

GOETHE'S VIEW OF MORAVIANISM IN „BEKENNTNISSE EINER SCHÖNEN SEELE“

Christian Rice und Robin A. Clouser, Ursinus College

Well known to every Goethe scholar is the sixth chapter of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, entitled „Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele“, Goethe's literary monument to Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg (1723-1774) and her idiosyncratic pietism. Following Goethe's sudden physical collapse while a student at the University of Leipzig, Fräulein von Klettenberg's regular visits to his sickbed corresponded with a revitalization of Goethe's health and spirit. He subsequently spent time with her, visited the Herrnhut community at Marienborn, and attended pietist gatherings¹. Although some early readers of the *Lehrjahre* thought the first-person narrative of a female religionist's life in Book Six came from Susanna von Klettenberg's own hand, subsequent critics have determined that the story is Goethe's own creation, based on her accounts and religious personality, with his freely conceived embellishments².

How substantively accurate is the picture Goethe gives us of the pietistic, specifically Moravian or Herrnhut, religion? Of Susanna as one inspired by this faith, and of Herrnhut founder Count Zinzendorf, who is also mentioned in the tale? How did Goethe feel about this religion and this type of religious personality? Relatively little has been published on these subjects, and that little varies widely.

The religious character of the *schöne Seele* was controversial before the work was even published. Goethe and his friend Friedrich Schiller discussed the representation of Christianity in the work, especially the mysticism of the *schöne Seele*, while it was still in manuscript³. Schiller was the first to raise the question of how Goethe viewed this figure and what she makes out of „das Eigentümliche christlicher Religion und christlicher Religions-

1 Boyle, Nicholas. *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*. Oxford 1991, 72, 75.

2 Trunz, Erich. „Kommentarteil.“ In: Trunz, *Goethes Werke*. 12th ed. München 1989, VII, 613-827: 768.

3 See Schiller's letter to Goethe, 17 August 1795, and Goethe's reply, 18 August 1795, in Trunz, *Goethes Werke*, 1989, 626-627.

schwärmerei”⁴. Both men seemed to agree with Schiller’s formulation that the unique character of Christianity lay „in der Aufhebung des Gesetzes..., an dessen Stelle das Christentum eine freie Neigung gesetzt haben will” – exactly the freedom the *schöne Seele* claims⁵. As the 19th-century critic Heinrich Düntzer (1856) concludes:

„Die Art, wie Goethe den stillen Verkehr der schönen Seele mit dem Heiligen in sich eröffne, scheint ihm [Schiller] höchst glücklich, dieses Verhältniß zart und fein und seine Entwicklung äußerst übereinstimmend mit der Natur”⁶.

Goethe, however, gave Schiller to understand that he considered the highest incarnation of Christian belief to be embodied in this novel in Natalie, a much less fully developed character in the *Lehrjahre* who focuses not on her own personal spiritual life but on good works⁷.

J.M. Lappenberg also views Goethe as being distanced from the *schöne Seele*⁸. Arnold Bergsträsser asserts, however, on the basis of evidence beyond the *Lehrjahre*, that Goethe’s personal religion was in essence very like that of the *schöne Seele*: „Goethe held that, in contrast to communal activity, true religion remains something inward and even individual”⁹.

John Becker offers an overview of Goethe’s ties to the Moravian Brethren during his life, as well as his references to them in his works, including the *Bekenntnisse*. Becker concludes: „Tatsächlich blieb die Religiosität der Brüdergemeinde die einzige Form des Christentums, die in Goethe jemals einen tieferen Eindruck zurückgelassen hat”¹⁰. Wilhelm Bettermann finds in the *Bekenntnisse* an unconscious distance on Goethe’s part from his subject:

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem, 627.

6 Düntzer, Heinrich. „Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre”. In: *Erläuterungen zu den deutschen Klassikern. Erste Abteilung: Erläuterungen zu Goethes Werken*. Jena 1856. 22.

7 Ibidem; Trunz, *Goethes Werke*, 627.

8 Klettenberg, Susanna Katharina von. *Reliquien der [sic] Fräulein Susanna Catharina von Klettenberg*. Ed. J. M. Lappenberg. Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses zu Horn, 1849. 194ff.

9 Bergsträsser, Arnold. „Goethe’s View of Christ”. In: *Modern Philology* 46 (1948-49): 172-202, 172.

10 Becker, John. „Goethe und die Brüdergemeinde”. In: *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte* 3 (1909): 94-111, 102.

„Die Religion als Bildungselement, das ist auch der leitende Gedanke der Darstellung der religiösen Entwicklung in den Bekenntnissen, und damit kommen wir zu der Auseinandersetzung mit der Religion, die Goethe unbewusst schon in der Darstellung vollzieht“¹¹.

In contrast, Samuel H. Gapp traces the history of Goethe's relationship with the Moravians and concludes that the *Bekenntnisse* is „filled with the spirit of Moravianism“¹². August Langen shows how closely the story reflects the vocabulary of the Moravians¹³. Daniel J. Farrelly finds that Goethe's story accurately reflects the pietists' emphasis on inner experience, but he questions Goethe's representation of the Herrnhut positions on sin, providence and good works¹⁴. Friedrich Strack argues primarily from the blood imagery in the story that Goethe's treatment of the religious theme is parodistic: „Dabei wird dem Blutmotiv erneut eine Funktion zugewiesen, die es in eine *parodistische Verwendung pietistischer Kultvorstellungen* rückt“.¹⁵

Many of Goethe's sophisticated contemporaries at the court of Weimar, with the exception of Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel, were put off by his inclusion of a portrait of pietism in a novel about the rowdy secular German theater. Many twentieth-century German scholars react to the *schöne Seele* as if she must be interpreted either as an exemplum of virtue and independent searching or an admonition against myopic selfishness. Nor are modern critics kind to the eighteenth-century pietist's values. Kurt May concludes:

11 Bettermann, Wilhelm. „Goethes Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele und die Religion.“ In: *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte* 6 (1912): 166-185, 182.

12 Gapp, Samuel H. „Goethe and the Moravians.“ *The Moravian* 94 (December 3 and 10, 1949), 1-3, 3-8., *ibidem* Dec. 10 p. 3.

13 Langen, August. *Der Wortschatz des Deutschen Pietismus*. 2nd ed. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968.

14 Farrelly, Daniel J. *Goethe and Inner Harmony. A Study of the 'schöne Seele' in the Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister*. New York 1973, 17-28.

15 Strack, Friedrich. „Selbst-Erfahrung oder Selbst-Entsagung? Goethes Deutung und Kritik des Pietismus in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*“. In: *Verlorene Klassik? Ein Symposium*. Ed. Wolfgang Wittkowski. Tübingen 1986, 52-78, 58 (emphasis by Strack).

„Uns aber wird sehr klar, daß das soeben neu aufgetauchte religiöse Lebensideal [der schönen Seele] auch nur einseitig ist und aus einer letzten, sublimsten Ichbezogenheit erwachsen...“¹⁶.

Stefan Fleischer writes that

„the *Bekenntnisse* provide the central dramatic commentary for the larger *Bildungsgeschichte* of the *Lehrjahre*: Pure inwardness is judged as empty and abstract and the fulfillment which the *schöne Seele* claims for herself comes at the price of the emptiness of her world“¹⁷.

Frederick J. Beharriell argues that the story of the *schöne Seele* represents

„the reduction of religiosity to the role of a substitute for normal sexuality“ and that Goethe’s gift to Susanna von Klettenberg’s memory was an „affectionate portrait ... [which was] at the same time an attack on all she held most dear“¹⁸.

Recent feminist critics and others try to rescue the reputation of the *schöne Seele* by praising her independence though still faulting her isolation. Marianne Hirsch maintains that

„Confessions of a Beautiful Soul’ ... illustrates the possibilities open to the exceptional woman in Goethe’s carefully constructed universe. ... Except for the mysterious free spirit Philine, none but the Beautiful Soul develops a sense of strength and independence. Yet she can do so only by negating the roles reserved for her and by withdrawing from all social intercourse“¹⁹.

Barbara Becker-Cantarino theorizes:

„Die innere Freiheit und der Trieb bedeuten keine individuelle Verselbständigung ihrer Person, sondern sind ein Ausdruck ihrer engen Verbundenheit mit Gott,

-
- 16 May, Kurt. „‘Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre’, Ein Bildungsroman?“ In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 31 (1957): 1-37, 25.
 - 17 Fleischer, Stefan. „‘Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele’: Figural Representation in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.“ *Modern Language Notes*, 83 (1968): 807-820, 820.
 - 18 Beharriell, Frederick J. „The Hidden Meaning of Goethe’s ‘Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele.’“ In: *Lebendige Form: Interpretationen zur deutschen Literatur*. Eds. Jeffrey L. Sammons and Ernst Schürer. Munich 1970, 60.
 - 19 Hirsch, Marianne. „Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm.“ In: *The Voyage in Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover, Vt.: Univ. Press of New England, 1983, 23-48, 28.

dem sie ihr inneres Glück schuldet. Es ist ein religiöser Trieb, dem die ‚schöne Seele‘ mit Freiheit und ohne Einschränkungen folgt²⁰.

Michael Bell writes that the *schöne Seele*

„grows up to be a woman essentially free of all earthly authorities and able to appeal directly to God the Father for an approval which never seems to be withheld and can never be disproved. ... Her mature personality is an authentic achievement of moral will in which a measure of repression and sublimation, as we would now call it, seems virtually inescapable²¹.”

Let us examine more closely Goethe’s depiction of the various traits and beliefs of the Moravians or Herrnhuter in the *Lehrjahre* and see how far his representation corresponds to Moravian and Zinzendorfian principles and to what extent Goethe found these beliefs admirable or crippling to personal development: whether they seemed useful or harmful to him in exploring the relation between mortals and transcendent powers.

Goethe depicts the Moravian faith by means of a quasi-autobiographical account of a young woman’s life – she is never given a specific name – and her lifelong search for harmony with God. The most significant correspondence between Goethe’s portrait and Moravian belief is the commitment of the *schöne Seele* to a faith centered on conscience and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a clear parallel to the beliefs embraced by the mainstream Herrnhut community in the mid-eighteenth century. Another key similarity lies in Zinzendorf’s and the Moravians’ avoidance of religious dogma. The *schöne Seele* specifically states that the lack of rigid dogma was a major reason for her attraction to the Herrnhut brethren. She finds the „Originalität und Naivetät der Ausdrücke” in the hymns of the Ebersdorf Herrnhut community a refreshing contrast to her parental church’s dry catechism and „Schulterterminologie”, and this undogmatic approach is what initially draws her to the Herrnhuter (397)²². These two aspects – a personal

20 Becker-Cantarino, Barbara. „Die ‚schöne Seele‘: Susanna von Klettenberg.” In: *Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit: Frau und Literatur (1500-1800)*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1987, 130-147, 142-143.

21 Bell, Michael. „Narration as Action: Goethe’s ‚Bekanntnisse einer schönen Seele‘ and Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*.” In: *German Life and Letters*, 45 (1992), 16-32, 23.

22 References to Goethe’s text are to the 1989 edition of *Goethes Werke*. (Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Goethes Werke*. Ed. Erich Trunz. 12th edition. Munich: Beck, 1989, VII, 358-420).

relationship with God and the avoidance of dogmatic expression – are the most salient common beliefs of the Herrnhuter and Goethe's *schöne Seele*.

Erich Trunz points out that the motif of Christ as a personal friend and confidant runs through the entire *Bekenntnisse*²³. As a child, the *schöne Seele* experienced a serious „Blutsturz“ (tubercular hemorrhage) that confined her to bed, an isolation that her mother enlivened with Bible stories and Christian legends. On the model of „der ‚Christliche deutsche Herkules‘“ who prays before each heroic rescue, she cultivates a close relationship with Jesus, whom she very early in life calls „mein Vertrauter“ and the „unsichtbaren Freunde“ (360, 370). „Mein Hang zu dem Unsichtbaren“, Goethe has the *schöne Seele* confess, „den ich immer auf eine dunkle Weise fühlte, ward dadurch nur vermehrt; denn ein für allemal sollte Gott auch mein Vertrauter sein“ (359-360). When as an adult she faces the question of sin, she finds her way to clarity by asking herself, „und war ich nicht im Innersten überzeugt, daß Gott mein Freund sei?“ (393).

Goethe's depiction corresponds to the real-life Susanna von Klettenberg's own beliefs. She explored the idea of friendship with the divine in several essays – „Der Character der Freundschaft“, „Von Beobachtung der sittlichen Pflichten bei einer christlichen Freundschaft“, and „Von der Freundschaftstreue“ – in which she discusses such issues as reciprocity, responsibility, and equality in her relationships with both earthly and supernatural friends. In Susanna von Klettenberg's poems too, Jesus is called „Freund“ and „Seelenfreund“²⁴.

Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the visionary of the Herrnhut community, and his followers shared this sense of Christ as a confiding friend. The Herrnhut system has even been referred to as a *Freundschaftskult*, due to the emphasis placed on having Jesus as a personal friend²⁵. From his earliest years, Zinzendorf felt a deeply personal relationship with Christ. Because from a young age he was isolated from other

23 Trunz, Erich. „Kommentarteil.“ In: *Goethes Werke*. 12th ed. Munich: Beck, 1989, VII, 613-827, 773.

24 Klettenberg, Susanna Katharina von. *Reliquien der [sic] Fräulein Susanna Catharina von Klettenberg*. Ed. J. M. Lappenberg. Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses zu Horn, 1849, 97, 126; cf. Trunz, 768, and Boyle, 75-76.

25 Zantop, Susanne. „Eignes Selbst und Fremde Formen: Goethes ‚Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele.‘“ In: *Goethe Yearbook*. Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1986, 73-92, 81.

children, Zinzendorf had a very introverted childhood. Reading Zinzendorf's remarkable recollections of his youth, one could certainly conclude that his only close boyhood friend was, in fact, Jesus²⁶. „So bin ich,“ Zinzendorf wrote, „viele Jahre kinderhaft mit Ihm [Jesus] umgegangen, habe stundenweise mit Ihm geredt, wie ein Freund mit dem andern.“²⁷ At a very young age the Count wrote letters to his friend Jesus and threw them out his window so that Christ could read them²⁸.

Both the *schöne Seele* and Zinzendorf, however, are frustrated by the form given to belief in Christ by the organized church. As a young adult the *schöne Seele* finds the best known theologies of her day lacking. At times in her youth when she drifted away from her relationship with God („von Gott war ich zu weit entfernt“, 371), she finds her way back, but never through a specific theology. Calling herself „der Wanderer in den Schatten“ (387), she explains her heart-felt approach in defiance of systematic theologians: „Wie glücklich war ich, daß tausend kleine Vorgänge zusammen, so gewiß als das Atemholen Zeichen meines Lebens ist, mir bewiesen, daß ich nicht ohne Gott auf der Welt sei! Er war mir nahe, ich war vor ihm. Das ist's, was ich mit geflissentlicher Vermeidung aller theologischen Systemsprache mit größter Wahrheit sagen kann“ (387-388).

What the *schöne Seele* seeks and can't find is an organized religious group centered on conscience rather than dogma, a society of believers who reflect her own independent beliefs. At one stage she tries the „Hallischen Bekehrungssystem“ of the Pietist A. H. Francke, but finds „mein ganzes Wesen wollte auf keine Wege hineinpassen“ (388). She tries to awaken her spirit with traditional rites and symbolic objects. „Da in meinem vorhergehenden zehnjährigen Christenlauf diese notwendige Kraft nicht in meiner Seele war, so hatte ich mich in dem Fall anderer redlichen Leute auch befunden; ich hatte mir dadurch geholfen, daß ich die Phantasie immer mit Bildern erfüllte, die einen Bezug auf Gott hatten ...“ (395-396). But church services, bells, organs, hymns and sermons fail to satisfy her need. Despite her deep longing for a religious leader, the *schöne Seele* eventually expresses dissatisfaction with her current pastor. „Unsern Oberhofprediger,“ she explains, „der ein trefflicher Mann war, hörte ich mit großer Neigung ...“

26 Weinlick, 18.

27 Atwood, Craig D. *Blood, Sex and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem*. Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1995, 10, n. 8.

28 Atwood, 10, n. 8.

und ich wußte die goldnen Äpfel des göttlichen Wortes auch aus irdenen Schalen unter gemeinem Obste herauszufinden" (396). But in the long run his interpretations nourish only „Phantasie und feinere Sinnlichkeit" in her; her soul develops „antennae" but lacks eyes: „meine Seele hat nur Fühlhörner und keine Augen" (396). Though she still longs for a good teacher, in her experience preachers miss Christ's message: „Diese Prediger stumpften sich die Zähne an den Schalen ab, indessen ich den Kern genoß. Ich mußte ihrer nun bald müde werden" (396).

Craig D. Atwood reports that „Zinzendorf ... turned his back on the polemical and doctrinal Christianity of his day and created an antirational religion that stressed personal religious experience as the foundation of the Christian life."²⁹ Zinzendorf himself explained this non-rational approach to religion when he wrote:

„Die Religion kan ohne Vernunft-Schlüsse gefaßt werden, sonst könnte niemand eine Religion haben, als der einen aufgeklärten Kopf hätte, und die wären die besten Gottesgelehrten, die am meisten Vernunft hätten; jenes aber ist nicht gläublich, und auch dieses streitet mit der Erfahrung. Die Religion muß eine Sache seyn, die sich ohne alle Begriffe, durch bloße Empfindung, erlangen lässet; sonst könnte kein Tauber, nochweniger aber ein blindgeborener und am allerwenigsten ein wahnsinniger oder ein Kind, die zur Seligkeit notwendige Religion haben."³⁰

Count Zinzendorf believed firmly that blind acceptance of doctrinal statements should not be seen as faith; true faith required the transformation of the human heart through an inner union with Christ³¹. Zinzendorf was quick to state his belief that many people who were thought of as pious Christians were so in name only. The alleged external marks of a true Christian – strict adherence to specific creeds and church doctrines – were not adequate substitutes for salvation Zinzendorf-style³².

Zinzendorf based his unorthodox belief on the passage in Luke where the unborn John the Baptist leaps in his mother Elizabeth's womb when she meets the pregnant Mary. Zinzendorf used this biblical story to illustrate that one can know Christ without the need of systematic theologies and creeds. Indeed, he interpreted this passage as proof that no rational

29 Atwood, Abstract.

30 Quoted by Atwood, 21, note 48.

31 Atwood, 19.

32 Ibidem.

discourse could ever be equal in meaning to a direct personal „heart religion” (*Herzensreligion*) in direct relationship with Christ³³. Not surprisingly, 82.3% of the hymns included in the 1753 *Herrnhut Gesangbuch* either made reference to the concept of heart-faith or included the word „heart” itself³⁴. Music was always one of the most significant parts of Moravian worship because it touched the heart directly. Zinzendorf went so far as to suggest that liturgists may be of greater importance than preachers³⁵.

It is through Herrnhut hymns that Goethe’s character finally discovers fellow believers who speak her language. Her new friend Philo encourages her to look at the writings of Count Zinzendorf, but she initially refuses because she believes him a „suspicious heretic”. Goethe’s text refers to the Herrnhut founder simply as „der Graf”: „Philos Eltern hatten mit der herrnhutischen Gemeinde in Verbindung gestanden; in seiner Bibliothek fanden sich noch viele Schriften des Grafen. ... Ich hielt den Grafen für einen gar zu argen Ketzer; so ließ ich auch das Ebersdorfer Gesangbuch bei mir liegen, das mir der Freund ... aufgedrungen hatte” (396-397). When she finally opens the Ebersdorf hymnal, however, she hears for the first time words that speak to her soul: „... [Ich] fand zu meinem Erstaunen wirklich Lieder darin, die ... auf dasjenige zu deuten schienen, was ich fühlte ...” (397). The lack of rigid dogma, the presence of „one’s own” feelings in the hymnal, these are the major reasons for her attraction:

„... die Originalität und Naivetät der Ausdrücke zog mich an. Eigene Empfindungen schienen auf eigene Weise ausgedrückt; keine Schulerminologie erinnerte an etwas Steifes oder Gemeines. Ich war überzeugt, die Leute fühlten, was ich fühlte, und ich fand mich nun sehr glücklich, ein solches Versehen ins Gedächtnis zu fassen und mich einige Tage damit zu tragen” (397).

She refers to her encounter with the Moravian hymnal as „jenem Augenblick, in welchem mir das Wahre geschenkt worden war” (397).

Thus in his character’s encounter with the Herrnhuter, Goethe precisely reflects the emphasis on personal feelings and the de-emphasis of dogma that in fact existed in the mainstream Herrnhut community in the mid-eighteenth century. Like her real-life model, however, the *schöne Seele* remains independent of the Herrnhuter, attractive as they are to her spiritually.

33 Atwood, 20, n. 45.

34 Atwood, 142.

35 Atwood, 136.

Fräulein von Klettenberg's relation to God was so idiosyncratic that Christine Sjögren contends it would have been extremely difficult for Susanna to communicate her faith to anyone even had she wished to do so. Sjögren believes Susanna is „not so much a fanatic or neurotic, but rather an enlightened pragmatist, who uses the means most available to her times in a quest for individual freedom”³⁶. Barbara Becker-Cantarino asserts there were also economic and social reasons why von Klettenberg decided not to join the Herrnhut community at Marienborn³⁷. But the majority of critics conclude that a desire for spiritual independence alone would have kept Susanna from joining a religious group. Nicholas Boyle comments: „As the history of her religious half-allegiances shows, Susanna von Klettenberg was constitutionally heterodox”³⁸.

In Goethe's version, the *schöne Seele* longs, after reading Philo's copies of the Count's writings, to fly to Zinzendorf; she is ready to leave her country and friends to join him, but her poor health and duty to her ill father prevent it. In the long run, Goethe's character says, it was best she keep her own course. „Ich gewann ihn [den Grafen] unbeschreiblich lieb. Wäre ich mein eigener Herr gewesen, so hätte ich gewiß Vaterland und Freunde verlassen, wäre zu ihm gezogen; unfehlbar hätten wir uns verstanden, und schwerlich hätten wir uns lange vertragen” (398). She maintains her independence, keeps even the spiritual leader she most respects at a distance, and becomes, she says, „eine herrnhutische Schwester auf meine eigene Hand” (398). Only occasionally does she join local Herrnhut gatherings and services (399-400). „[Die schöne Seele] geht ganz ihren eigenen Weg,” comments Becker-Cantarino, „ist ebenso selbständig wie selbstbewußt in religiösen Fragen, wo sie zwar als Pietistin gezeichnet wird, aber nicht als schwärmerische Mitläuferin, sondern als eine, die sich doch fein von den Herrnhutern, von Zinzendorf und anderen Pietisten distanziert, wenn ihr Nachdenken und ihr innerer Trieb sie anders führen.”³⁹

36 Sjögren, Christine Oertel. „Pietism, Pathology, or Pragmatism in Goethe's *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele*.” In: *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 193 (1980): 2009-2015, 2014-2015.

37 Becker-Cantarino, 136.

38 Boyle, 76.

39 Becker-Cantarino 146; see also Critchfield, Richard. „Prophetin, Führerin, Organisatorin: Zur Rolle der Frau im Pietismus.” In: *Die Frau von der Reformation zur Romantik. Die Situation der Frau vor dem Hintergrund der*

When the *schöne Seele* distanced herself from Francke's „Hallischen Bekehrungssystem“, Goethe had her make explicit the point on which her soul balked: „die Idee eines bösen Geistes und eines Straf- und Quälortes nach dem Tode konnte keinesweges in dem Kreise meiner Ideen Platz finden“ (388). No such philosophical difference is voiced, however, when the *schöne Seele* decides not to join the Herrnhuter. Goethe shields the Moravians from the weight of any criticism by his first-person narrator by adducing only her invalidism, need for spiritual independence, and duty to her father as reasons why she does not join the community. He also places in his character's mouth a tribute to and earnest defense of the noble character of Count Zinzendorf:

„Ich machte große Fortschritte in der Zinzendorfschen Art, zu denken und zu sprechen. Man glaube nicht, daß ich die Art und Weise des Grafen nicht auch gegenwärtig zu schätzen wisse; ich lasse ihm gern Gerechtigkeit widerfahren: er ist kein leerer Phantast; er spricht von großen Wahrheiten meist in einem kühnen Fluge der Einbildungskraft, und die ihn geschmäht haben, wußten seine Eigenschaften weder zu schätzen noch zu unterscheiden.“ (397)

One could reasonably conclude from these narrative and authorial choices that Goethe respected the mind and accomplishments of the founder of the Herrnhut version of Christianity.

Goethe was himself frustrated by orthodox Christianity and felt distance from it at an early age, though he was confirmed at age thirteen⁴⁰. Nicholas Boyle says the young Goethe's „peculiar attitudes“ were clearly not those of an indifferentist, nor of a pagan, but rather of someone determined to make his own way, in religion as in other things⁴¹. The stubbornly independent Susanna von Klettenberg helped to confirm Goethe in this attitude. As an adult Goethe forged his own idiosyncratic, deeply personal relationship with the transcendent powers, whom he called „die Götter“ or „Schicksal“.

Goethe's personal aversion to standard church practice was also shared by Schiller, who, commenting on August 17, 1795, on the sixth chapter of the *Lehrjahre*, praised Goethe's success in steering clear of doctrine in his depiction of the *schöne Seele*:

Literatur- und Sozialgeschichte. Ed. Barbara Becker-Cantarino. Bonn: Bouvier, 1980, 86-137, 127-128; Zantop, 76.

40 Boyle, 69, 57.

41 Boyle, 69.

„Sehr hätte ich gewünscht, mit Ihnen über dieses sechste Buch mündlich zu sprechen, weil man sich in einem Brief nicht auf alles besinnt und zu solchen Sachen der Dialog unentbehrlich ist. Mir deucht, daß Sie den Gegenstand von keiner glücklicheren Seite hätte fassen können, als die Art ist, wie Sie den stillen Verkehr der Person mit dem Heiligen in sich eröffnen. Dieses Verhältnis ist zart und fein, und der Gang, den Sie es nehmen lassen, äußerst übereinstimmend mit der Natur. Ich finde in der christlichen Religion virtualiter die Anlage zu dem Höchsten und Edelsten, und die verschiedenen Erscheinungen derselben im Leben scheinen mir bloß deswegen so widrig und abgeschmackt, weil sie verfehlte Darstellungen dieses Höchsten sind.“⁴²

Goethe's lifelong practice of secretly supporting various impoverished persons from his own funds is one way in which he showed respect for what he considered a „kernel” of Christian values.

In his character's stubborn religious independence though not in the specific expressions of faith she chose, the *schöne Seele* exhibits the type of relationship to God that Goethe himself practiced and most admired: a self-discovered one. Gapp, among others, points out that although Goethe was neither a Moravian nor a recognizable Christian, he had great respect for Susanna von Klettenberg and her faith⁴³. Boyle credits Susanna with having helped Goethe to „a consciousness reflecting about itself and its eternal well-being” in which „the inimitable ... profundity of his later works has its origin”⁴⁴. Not only in the *Lehrjahre*, but again fifteen years later in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811), Goethe recalled Fräulein von Klettenberg in further reflections on her positive influence in his life. Becker considers that section of Goethe's literary autobiography „wohl das schönste Denkmal der Brüdergemeine in unsrer klassischen Literatur”, even more beautiful than the portrait of the *schöne Seele* in the *Lehrjahre*, despite the fact that it shows „mit grösster Klarheit ... was Goethe an der Gemeine anzog und was ihn schliesslich von ihr fernhielt”⁴⁵.

One would not turn to Goethe's „Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele” for a sociological picture of Herrnhut society. Goethe makes no attempt to depict a Herrnhut community, its daily life, modes of governance, religious services, or social interactions, though these are essential elements in an

42 Trunz, 626-627.

43 Gapp, II, 7-8; see also Bergsträsser, Arnold. „Goethe's View of Christ.” *Modern Philology*, 46 (1948-49): 172-202.

44 Boyle, 75-76.

45 Becker, 99.

understanding of how Moravian beliefs translated into actual practice. Yet his story of one woman's path to spiritual harmony captures the essential religious experience of the Herrnhuter. In the novel that is its context, the *Bekenntnisse* have a positive and calming effect on all the characters who read the circulating manuscript, including the bitter actress Aurelia and the restless protagonist Wilhelm. In this tale of a woman's spiritual quest, Goethe has captured forever an accurate if not complete reflection of the beauty, simplicity and essence of Moravianism.

Christian Rice und Robin A. Clouser, 'Goethes Bild der Herrnhuter in den "Bekenntnissen einer schönen Seele"'

Im sechsten Kapitel seines Hauptwerkes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* beschreibt Goethe die Herrnhuter Frömmigkeit in Form eines semibiographischen Lebensberichtes einer jungen Frau und ihrer Suche nach Harmonie mit Gott. Diese *Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele* beruhen auf Goethes Bekanntschaft mit Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg (1723-1774). In der Schilderung seiner Begegnung mit den Herrnhutern beschreibt Goethe die Hochschätzung des persönlichen Empfindens und die Unterbewertung von theologischer Lehre was typisch für die Brüdergemeine in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts war. Die Beschreibung, die sie von den Herrnhutern und deren Führer Nikolaus von Zinzendorf gibt, ist sehr lobenswert. Wie ihr Vorbild im richtigen Leben entscheidet sich die *schöne Seele* den Herrnhutern nicht anzuschliessen, wie anziehend sie auch sind für ihr Glaubensleben.