

‘I felt a Power from his Wounds and Blood’: Native American Women and Female Missionaries in early Moravian Missions in North America, 1742-1765

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Today I want to tell you a story about the most remarkable mission you’ve (probably) never heard of.

Many good stories end with a wedding, but I am going to begin with one.

The year is 1742. A religious awakening has been spreading on both sides of the Atlantic with preachers like George Whitfield, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards stirring up religious fervour” among people of all stations and backgrounds, especially young people. Religion is on everyone’s lips.

We are in a church hall in Bethlehem in colonial Pennsylvania. At the front we see a German imperial count, Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the leader of a new renewal movement, known as Moravians in English. He is the officiant for a double wedding. In front of him are two young women, in their early 20s, both second-generation German immigrants raised in the colonies. One is Jannetje Rauh, the daughter of a yeoman farmer, who grew up near the Mahican village of Shekomeko in NY, where the Moravians have just begun their first Indian mission. And then there’s Margarethe Bechtel, the daughter of a prosperous craftsman and Reformed lay preacher in Germantown, PA. These two women have not chosen their husbands and nor have their parents. They have never even talked to them before. Their husbands are missionaries and the women have been chosen to serve as missionaries with them based on their talents. They have consented to what Pietists called the marriage militant, in which marriage is not based on personal inclination but on service to God. They will not even raise their own children as the Moravians will provide childcare – when the women wean their babies at 14 or 15 months, they will turn them over to be raised communally in the Moravian nursery and schools.

This is an important day not just for Margarethe Bechtel and Jannetje Rauh, but for missions history as they have become just the first female Moravian missionaries, and possible two of the first Protestant female missionaries ever. With the possible exception of Quaker Public Friends who did not engage in cross-cultural mission work in America yet, they seem to be the first women tapped for roles as missionaries. I do not say missionary wives because they were not home support to their husbands, but had significant responsibilities for evangelism and ministries to girls and women. (We have to remember that this was 50 years before women would be sent by the British Baptists with William Carey and his wife in 1793)

In fact, Jane Merritt, a historian of early America, has argued that “Moravian women’s participation led to more Indian baptisms than any early Protestant missionary effort in the colonial northeast,

especially among women.”¹

Now there are obviously many other reasons for the unusual success of the Moravian Indian missions which we will also look at briefly, but there can be little doubt that the deployment of dedicated female missionaries was a crucial factor in the success of the mission.

Yet they have been virtually forgotten until recently. There has yet to be a monograph about them, which is what I am writing with my doctoral dissertation. The stories you will here today are drawn from the Moravian archives located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, including a number of examples from spiritual memoirs and unpublished mission diaries which I have newly unpacked and transcribed. So you are some of the first to hear them and I look forward to your questions, insights and wisdom as we explore the roles of the women missionaries, and the relationships and female support networks they developed with Native American women in the missions today.

I. BACKGROUND

Before I begin, I would like to provide a brief bit of historical background about Native Americans and missions, beginning with a word about terminology. I have chosen, in keeping with the current academic usage in America, to use several terms to describe the indigenous peoples of what is now the U.S.: When referring to members of indigenous tribes, the preference must always be to use the tribal name if possible. When referring to multiple tribal groups at once, in Canada one speaks of indigenous peoples or First Nations, while “Native American” has been the preferred term for the U.S. government and much academic work since the 1990s. The adjective Native has been growing in popularity recently and we often speak of Native Christianity or Native traditions, although I am aware that this word has a different resonance in England. Most surprisingly, many indigenous peoples themselves overwhelmingly prefer Indian or American Indian today, despite its problematic past, so I also use this term.

Whichever term we use, we must keep in mind that we are speaking of what were once at least 600 tribes. These can be grouped according to tribal regions. We will be focusing only on Eastern Indians who spoke related Algonquian dialects including Mahican and Delaware (Lenni Lenape), and they had strong cultural affinities to one another. The Eastern Indians were those most immediately impacted by early European settlement. Some tribes were almost completely decimated through epidemic disease esp. smallpox (ca. 90% of their populations, based on their own assessment with which historians agree). They were also affected by warfare, the loss of land, diminished hunting, the import of alcohol by aggressive run traders, etc. All these factors not only reduced the population, but destroyed kinship networks and undermined social and political structures.

a. Brief history of missions in America

As you know, Europeans first arrived in the Caribbean in the 1490s, and by the 16th century the Spanish, French, and English colonial powers had spread across the continent. They justified their right to take indigenous peoples’ land on religious grounds, arguing that the local peoples were heathens and were also not making productive use of the land. Missions were a part of each of these colonial projects and varied in their methods and the receptivity of local peoples to their message, though we do not have time to go into it in detail. The Spanish had Franciscan and Dominican friars, the French allowed the Jesuits to do mission, and the English half-heartedly raised money to run a few missions via the world’s first Protestant missionary organization “SPG in New England” in the 1640s. Their success was very limited.

This brings us up to the religious revivals of the 1730s and 40s. Some Native Americans

¹ *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (UNC Press 2011), 16

were intrigued that their usually staid, Puritanical neighbors had gone a little crazy, with highly emotional services marked by tears and shouts and people shouting and fainting. A few Indians slipped into church pews to hear preachers like David Brainerd speak of sin, salvation, and broken hearts. A very few indigenous Christian churches were created by Indians themselves in New England, and a few indigenous Christian leaders and schools were created - though all with very limited success (L. Fischer). Generally, Indians were annoyed when preachers came trying to tell them there was a God (they believed a supreme Being as well as lesser spirits) or about moral living like not stealing, lying or drinking as these were also precepts in which they believed – and the whites were just as bad anyway. When given a choice, they were rightly sceptical about the “white man’s God,” given their generally poor treatment at the hands of most Europeans.

b. Who are Moravians

It was in this context that the Moravians showed up to do mission. Many of you will be familiar with them, but for those who are not, a few words of introduction are in order. The Moravians were originally a revival movement in Germany led by the gifted though eccentric Count Zinzendorf, with whom we began our story. Count Zinzendorf grew up in a strongly Lutheran Pietist family, attended the Pietist school in Halle, and even met the first German Pietist missionaries to Tranquebar in India when he was an impressionable young boy in the early 1700s. He was shaped by many aspects of Pietism: the focus on conversion, a strong personal devotional life fostered through small groups and daily Bible study, and the focus on social reform, and mission. And he longed to be a pastor but this wasn’t posh enough for his noble family, so he was trained as a lawyer and court official.

Until, that is, a group of religious refugees from Moravia and Bohemia (in present-day Czech Republic), sought refuge on Zinzendorf’s estate in Saxony in 1722. He granted religious freedom to them and soon the community attracted other German-speaking Pietists from around central Europe. When conflicts developed, Zinzendorf became directly involved in the affairs of the community called Herrnhut, turning it into a hotbed of religious innovation that began to grow quickly. Zinzendorf’s dream was to create “trans-national and trans-confessional fellowship of awakened souls” (Vogt), focused on mission. With close connections to English revivalists such as Whitefield and the Wesleys, the Moravians soon became key players in the transatlantic awakenings in Europe and America in the 1730s and 40s, even picking up members in England and Ireland as well.

What distinguished Moravians was their own brand of “heart religion.” They rejected the rational religion of the early Enlightenment. True religion was not about the head, but about the heart, expressed in tears, joy, and ecstasy. It was emotional, visceral and intense. They cultivated a unique devotional life that brought together Lutheran atonement theology with late medieval piety. This included an obsession with the blood and the wounds of Christ and also with bridal mysticism. The latter was an idea popularized by late medieval mystic Bernard of Clairvaux that all souls are female and that the soul is the bride of Christ whose goal is mystical union with the beloved, as expressed in romantic and erotic language. Zinzendorf also introduced other practices such as calling the Holy Spirit “mother,” to reflect the Spirit’s “maternal” office as comforter and teacher, and he encouraged a strongly incarnational, earthy piety focused on the life of Christ.

Beginning in 1732, when the community only numbered about 300 people, the Moravians began sending out their first missionaries around the Atlantic world, first to the West Indies and then Greenland, Surinam and South Africa, and British North America. Some of their first missions were spectacular failures, but they were quick learners. They discovered that they should not start with abstract doctrines about God or sin, but first to be an example and give testimony through their actions. Then if they were given an audience, they would share a simple message of “Christ crucified.” Through preaching and litanies about the blood and wounds of Christ to describing suffering and redemption, they seem to have struck a chord.

From the beginning, the Moravians did not expect to convert whole tribes but simply to identify those in whom the Spirit had already been working. They wanted to “gather” the “first

fruits, those who had been awakened, who would represent their tribe, their people, into the global church and who would gather at the end around Christ's throne. This was also a good mission policy in terms of keeping expectations low: If they contacted a community and there was no interest at all, they could easily decide God was not working there and not lose face by moving on.

Despite this emphasis on the "heart," the Moravians were not simpletons when it came to running a global mission operation. Being Germans, they were nothing if not well organized. They had a clear chain of command, vast social networks spanning the globe, a strong sense of community, excellent communication methods, and meticulous documentation (boon for historians). As a result, the missionaries were highly professional, though few of them were "professionals" in the sense of having formal training as pastors, doctors or teachers, as became the norm for missionaries in the nineteenth century.

Moravian missionaries were usually lay people, male and female, and only a few were formally-trained as pastors. They preferred, in fact, to have lay ministers and missionaries who were craftsmen who could offer a trade along with their spiritual leadership, so they drew largely from the artisanal classes or yeoman farmers. But they also had a cadre of Pietist European aristocrats who had converted such as Zinzendorf who were involved in the highest levels of church management in Europe.

c. Moravian Indian Mission

The first mission to the American Indians began inauspiciously enough in 1740 when an idealistic young German Moravian recruit named Christian Rauch went "looking for Indians" in New York City. He found two Mahican men who had come to petition the governor for guarantees to the rights of their ancestral lands in New York who were now angry and drunk. He asked to meet them and talk about God: they humoured him by promising to meet and take him to their village. They were no shows. Undeterred, Rauch found his way to their village on his own and tried to preach. Initially they were polite and listened, but soon they turned from him. He was laughed at, ignored – and even threatened at gunpoint. But he kept coming, hiking 2 miles each way every day to chop wood, build houses, plant fields, and work the harvest, as well as learn the language and build relationships. And the two men who had laughed at him first and been sceptical about him and Christianity as they had been "deceived by white men" many times, they came to love Christian Rauch and felt their hearts "warmed" by hearing about the blood of Christ.

The Moravians understood that gaining trust was the key to gaining an audience. They had to prove that as Europeans they were nevertheless not going to steal their land, their children, or their dignity. That they did not see the Native Americans as inferior, dirty, or untouchable. So the Moravians had to commit to living in Native communities and being good guests. Like Christian Rauch, the missionaries who joined him did manual labour - whether sowing corn or chopping wood. If there was not enough to eat, they were hungry, too. Moravian missionary couples chose to sleep in Indian huts unarmed when visiting native villages, displaying their trust in their hosts, which not self-evident. They also invited Indian guests to sleep in their homes, both of which were commented upon with surprise by Indians at the time, as the English refused to do so. They showed generosity with what they had, or offered services or material help and as a result were judged to be sincere, kind, and unafraid of the Indians. There was even some intermarriage with at least two missionaries who married Mahican women.

As scholar Rachel Wheeler has argued, the perceived warmth of the Moravians for their Indian hosts "was arguably the central factor in gaining an audience for the Moravian message among Indian communities."² As the tribal leader Shebosh who had first laughed at Christian Rauch and even threatened to kill him, later wrote of his affection for the young German man: "There is not another such person in the world." Another Native American woman said she "could not express with what great love she had been received by our People ... but particularly that the

² Wheeler, Rachel. *To Live Upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Cornell UP 2008), 91

women had kissed her. She said, it made a great Impression on her Heart, for she had never before been treated in that manner by white People.” A man called Jonas said on his deathbed he had found the Moravians to be a “people who from the bottom of their Hearts acted faithfully towards the poor Indians.”

The Moravians fundamentally rejected the notion that mission was about “civilization before Christianization,” that is, that converts must first learn to read and learn the bible and catechism as part of becoming Christian, or that they should adopt European styles of clothing, architecture or other aspects of European “culture.” While they offered schools for children, they did not ask adults to learn to read to be baptized. In the early missions, Moravians were largely indifferent to Indian culture. Like other revivalists and early evangelicals, they thought of mission largely in terms of saving individual souls. They did not think of aspects Indian traditional clothing, housing, medicine, sweat lodges or even men with permanent war tattoos as having religious value or as contrary to Christianity. For them faith was a disposition of the heart.

In 1743 the first baptisms took place. In keeping with Christian and Native traditions, the new converts chose biblical names to signify tradition and which also reflected their communal roles or identities – the tribal leader Shabash became the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah, the tribal speaker of the chief Tschoop became Johannes (John the Baptist), while other leaders were Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Jonathan and Anna and so forth. The missions grew to include the Delaware (Lenni Lenape), of whom an estimated 10% chose baptism and conversion to become Moravians. For political reasons, the missions had to move and reorganize several times so that communities included a mix of Mahican and Delaware and related tribes in new Christian Indian villages with joint indigenous and missionary leadership.

d. Women Missionaries

And so we meet again with Margarethe and her first husband Gottlob Büttner as well as Janettje and her husband Martin Mack who in 1742 had gone to join Christian Rauch and the missionary team in Shekomeko.

Why were there? The participation of women in mission was integral to Moravian communal life and ministry in the first place. Zinzendorf believed that women were needed for effective mission because of his metaphysics of gender, which argued that men and women were spiritually equal but essentially different and needed to be ministered to by those like themselves. For this reason, in Moravian closed communities such as Bethlehem, which were similar to convents or communes, men, women and children lived, worked and worshipped within their own group or “choir” divided not just by gender but by age and marital status, such as the Single Sisters’ Choir, the Great Boys Choir, or the Widows Choir, each group with its own distinctive piety although the entire community also shared in common worship as well. Such a separation of genders made it necessary for women to take on pastoral, liturgical and administrative leadership roles within their own choirs, as well as representing their groups in the councils of the church.

Zinzendorf’s support for women’s ministries was not just practical. He made a theological and biblical case defending women’s right to speak in church as a form of prophecy, and even their right to ordained offices. Women were ordained as acolytes with specific liturgical functions, as deacons, and about a dozen as priests in the 1740s and 50s. At the first public ordination of women to the priesthood in 1758, Zinzendorf declared, “The sisters also have a right to the priesthood. They have among themselves and in their capacity the same three first degrees of the congregational offices as the brethren.” Beyond this, there were a few women who served as elders, similar to abbesses or even bishops with oversight functions for female ministries. The most remarkable of these young female spiritual leaders in the early movement was Zinzendorf’s right-hand woman, Anna Nitschmann, and later his second wife.

Women were active agents in the field, engaged in serious, spiritual work, although they did not have the sphere of influence or professional duties we see in late 19th century British or American missions, of course. Many were ordained as acolytes and even as “deacons.” They engaged in “soul work” as evangelists, pastoral care givers, confessors, or in their sacramental roles,

but also as translators and interpreters, as school teachers for girls, as liturgical leaders, as hospitality hosts, as administrators, as councillors, as mediators for outsiders.

Women missionaries had a number of jobs in the missions. In particular were seen as mediators for outsiders who wished to affiliate with the mission. They were small group leaders, confidantes, confessors, teachers, pastoral care givers, sick nurses and midwives, and mediators of the divine whose presence was called for during crucial life transitions. They had liturgical roles during baptisms or special services, they led daily devotionals. Some women were designated to care for practical matters such as cooking and hospitality, or spinning work to raise money for the mission. But even those women often took on responsibilities for “soul work” when the other women were not available.

Margarethe Bechtel and Jannetje Rauh were both particularly good linguists, perhaps as they had grown up bilingual in the American colonies, and the male missionaries and church officials relied on them at first. Margarethe reportedly learned Mahican quickly. During the course of her 50-year missionary career, Margarethe learned several Mahican and Delaware dialects and was used numerous times as an interpreter by male missionaries and visiting officials from the Moravian church. Evangelism and pastoral visits with women and girls were a major component of her work along with teaching school. She writes in her memoir how it was a difficult transition for her to live a basic life in a poor Native American village but how she came to “gain a love for [the Indians] and was loved by them in return.” Her chief love was proclaiming “what the blood of the wound does for sinners,” as her second husband wrote in the appendix to his wife’s memoir. For example, in 1742 a few months after her first marriage, Margarethe was asked to come to the hut of the tribal elder and Christian leader Abraham, because some curious Indian visitors had asked to hear about the Savior. After a decade away from the missions in the 1760s, her husband wrote how she “came alive again” when she could be return to the mission and the Indian women she had known for decades.

Over the course of her long career, her duties included not just evangelism but pastoral care among girls and women in the community, hearing confession before allowing women to partake of Communion, distributing Communion to female converts, hosting love-feasts (ritualized communal meals), leading small groups and devotional services for women and girls, teaching school for girls, serving as a midwife a few times, and participating in decision-making with the other missionaries and local Native leaders at team conferences.

(Because she was embedded in Native communities along the dangerous frontier in the mid-eighteenth century, Margarethe’s memoir has more than its share of drama and danger. She survived falls from horseback, serious illnesses, violent attacks on the missions during the French and Indian war in the 1750s, and she was even captured by hostile Huron Indians during the American Revolution. By and by, she also gave birth to nine children, of whom seven survived to adulthood. But this was not the focus of her life and hardly shows up in her biography excepting her sorrow at the death of her first husband and her eldest son.)

Jannetje Rauh did not meet the Moravians as part of the religious revivals but rather through family. Her father had taken in Christian Rauch, the very first Moravian missionary to the Indians, to board with him and tutor his children. Luckily for Christian Rauch, Jannetje had spent a lot of time in Shekomeko as a girl and knew the language and culture well. Her duties in the mission were similar to Margarethe’s but surprisingly her ministry was not confined to women, likely because of her excellent language and culture skills, which meant she was needed for interpreting and diplomatic work early on. For example, when her husband Martin Mack first received permission to preach among Mahicans in Connecticut in 1743, Jannetje was his public interpreter, greatly to the astonishment of at least one Englishman who had come to hear Mack preach and did not expect to a young woman preaching. This disconcerted visitor asked an elderly Mahican man nearby what he thought of her. The man replied: “she believes what she speaks. I never heard anyone speak with such confidence, for her words proceed from her heart.” Jannetje is also unique for providing pastoral care to men and developing close relationships to male leaders including Mahican captain Maweseman, baptized as “Gideon,” and the Oneida chief Shikellamy at the trading post of Shamokin, to whom she regularly brought gifts of very desirable turnips as a friendly diplomatic overture. Unfortunately, Jannetje fell gravely ill after just 7 years in the field

and died, but her contributions were remembered years later. She is praised by name in fact in Georg Loskiel's famous account of the early North American missions, published 40 years later.

There were other women who had a prominent role in the early missions, of course, such as Anna Rebstock, who became Martin Mack's second wife about 5 years after the death of Janettje. She worked with Mack in the Native American missions for several years and then among black slaves in the Caribbean. And there is Johanna Ingerheid from Norway who was married in her thirties to missionary Johann Jacob Schmick. She and her husband had multiple responsibilities including not only the Indian missions but later work in German congregations and as overseers in the choir system in another Moravian community in America.

Missionary Encounter

There is so much I could say about the mission encounter, but for the remainder of my talk I will focus on the relationships that developed with Native American women and girls.

The Moravian women in charge of "soul work" cultivated close relationships with the Native American women who chose to join the mission. While the missionaries were encouraged to be honest in recording all the events of each day in their diaries including the conflicts or criticism, we still need to exercise some caution with the mission diaries as sources. Yet the picture that emerges from the archives is that deep emotional relationships were forged between Euro-American missionary women and Native American women, relationships that were sustained for decades. The choices of many women to remain with the Moravians when it was risky or in tension with tribal commitments also reinforces the truthfulness of these portrayals. Genuine bonds of affection seem to have developed between missionaries and those in the missions, and especially between women.

Missionary women did daily rounds to see women and girls in their wigwams and engaged with those who wanted more intimate pastoral conversations. Furthermore, they led devotions for different choirs of women and girls as well as small groups, such as the pregnant women's group or the widow's group, where women with similar life circumstances could talk together and apply their faith to their situations. The missionaries came to know the women and girls closely and made recommendations for whether they should be admitted to communion for the first time, for example. Most importantly, before each Holy Communion, the women missionaries interviewed their charges to determine their spiritual condition and whether they were ready in what they called speakings, not unlike confession.

Given the intimate and regular personal contact and the tragically difficult situation in which Native women found themselves in the colonial context, it is not surprising that close relationships developed. An elderly widow once tearfully shared with Janettje Rauh "all that she had done throughout her life" and all her feelings of restlessness, then proceeded to carry the young woman across a river swollen with melted snow. When trusted confidantes had to leave for extended trips, Indian Christian women let their disappointment be known. When Margarethe Jungmann went to Bethlehem for her confinement a few months before giving birth, several Indian Christian women complained and asked who the replacement was and when she would return. Or when a new missionary was posted to Gnadenhütten, Johannes Roth, the outspoken Mahican woman Bathseba told him directly to go away and send Johanna Schmick back instead. Janettje was especially beloved by the Indian women. In 1745 when Martin Mack came back from a visit to Bethlehem headquarters without his wife, he reports how the women immediately began to ask about Janettje, and when they found out she was not coming yet, some of them began to weep.

This close attachment also reflects the kind of relationships Eastern Indian women expected from their female extended kin networks. Mahican and Delaware women were used to living in matrilineal kinship groups where adult children continued to live with their mothers and mother's kin and the closest bonds were between siblings and not between husband and wife. It would seem that they bonded with the European women as they would with sisters and aunts,

becoming a kind of surrogate family. Easter Indian communities also practiced the adoption of war captives in which members of another tribe were adopted to take the place of those who had died, so fictive kinship was familiar to them. The Moravian pious language of brother and sister for fellow Moravian Christians nicely reinforced this sense of adoptive family. For example, Indian Christian women often asked the female missionaries to take care of their children while they were traveling to visit other villages and in a few cases they even asked missionaries to adopt their children as their own. In 1748, missionary wife Anna Rauch, who was childless, was asked to adopt a young girl christened as Beata, whose parents felt they could no longer provide for her. Women also became godparents to each other's children. This sense of kinship went in both directions, with European women serving as godmothers for Indian women's children but also Indian Christian women as godmothers for missionary's children, such as Anna Elizabeth Mack, who received three Indian godmothers at her baptism in 1754.

Moravian understandings of the power that flows from the blood and wounds of Christ was also appealing to women. They deeply related to the wounded Christ, and that the idea that Christ's pain could be redemptive for them, could give them love and power to deal with their own suffering. Sarah, a matriarch in the Mahican Indian community, once told the missionaries about a such a time in prayer when she meditated on the wounds of Christ: "She saw nothing with her Eyes, but her heart believed so in the Saviour as if she had seen him and she had then such a feeling of it, that she thought that if any one should pull the flesh from her bones she would nevertheless abide with him, and said she, 'I believe I should not have felt it neither, for my whole body and heart felt a power from his wounds and blood.'"

Preaching about the wounds was a way that women were reminded they were loved by Christ, despite their own struggles and sorrow. There is a fascinating story of how this preaching of the wounds functioned from April 1747, in the mission in Shekomeko. An Indian Christian woman known as Esther, who was very involved in the mission, hadn't been feeling "right in her heart." The missionary Margarethe's little daughter Elisabeth was still living in the village, noticed that Esther was unhappy, and went over to her. She could not have been much older than about 15 months, as she had not been weaned. According to the mission diary, the child looked at Esther for a long time "earnestly as though she wanted to say something." She then began to point to her own hands and her feet and her side, and spoke the Mahican word for a wound (*paquaiik*), before repeating this performance again several more times. The little girl then stretched her arms out wide to show "how the little Lamb was stretched out on the cross," as the missionaries wrote, then pointed to her head with its imaginary crown of thorns. Other missionaries watching were astonished by this little girl's first "sermon," as they called it, while several other Mahican Christian women teared up and Esther's "blushed."

Esther continued to be deeply enthralled by the blood and wounds and find meaning in it. On Good Friday in 1753, missionary Anna Mack was making her rounds in the wigwams in the mission town of Gnadenhütten when she found Esther and another woman known as Rahel meditating together and discussing the suffering of Jesus. "It is good that you came," Esther exclaimed, "as we wanted to come to you to ask 'which way (*wobin?*)?' that is, "where did the Savior go with his heavy cross?" The missionary Anna Mack pointed towards the east and explained that there was a high mountain called Golgatha "where the Savior was crucified and received many wounds for our sake." This apparently satisfied the two women, who spent a long time afterwards discussing together, before Esther went to join another meditation in the mission town with the rest of Indian Christian community. When Anna Mack stopped by with Johanna Schmick to check on them, Esther described her experience of the rituals of Holy Week, exclaiming "how happy I was yesterday during the foot washing and communion. My heart felt that that Savior was there and I asked Him that he would be merciful to me, a poor child."

Native women also incorporated European women into the ritual functions that Indian women had traditionally exercised for one another at major life transitions such as birth and death. Missionary women were often called on to assist as midwives or speak a blessing for a newborn baby, and even more frequent calls came in the night to bless and anoint a woman or child who was dying or to assist with burials or making shrouds for the dead (Anna Mack). In these ritual acts, the missionaries both fulfilled traditionally female Indian roles and acted as intermediaries to

the Christian God.

Women like Esther and Sarah who remained with the mission for decades went on to become “workers” with a variety of roles. Esther was a lay minister, conducting worship services for other women, counseling fellow Indians (converts or not), mediating requests from Indians to European missionaries, and taking part in community decision-making in the Conferences with the European missionaries. As white women were increasingly pulled back out of the field with the violence of the French-Indian War, Pontiac’s War, etc., Native Christian female leaders like Esther, Sarah or Bathseba took on new agency and leadership. They became missionaries to their own tribes and visiting Indians. What I find most fascinating about Esther is how she clearly saw herself as a missionary - and not just to other Native American people: in 1748 she expressed a desire to accompany the Moravian leader Johannes de Watteville on a mission trip to the West Indies to do mission among black slaves there, although her request was turned down by the lot, which was often used in decision-making.

Now it would obviously be naïve to claim that European and Indian women always had harmonious relationships or to suggest that the missions only exerted a positive and empowering effect on Native women’s lives. There were a variety of areas of conflict including tribal ties, marriage and sexuality, parenting and land use.

Women such as Sarah felt torn between her tribal duties and her ties to her new Christian fictive kin, especially when her husband’s duties as war chief called him to move away from the mission and she reluctantly had to follow him although she wanted to stay with the mission. Another hot spot for conflicts were differing expectations about marriage and sexuality. Bathseba and her husband Joshua had a troubled marriage with alcohol and domestic abuse problems, and the missionaries often tried to mediate, sometimes finding fault with her husband for beating her, but at other times blaming her for running away, although it would have been her prerogative as a Mahican woman to leave an abusive husband.

Esther also had trouble with the mission over marriage questions in particular. When her first husband died, the mission sought to arrange a new marriage for her as widow with children. She first refused to marry a fellow Christian Indian named “Peter Robert”) in 1748, and the following year another Indian Christian man named Christian Rénatus asked the missionaries to help him marry Esther, but she firmly refused. According to the missionaries’ version of the altercation, she became angry and hostile and began to say “nasty things” about the mission. A few weeks later, however, she was reported as “seeking forgiveness for her disobedience.” Though she still refused to marry the man. Finally, six months later she was betrothed to a fellow convert, known as Johannes Peter, with whom she was married and ministered for many years and with whom she had several more children. The exact reasons for the conflict are unclear, but since young women in matrilineal tribes chose their own husbands according to their own inclinations, she may have resented missionary intrusion that limited her agency.

As our story comes to an end today, I would like to return to the woman whose wedding we began with: Janettje Rauh. In December 1749 she was lying very ill at the mission in Gnadenhütten, Pennsylvania. Various Indian “sisters” including Esther, Bathseba and Salome had been keeping vigil with her. Early the next day, Janettje “went home.” Later that day, another Indian woman named Zippora returned from the hunt with her husband because she had had a dream that made her worry about Janettje. On the way, she met Martin Mack who confirmed that his wife had died. Grieving, she confided in the other missionary Margarethe: “dear Sister, this morning, as it started to be day, I dreamt I saw [Janettje] and I heard her say, “Adieu, you dear Indian sisters.”

These interchanges remind us that there was a brief moment in time when it was possible to cultivate and sustain trust and friendships, to become like family, even if some inequalities remained. In a politically fraught and dangerous time, it was possible to create a fragile multi-ethnic Christian community. As Native American tribes struggled to survive in an increasingly hostile world, they soon discovered that becoming Christians would not keep them safe in the long-run, that the Moravians could not wave a magic wand, that they were also hated and feared by other Europeans. It was a time of torn allegiances and growing suspicion and violence between

European settlers and indigenous peoples along the frontiers that saw two deadly attacks on the missions in 1755 and again in 1781. And yet most did not want to leave.

Those who joined the missions may have been hoping not just for salvation in the hereafter (sincere) but also a better life for their communities now, for spiritual and physical resources that would allow them to survive in a rapidly changing world. They were not looking to become Europeans, but to find comfort and sustenance, forge helpful alliances, and build up new stronger Indian communities where they could be safe from the growing scourges of alcohol, abuse, and hunger. Moravian missions allowed Mahican village leaders who had become Christian to find new forms to strengthen their influence and bring their community together through a revival via Christianity of traditional Mahican values of mutuality, respect, communal decision-making, and accountability. They were trying to build a different kind of community, a place of hybrid identities with supreme loyalty to God and each other as the church. Above all, they had found networks and spiritual resources to go on, they had felt the “power in the blood and the wounds.”