

Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem. By CRAIG D. ATWOOD. Max Kadeb German-American Research Institute Series. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. Pp. xi, 283. \$37.50.)

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Scholars of subjects as diverse as backcountry slavery and Pennsylvania's Indian relations have combed the scrupulous records left behind by the Moravian community. To date, however, the beliefs that spurred the German-speaking community into so many different quarters have been left largely unexamined within an early American context. In this new work on the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Craig D. Atwood delves into these beliefs by foregrounding the colorful and often gory theology of the group's founder, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a theology that inspired religious enthusiasm as well as controversy with its Christocentric "blood and wounds" emphasis. Zinzendorf's ideas, Atwood argues, animated and supported Bethlehem, the Moravians' key settlement in North America, during its twenty-year communal period (1741–1762). Indeed, for Atwood "Bethlehem was the embodiment of Zinzendorf's vision" (p. 7).

Community of the Cross attempts three related tasks. First, it aims to reintegrate Zinzendorf's vivid and experiential religion into the study of a community that has been, for the most part, left in the hands of social historians less interested in what Bethlehem's residents believed than in how their communitarian society functioned. Second, by making Zinzendorf the central figure of a town in which the count spent only a few months, Atwood illustrates the tightly organized and transatlantic nature of the Moravian community and shows how one of the most creative branches of German pietism—itsself one of the most dynamic religious movements of the eighteenth century—took root in North America. Last, and perhaps most important for scholars of early American religion and early modern pietism, Atwood challenges the notion that Zinzendorf's most exuberant religious expressions were part of a short-lived and unpopular phenomenon (particularly in America) and that the so-called Sifting Time they represented ended in 1749 when the community moved away from its obsession with the "juicy," "purple," and "cavernous" side wound of Christ and toward more orthodox Protestant worship (p. 326).

Atwood argues that Zinzendorf was the prime mover of all things associated with the *Brüdergemeine* (as the Moravians called themselves), even in America, downplaying the influence of other leaders (most notably Bethlehem's August Spangenberg) and minimizing the difficulty of maintaining an international religious society in an era when imperial war and ocean voyages made communication problematic. Emphasizing instead Zinzendorf's ideology as the centerpiece of the Moravian community, the book's first three chapters describe the group's European context and the development of the count's unique approach to Christianity. Although Atwood notes that the group's initial members were refugees descended from the fifteenth-century Hussite Unity of the Brethren, he argues that the renewed community of the eighteenth century "did not re-create the old *Unitas Fratrum*" (p. 25). Instead, Zinzendorf combined the pietist emphasis on making Christianity "a more vital presence in society and in individual lives" (p. 28) with his own nonrational approach to religious understanding, in which the unmediated experience of Christ—the central figure of the Trinity for the Moravians—formed the foundation of all religious knowledge.

Christ's humanity, divinity, and above all his body, blood, and wounds stood at the center of this emotional religion, providing the means through which eighteenth-century Moravians worshiped and came to know the divine. "Swimming in the blood of Christ was not a morbid image for Zinzendorf but an expression of the soul's desire for eternal life in Christ" (pp. 100–101), Atwood tells us, and Christ's blood thus provided the *Brüdergemeine* with an intimate and joyful connection to its savior. Furthermore, over and above the contemplation of Christ's suffering that

was the responsibility of all Christians, Zinzendorf believed individuals also experienced their savior intimately through metaphorical physical communion: men through the blessing of having the same form that God himself had taken on earth and women through the sexual union that form enabled. “For Zinzendorf’s followers,” Atwood explains, “sexual intercourse was a liturgy in which the woman plays the Gemeine [community] and the man Christ” (p. 93).

The intense imagery derived from these ideas reverberated throughout Zinzendorf’s theology and provoked not a little controversy. His radical emphasis on Christ as the predominant figure in the Trinity, coupled with the physicality with which Moravians described him, continues to spark discussion among historians about Brüdergemeine’s gendering and interpretation of the Trinity. Atwood agrees with Aaron S. Fogleman’s argument for a Moravian “feminization of the trinity,” for example, particularly as it relates to the Holy Spirit as mother (“Jesus Is Female: The Moravian Challenge in the German Communities of British North America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LX [2003], 295–332). Simultaneously, however, one of Atwood’s most valuable contributions is his detailed elucidation of Jesus’ many roles and characteristics in Zinzendorffian theology, preventing any simple statement about Christ’s essential gender. Taken together, these chapters provide an engaging (though markedly sympathetic) summary of one of the eighteenth century’s most creative theologians.

Moving across the ocean for the book’s second half, Atwood demonstrates how Zinzendorf’s theology permeated Bethlehem during its communal era, outlining a far more stable picture of that period than previous scholars have embraced. Blame for the town’s social and economic difficulties in the late 1740s is usually placed on the religious exuberances of the “Sifting Time,” when Zinzendorf’s blood and wounds theology was to have peaked and then been eradicated. Atwood, however, posits that Bethlehem’s residents employed the language associated with the “Sifting” throughout the communal era, until “the Brüdergemeine lost its creative genius” (p. 224) when Zinzendorf died in 1760. To support his case for Zinzendorf’s persistent theological influence after 1750, Atwood relies on a close examination of daily worship in town, in particular the hymns and litanies selected for communal use. Linguistic analysis of the principal Moravian hymnals shows the centrality of such concepts as the lamb, wounds, heart, and blood of Christ long after the “wounds cult” is thought to have died out. In daily services and through a host of other rituals, “the Gemeine reaffirmed its connection to its bloody Savior, and, in doing so, to Zinzendorf’s theology” (p. 170). As Atwood states, “they lived, worshipped, worked, and loved within the side wound of Christ” (p. 213).

Atwood’s version of Bethlehem is almost utopian, with improbable overtones of timeless uniformity, but by salvaging the Moravians’ and Zinzendorf’s creative piety from dismissal as the detritus of the “Sifting Time,” he does much to recover the texture of Bethlehem’s religious life. *Community of the Cross* thus offers an important corrective to scholarship on American Moravians that has thus far overwhelmingly ignored the substance and depth of the group’s faith, a striking oversight given that it was exactly these characteristics that made the Moravians unusually effective missionaries among the native and enslaved peoples of the Atlantic world. Additionally, he clearly demonstrates the strength of the intellectual and religious ties between backcountry Bethlehem and central Europe during this period. Unfortunately, as is to be expected in a book that offers so many correctives, it may be said that the result goes too far in the opposite direction, disconnecting Bethlehem from its backcountry environment, from life in its missions, and from the cataclysmic events of the French and Indian War in favor of a clearly international but exclusively Moravian Atlantic world. Nonetheless, its vivid portrayal of a graphic theology will be useful to scholars of the Moravian movement and of international pietism and will provide an essential resource for those seeking to connect what the Moravians did with why they did it.