. Andreas Gross, the spokesman for the radical Pietists of the Wetterau, maintained that the Moravians had brought to Herrnhut, 'a jumble of doctrine, a total ignorance of the constitution and discipline of the Bohemian church, and were, in addition, unconverted persons'.<sup>70</sup> The last point might be thought sufficiently met by the revival after they had arrived. But Zinzendorf's story about the miraculous discovery in Zittau public library made it hard to controvert the second, while the private narratives of the exiles

<sup>65</sup> By the Consensus of Sandomir (in Poland), 1570.

<sup>66</sup> J.G. Carpzov, *Religions-untersuchung der Böhmisches- und Mährischen Brüder von Anbeginn ihrer Gemeinen, bis auf gegenwärtigen Zeiten* (Leipzig, 1742), Preface n.p.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 407–8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 405, 413, 416.

<sup>70</sup> Andreas Gross, *Erste und letzte Antwort auf die so-genannte Erklärung des Herrn Grafen N.L. von Zinzendorf* (Frankfurt, 1742), Appendix, 97–119, 306–56.

themselves gave only too much force to the first. In 1742 Martin Liebisch and David Schneider wrote a narrative of their heritage in which they claimed descent from the old Moravian and Bohemian Brethren and 'as such' recognition by the Reformed in Holland.<sup>71</sup> What neither of these critical accounts admitted was that, to all those like Zinzendorf who now were concerned to get behind the entrenched lines of division in European religion, there might be positive value in the confused traditions of a religious body which had worked under very unfavourable circumstances in a pluralistic milieu. Though even Zinzendorf was known to say 'that the Moravian and Bohemian religion [i.e. confessional tradition] is much worse than the Lutheran and Reformed; the Bohemian Confession does not hold a candle to the Augustana', and its adherents were always making unholy compromises with more powerful neighbours.<sup>72</sup>

The singularities in the history of a sect whose patron insisted was not a sect, and whose original adherents insisted was not a new sect, enhance rather than diminish the interest of the Moravians to the student of sects in general. What they illustrate is the difference between those sects which originate in schism, and are in fact conflict-groups, and those which have their origin in religious revival. To the conflict-group, the enemy is clearly delineated, and the lines are drawn. To the revival-group, the world which has to be overcome is too protean to admit of simple prohibition, and if the past (even the Catholic past) contains well-springs of spiritual vitality, it is folly not to draw upon them. Indeed, the whole revival movement aspired to be orthodox without Orthodoxy, to be puritan without precisionism, to be alert to what Catholic spiritual writers had to say (often against the managers of Catholic establishments), to be eclectic towards both past and present. The weight of discussion devoted to religious affections and to the marks of the New Birth showed clearly enough that religious vitality was not readily to be reduced to a formula; that, on the one hand, the devil did mimic the work of God, and that, on the other, God's true children were to be found in the most unlikely confessions. Empirical tests might properly determine the outward forms of church life, the inner forms of church discipline and fellowship, even, what a Wesley might refer to, in no proprietary sense, as 'our' doctrines. The revival-groups were thus in a real sense not 'dissenting' sects, even where the public law of the societies in which they were born required them to be classified as such. The characteristic expression of their belief was not the confession of faith, in the Reformation tradition, but the accumulation of archives, the evidence of the way God operated in history. Their leaders, though they were usually theologically aware, were not professional theo-

<sup>71</sup> *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, vi (1912), 186–95.

<sup>72</sup> Müller, *Zinzendorf als Erneuerer*, 100–1 (repr. in 2 *Zinzendorf Werke*, xii. 106–7).

logians defending a line, but pastors and evangelists writing letters and journals, preaching daily. And if their 'openness' offered many advantages over the compact citadels of the other type of sect, it was a question in the long run whether a mind open on so many fronts could retain even the eclectic connection with the past which had been so important at the beginning.