

This Month in Moravian History

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Paul Eugen Layritz 1707-1788

This month marks the birth of Paul Eugen Layritz, father of the Moravian school system, on November 13, 1707 in Wunsiedel, Vogtland. The second youngest of 14 children, Layritz studied theology at the University of Jena, where he experienced a spiritual awakening around 1729. Following in the footsteps of his father, Layritz accepted a position as principal of a boys' school in Neustadt a.d. Aisch, where he served for the next ten years. Although acquainted with the Moravians for more than a decade, Layritz first joined the church in Herrnhag in 1742, facing criticism and bitter disappointment from his family, colleagues and pupils. Over the next forty years Layritz restructured and commanded the Moravian school system in Germany, and was ordained a bishop in 1775. Layritz died in Herrnhut on August 1, 1788.

Although an astute scholar, Layritz was not a prolific writer. He focused much of his energy instead on the careful administration of Moravian schools. He did however publish a widely successful Latin-German dictionary, which remained in use for many years, along with a treatise concerning Moravian educational



principles entitled *Considerations Concerning a Rational and Christian Education of Children* (*Betrachtungen über eine verstandige und christliche Erziehung der Kinder*) in 1776. This concise volume set forth a practical standard for child-rearing adopted by Moravian settlements

worldwide. The book is divided into five chapters outlining a child's development from conception through adulthood, including recommendations to enhance a child's physical, mental and spiritual growth in each stage. Pregnant females are advised to get plenty of exercise, fresh air, and to avoid stress. The nutritional components of various types of milk are analyzed for nursing mothers. To foster responsibility children are encouraged to learn household chores and give alms to the poor. Layritz downplayed the benefits of corporal punishment, advising parents instead to attune themselves to the natural inclinations of their children and mold their behavior with "watchful eyes and sympathetic hearts."

Layritz greatly admired the educational philosophy of the Moravian forefather, Comenius. He agreed with the Comenian balance of intellectual and religious instruction, and also believed in the education of girls, as "they have the same sensibilities [as boys]." Layritz's practical administrative practices sometimes clashed with Zinzendorf's idealistic notions of spiritual education. Zinzendorf hated his own school experience, likening it to intellectual "slavery." Although party to the emotional extravagance that characterized Moravian worship in the late 1740s, Layritz distanced himself in the years that followed. In a letter dated 1751 he wrote: "For my part I truly hope to ensure that the children learn all that they can, and that we don't raise a race of good-for-nothings, which has happened in the past." Throughout his career Layritz strove to balance the love of learning with a love of the Savior in Moravian schools.

Image: *Jesus Blessing the Children*, from title page of Layritz, *Betrachtungen* (1776). Sources: Dienerblätter; Marianne Doerfel, "Zur Übernahme der Pädagogik des Comenius durch Paul Eugen Layritz," in *UF* 32 (1992) and "Paul Eugen Layritz," in *Lebensbilder aus der Brüdergemeine* (2007); Haller, *Early Moravian Education in Pennsylvania*; Layritz, *Betrachtungen über eine verstandige und christliche Erziehung der Kinder*, 1776.

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