

INTRODUCTION

Zinzendorf: So, why did we come together back in 1722?

Watteville: To be a Philadelphia!

Zinzendorf: Because we were.

—*Conference at Lindsey House, Chelsea, September 25, 1753*

Just outside the town of Herrnhut, somewhat sheltered under the tall trees of the forest along the road to Zittau, stands a stone marker. On the front of the simple, cubiform shape a cast-iron plaque informs the passerby that this is where Moravian settlers felled the first tree for the construction of Herrnhut. On June 17, 1822, a century after the founding of Herrnhut, a large crowd gathered at this location to dedicate the historical marker. For them the felling of the first tree on June 17, 1722, marked a new phase in the history of a church that had long been thought dead. It was the beginning of a worldwide fellowship of affiliated communities in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, South America, and Africa that originated at this spot. In 1822 Herrnhut was the center of a global church with fifty thousand members, and this spot in the woods was where it all began.¹

Herrnhut

The earliest years of Herrnhut are the topic of this book. We will examine how this new religious community was able to survive in a time when secular and religious authorities usually did not permit religious activity outside the recognized churches.



Fig. 1 Dedication of the memorial marker at the location of the felling of the first tree for the construction of Herrnhut. Engraving by L. Beste, 1822. Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, DP f.242.6.

In June of 1722 three families from Moravia arrived on the estate of Count Zinzendorf, who allowed them to settle on his land. On June 17, they began construction of the first house, and in October the families were able to move in. During the following years, as other exiles joined them, the settlement grew. Herrnhut was not a typical colony of Protestant refugees from the Habsburg Empire, such as the ones elsewhere in the region along the border with Bohemia and Moravia. Herrnhut was a religious community that developed its own organization and religious practices, separate from the local Lutheran parish. Herrnhut was part of a project, centered in the pious household in Zinzendorf's manor house in nearby Berthelsdorf and led by a group of Pietist friends. It would be wrong for the Herrnhut story to focus exclusively on the Moravian refugees. The reception of Protestants from Moravia was but one component of the overall plan to establish an *Anstalt*, a religious enterprise or institution with the goal of extending the Kingdom of Christ. Besides religious refugees from Moravia and Silesia, Pietists from other European regions came to live on the Berthelsdorf estate. By 1727 Herrnhut had a total of 224 inhabitants, 120 originally from Moravia and 104

from elsewhere.² Other religious refugees were accepted on the Berthelsdorf estate as well. In 1726 a group of Schwenkfelders from Silesia arrived, but their presence on Zinzendorf's estate ended abruptly with their expulsion from Saxony in 1733/34, something the Moravians were able to avoid.

In 1727 Zinzendorf took a leave of absence from his position at the royal court in Dresden and permanently moved to his estate. Rather than living in the manor house in Berthelsdorf, the Zinzendorf family took up residence in one of the houses on the town square in Herrnhut. During the summer of 1727, fierce discussions about the relationship of the community with the local parish were resolved with the introduction of formal rules and regulations for life in Herrnhut. And on August 13, during the celebration of Holy Communion, the Herrnhuters experienced a revival as a transformative moment, binding them closely together as an independent religious community. They believed God had formed them into a separate congregation, similar to the church of the ancestors of the Moravian settlers.

Within years of its founding, the Herrnhut community was in correspondence with the King of Prussia, the Queen of England, the Crown Prince of Denmark, and even the pope in Rome. Under the leadership of Zinzendorf, who was not only their secular lord but also their spiritual leader, this "renewed Moravian Church" quickly spread throughout the European continent, Britain, and North America. Moravian missionaries went to the enslaved in the Caribbean, to the Inuit in Greenland and Labrador, to the American Indians, and to the Khoekhoe in southern Africa. Within a few decades, Herrnhut had become the center of one of the most significant transatlantic religious movements of the eighteenth century, attracting Germans, Dutch, English, Scandinavians, American Indians, and enslaved men and women in the Caribbean.

This quick expansion was remarkable for a religious group that did not belong to one of the three officially recognized religions in the Holy Roman Empire. Herrnhut was able to survive by developing a successful defense narrative that made it more acceptable to the authorities by obscuring its true identity. This will be called the Herrnhut model: Herrnhut was a separatist religious community that masked its separatism behind a pretense of affiliation with the Lutheran Church and behind a chosen historical identity, that of the renewed Unity of Brethren.

The seemingly remote community of Herrnhut developed against the background of a larger discussion regarding the changing nature of Protestantism in Europe. The relationship of the state and religion was changing as eighteenth-century religion began to distance itself from the older confessional framework. Religion became more individual as the emphasis shifted

from doctrine to the lived experiential faith of the laypersons. During a time when the religious landscape in Europe was often characterized by fairly homogeneous regions, nonconforming groups began to demand toleration, while rulers began to realize the economic and social potential of minority groups.³ The Herrnhut community, small as it may initially have been, was carving out space within the confessional state. The Moravian network that eventually evolved transcended the boundaries of both the confessional state and confessional religion.

On the Berthelsdorf estate, two unlikely partners found each other: a group of Pietist friends centered around Zinzendorf and a colony of Protestant exiles from Moravia. How did these two groups find common ground? As I will argue in this book, the success of the Herrnhut community was due to the fact that the ideals of Zinzendorf and his Pietist friends were often compatible with the expectations of the Moravian settlers. As we will find, the Protestants from Bohemia and Moravia adhered to a generic form of Protestantism and did not care to become integrated into the Lutheran Church, nor were they interested in the distinctions between Lutheran and Reformed confessions. Confessional indifferentism often caused problems when exiles were forced to integrate into the confessional framework of the communities where they settled. In Herrnhut no such coercion existed, as Zinzendorf and the other leaders were intent on establishing a community of the true children of God, regardless of their denominational background. Zinzendorf's Philadelphian ecclesiology and the confessional indifferentism of the Moravian settlers were compatible. Another compatibility was the desire of the settlers to conduct prayer meetings with Bible reading, singing, explanation, and sometimes discussion. This was the worship style that was familiar to generations of crypto-Protestants. Often, local pastors and authorities in the regions where refugees were allowed to settle did not allow such prayer meetings, since they were considered conventicles and therefore outlawed. In Herrnhut this was not the case. Zinzendorf, influenced by the traditions of Pietism, considered prayer meetings the optimal form for true believers to gather and worship. Zinzendorf and his Pietist friends recognized the desire of the Protestant settlers as a valid form of devotion.

Despite this compatibility, ample potential for disagreement and conflict remained for the inhabitants of the Berthelsdorf estate. There was the political reality of early modern Germany, where one could not simply establish a religious body outside the official church. Thoughts about the relationship of the Herrnhut community with the Lutheran Church differed among Zinzendorf, his Pietist friends, and the Moravian settlers. During the 1720s this question caused repeated discussions. The most dramatic dissension took

place during 1727, when Zinzendorf ultimately organized Herrnhut as its own religious community, separate from the Lutheran Church and only loosely connected to the local Lutheran parish of Berthelsdorf.⁴ And even after the summer of 1727, when the newfound unity about organizational questions was sealed by what was believed to be the outpouring of God's spirit, this debate flared up from time to time. Important for the identity of the Herrnhut community was the belief that God had renewed the extinct church of their ancestors. I will argue that this narrative of the renewal of the ancient Unity of Brethren was a useful model for the Herrnhuters, enabling all participants to find common ground. I will also argue that for many this narrative was not the primary motivation for joining the Herrnhut community. In 1727, 45 percent of the Herrnhut residents were not of Moravian origin.

In the past, historians have argued that Zinzendorf tried to temper the Moravians' desire to renew the Moravian Church, or even that he was opposed to it.⁵ I will argue the opposite: it was Zinzendorf who invented and promoted the idea of renewing the Unity and appropriating its history. The idea dates to the summer of 1727, after the introduction of the statutes of Herrnhut, when he found parallels between the rules and practices of Herrnhut and the constitution of the Unity of Brethren. He presented it to the Moravian settlers and other residents, who gladly went along.

Lutheranism

In order to understand the character of the Herrnhut community, we have to understand its relationship to the Lutheran Church and its claimed connection to the Unity of Brethren. We also have to understand the relationship to Pietism and Philadelphian ideas.

There are two schools of thought regarding Zinzendorf's relationship to the Lutheran Church. According to the first tradition, Zinzendorf was a Lutheran who wanted to keep Herrnhut within the Lutheran Church. Only because the Lutheran theologians of his time failed to understand Zinzendorf's intentions was Herrnhut excluded from the Lutheran Church and forced to form an independent religious organization. This manner of reading Zinzendorf dates back to the eighteenth century, especially to Spangenberg and the official Moravian historiography of the post-Zinzendorf era.⁶ Of course, this was the position Zinzendorf himself took whenever he defended his enterprises for ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Bernhard Becker, in his influential study of Zinzendorf's theology (1866), argues that

“as a true Lutheran Zinzendorf never intended this movement to develop into a new, independent denomination.”⁷ The interpretation of Zinzendorf as a Lutheran who wanted to integrate the Herrnhut community into the Lutheran Church is a continuation of the apologetics of the eighteenth century and can be found especially among historians close to the Moravian Church.⁸

The second school sees in Zinzendorf a radical Pietist who left the Lutheran Church and made Herrnhut into a separate religious body.⁹ This interpretation also goes back to the eighteenth century. In *Abriss der Brüdergemeine* (1751) Johann Albrecht Bengel recognized the Philadelphian motives of Zinzendorf’s endeavors, which the count often clothed in Lutheran-sounding assertions.¹⁰ In the nineteenth century it was Albrecht Ritschl who read Zinzendorf as a Philadelphian aiming to find souls among all religious traditions whom he united in his community. According to Ritschl, Zinzendorf claimed to adhere to Luther’s teachings without actually understanding Lutheran theology. Ritschl did not believe Zinzendorf’s assertions that he had a positive appreciation of the Lutheran Church: the members of his Philadelphian congregation did not have to leave their churches, not because Zinzendorf considered the churches to be living branches of Christianity but because he regarded them with indifference.¹¹ Twentieth-century historians such as Wilhelm Lütjeharms, Otto Uttendörfer, Ingeborg Posselt, Sigurd Nielsen, Leiv Aalen, and Hans Schneider have recognized Zinzendorf’s Philadelphian principles.¹² Schneider argues that Herrnhut was not a Lutheran *ecclesiola in ecclesia* based on Spener’s model but rather a heterogeneous religious community, separate from the Berthelsdorf parish and beyond the oversight of Lutheran pastor Rothe.¹³ This study will expand on these findings and argue that Herrnhut was intended to be a separate body of Philadelphian believers *outside* the Lutheran Church. Philadelphians considered such gatherings not part of the institutional church but congregations of a higher order.

A separate religious body would have been met with vigilance and great concern by the authorities. Therefore, the impression that Herrnhut was indeed a separate community had to be avoided. In early modern Germany separatism was illegal, and any semblance of separatism was therefore full of risks. Zinzendorf knew it was his responsibility to protect his undertakings from attack. As a nobleman, trained in law and well versed in theology, Zinzendorf was able to find the right arguments to defend his endeavors and to depict the community of Herrnhut in an innocuous manner. Many apologetical and defensive texts were written to downplay Herrnhut’s separate identity in order to appease the authorities, both secular and religious. Later histories of the Moravian Church, such as Spangenberg’s Zinzendorf

biography, often repeat this apologetic view. Consequently, it is not difficult to find statements by Zinzendorf claiming the opposite of what is argued here: namely, that Herrnhut by no means separated from the Lutheran Church and that everything Zinzendorf ever did was to keep Herrnhut based upon the foundation of the Lutheran Church.¹⁴

Pietism

The events in Berthelsdorf and Herrnhut during the 1720s were part of a larger phenomenon, usually referred to as Pietism, a movement within Protestantism that started many decades earlier. Pietism is generally considered a reform movement of believers who gathered in small groups (conventicles) within and outside of official church congregations, promoting religious and societal change.¹⁵ The term *Pietism* has been used since the second half of the nineteenth century as a comprehensive label for various reform movements within the Protestant churches of the European continent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Originally, it was a polemical label with a strong pejorative connotation. The discussion on the definition and duration of Pietism dates back many decades.¹⁶ Recently, Veronika Albrecht-Birkner proposed “early modern Reform Protestantism” as an umbrella term for the range of reform movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷ The goal of this Reform Protestantism was to complete the Reformation, which, depending on one’s perspective, was either left unfinished or had fallen into decline. Characteristic of Reform Protestantism was the relativization of confessional boundaries and the use of ideas borrowed from other confessional traditions. Albrecht-Birkner distinguishes between top-down Reform movements (e.g., Francke’s network) and bottom-up movements (e.g., Zinzendorf’s Moravians). Lucinda Martin has pointed out that these reformers are part of a long tradition of criticism of the church. The reformers denounced the rigid character of the churches (*Mauerkirchen*), which focused on rituals and outward faith rather than on a religion of the heart. The reformers emphasized the idea of an invisible church, a union of true believers, in a church without walls. Zinzendorf was one of these reformers of early modern Europe who wanted to unite God’s children from all denominations, nations, and classes.¹⁸ Pietism was an international movement, and perhaps in no other movement of the time did this internationality become as manifest as in Moravianism.

The beginnings of Pietism are usually traced back to Philipp Jakob Spener in Frankfurt am Main.¹⁹ In 1675 Spener published a tract, *Pia Desideria*, that is often considered the founding text of the reform movement. Spener

propagated a reform of church and society through reform not from above, by a ruler or church leadership, but rather from within, by promoting a more pious way of life among the laity. Spener called for a true implementation of the Christian message. According to Spener, "true Christianity" means a profound change of a person's behavior. Faith is alive when it is a matter of the heart rather than of the mind and when a person actually practices faith in their life.²⁰ According to Spener, both church and individual believer should follow the example of early Christianity in order to reach perfection.²¹

Spener called for conventicles, *collegia pietatis*, small gatherings of the pious to foster true piety by study of the Bible, prayer, and group discussion. By stressing the concept of the priesthood of all believers, Spener encouraged participation of laypeople on all levels. These small groups would serve as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, little churches within the church, enlivening and strengthening the overall church.²² Although the idea of small group gatherings could find justification in Luther's works,²³ these conventicles often raised suspicions among church leaders and secular rulers alike as they considered these groups, where ordinary men (and women) were given opportunity to interpret the Bible, a challenge to their authority and to the established order.

Among some of Spener's followers, the push for reform went even further. They stopped attending church regularly and were unwilling to take Communion together with the "unconverted," who in their eyes were "unworthy" of the sacrament. The meetings of these separatists were beyond the control of the ministry. Strom and Lehmann call this the "ongoing tension" within Pietism between those who wished to reform the church from within and those who had given up on the established church and had broken away.²⁴ In early modern Central Europe, where a ruler determined the confession of his subjects, the religious community and the civil community were one and the same. By separating from the church, a person appeared to place themselves outside of the civic community as well, causing concern from both religious and secular authorities. Pietists who separated from the church are usually called "radical Pietists," while those who attempted to reform the church from within are called "church" or "ecclesial Pietists."

A second wave of Pietism emanated from Leipzig in the late 1680s.²⁵ Theology students in Leipzig around August Hermann Francke conducted conventicles that also included local townspeople. After the authorities took action and the students left Leipzig, the *collegia pietatis* spread through central and northern Germany. Ecclesiastical and civil authorities in many places criticized the conventicles, reinforcing the Pietists' conviction of the corrupt nature of the established church.²⁶ Francke himself went to Erfurt, where his sermons attracted large crowds until he was expelled by city authorities after

only fifteen months. He then accepted a position at the University of Halle, combined with the office of pastor at Glaucha, located just outside of the city. Here Francke founded various institutions, including schools, a printing office, and an apothecary. With its university and the institutions founded by Francke, Halle became the center of Pietism. A new generation of Pietist ministers, often trained at Halle, tried to reform the church from within. Some of these regenerate ministers soon found themselves in trouble. Their demands for a better life for their parishioners, combined with their outspoken criticism of local traditions such as dances, wedding celebrations, fairs, and christening banquets, together with their refusal to give Communion to offenders against their moral rules of a Christian life, caused division within the communities.

Through his pragmatism and by distancing himself from radical elements, Francke succeeded in gaining recognition of Pietism as a reform movement *within* the church, even though many ecclesial Pietists continued to experience difficulties. The radical Pietists were not as moderate and did not hide their criticism of the doctrine and practice of the institutional church. They espoused ideas that did not conform to orthodox Lutheran or Reformed teachings. Their views of the church deviated from the ecclesiologies of the established Protestant churches; they often separated from the church, which they condemned as “Babylon.” Needless to say, many radical Pietists encountered opposition and even oppression.²⁷

Schneider sees the emergence of organized communities among radical Pietists as “a new phenomenon” in the eighteenth century.²⁸ Earlier generations of radical Pietists mostly rejected the formation of such congregations. They believed God should be worshipped “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), for which the established church was not needed, nor did they find it right to organize new “sects.”

In many German territories special decrees prevented Pietists from organizing themselves independently from the established territorial churches. The formation of organized radical Pietist communities was possible only in areas with tolerant governments willing to violate imperial law. The stipulations of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) recognized the right of the sovereign to determine the religion of his subjects while outlawing any religion within the Holy Roman Empire other than the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches. In addition, the peace treaty guaranteed nonconforming Christians the right to devotions held privately in their homes, as long as these groups had been present in the region in the deciding year of 1624. Toleration and acceptance of other religious groups was explicitly outlawed. Even when individual rulers were willing to tolerate dissenting groups,

their position remained uncertain, as they were often expelled for openly criticizing the government or for causing offense.²⁹

In the case of Herrnhut the local lord himself was the instigator and leader of the community. The Herrnhut community therefore enjoyed a great deal of freedom within the confines of the political constellation of Upper Lusatia. Still, Zinzendorf was not the sovereign, and there were bounds to the latitude in religious matters he enjoyed, as he was to experience on multiple occasions. As we will find, it appears that Zinzendorf tried to appeal to the regulation that private worship of nonconforming believers was to be allowed.

Similar to the modern distinction between radical and ecclesial Pietists, Zinzendorf distinguished between “two branches of so-called Pietism”: the “mystics,” on the one hand, who gave up their offices and positions in the church, and the “eager Christian ministers” on the other hand, who remained within the church. He found fault with both groups. He criticized the “mystics” for sometimes changing their teachings and deviating from Christian doctrine, and also for allowing offensive and troublesome elements in their communities, while he faulted the Pietist ministers within the church for having lost some of their original zeal. When, however, according to Zinzendorf, the separatist mystics and the church Pietists would join together, as at the court of his in-laws in Ebersdorf, “true blessing will result in teaching and practice.”³⁰ These words from 1746 also adequately describe Zinzendorf’s position on piety, church, and separatism in relation to developments in Berthelsdorf and Herrnhut during the 1720s. Together with the Pietist ministers Scheffer and Rothe, Zinzendorf formed a religious community that incorporated elements of various backgrounds and traditions. For Zinzendorf, true doctrine was not a matter of reason but rather the inwardly experienced religion of the heart, as expressed in the devotion of the suffering and death of Jesus; Christian life was defined in the statutes and regulations formally adopted in 1727. The irony of Zinzendorf’s model, however, was the fact that by combining radical and moderate elements in an organized religious community, Herrnhut became detached from the institutional Lutheran Church. And although Zinzendorf himself was perhaps reluctant to take this step, pressure from within the community in early 1727 forced him to separate Herrnhut from Berthelsdorf.

We will see that the position of radical Pietists regarding the established church and separatism varied. Historians warn not to draw the lines between radicals and the more moderate church Pietists too sharply: some Pietist pastors who chose to stay within the church had radical ideas, whereas not everyone who separated from the church necessarily adhered to radical beliefs.³¹ We will find that those involved with the project on the Berthelsdorf

estate had different ideas about their relationship with the Lutheran Church and on separatism. Andreas Rothe was an example of a Pietist minister who willingly participated in Zinzendorf's project on the Berthelsdorf lands but who, after his installation as parish pastor, became more attached to the Lutheran Church and warier of religious activities outside of the church. Melchior Scheffer in Görlitz was much more outspoken against the established church than Rothe, but when confronted with the possibility of disciplinary action from church authorities, Scheffer gave in to the pressure. In the end both Rothe and Scheffer chose to remain loyal to the Lutheran Church, which meant their relationship to Herrnhut grew more distant. Zinzendorf strove to give the impression that he remained attached to the Lutheran Church while he actively pursued plans that were clearly outside the confines of the institutional church. Christian David openly pushed for separation of the Herrnhut community from the church. Rothe, Scheffer, Zinzendorf, and David represented differing degrees of separation from the church. Important for our understanding of Zinzendorf, his relationship to the Lutheran Church, and his ecclesiology are his Philadelphian ideas.

Philadelphianism

The ideas of the nonconformist reformers in late seventeenth-century Germany about an invisible church of true believers were similar to religious reform movement ideas in England. The Philadelphian movement in England quickly became a significant influence on radical Pietists in Germany at the end of the seventeenth century.³² Philadelphian ideals were of great importance for the development of the Herrnhut community as well, as will be argued throughout this study.

The origins of the Philadelphian movement are to be found in England. The Philadelphian Society in London consisted of followers of the tenets of Jacob Böhme under the leadership of John Pordage (1607–1681), Jane Lead (1623–1704), and Francis Lee (1661–1719).³³ Translated into German and printed by publishers in the Netherlands, the publications of the Philadelphian Society found a keen audience among radical Pietists in Germany. In 1702 the Philadelphian Society in London adopted statutes that they hoped to introduce among the Philadelphian friends on the European continent as well. This attempt failed because most German Philadelphians declined to become part of a formal organization. The German Philadelphians feared adoption of formal rules would make them into a new "sect," which went against their core conviction.³⁴ Following Lead's death in 1704, the

Philadelphian Society in London dissolved. Her ideas, however, remained influential in Germany for several decades.

The goal of the Philadelphians was to reform the church, which in their view had deviated from the “Apostolic Rule” and was hopelessly divided among countless “sects” (denominations), all claiming to be the true church of Christ.³⁵ For a Philadelphian, the word *sect* referred not to religious cults outside of the accepted denominations, but to these denominations themselves. The Philadelphians wanted to reestablish the unified church through apostolic faith and a spirit of brotherly love among the faithful. Significant for the worldview of the Philadelphians were the letters to the seven churches in the biblical book of Revelation and the resulting historical periodization. Philadelphians believed these letters were not directed only at the seven churches but retained their validity to later generations of Christians. Thus they applied the image of the church of Sardis, the church that although it had a name that lives was actually “dead” (Rev. 3:1), to the institutional churches of their own time. The church of Philadelphia represented the true Christians throughout the ages, “without Fault and Blame,” who with but little strength keep the word of Jesus and hold on until the end (Rev. 3:8–13).³⁶ At the same time, the term *philadelphia* also referred to the impartial brotherly love (φιλαδελφία) that characterized true Christians (John 13:34–35) and would conquer the differences among the Christians. Eventually the age of Philadelphia would replace the age of Sardis.³⁷

According to a summary of the ideas of the Philadelphians found in the *Propositions Extracted from the Reasons for the Foundation and Promotion of a Philadelphian Society* (1697), the church on earth had to be made “conformable” or uniform with Christ by the Holy Spirit, which is universal and one, without the “Narrowness, Partiality, or Particularity of Spirit” that characterized the existing churches. The Philadelphians found that God “is stirring up” people in different European countries “to Wait in Faith and Prayer . . . till such a Pure Church may arise.” The faithful had to prepare for the “Resuscitation of this Spirit,” individually but also jointly as a group,³⁸ and to wait and pray for “Divine Learning,” which went beyond human knowledge. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit will cure “the many Divisions and Sects of Christianity, all pretending to be the True Church.” The divisions could not be healed by human learning, political measures, or power. By retaining their mutual love and by strengthening faith among Christians of all denominations the Philadelphians would be able to overcome the “imperfections” and “corruptions” of the denominations. The two “Grand Pillars” of the Philadelphian ideas were “Catholick Love and Apostolic Faith,” and the goal of this apostolic faith was “the Revelation of the Kingdom of God within the Soul,”

an internalized, experiential faith rather than a rationalized theology based on doctrine, finally resulting in a “Virgin Church.” The faithful gathered in the apostolic congregation of true believers. Until “such a Philadelphian Church on Earth” had been established, Christ would not return to earth.³⁹

Zinzendorf’s ecclesiology was very much influenced by Philadelphian ideas on the relationship between the institutional churches and the apostolic congregation of true believers. Important to note is that according to Philadelphian ideas, the apostolic church was of a higher order than the existing churches. According to the Philadelphians, corruptions were to be found in the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Reformed churches, and the Church of England alike, the dogmatic differences over which these denominations had been arguing for centuries were mere human “imperfections.” This claim caused their critics to accuse Philadelphians of indifference and disrespect for the institutional church.⁴⁰ Philadelphian ideas could be considered an attack against the confessionalism of the time.⁴¹

Philadelphians characterized dogmatic differences among the denominations as mere “Perswasions or Opinions.” True Christians were to abstain from theological discussions and refuse to decide who was right or wrong among “the contending Parties.”⁴² Philadelphians were advised to remain “in the Bond of Peace in the Visible Unity of the Church.”⁴³ They were not to condemn the “Externals or Rituals of the Christian Religion,” nor were they to make much of them. As they considered the teachings and rites of the institutional churches of secondary importance, they were able to continue to worship in these churches without the need to separate. Philadelphians were to “Worship the Father, through his Son, in Spirit and Truth [John 4:23] in whatever Temple, or Place they may appear as to their Outward Persons.”⁴⁴ Philadelphians believed that later generations had departed from the original theology of the apostolic church, but that these human additions to the “apostolic faith” were temporary and could eventually be eliminated.⁴⁵ Philadelphianism relativized the truth claims of the confessional churches, preparing the way for a worldview of religious diversity.

This Philadelphian viewpoint is significant for Zinzendorf’s ecclesiology. The following from Lee’s *State of the Philadelphian Society* summarizes Zinzendorf’s own position regarding the relationship of Philadelphians to the institutional church: “They [the Philadelphians] differ not from the Protestant Churches as to external Communion; they do not refuse Communion with them, either in hearing the Word, or receiving the Sacraments, and therefore make no Schism.”⁴⁶ This is where he has often been misunderstood: when Zinzendorf claimed he intended to remain within the Lutheran Church or when he urged others not to cut their ties with the institutional

church, he did so not out of a particular esteem for the church but rather out of a deeply held Philadelphian conviction. The congregation at Herrnhut was intended to be such an apostolic gathering of Philadelphian Christians, waiting and preparing for the unification of Christ's church on earth while continuing to worship in the parish church at Berthelsdorf. Zinzendorf's ideas on separatism will be further discussed in chapter 7.

Philadelphians believed the reason for the demise of the denominational churches, both Catholic and Protestant, was that they had abandoned the faith and practice of the apostolic church. Therefore, Philadelphians did "diligent Research after the Primitive and Original Model of the Church of Christ, while it kept its first Love [Rev. 2:4]." By restoring the apostolic church they hoped to "re-establish the Catholick Unity in the Band of the Spirit."⁴⁷ Herrnhut was intentionally designed as an "apostolic congregation," and as we will see, this Philadelphian ideal played a crucial role in the development of the community, such as the call of Pastor Rothe in 1722, the establishment of offices in 1725, and the introduction of the Brotherly Agreement of 1727.

During the history of Christianity many reform movements have aimed to restore the early church. The Unity of Brethren is one such group.⁴⁸ In the late seventeenth century the lost purity of the early church became a popular theme among many seeking renewal.⁴⁹ Influential was Gottfried Arnold's voluminous book *Die Erste Liebe, das ist Wahre Abbildung der ersten Christen* (The first love, which is a true portrayal of the first Christians; 1696). Arnold's intention was to show his contemporaries how far the established churches of his day were removed from the "first love" (Rev. 2:4) of the early church, to which they needed to return. He held up the early Christians as an example of a true religion of the heart and an active Christianity without institutions, rites, or ceremonies. His book gained great popularity among Pietist circles. Several groups, separating from the established churches to restore apostolic ideals, looked to Arnold for guidance on how to re-create the true community of the faithful.⁵⁰ Later the recognition of parallels between the Unity of Brethren and the organization of Herrnhut based on the shared apostolic example led to the profound experiences of August 13, 1727, as we will see in chapter 4.

Philadelphian ideas found a receptive audience among radical Pietists on the European continent, while radical thought from the Continent was discussed in England.⁵¹ In the Netherlands the Collegiants, dating back to the early seventeenth century, had similar ideas about tolerance among believers from different denominations, the corruption of the institutional churches, and the ideal of restoring apostolic Christianity.⁵² Spener's ideas on gathering the pious in *collegia pietatis* had its parallel in the Philadelphian concept

of the apostolic congregation as the assembly of true Christians awaiting Christ's return. Many German radical Pietists read Philadelphian publications that were translated and published in the Netherlands. Some German Pietists, such as Gottfried Arnold, the Berleburg separatists, and the Petersens, began to correspond with Lead in London. Johanna Eleonora and Johann Wilhelm Petersen in Niederndodeleben, west of Magdeburg, became the principal advocates for Philadelphian ideas in Germany.⁵³ Zinzendorf admired the Petersens; he visited Petersen in the summer of 1724, not long after the death of Eleonora Petersen, and again in August 1726. We know that Zinzendorf particularly liked Eleonora Petersen's *Geistlicher Kampff der Erstgebohrnen* (Spiritual battle of the firstborn), an exposition of her Philadelphian ideas, which he recommended to his Berthelsdorf friends and also to his mother.⁵⁴

Most Philadelphians did not want to found a new church: the bond with other true Christians was maintained through correspondence and through conversations and loosely organized meetings. Some groups, however, adopted formal rules and a common belief system, something generally considered contrary to Philadelphian ideas.⁵⁵ Zinzendorf was confronted with the same dilemma: would the group on his estate remain a loosely organized fellowship with close relations to the local parish, or was it to become a more distinctly organized religious association?

Zinzendorf encountered Philadelphian ideas at different times in his life, possibly as early as childhood while growing up in his grandmother's house. In retrospect, he described his grandmother, Henriette Katharina von Gersdorf, as a Philadelphian: "She did not know of any difference between the Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed religions; anyone who had a heart and came to her was her neighbor."⁵⁶ A recent analysis of her library reveals that Gersdorf owned a great number of Philadelphian books, such as Jane Lead's *Offenbahrung der Offenbahrungen* (*Revelation of Revelations*) and books by the Petersens.⁵⁷ Schneider suggests that an important opportunity for Zinzendorf to become familiar with Philadelphian publications occurred in the summer of 1719, when he stayed in Utrecht in the Netherlands for three months during his grand tour. Here Zinzendorf became personally acquainted with Loth Fischer, the translator of Philadelphian works into German.⁵⁸ Fischer, who lived on Ganzenmarkt in Utrecht, was a follower of Gichtel and a member of the Collegiants, the Dutch society that adhered to ideas similar to the Philadelphians. In 1719 Fischer finalized a complete edition of Jane Lead's works in German, and it seems likely that he shared these books with the young count.⁵⁹ These publications contain the core principles of the Philadelphian Society, many of which we see reflected in Zinzendorf's

own ideas during the following years. The importance of his encounter with Loth Fischer can hardly be overstated.

Overall, the grand tour was an opportunity for Zinzendorf to be exposed to a variety of different churches and religious groups, of which he took full advantage.⁶⁰ At the end of it he spent time at the court of the Reuss family in Ebersdorf, where he experienced in practice how a Philadelphian congregation functioned.⁶¹ There, already influenced by general Philadelphian notions during his upbringing and having received a further understanding and appreciation of these ideas by reading the books Fischer shared with him in Utrecht, Zinzendorf came to understand how Philadelphianism could be practiced. From then on he decided to become “an instrument and worker in [God’s] Philadelphian church.”⁶²

By reading Zinzendorf as a Philadelphian, we will gain a richer understanding of his intentions and of the development of the religious community at Herrnhut. The main actors in the founding and early development of Herrnhut were all influenced by Philadelphian ideas, including Andreas Rothe, Christian David, and Melchior Scheffer.

The Present Study

In order to understand the Moravian movement of the eighteenth century, we need to understand its formative years. Accordingly, in this book we will be investigating a short but crucial period in the movement’s history: its first ten years. These years coincide with Zinzendorf’s ownership of the Berthelsdorf estate, which he purchased in 1722 and, under pressure from the authorities, sold in 1732 to his wife, Erdmuth Dorothea. The investigation by Saxon authorities and the resulting sale of the property to Erdmuth will be the end point of our investigation.

Besides Zinzendorf, other significant actors in the formation of Herrnhut include Lutheran pastors Melchior Scheffer and Andreas Rothe; Moravian settlers such as Christian David; and Pietists from other regions such as Friedrich von Watteville, Johanna von Zezschwitz, Johann Georg Heitz, and Erdmuth Dorothea von Zinzendorf. However, as local lord and leader of the Herrnhut community, Zinzendorf was undeniably the most influential person, and, more importantly, he dominates the archival record, as most of the surviving records come from what originally were his family archives.

The story of early Herrnhut is not unknown. The events of August 13, 1727, are celebrated each year in every Moravian Church around the world,

offering plenty of opportunity for historical reflection. Many aspects of the history of eighteenth-century Moravianism have been studied in recent years. Academic journals, conferences, and book series are devoted to the study of Moravian history. Scholarly discussion of the formative years of Herrnhut, however, is not as exhaustive as one might expect. The most recent comprehensive history of the beginnings of Herrnhut in German dates from 1959.⁶³ The most recent English publication on the early years of Herrnhut dates from 1946; it is a translation of a German publication from 1922.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, many studies of individual aspects of early Herrnhut and of Zinzendorf's biography and theology have been published. In recent decades the study of German Pietism has really taken off. Especially with the founding of the Interdisciplinary Center of Pietism Studies in Halle and the improved access to so many relevant archives after the end of communism, great progress has been made in many fields relevant for the understanding of early Herrnhut: radical Pietism, the history of Upper Lusatia, and the history of crypto-Protestantism in the Habsburg Empire.

The existing monographs on the early history of Herrnhut are generally older. Gerhard Reichel (1874–1953), professor of church history at the Theological Seminary in Herrnhut, wrote two studies based on thorough archival research: *Die Anfänge Herrnhuts* (Herrnhut's beginnings, 1922) on the founding of Herrnhut in 1722, and *Gottes Wunderführung im alten Herrnhut* (God's miraculous guidance in ancient Herrnhut, 1927) on the revival of August 13, 1727.⁶⁵ Volume 2 of Erich Beyreuther's three-volume Zinzendorf biography, *Zinzendorf und die sich allhier zusammen finden* (Zinzendorf and those who here together are assembled, 1959), deals with the history of Herrnhut from its founding until 1732.⁶⁶ Beyreuther (1904–2003) taught church history at the University of Leipzig until he immigrated to West Germany in 1962. He was a historian of Pietism, and his book on early Herrnhut testifies to his great knowledge of the archival record. Another relevant study is Hanns-Joachim Wollstadt's *Geordnetes Dienen in der christlichen Gemeinde* (Orderly serving in a Christian congregation, 1966). Wollstadt (1929–1991) was a Protestant pastor in East Germany, and the goal of his detailed study of the communal organization of Herrnhut during the 1720s and '30s was to find usable elements in the past for the church of his day.⁶⁷

Even though no monographs on the origins of Herrnhut have been published during the last five decades, many articles and book chapters on the early years of the Herrnhut community have been written.⁶⁸ Especially important are the studies by Hans Schneider, church historian in Marburg, Germany, who has convincingly described the Philadelphian principles at play in the Moravian Church of the eighteenth century.⁶⁹ During the last few

decades the study of Pietism in all its variants has produced many new insights that make it opportune to revisit the history of early Herrnhut.⁷⁰

Archival Sources

There is an astounding abundance of archival records relating to the early years of Herrnhut. Hundreds of letters, many detailed lists of inhabitants, diaries, and early histories of the new town dating from the first ten years are preserved; not even the notes from the postmaster in Löbau, to name but one example, have been discarded.⁷¹

Two factors contribute to the existence of so much archival material: Zinzendorf's role within the community and the belief of the Herrnhuters that, as a community of true Christians, they needed to document the wonders of God in their midst.⁷² For noblemen like Zinzendorf it was quite common to keep record of their activities. Incoming letters were archived, and his secretary, Tobias Friedrich, his close friend Friedrich von Watterville, and others copied and filed outgoing letters. The Moravians began preserving their records early on. After Zinzendorf's death, the records of the family, often inseparable from the records of the church, were incorporated into the newly founded Unity Archives (1764), which have been continuously cared for and fortunately survived the destruction of Herrnhut during World War II. In addition to the records of the central administration of the church kept in the Unity Archives, the Herrnhut congregation kept its own records in the *Gemeinhaus* located on the main square. This building, including the original meeting hall and the archives, was lost in 1945 when Russian soldiers set fire to many of the buildings in the center of town. The surviving finding aid of the congregational archives, however, indicates that not many records from the earliest years remained in the congregational archives when it burned, as they had already been transferred to the Unity Archives.⁷³

Because Zinzendorf resided in Dresden much of the time during the early years of Herrnhut, he was kept informed by letter. Therefore, many matters regarding the community were discussed in writing. Pastor Scheffer in Görlitz was actively involved in the planning of the Herrnhut community; two hundred of his letters survive.⁷⁴ Letters by Pastor Rothe, another key player during these formative years, however, are much rarer as they fell victim to the destructive zeal of archivist Christlieb Suter in 1802, who rid the Unity Archives of anything shedding a critical light on the church.⁷⁵ Because of this,

the position of Rothe in the ongoing discussion between him and Zinzendorf during these early years is much harder to examine.

Two genres of archival records need to be mentioned here, as they are typical for the Moravians: the congregational diary and the memoirs (*Lebensläufe*).

The congregational diary of Herrnhut begins in April of 1727, when Zinzendorf took up residence in Herrnhut after taking a leave of absence from the court in Dresden. Day by day, the Herrnhut diary records the important events in the development of the young community. Keeping a diary became customary for each Moravian community; some continue well into the twentieth century. A Moravian diary is different from a regular chronicle, in that it was intended as a story of special divine action and contains many miracle stories.⁷⁶

The 1727 diary was compiled several years after the fact, probably in 1732 or 1733, from various sources, including Zinzendorf's own diary, Martin Dober's diary, and texts by Christian David.⁷⁷ For the most part, the congregational diary was kept by Zinzendorf's secretary, Tobias Friedrich, or by the count himself; therefore, the diary is very much in Zinzendorf's own voice. A few personal diaries also exist, such as the 1731 diary of Martin Linner and the 1730 personal diary of an unidentified single woman.⁷⁸ What remains of Zinzendorf's personal diary are fragments, often written as travel reports to the congregation in Herrnhut.⁷⁹

Memoirs or *Lebensläufe* of many early Herrnhuters also contain relevant information about the 1720s. It became customary for Moravians to write a biographical account of their spiritual journey to be read at their funeral service.⁸⁰ The memoirs of the Moravian settlers reveal many details about life in Moravia and their spiritual development. Edita Sterik quotes extensively from these memoirs in her work. One needs to be aware, however, that the memoirs were not written until the authors had been living in Herrnhut or another Moravian community for some time, where, trying to satisfy the expectations of the church, they were influenced by the language and theology.⁸¹

The abundance of surviving records enables us to take a detailed look at the origins and early developments of the Herrnhut movement. The wealth of archival material available for Herrnhut provides us an amount of historical detail often lacking for comparable communities.

Chapter 1 will introduce the main actors and explain how their desire to reform the church on the basis of the ideals of Philadelphianism united them. Chapter 2 will look more closely at the plans for the religious community on Zinzendorf's estate and at the historic development of Herrnhut.

This chapter will argue that Herrnhut was planned from its conception as a sizable community consisting of various “institutions”; the reception of Protestant refugees was only one of the projects. These projects were coordinated by a group of associated friends, the so-called Brotherhood of Four.

Care for the Protestant settlers from Moravia was the most visible of the projects the Brotherhood of Four took on. Chapter 3 deals with the Moravian settlers in more detail, arguing that their expectations matched the plans and ideals of Zinzendorf and his friends. Because of the freedom resulting from Zinzendorf’s Philadelphian ecclesiology, the settlers, who were not affiliated with a particular Protestant confession, were not forced to become part of the Lutheran Church as they were in other places.

On several occasions during these formative years, dissent arose among the pious on the Berthelsdorf estate, stemming from ecclesiological questions: were the pious people on the estate merely members of the Lutheran parish and subject to the rules, requirements, and oversight of the pastor and the local lord, or did they constitute a separate group that determined their relationship to the local church themselves? Chapter 4 will deal with this debate and with the agreement that was ultimately reached in 1727, when Zinzendorf separated Herrnhut from the Berthelsdorf parish, making it into an independent religious body.

Herrnhut was very much a community of laypeople in which ordained ministers did not play a dominant role. The theology of the community is the topic of chapter 5, while chapter 6 investigates various aspects of life in Herrnhut: liturgical life, organization, and the heterogeneous character and self-identity of the community.

The religious activity on Zinzendorf’s estate did not escape the scrutiny of the authorities, both secular and religious. In 1732 the demise of Herrnhut seemed imminent as August the Strong, Elector of Saxony, wanted Zinzendorf to sell his possessions and leave the country. The final chapter examines how Zinzendorf was able to avert such disaster by creating a public identity for Herrnhut that concealed its controversial characteristics. In order to safeguard Herrnhut from persecution, Zinzendorf invented an identity of an older Protestant church for the Herrnhut community. According to Zinzendorf’s narrative, this group desired to be affiliated with the Lutheran Church as much as they could without abandoning their own principles. This narrative enabled Herrnhut to survive and develop into one of the most successful religious movements of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century.