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# I Didn't Know that I Was Starving 'Til I Tasted You: 18th Century Moravian Women's Ecstatic Experience of Bridal Mysticism in Communion and Marital Sexuality

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## Abstract

*Against recent moves to exoticize Moravian sexual practices, this project is an attempt to understand how sexuality and religion intersect and relate to each other in Moravian piety and theology. In the mid-18th century, Moravians practiced a deeply sensual and erotic form of bridal mysticism. Christ, the bridegroom and lover of the believer, became uniquely tangible to the Moravian in their experience of Holy Communion, as well as in sexual encounters with their spouse. This paper examines the realization of this union in the experience of Moravian women through their spiritual autobiographies (Lebenslauf) as well as the manuals for sexual intercourse in the 18th century Moravian Choir Instructions. During communion, women consumed the body of their eternal bridegroom with their own bodies, drawing close to Christ and nourished themselves through the ritualized breaking and bleeding of Jesus for their salvation. Moravians also understood marital sexual intercourse to be a blessed, liturgical act ordained by God and was it therefore an extremely ritualized act in which a husband represented Christ and a wife the Church. In encountering their husbands, Moravian women could encounter Christ. Sex was carefully directed to ensure its sacredness as well as the comfort of the couple.*

## Text

In the mid-18th century, Moravians[1] practiced a deeply sensual and eroticized form of bridal mysticism that often transcended the body/soul dualism

[1] The Reformed Unitas Fratrum, the Modern Moravian Church, bases their origins in the Czech Reformation around Jan Hus but was also largely influenced by German Pietism. After Jan Hus' execution in 1415, some Hussites continued to worship and form congregation in the spirit of his teachings. During the Thirty-Years-War, some of the few remaining Hussites were driven into hiding due to the Catholic domination of the region. In 1722, a group of Hussite Moravian (a Czech region) and Bohemian refugees arrived on the estate of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf in Saxony. Zinzendorf, who had been influenced by the Lutheran Pietism of the *Francke Foundation*, hoped to

traditionally associated with mysticism.[2] This project examines how some Moravian sisters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania interpreted and experienced a mystical union with Jesus during Holy Communion, as well as in sexual intercourse with their spouse through the lens of these women's autobiographical writings. During communion, Moravian women consumed the body and blood of their eternal bridegroom with their own bodies, nourished themselves through the ritualized breaking and bleeding of Jesus for their salvation, and often experienced ecstatic and transcending episodes. Wine and bread would stimulate and heighten their bodily senses in this highly anticipated event. Moravians also understood marital sexual intercourse to be a blessed, liturgical act ordained by God. Marital sex was an extremely ritualized event in which a husband represented Christ, and a wife the Church. In sexually encountering their husbands, Moravian women could experience a glimpse of their future heavenly union with their bridegroom, Jesus. Sex was carefully directed to ensure its sacredness as well as the comfort of the couple. This ritualization and its specific manual instructions could support Moravian couples to be educated about sexual procedures before their wedding night and presented an opportunity to find spiritual meaning and enjoyment in their sex life.

However, these unique sexual practices received contemporary pushback and polemic critiques, depicting Moravians as peculiar, or even dangerous for their views on gender and sexuality. In an essay entitled "Queer Moravians?", Michael Taylor highlights the near absence of scholarship on gender and sexuality in the field of Moravian and general Pietist studies.[3] Moravians often challenged the "norms" of sexual practice in their cultural environment as well as ideas of women's roles and autonomy. Taylor suggests that queer theory poses a fruitful lens to interpret Moravian and Pietist sexual histories "in an attempt to historicize

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build an ecumenical Christian community on the principles of the apostolic church and viewed the refugees as a sign that the time for this Philadelphian dream to unfold had come. His enthusiasm, high social engagement, and theological innovation made him a charismatic leader that attracted many to join in his endeavor. He, and his quickly growing number of followers, started to build a community which became known as *Herrnhut* (Lord's Watch). In 1727, the group experienced a revival that resulted in even more Germans joining the Moravians, or *Herrnhuter*, and heightened their ambition to spread plant the seed of the Gospel around the world. In the late 1730s and 1740s Moravians began to establish mission posts and communities in several European countries, Africa, the Caribbean, and North America (Douglas Shantz, *An Introduction To German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013)*, 254-258; Craig Atwood, *Community Of The Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 29-31; Aaron Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 73; Peter Vogt, "A Voice For Themselves: Women As Participants In Congregational Discourse In The Eighteenth Century Moravian Movement," in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity,* ed. Beverly Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 228.

[2] I would like to thank Chance Bonar for his proof-reading assistance in the process of writing this article, as well as Craig Atwood and Jennifer Adams-Massmann for introducing me to the genre of Moravian memoirs.

[3] Michael Taylor, "Queer Moravians? Sexual Heterodoxy and the Historiography of Zinzendorf's Ehereligion." in *Gender im Pietismus: Netzwerke und Geschlechterkonstruktionen*, ed. Pia Schmid (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2015), 93–115.

and theorize sexual heterodoxy."[4] While there has been a shift away from "the history of vitriolic attacks and apologies" in recent historiography on Moravians and sexuality, more recent scholarship still applies normative sexual concepts to Moravians history of sexuality when it describes the church's practices with words such as *bizarre* or *weird*.[5] He appeals to scholars of Pietism to not sensationalize Moravian sexual practices and gender concepts and therefore repeat past condemnations. This project is an attempt to understand how sensuality, sexuality, and religion intersect and relate to each other in Moravian piety and theology and these Moravian concepts help us to theorize sexual heterodoxy and move beyond constructing normative concepts of sexuality in 18th century Christian practice.

Overall, little scholarship on the mystical piety and theological interpretations of Moravian women has been conducted. The most substantive research on this topic has been introduced by Katherine Faull.[6] Most scholars interested in the intersection of gender, sexuality, and mysticism pay attention to the writings of leader and founder Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, as well as official church publications and liturgical books and largely omit lay sources, especially female writings.[7] The

[4] Taylor, "Queer Moravians?," 97.

[5] Taylor, "Queer Moravians?," 97.

[6] Katherine Faull has spear-headed the research on Moravian lay memoirs and especially on Moravian women. She has published a collection of Moravian women's memoirs in eadem. *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750 - 1820* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009). Other relevant publications include: "'You Are the Savior's Widow:' Religion/Sexuality and Bereavement in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church." *Journal of Moravian History*, no. 8 (2010): 89–115; "Speaking and Truth-Telling: *Parrhesia* in the 18th century Moravian Church" in *Self, Community And World: Moravian Education In A Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker, (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 2009), 147-167; "Girl Talk: The Role of the "Speakings" in the Pastoral Care of the Older Girls' Choir," *Journal of Moravian History* no. 6 (2009): 77-99; "Christ's other Self: Gender, Religion, and the Body in the 18th Century Moravian Church," *Covenant Quarterly* no. 4 (2004): 28-39. Peter Vogt and Beverly Smaby have investigated the importance of female leadership and teaching in the Zinzendorf era, yet they largely omit writings by Moravian lay women in their studies of female piety (Peter Vogt, "A Voice For Themselves: Women As Participants In Congregational Discourse In The Eighteenth Century Moravian Movement." in *Women Preachers And Prophets Through Two Millennia Of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 227-247; "Female Piety Among Eighteenth Century Moravians," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal Of Mid-Atlantic Studies*. no. 64 (1997): 151-167.

[7] See e.g. Craig Atwood, *Community Of The Cross* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004); Aaron Fogleman. *Jesus Is Female* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Paul Peucker. *A Time Of Sifting* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016). This is by no means a reason to discredit these scholars' work, from which I often draw on throughout this paper. This article is a small effort in the project to fill this gap in the scholarship in introducing more female lay voices in the studies of Moravian Pietism. The most substantial exception to this trend is Jon Sensbach,.*Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) is one of the few monographs dedicated to a Moravian woman's story and traces the biography of an 18th century African Moravian woman named Rebecca Protten and her ministry in the Moravian congregation in the Atlantic world. Yet overall, as Jonathan Strom (Jonathan Strom, "Problems and Promises of Pietism Research." *Church History* no. 71 (3) (2002): 536–54, 551, DOI:10.1017/s0009640700130264) has pointed out: "The study of women

archive for this study are spiritual memoirs (in German, *Lebenslauf*) of 18th century Moravian women in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.[8] A *Lebenslauf* was written by many Brethren as a spiritual reflection of their life journey, which was later shared with the community after their passing during their burial service or in the congregation's newsletter, the *Gemeinenachrichten.* The memoirs, quoting Katie Faull, "reveal what the writer thought about him- or herself, what she or he chose to include in an account of a lived life, which events she or he considered to be significant, and which she or he chose to omit."[9] In their memoirs, many women reflect on the significance of Moravian mysticism in their lives and reveal some of their personal religious experiences. The second part of this paper on the ritualization of Moravian sex also draws from the manuals for the spiritual meaning, preparation, and conduct of marital sexual intercourse in the 18th century Moravian *Choir Instructions.*[10]

Early Moravian theology and piety was heavily Christocentric and largely emphasized the humanity of Christ. Central to Moravian devotion was the idea that Christ became a human being, who Christians could see, touch, and interact with. A Moravian was called to dedicate her entire life to this tangible Christ and interpret

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and gender in the Pietist movement has not kept pace with similar research in other areas of the history of Christianity."

[8] The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem and Herrnhut are filled with a plethora of these memoirs, most of them were written in German throughout every Moravian settlement in the Atlantic world. For the purpose of writing this paper, I worked with German transcriptions provided by Katherine Faull through her Moravian Materials website ("Umgang Mit Dem Heiland: Lebensläufe Der Herrnhuter Schwestern Aus Nordamerika," Katie Faull, https://katiefaull.com/moravian-materials/umgang-mit-dem-heiland-lebenslaufe-bethlehemer schwestern/.) as well as memoirs accessible through the Bethlehem Digital History Project ("B.D.H.P. - Memoirs.," Bethlehem Digital History Project, http://bdhp.moravian.edu/personal_papers/memoirs/memoirs.html). For the English citations throughout this paper, I use Faull's very precise translations in the collection *Moravian Women's Memoirs*.

[9] Katherine Faull, "Speaking And Truth-Telling: Parrhesia In The Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church," in *Self, community and World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 2010), 154-55. See also Pia Schmid, "Moravian Memoirs as a Source for the History of Education," in *Self, Community and World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 2010), 169.

[10] See Katherine Faull, *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers 1785-1786* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). 18th century Moravian communities were divided into groups according to age, gender, and marital status. These group were called Choirs (*Chöre*). The Choir System had emerged shortly after the formation of the Moravian congregation in Herrnhut. At first, the single men of Herrnhut moved into a separate dormitory in 1728. In 1730, the Single Sisters made a similar move and founded their Choir House. In the years to follow, Choirs for younger and older children, married, and widowed Moravians were formed and if a Moravian was born into a community, she would have moved through the different choirs throughout the stages of her life. The Choir System was quickly adapted in many communities throughout the Atlantic world, such as in Bethlehem. Over time, offices for the Choirs' leadership, hymnals and liturgies, and instructions for the order and daily life in the Choirs were developed (See Faull, *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers 1785-1786*, 4-5; *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, xxiv; Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 8).

her human existence through his incarnation. In this context and drawing from various mystical traditions throughout the medieval and early modern period such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Moravians came to develop their own interpretation of bridal mysticism.[11] Christ became the Bridegroom and lover of the believer, whom he caressed and nourished. This union was to be fully realized in the Eschaton and even more intimate than an earthly marriage.[12] Simultaneously, the Moravian Christ was as a tortured and bleeding *crucifixus* and not a triumphant, resurrected body.[13] His blood became a healing medium to release a believer from sin and death, and Moravians longed to be nurtured and cleansed by it. Being over streamed or bathed in the blood of Christ became an expression of surrendering to the desire of an eternal life with Christ, only made possible through the spilling of his blood. However, Jesus's blood was not only the guarantee for eternal life, but a source of strength in this life as well. Moravians longed to be revitalized and nurtured by the blood and body of Jesus in the ritual of the Eucharist.[14]

In contrast to many other mystical traditions, Moravians did not regard the body as a hindrance to obtain a union with the Divine, but as an integral part of their religious experience. In the memoirs, many women describe their physical experiences, such as tasting and crying, as an important aspect of their piety. Many women specifically mention that they experienced glimpses of their eschatological union with Christ affecting the body *and* the soul and found rest and nurture in the arms and blood of their tortured Bridegroom. As we will be shown, the importance of the body in Moravian bridal mysticism became even more central in the religious ritualization of sexual intercourse.[15]

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[11] Nuptial imagery and the interpretation of Jesus as a Bridegroom, of either the Church or an individual believer, appear in a wide range of Christian texts and have been applied by various mystics throughout the medieval and early modern period. For example, St. Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermon on the Song of Songs utilized images of the individual soul unifying with God in terms such as kissing, embracing, and entering a bridal chamber. Female medieval mystics such as Margery Kempe or Catherine of Siena also embraced Jesus as their Bridegroom and had ecstatic episodes experiencing his love. (See William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47-50; Michelle Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 108-110,11; Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 91-94). I do not suggest that every Moravian woman experienced or embraced bridal mysticism, yet it is a reoccurring theme in their memoirs. For the sake of limiting this article, I am only citing a few illustrative examples.

[12] Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 91-95.

[13] Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 78, 95.

[14] Similarly, early Moravians also adored the wounds of Christ, the lasting symbol of His atonement that guaranteed this eternal life. The side wound became the most adored wound and a place of rest and nearness to the Moravians' Saviour. The Moravian Brethren longed to kiss and suck the side wound to receive nourishment from the blood of Christ or imagined themselves laying or living inside the wound as a place of rest and safety. Since side of Jesus was the closest to his heart, it was also the wound that connected the believer's heart to the heart of the Saviour (Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 95-107).

[15] Faull, "Speaking And Truth-Telling: Parrhesia In The Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church," 162; *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers 1785-1786*, 11.

In their spiritual biographies, Moravian women embraced the relationship with their bloody bridegroom. Their writings rarely speak of God as the Father or as the Spirit and offer a plethora of personal spiritual accounts and devotions, that vary in nature and intensity. They do not present a systematized understanding of mystical experience or aim to instruct others in this endeavor, but rather are individual reflections on experiences within the Moravian theological framework. Yet, many of them share in common an embracing and longing for a relationship with their Saviour and Bridegroom Jesus, emphasizing the humanity of Christ in deeply sensual terms. Some of the common themes in the women's account are nuptial imagery, the adoration of the blood and wounds of Christ, and the sensual and ecstatic experience of Holy Communion.

Christ's crucified body became uniquely tangible to the women in their consumption of Holy Communion. Being admitted to the Communion table was a central part of a Moravian's spiritual life and they often waited a long time for this moment.[16] Their bridegroom's body and blood were materialized in wine and bread, which would stimulate their senses. Being able to feel their tender partner and being nourished by his blood made communion a joyous and exalted experience. For example, at the age of 12, the Moravian sister Benigna Zahm is allowed to take Communion for the first time and she describes this important event in a Moravian's religious life as follows: "I experienced the indescribable great grace of enjoying the body and blood of my Friend who was tormented for me, during which I was heavenly happy."[17] At the age of 19, Benigna again documents a more detailed experience of spiritual awakening during communion which causes her to rededicate her live to Christ as his handmaiden. She is sensing him when she can taste and touch the communion bread:

> I gave myself anew to the Bridegroom of my soul and made the covenant with Him to become and remain his faithful handmaiden. I felt His gracious presence the whole day long in the most blessed fashion, especially during the enjoyment of Holy Communion […] I cannot describe how I felt then, especially as I prostrated myself and enjoyed His body. I felt something I

[16] Caroline Walker Bynum (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 30, 59-61, 154-161, 257-258, 274-275) has argued that the aspects of physicality and nourishment were of great importance to late medieval women's eucharist piety, especially to female mystics such as Catherine of Siena and Mechthild of Magdeburg. Women, themselves traditional food prepares and givers of life and nourishment, could relate to a body becoming food. The dripping blood of Christ's wounds reminded of milk running out of breasts. "Women's bodies, in the act of lactation and of giving birth were analogous both to ordinary food and to the body of Christ as it died on the cross and gave birth to salvation" (Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 30). The Moravian women had a very similar personal relation in the consumption of Communion.

[17] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 20.

> had never before experienced during any holy Communion. I wanted to remain prostrate before Him and cry myself away to Him.[18]

Another Moravian sister, Anna Marie Worbass, emphasizes the deep longing she feels for Christ's nurture and care throughout her spiritual journey: "I feel His work of grace making me more and more into a poor being, hungry and thirsty for Him, yes needy for blood, so that He can come every day and comfort, bless, and nurture me." However, when Anna Marie is not immediately allowed to receive the Eucharist after she joins the Moravian Congregation, she is overwhelmed by her "deepest basic depravity". Yet in the midst of this distress her faith in the Saviour ultimately allows her to surrender herself fully to him: "I could lay myself down before Him at His feet as a poor sinner and ask for His blood in forgiveness to wash over my whole heart. He comforted me in his bloody deathly form." It is again a tortured Christ who reveals himself to Anna Marie, giving her comfort and letting her experience the atonement of his blood. This newfound devotion ultimately allows her to join the Communion table, which she experiences in a deeply sensual and emotional fashion: "Soon thereafter He gave me the blessed enjoyment of His body and blood in Holy Communion, to be desired in His arms and at His breast. My eyes could not remain dry at this enjoyment."[19]

One of the most vivid descriptions of a Bethlehem Sister's ecstatic rapture during a Communion celebration is the memoir of Marie Elizabeth Kunz, likely written around 1755/56:

> With body and soul I could give myself up just as I was and want nothing else in this world than to depend on Him […] and it was just as though the tormented body of the Bloody Saviour were hanging right before my eyes. Now, because it was Communion day, I could hardly wait until I got to enjoy His Body and Blood in the Sacrament, and as I was actually enjoying it I could hardly remember whether I was still here or already in the marriage hall.[20]

Marie is fully surrendering herself to Christ, resulting in a vision-like encounter with his tormented body. Yet, this encounter does not despair her or disgust her, but she is experiencing the episode in erotic terms. As this body becomes tangible to Marie, the boundaries of this world and the heavenly realm become blurred as she cannot tell if she is already in the marriage hall consummating her mystical union or still in the meeting house of the congregation.

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[18] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 21.
[19] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 62-63.
[20] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 58.

Similarly, Moravian marriage could provide a glimpse of the union the believer was to experience with Christ after death. This was not merely a symbolic representation, but the sexual union of husband and wife became the ultimate sacramental expression of the mystical marriage on earth, in which a Moravian husband represented Christ and a wife the Church. For Moravians, sexual relations were not simply as a means of procreation, but an opportunity for the couple to obtain a deep relationship with each other and most importantly with the Divine. Therefore, Moravians developed the practice called *Eheviertelstunden* (marriage quarterly hours). In early Bethlehem, married couples had sex in special sleeping quarters in the Married Sisters' House, where two double beds were installed solely for the purpose of this form of ritualized sexual intercourse.[21] We can learn about the details of this practice in the Moravian Choir Helper instructions, which provide detailed guidelines for community leaders, usually a married couple, on what to teach soon to be married couples about sex and how to support them in preparation of their wedding night.

The Choir Helper Couple insured the new couple that the use of their reproductive organs was to promote their "most intimate union as a couple in agreement with the Creator's purpose." Further, the couple was counseled individually separated by gender by the Choir Helper couple about the details of marital relations and how to approach their partner, before consuming their marriage for the first time. For instance, a Choir Helper urged a new husband to treat his wife in the following manner:

> "He will also warn the brother against everything that could originate from either thoughtlessness or useless curiosity, because if the demonstrates something like this to his wife, it can easily happen that she will lose, if not all, then certainly a lot of, respect for him."[22]

Sex was carefully directed to ensure the sacredness of the act as well as the comfort of the couple. This is one example from an English Moravian sex manual manuscript in Bethlehem:

> The most convenient position for the performance of the marriage union for the wife is lay down on her back having the middle part of her body raised by a pillow, to make room for the husband to kneel between them and in this position to admit the genital of the husband into her matrix, in which she is to assist by applying her hand to the said member of the husband directing the

[21] Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 187. Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female.* 94.

[22] Faull, *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers 1785-1786*, 129.

> same into the virgin-aperture. This is often in the beginning painful for both and especially for the wife, when it is performed the first time and both must use patience.

During their first time of engaging in sexual intercourse after being wed, the couple was advised to, "not to force anything and let things take their course," and if the man could not achieve ejaculation, to wait and to try again later. In case the sexual attempt was deemed 'successful,' meaning male ejaculation occurred, the husband was asked to lay the hands on his wife for a blessing. Afterwards, the helpers worshiped in thankfulness with the young couple. The next day, the couple would eat breakfast with the helpers to discuss any questions or concerns.[23] After this ritualized first marital sexual experience, marital relations were recommended, not forced, to take place about once a week since Moravians believed that regular sexual contact led to "an increased tenderness in their love."[24]

In today's context, this practice likely seems unusual and invasive of a couple's privacy. However, this insightful counsel provided by the Choir Helpers to newly married couples, likely helped to overcome the nervousness and awkwardness of first time sexual intercourse among the newlyweds. This does not imply that all Moravians enjoyed or liked sex. However, in 18th century Bethlehem it could support couples to enjoy their sex life and be well educated about the details of sexual intercourse, or at least penile heterosexual penetration. The accountably the Moravian men had to their wives and their Choir Leaders in regards to sex as well as the concept of sex as a sacred act likely lowered the risk of sexual abuse within marriage.

In their memoirs, some Moravian women express that they were initially reluctant or nervous to marry a Moravian Brother, but ultimately many of them grew very fond of their husbands and married life. For example, when the Congregation leadership proposed marriage to Marie Reitzenbach in 1779[25], she was not happy about the calling into this new state at first and perceived her marriage as a duty and sacrifice to Christ: "I found it incredibly hard to take this step. Only the thought that it was my duty to do everything for the love of my dear Saviour […] made me give myself up to do this." Given these words, it would be easy to assume

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[23] Faull, *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers*, 104-105, 132.

[24] Faull, *Speaking To Body And Soul: Instructions For The Moravian Choir Helpers*, 131-134.

[25] Moravians arranged weddings "according to the economic and religious needs of both the individuals and the Gemeine [Congregation]" (Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*, 184). A match was decided on, as many other communal and ecclesiastical decisions, by means of the lot. Choir Leaders consulted the Elders on potential good matches and they were then put to the lot to seek approval. However, a sister or brother could refuse the match, if they felt so inclined (See Atwood, *Community Of The Cross*; Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female*, 91; Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, xxx).

that Marie lived in an unhappy marriage, but the opposite seems to have been the case. After her husband's death, she reflects on their cheerful marriage and how they comforted and delighted in each other:

> I was made a widow by the calling home of my dear husband, after we had shared joy and pain and had been a comfort and a cheer to each other. For this reason I felt his loss very painfully and noone could comfort me but *the* Friend to whom I have often told all my troubles and with whom I alone took refuge.[26]

Marie and her husband must have grown fond of each other and lived a happy married life. Marie is deeply saddened by the loss of her husband and only finds solace in her Saviour Jesus.

Similarly, Anna Marie Worbass, though also perceiving her willingness to marry as an obedience to Christ, reflects positively on the changes in her marital status:

> In 1758, it was put to me that I should change my state, and I gave myself up to the will of the Saviour and on July 29 I was joined in holy matrimony to the single brother Peter Worbass. The dear Saviour accompanied me into this state with His dear nearness and made of all the conditions connected with this state a blessing to me.[27]

These new "conditions" Anna Marie mentions would have included sexual intercourse. Of course, Anna Marie does not explicitly mention this part of married life in her memoir, but she seems to imply that through the nearness of the Saviour among the other aspects her married life, she experienced sexuality as a blessedness from Christ.

The Moravians' mystical theology and religious practice attracted many women in the Atlantic world into their congregations. They obtained a personal union with Christ that allowed them to embrace their embodiment in a joyous and often overwhelming experiences, for example at the communion table and possibly also in the bed chamber. Through the tradition of memoir writing, Moravian sisters have left us with unique religious reflections and experiences of 18th century women which allow us to get a glimpse of these women's desires, senses, and memories. The recent widow Catharina Krause concludes in her memoir in around 1792.

[26] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 116.
[27] Faull, *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, 63.

> I was translated into the state of widowhood when my dear husband was called home. On that occasion I thanked my faithful Saviour from the bottom of my heart for all the mercy and faithfulness He had shown me and my late husband in our married state, and I gave myself over to Him anew as the best Husband of my soul for further guidance.[28]

Even within or after a marriage, a deep and sensual union with Christ remained the ultimate goal and purpose in a Moravian life.

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