Abstract

What does it mean to be a religious "outsider"? And how does being an "outsider" change the ways that we understand different groups, or even how they understand themselves? This paper attempts to address these questions in relation to the eighteenth-century Moravian Christians. By examining this relationship, we can see how the Moravians were able to perform missionary work in a different way than other groups of their time because of their unique beliefs and understandings of Christianity. These same beliefs in Moravian Christianity that made them outsiders to mainstream societies in the eighteenth century also allowed them to better relate and sympathize with those they were working with. Similarly, their immense global outreach as missionaries caused them to constantly renegotiate their identities in ways that made them acutely aware of how societies dealt with outsiders. Through primary and secondary narratives of individual Moravians lives, we can see the ways that they grappled with their own status as outsiders and the ways this impacted their understanding of themselves and the work they were doing. These accounts and my own analysis allow us to better understand Moravian Christianity in the eighteenth century, as well as how groups deemed as outsiders function in societies and understand themselves.