

Earl P. Olmstead, *David Zeisberger: A Life among the Indians*. Foreword by George W. Knepper. Kent, Ohio-London: The Kent State University Press, 1997.

Small moments or sometimes mere coincidence often make history happen. On a January morning in 1743 young David Zeisberger was standing on the deck of the sloop „James“ bound for Europe. Bishop David Nitschmann noticed that this young man's mind wasn't focused on leaving for Germany, and it did not take much for him to convince Zeisberger to leave the ship and return to Bethlehem. Thus began the career of one of the most extraordinary characters in Moravian history and in American mission history as well. For more than 60 years David Zeisberger was the intelligence and driving force behind one of the most successful missionary undertakings on the North American continent.

Up to a few years ago, the history of Moravian missions was mostly written from a religious point of view. But in recent years, the Moravians and their missionary activity have come to be of great interest to historians and anthropologists in Germany and the U.S. alike. Works on the early phase of Moravian missions in North America from 1745 to 1765, an annotated German edition of the Zeisberger diaries, a history of the Moravian missions during the Revolution, and a history of the Delaware Indians have been published. Olmstead's new book, which is much more than a mere „Life of...“ adds to this series. Each of these works has a different focus, but combined they give an excellent picture of the Moravian mission in North America in the 18th century.

Using the voluminous Zeisberger diaries, correspondence, and other papers, Olmstead tells the story of Zeisberger's travels and travails in the Indian country. In his earlier work *Blackcoats among the Delaware*, Olmstead dealt with the post-revolutionary phase of Zeisberger's work among the Indians. This book concentrates on Zeisberger's earlier activities and the most fruitful, but also most turbulent, phase of Moravian missions in America. Olmstead tells us in great detail how this young lad who fled to America after a harsh education at Heerendijk (Netherlands) became the Moravian's most prominent character in the mission field. Zeisberger's story is the story of the Moravian mission in America. He was there when the Moravians started their activity among the Indians in Pennsylvania in 1745. He was chosen to make the initial contacts with the Iroquois in order to fulfill the Moravian dream of sending missionaries to these powerful Indians. And he was the one to lay out and introduce a totally new missionary approach to the Indians after 1765, when the Moravians had to

consider the fact that their more or less paternalistic approach to the Indians during the earlier years had almost led to disaster.

In describing Zeisberger's work, Olmstead paints a rich and detailed picture of a dedicated missionary who impressed friends and foes alike. This is the most fascinating aspect of Zeisberger's character and one that runs through all of his work. His determination and firm stand when it came to discuss religious matters with the Indians always impressed his counterparts, whether they liked his teachings or not. Even though he considered his beliefs to be superior to the Indians' he never despised their way of living and thinking. That gained him respect, friends, and followers. From the moment when he first entered the Iroquois council at Onondaga to the time of the American Revolution, when he was a trusted partner of the Delawares, Christian and non-Christian alike, a firm adherence to principle was the trait that made Zeisberger unique. Olmstead shows us that Zeisberger not only was a dedicated missionary, but also a diplomat-and a realist. It was Zeisberger who realized first that a mission among the Iroquois was impossible. This is the reason why he never told the people at Onondaga about the Moravians' real plans. Zeisberger knew that the Iroquois needed an alliance with the Delaware Indians for political maneuvering. He also knew that he needed the Iroquois' good will for a more or less undisturbed mission work. He couldn't and didn't expect more. Olmstead is a little shy when it comes to drawing this and other conclusions, and this is one of the few weaknesses of Olmstead's book. While we learn a lot about Zeisberger's travels and deeds, we hardly get to know the person behind them. What did this missionary really think about his Indians and his working with them? We get only the hint of an answer here.

With the founding of Friedenshütten in 1765 began the most fruitful phase of the Moravian mission. This is the best part of Olmstead's book. Based on Zeisberger's diaries he gives a detailed account of these years. Zeisberger was fully in charge. He shaped the mission villages, formulated the new Moravian approach that tried to keep a balance between Christians and non-Christian Indians, between native thinking and believing and Christian teachings. By 1765 Zeisberger had learned that in order to be successful the missionaries had to cooperate closely with the converts, seeing them as equal partners and not just children. Zeisberger knew that the missionaries had as much to learn from the Christian Indians as vice versa. It is remarkable how with this new approach Zeisberger and his converts managed to gain the confidence of the Delaware council and how they became a distinctive part of the Delaware nation. This is by far Zeisberger's

greatest achievement and one of the most intriguing chapters of American mission history.

But Olmstead does not hesitate to point out the weaknesses of Zeisberger's method. If Indians left their villages and families to become members of the Christian congregation, this had a disruptive effect on their old social and political networks. This was especially true when members of the Delaware council became converts. Zeisberger knew that such a move could prove disastrous for the Indian society. Olmstead is right when he states that the missionary left it to the Indians to cope with that problem. Many of them couldn't.

The Revolution was a test for old and new loyalties. Olmstead shows us how these crucial years almost tore the mission apart. Zeisberger was in the midst of it and Olmstead shows how the missionary sometimes could hardly carry the burden. Zeisberger supported Chief White Eyes' plan to keep the Delawares neutral because he knew that this would be the best protection for his converts. Many converts left the mission because old loyalties were stronger than new ones. But unlike the situation in 1765, the mission was never on the brink of disaster. Even after the converts were carried off to the Sandusky, and even after the brutal massacre at Gnadenhütten, many converts stayed together and revived the mission led by the then 60-year old David Zeisberger.

With Olmstead's brilliant narrative and the other works mentioned above the groundwork is laid for gaining a fuller perspective on the Moravian mission of the 18th century, using contemporary historical, archaeological, and anthropological methods. Now it is time for interpretation and evaluation. Scholars of Moravian mission history should meet to discuss the implications of these new approaches for their own studies. Perhaps Zinzendorf's 300th anniversary in the year 2000 might be a significant date for such an undertaking.

Stefan Hertramp

Colin Podmore. *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998. 332 p. £ 45,00.

Much has already been written about the eighteenth-century beginnings of the Moravian Church in the United Kingdom. This is particularly true of the Moravians' relations (or lack of them) with the Wesleys. Most of these studies, however, have been written from a Methodist perspective. Colin