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Comment

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Historian and Covenant pastor Jonathan M. Wilson begins this issue with a fascinating article that traces three Lutheran chaplains' diverging responses to the American Revolutionary War. All three chaplains, Christian Streit (1749–1812), Frederick V. Melsheimer (1749–1811), and Christopher Triebner (1740–1815), were to varying degrees linked to the German Pietism centering around the University of Halle, and all three negotiated the tensions of patriotism and clerical vocation differently. Wilson draws from these historical case studies contemporary application, suggesting finally that "today's heirs to Pietism might consider reclaiming a framework of non-partisanship, that is, of political non-alignment, as we wrestle with and proclaim the ethical demands of justice, holiness, grace, duty, biblical hermeneutics, and conscience."

In the previous issue of this publication, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, professor of theology and ethics at North Park Theological Seminary, contributed a historical survey of Covenant freedom, followed by a constructive proposal for faithful dissent amid conflicting biblical interpretations.[1] The conversation continues in this issue with responses from Brian Bantum (associate professor of theology, Seattle Pacific University and Seminary), Stephen S. Bilynskyj, (pastor, Valley Covenant Church, Eugene, Oregon), Scott Erickson (head of school, Phillips Brooks School, Menlo Park, California), Mark Safstrom (assistant professor of Scandinavian studies, Augustana College), and Klyne R. Snodgrass (emeritus

[1] Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, "Covenant Freedom: Freedom for All or Free-for-all?" *Covenant Quarterly* 75:3–4 (2017): 34–54.

professor of New Testament, North Park Theological Seminary). These responses, along with Clifton-Soderstrom's engagement with the questions and critiques they raise, bring further clarity to the nature and limits of freedom, the possibility of unity amid diversity, and the relationship between biblical exegesis and contemporary culture. Additionally, they raise further questions regarding the centrality of Covenant ecclesiology and the value of the language of "faithful dissent."

The *Covenant Quarterly* is a forum for charitable, critical dialogue on relevant issues in pastoral theology. We hope the dialogue printed here will generate further conversation in that same spirit, to the end described by Clifton-Soderstrom: "that we speak well of those in our communion, that we speak directly to those with whom we have issue, and that we commit to each other as members of the same body. This calls for charity in all things, and real charity requires courage to work through conflict over the long-haul."

The Pietist Chaplains of the American Revolution

Jonathan M. Wilson, pastor, Salem Covenant Church, Pennock, Minnesota, adjunct instructor, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

During the mid-to-late eighteenth century, both the Moravians and the Francke Institutes, Halle Pietism's flagship enterprises, sponsored ecclesial endeavors and communities in North America.[1] The Moravians tried briefly to take root in Georgia, then shifted to Pennsylvania where they flourished, later expanding to North Carolina. The first effort of the Halle Pietists was an experiment in communitarian living in Ebenezer, Georgia, in the 1730s; the second was a synodal experiment, the Pennsylvania Ministerium, begun by Lutherans in the mid-Atlantic colonies in the 1740s. The Moravians and Pietists were, therefore, in the American colonies during the Revolutionary War. The Moravians adopted neutrality, though their settlements were used as prison garrisons.[2] Among Halle Pietists, some were elected to public office on behalf of the patriots.[3] Many fought.[4]

[1] Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 87–110.

[2] Harry M. Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 6.

[3] E.g., John Adam Treutlen (1733–1782), an elder in the Halle-sponsored Lutheran community of Ebenezer, Georgia, was elected governor of the patriot assembly of Georgia. George F. Jones, *The Salzburger Saga: Religious Exiles and Other Germans Along the Savannah* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 126.

[4] German militia units mustered in Philadelphia assembled on Sunday mornings in two columns, paraded down the street, and then separated, one column to the Reformed church, the other to the Lutheran church. A.G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 306.

Some fled to Canada.[5] And on both sides of the war, Halle Pietists served the combatants as military chaplains to German-speaking regiments.[6]

This article first describes the outlook on patriotism among the clergy in the Pennsylvania Ministerium, with particular focus on the opinions of its founder, the Halle missionary Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. It then tells the stories of three Lutheran chaplains connected to Halle Pietism: Christian Streit (1749–1812), who took a call to a patriot regiment and received a testimonial from the Pennsylvania Ministerium in the first denominational endorsement for a military chaplaincy in American history;[7] Frederick V. Melsheimer (1749–1811), who deserted his German auxiliary regiment in order to marry a Moravian and seek admittance into the Pennsylvania Ministerium;[8] and Christopher Triebner (1740–1815), a Halle missionary to Georgia, who became a loyalist and a chaplain to German auxiliaries (commonly called Hessians).[9] Each is a unique story of faith, conscience, and duty.

In the centuries since the American Revolution, chaplains in the United States and Europe have evolved from civilian contractors to commissioned officers. Both then and now the balance between military duty and the pastor's conscience toward God has at times been difficult to maintain. Perhaps present dialogues on clergy ethics may find it instructive that

[5] E.g., Bernard Hausihl, pastor of one of two Lutheran congregations in New York City, took a Lutheran pulpit in Nova Scotia in 1783 as part of the British government's program to resettle the loyalists at the end of the war. Charles H. Glatfelter, *Pastors and People: German Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the Pennsylvania Field, 1717–1793, Volume 2: The History* (Breinigsville, PA: The Pennsylvania German Society, 1981), 395.

[6] Approximately thirty Reformed and Lutheran chaplains served the German auxiliaries. In my studies I have not yet discovered a comprehensive list but have found several sources useful for correcting each other: Bruce E. Burgoyne, trans. and ed., *Hessian Chaplains: Their Diaries and Duties* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2007), xi–xvii; Max von Eelking, *Memoirs, and Letters and Journals, of Major General Riedesel during His Residence in America*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. William Leete Stone (1868; repr. Lexington, KY: Forgotten Books, 2013), 265–73; Parker C. Thompson, *The United States Army Chaplaincy, Volume 1: From Its European Antecedents to 1791* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1978), 166. According to Thompson, a total of 218 chaplains served the patriots, the majority of whom were church pastors who followed their local militia unit on a thirty-day term of service; 111 served in the Continental Army with various lengths of enlistment.

[7] Thompson, *The United States Army Chaplaincy*, 130.

[8] Melsheimer is the chief subject of my doctoral dissertation, "Switching Sides: A Hessian Chaplain in the Pennsylvania Ministerium" (Chicago, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2015). This article adapts material found in the dissertation, especially pp. 1–120.

[9] Jones, *The Salzburger Saga*, 130. Triebner is not treated in depth in *Switching Sides.*

during the American Revolution the three Lutheran Pietist chaplains of this study responded to the ethics of partisanship in three different ways. This study concludes with suggestions for how the Evangelical Covenant Church, which locates itself in spiritual and intellectual continuity with Halle Pietism and Zinzendorf's Moravianism, may find resources in these historical precedents.

The Non-Partisan Lutheran Clergy

It is not surprising that Lutheran Pietists took part in the American Revolutionary War. The question is why there was not more involvement, especially among the clergy. The answer lies in the Lutheran understanding of the clerical office. In times of civil unrest, a population commonly will split three ways: those fighting to change the establishment (in the case of the American Revolution, the patriots), those fighting to preserve the establishment (the loyalists), and those trying to stay out of the conflict, either for lack of a strong personal interest in the outcome or out of personal convictions regarding the tasks to which one should devote one's life. This third position is neutrality, and it is often the position of the majority.

During the American Revolutionary War, Germans comprised 10 percent of the European population in the thirteen colonies, while close to 90 percent was English speaking.[10] Throughout the war, a large number of English-speaking clergy from Reformed backgrounds openly supported the patriot cause and enlisted as patriot chaplains. The wedding of pulpit and patriotism has dominated the narrative imagination of American evangelicals ever since.[11] Thomas Allen (1743–1810) was a Congregationalist pastor who served the militia of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. This militia joined itself to the force that gathered under the command of General John Stark (1728–1822) and fought the Battle of Bennington in what is now Vermont, where 2,000 patriots opposed 750 Canadians, loyalists, Native warriors, and dismounted German auxiliary dragoons. On August 16, as the patriots were about to press their attack, Allen went ahead of the regiment and regaled the dragoons to lay down their arms. When he was shot at, he returned to his line and led the charge of the Pittsfield militia against the breastworks.[12]

[10] Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence Was Fought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 30.

[11] This theme was reinforced recently by Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

[12] Thompson, *The United States Army Chaplaincy*, 162.

For Lutherans, however, Article Twenty-eight of the Augsburg Confession held that pastors were not to take part in rebellions against their own sovereign governments.[13] In lands where representative assemblies played a governing role, this was interpreted to mean that Lutheran clergy were to be "politically" neutral: they were to remain disinterested in the partisan contests for power in the assemblies but always loyal to the sovereign authority itself. This non-partisan approach is modeled by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711–1787), the Halle missionary who founded the Pennsylvania Ministerium in 1748.

In 1759 Muhlenberg held a thanksgiving service in honor of the victory of the British over the French on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec;[14] it was appropriate for him in his clerical office to celebrate his sovereign's victory over a foreign power. In 1764 he expressed his sympathy for the Paxton Boys, a violent mob marching on Philadelphia to demand the aid of the provincial government in defending the frontier during Pontiac's War.[15] It was the duty of the sword of government to provide protection for its citizens, even if the Quaker-led government had little stomach for military organization and campaigns. Yet the following year, Muhlenberg refused to join himself to a petition proposed by Benjamin Franklin to end the proprietary rule of the Penn family and make Pennsylvania a "crown" colony.[16] As this was a matter of internal partisanship, it was not part of Muhlenberg's office to get involved. When war erupted in 1775, Muhlenberg continued to include prayers to the king in his liturgy until 1776, when Pennsylvania declared itself independent of the king and parliament. Muhlenberg stopped praying for the king because he was neutral: he could not actively oppose that jurisdiction that effectively governed with the sword, providing order and protection; in Pennsylvania that meant the patriots.[17]

[13] "The Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord*, ed. and trans. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 90–91.

[14] Henry Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942), 419.

[15] Henry Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1945), 18–24.

[16] Ibid., 190–92.

[17] Henry Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 103.

This last decision got him in trouble. On June 1, 1776, Francke Institutes director Gottlieb Anastasius Freylinghausen (1719–1785) addressed a letter to Muhlenberg that was meant to be an encyclical to pass throughout the Pennsylvania Ministerium.[18] In it Freylinghausen praised two of Muhlenberg's colleagues, Justus Henry Helmuth (1745–1825) and John Christopher Kunze (1744–1807), for confirming their neutrality in letters to Halle dating to August 1775. The Halle director expected Muhlenberg to do the same from then on.[19] Freylinghausen further enjoined the synod's pastors to encourage their parishioners to stay out of the war. If the German Lutherans put repentance first and sought God, they would be protected from war's alarms and suffer nothing more than God measured out for their spiritual improvement.[20]

The Francke Institutes used Hessians to deliver their mail to the Americas: this letter was sent with a flotilla of German auxiliary reinforcements in April 1777.[21] The letter finally reached Pennsylvania with the invading royalist army under General William Howe (1729–1814). After defeating the Continental Army at Germantown and Brandywine, the royalists occupied Philadelphia. It appears that Freylinghausen's letter was read aloud by a German auxiliary officer. Kunze, pastor in the city, reported to Muhlenberg, then living in semi-retirement in Trappe, Pennsylvania, that the royalist "officers were unhappy" with him because it was felt that he had "not lived up to Professor Freylinghausen's expectations."[22] There were rumors that the royalists would arrest him. This prompted Muhlenberg to write two lengthy defenses of his neutrality to distance himself from the patriots.[23] Muhlenberg also couriered the synod's mail for Halle by means of Hessian soldiers and the British royal navy.[24]

While many Lutheran Pietists in Pennsylvania and Georgia shared Thomas Allen's zeal for the cause, the issue for their clergy concerned vocation. The ministry of Christ was the highest calling, and Article

[18] G.A. Freylinghausen, "Brief an H. Mühlenberg, June 1, 1776," in Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg, *Die Korrespondenz Heinrich Melchior Mühlenbergs*, vol. 4, ed. Kurt Aland (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 730–32.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] William Pasche, "Brief von Kensington an Herrn Inspektor Fabricius zu Halle, 15ten Junii 17(79)," M4 C19:11, 35. Franckesche Stiftungen archives, Halle an der Saale, Germany.

[22] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 3, 101.

[23] Ibid., 101–104.

[24] Ibid., 52.

Twenty-eight stated that it was not to be mixed with the public or military office under any circumstances, much less in a partisan rebellion. Those Pennsylvania Ministerium pastors who chose to involve themselves life-and-limb with the patriots resigned their ordinations in order to do so. While few chose that path, those few included two of Henry Muhlenberg's own sons, Peter and Frederick.

Frederick Muhlenberg (1750–1801) did not make this choice until he decided to enter political life full time in 1780.[25] He had been sent from Pennsylvania to boarding school at the Francke Institutes in 1764 and had graduated from Halle University. But already in January 1776, Peter Muhlenberg (1746–1807) accepted a commission as a colonel in a Virginia regiment. For his farewell sermon to his church and to the ordained ministry, he preached on "a time for war" (Ecclesiastes 3:8). At the end of the sermon, he removed his robe to show his uniform underneath. Over three hundred men signed up for his regiment that day.[26] After taking part in the successful defense of Charleston, South Carolina, Muhlenberg was promoted to brigadier general and joined George Washington's staff.

In the second of his treatises on neutrality, Henry Muhlenberg addressed the issue of his son Peter, the patriot general. As his son was now an adult, the father could not be held accountable for his choices.[27] But in fact Henry's neutrality was only public. His home in Trappe was near Valley Forge, the winter camp where Peter was stationed. This likely prevented the senior Muhlenberg's arrest, and Peter was an overnight guest during Christmas.[28] Henry Muhlenberg's *Journals* are clear that while he never adopted the triumphalism of the patriot cause, he sympathized with it, as he had sympathized with the Paxton Boys in the 1760s. In his view, King George III had not measured up to the wisdom of his father, George II, but instead, like Solomon's son Rehoboam, was choosing to chastise his subjects with scorpions (1 Kings 12:6–14).[29]

[25] After holding various offices, Frederick Muhlenberg ran for Congress and was appointed the first speaker of the House of Representatives under the constitution of the new United States. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Richards, *The Pennsylvania German in the American Revolutionary War: Pennsylvania German Society, Proceedings and Addresses*, vol. 17 (Lancaster, PA: 1908), 431.

[26] Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty and Property*, 306.

[27] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 3, 125.

[28] Ibid., 116.

[29] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 2, 724–25.

Although vigorous in protesting his neutrality, Muhlenberg omitted an important detail concerning the regiment that his son commanded. He had written a certificate of endorsement for the regiment's chaplain, Christian Streit. By doing so, Henry Muhlenberg broke new ground in the relationship between church denominations and clergy in the military.

Christian Streit: The First Endorsement

The story of Christian Streit illustrates the general posture of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in that he was the only pastor in the synod to serve in a military chaplaincy. Streit's father, an immigrant from the German territories of the Palatinate, had been an elder of a Lutheran congregation in Raritan, New Jersey, and had become a friend of Henry Muhlenberg. Under the tutelage of Pennsylvania Ministerium clergy, Christian Streit and Peter Muhlenberg rotated with each other as catechists in a circuit of New Jersey congregations.[30] Streit was ordained in 1770[31] and served in his first call in Easton, Pennsylvania, until 1776.

When Peter Muhlenberg, serving in Woodstock, Virginia, chose to receive the commission to command the Eighth Virginia Regiment of the Continental Army, Streit petitioned to join him as the regiment's chaplain. He served two tours of chaplaincy, first with the Eighth Virginia in 1776–1777 and later with the Ninth Virginia in 1780; in the interval he served the Lutheran congregation in Charleston. In his second tour, he was captured by the British and was not exchanged until 1782.[32]

It is curious that in 1776 Henry Muhlenberg did not hesitate to satisfy Streit's request for a certificate of endorsement on behalf of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, "the first denominational endorsement known to have been given a clergyman in his process of changing from civilian to military status!"[33] Lutheran governments in the eighteenth century clearly understood that military chaplaincy was an appropriate vocational path for clergy. The standing army was loyal to the sovereign power of the state and not beholden to any partisan faction in a representative assembly. Streit, however, was enlisting as a chaplain for rebel combatants in a civil

[30] Ibid., 449.

[31] A. Spaeth, H.E. Jacobs, G.F. Spieker, eds. and trans., *Documentary History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Pennsylvania, 1748–1821* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, 1898), 124.

[32] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 3, 488.

[33] Thompson, *The United States Army Chaplaincy*, 130.

war, in order to aid, abet, and give spiritual succor to partisans opposed to the sovereign power. It is no wonder that while Henry Muhlenberg emphasized his legal and spiritual distance from his son the patriot officer, he made no mention of his own supportive role in vetting a chaplain for partisan rebels.

The certificate is a testimonial from Henry Muhlenberg as synod president that Streit was in good ministerial standing. A copy of the English-language endorsement is reprinted in Henry Muhlenberg's *Journals* as follows:

> Whereas Bearer of these the Revd Mr. Christian Stright has received and accepted a call to be Chaplain for the Eighth Regiment of Regulars for the State of Virginia, and on his journey to move there; these are therefore to certify, that the said Revd Gentleman is a regularly ordained Minister of the Gospel, sound in Protestant Principles and sober in life; desirous and virtuous to promote the Glory of God and Wellfare of the State, and therefore recommended to all Friends and Well-wishers of Religion and State.[34]

Muhlenberg signed himself "Senior Minister and President of the German Lutheran Ministry in the State of Pennsylvania."[35] The Pennsylvania Ministerium was, in Lutheran terms, the civilian consistory that had seen to Streit's ordination. For Lutheran clergy, such testimonials were considered a requirement for any call. The issue was not whether Peter would receive him but whether Streit, on making the trip from Pennsylvania to Virginia, would be able to present himself to local patriot "committees of safety" and be passed through on his journey.

Two conclusions emerge from Streit's story. First, it indicates that Muhlenberg believed the "Wellfare of the State" was in the hands of the patriots and not King George III. The testimonial is dated August 23, 1776, which is nearly three months after Francke Institutes director Freylinghausen wrote his letter of admonishment but still over a year before Muhlenberg and his colleagues knew about the letter. Perhaps Muhlenberg's outlook would have changed had he known how the Francke Institutes themselves would weigh in. The second conclusion derives from Streit's being the only Pennsylvania Ministerium pastor to be so

[34] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 2, 736.
[35] Ibid.

credentialed: on the whole, the Lutheran clergy held themselves neutral as they understood to be their duty, and as Freylinghausen reminded them to do from behind his desk at the Francke Institutes in Europe.

Melsheimer: Discovering Pennsylvania Pietism

Meanwhile, dozens of Lutheran clergy did their duty for the regiments on the royalist side. The Declaration of Independence has forever excoriated German auxiliaries as "mercenaries" hired out to bring destruction to American people.[36] In fact these auxiliaries were standing armies acting on the orders of their sovereign states. Most were served by Lutheran or Reformed chaplains, and part of unit discipline under fire was that the troops sang hymns as they took the field.[37] It is, furthermore, a myth that these Hessians deserted in large numbers when they breathed the air of American freedom. Desertion rates were lower among auxiliaries serving in North America than they were among armies within Europe.[38] Thus the story of Chaplain Melsheimer is truly exceptional.

Frederick Valentine Melsheimer was born in the German duchy of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel in 1749. His mother came from a merchant's family; his father was superintendent of the Duke's forests. Frederick Melsheimer attended Helmstedt University beginning in late 1768 and described his theological training as being according to "strict" orthodox rules.[39] After graduating in his early twenties, he tutored the children of wealthy patrons for several years. At the age of twenty-six, Melsheimer was offered the chaplaincy of the dragoon regiment of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel.[40] After the civilian consistory interviewed and ordained him in February 1776, he was called by the regiment's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Baum (c. 1727–1777).

Melsheimer knew before receiving the call that the regiment was being

[36] As stated in the Declaration, the German auxiliaries were "foreign Mercenaries" sent by George III "to compleat the works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages…."

[37] Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains*, vi–x.

[38] Rodney Atwood, *The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 204.

[39] F.V. Melsheimer, "A Candid and Unbiased Account of the Reputation, Life, and Customs of the Moravian Brethren" (*Freymuthig, und unparteiische Untersuchung der Ehre, des Lebens, und der Gewohnheiten der Mohrischen Brüder!*), 1789, PPEJ 1647. Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

[40] Dragoons are mounted infantry. Standard equipment included the smooth-bore carbine, a shouldered fire-arm with a shorter barrel than a musket.

deployed. Duke Karl I (1713–1780) had been the first to conclude a treaty with Great Britain for the provision of auxiliary troops to serve in North America.[41] Melsheimer kept a travel journal of his observations of life at sea and in North America, which he immediately sent back for publication. He completed two volumes covering eight months of 1776.[42] From this early writing, it appears his years at Helmstedt were unfruitful for spiritual formation. In the first volume, he makes no mention of his chaplaincy; in the second volume, he mentions his role only in passing; and in neither does he describe any of his duties. This contrasts with his colleagues in the auxiliaries, Lutheran and Reformed alike, who give numerous precise details of their clerical activities.[43]

After September 1776, Melsheimer did not publish any more journals, and whether he kept a diary is unknown. His movements can be traced by the memoirs of others and by documents of the Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel Corps, which came under the overall command of British General John Burgoyne (1722–1792).[44] Melsheimer rode along on Burgoyne's invasion of New York from Quebec in 1777. When Burgoyne detached the Braunschweig dragoon regiment to raid Bennington for horses and cattle, Melsheimer joined the regiment on the expedition.

At some point during the campaign, Melsheimer began to have a troubled conscience about military life and values. In a letter to Johann Ettwein, director of the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Melsheimer describes the sharp contrast between the demands of Christ and military duty, "as different as heaven is from earth."[45] Among the irreconcilable army duties listed by Melsheimer is *Raub*, that is, plunder, of which a German army chaplain was entitled to the same share as a lieutenant.[46] The specific mission of the dragoons on the raid of Bennington was to

[41] Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence Was Fought* (New York: Harper, 2007), 49.

[42] F.V. Melsheimer, *Voyage of the Brunswick Auxiliaries from Wolfenbüttel to Quebec*, ed. and trans. William L. Stone (Montreal: Morning Chronicle Steam Printing Establishment, 1891).

[43] See Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains.*

[44] An excellent source is the journal of dragoon company surgeon Julius Wasmus, who was billeted with Melsheimer in Brimfield. Julius Wasmus, *An Eye-Witness Account of the American Revolution and New England Life: The Journal of J.F. Wasmus, German Company Surgeon, 1776–1783*, trans. Helga Doblin, ed. Mary C. Lynn (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990).

[45] F.V. Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, April 26, 1779," Johann Ettwein Papers #400, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

[46] Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains*, vii.

plunder New York's upstate population of their cattle and horses.[47] This challenge to his conscience, compounded by the disasters of war that shortly followed, became for Melsheimer a spiritually-defining crisis of the type described by Halle Pietism's founder August Hermann Francke.[48] In Melsheimer's case, this spiritual crisis led to the breakthrough of an ethical awakening. When he began to write again in 1779, testifying to Ettwein of his spiritual journey, we find a different kind of person from the one revealed in his travel diaries of 1776.[49]

The disasters that compounded Melsheimer's crisis of conscience followed rapidly on each other. The dragoon-led detachment encountered a patriot force ten miles short of Bennington. August 14 was spent in skirmishing. On August 15, due to the wet weather, the armies did not move against each other, but the royalists took the opportunity to raise breastworks and dig in. On August 16 at 1:00 p.m., General Stark ordered the patriots forward. The Battle of Bennington was sharply fought and was a decisive victory for the patriots.[50] Melsheimer was shot through the right arm during the fight. Baum, his commanding officer, was mortally wounded while leading a final desperate bayonet charge.[51] Most of the dragoons were captured, Melsheimer among them.

Conditions for prisoners of war varied, and Melsheimer was better off than many.[52] He was paroled, meaning he had a great deal of freedom on his own cognizance, and he was billeted with a dragoon company surgeon in a home in Brimfield, Massachusetts, for one year.[53] The family, with fifteen children, were generous hosts.[54] However the main body of the regiment was several miles away, and Melsheimer lacked the opportunity to perform his call.[55]

[47] Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997), 291.

[48] August Hermann Francke, "From the Autobiography," in *Pietists: Selected Writings,* ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 104–105.

[49] F.V. Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, April 26, 1779," Johann Ettwein Papers #400, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

[50] For a detailed account of the expedition and Battle of Bennington, see Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 285–328.

[51] Wasmus, *An Eye-witness Account*, 73; Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 313.

[52] The combination of inadequate nutrition and eighteenth-century hygiene caused diseases to be rampant wherever soldiers were quartered close together, whether on active duty or as prisoners of war. Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 162–76.

[53] Wasmus, *An Eye-witness Account*, 77.

[54] Ibid., 84.

[55] Ibid., 89.

After the year in Brimfield, he was sent to Newport, Rhode Island, crossing behind royalist lines with other dragoon officers to await their exchange. The main body of the dragoons, meanwhile, were marched off to prison quarters in Virginia. Melsheimer was still paroled, and, although he shared in the provisions of the German auxiliaries from Ansbach-Bayreuth, he was not on active duty. On arriving in Newport, he sent a letter to the consistory of Wolfenbüttel seeking release from his call to the regiment; he never received an answer. During the winter of 1778/9, the exchange negotiations collapsed. The supreme commander of royalist forces, General Sir Henry Clinton (1730–1795), declared that the patriots would have to attend to their royalist prisoners as this was the duty of all armies, hoping this would force the patriots to deal in better faith.[56]

The dragoon officers and Melsheimer were sent back to the patriots, who settled them in the Moravian single men's dormitory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, near Bethlehem. Growing up hearing scandalous rumors of these closed, sectarian communities, Melsheimer chose to be billeted apart and lived with a farmer whom he soon found much meaner-spirited than his hosts in Brimfield. It was not long before Bethlehem's local reputation and the esteem of its director, Ettwein, made Melsheimer curious about the town of Bethlehem itself.[57] When Melsheimer was finally permitted to visit the Moravian settlement, he was given the tour by Ettwein personally. He was so impressed that he was "determined to remain in Bethlehem."[58] The patriot commissary arranged it, and Melsheimer was placed in the home of Samuel Mau.[59] Samuel's daughter, Maria Agnes Mau (1760–1841) had already been admitted to the dormitory of the "Single Woman's Choir," but over the course of the spring of 1779 she and Melsheimer became engaged.

Thus Melsheimer had experienced firsthand, in Brimfield and Bethlehem, the lifestyles of godly Americans and had fallen in love. Unlike Brimfield, the Moravian religious community was predominantly German in language and culture and combined a high degree of structure and order with an orientation toward non-violence. Melsheimer's praise

[56] Frederick Adolph Riedesel, *Memoirs, and Letters and Journals, of Major General Riedesel during His Residence in America,* vol. 1, ed. Max von Eelking, trans. William L. Stone (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1868), 44.

[57] Melsheimer, "An Unbiased Account."

[58] Ibid.

[59] Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, April 26, 1779."

for the Moravians of Bethlehem is effusive.[60]

His relationship to the dragoon officers continued to sour during the spring of 1779. Melsheimer argued that his letter to the consistory constituted his resignation. His patron who had called him was dead, and the regiment he was called to serve was scattered over the country, the greater part of it in Virginia. How then was his office as chaplain to the dragoons still valid?[61] The handful of officers with him did not take his point of view.[62]

On April 4 Melsheimer was allowed to lead an Easter service in one of the chapels in Bethlehem.[63] On April 26 he wrote a letter to Ettwein seeking permission to marry Maria Agnes Mau.[64] On May 6 he was, in a sense, court-martialed by the handful of dragoon officers with him in Bethlehem; as he tells it, he was mostly subjected to insults.[65] On May 10 his permission to marry Maria Agnes was entered into the Bethlehem diary.[66] On May 11, according to Braunschweig military records, Melsheimer "deserted" his regiment.[67] In late May he preached his first sermon in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, where the parish's founding pastor had just died. On June 3 he and Maria Agnes were married.[68]

In the Moravian community, Melsheimer had discovered one form of Pennsylvania German Pietism. Although impressed by Bethlehem and in love with Maria Agnes, he never forsook his Lutheran ordination. He used his time in Bethlehem to network with a second form of Pennsylvania Pietism, the Pennsylvania Ministerium planted by the Halle missionaries. Given the acrimony between the two Pietisms both in Europe and in America in the eighteenth century, this is somewhat ironic. In this way Melsheimer anticipates Pietists of today who intentionally claim spiritual forebears in both Halle and Herrnhut, in both Francke and Zinzendorf.

Melsheimer attended the annual convention of the synod in October

[60] Melsheimer, "An Unbiased Account."

[61] Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, April 26, 1779."

[62] Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, May 11, 1779," Johann Ettwein Papers #401, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

[63] *The Bethlehem Diary*, 1778–79, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

[64] Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, April 26, 1779."

[65] Melsheimer, "Letter to Ettwein, May 11, 1779."

[66] *Bethlehem Diary,* 1778–79.

[67] Eelking, *Memoirs*, 268.

[68] P. C. Croll, "Bicentennial History, Hill Church of Lebanon County, Pennsylvania," in *Sestercentennial History, Hill Lutheran Church (Berg Kirche) 1733–1983* (Lebanon County, PA: Lebanon County Historical Society, 1983), 19.

of 1779 in Tulpehocken, where he applied for admittance.[69] The synod was, however, officially neutral, their position confirmed by their missionary director and benefactor in Halle. It was impossible to endorse for their pulpits a German auxiliaries chaplain accused of desertion. The endorsement for Streit had come before Freylinghausen's letter reached America; had the letter reached America first, Muhlenberg might have desisted. In any event, the endorsement for Streit did not set a precedent on which Melsheimer's case could rest. Admitting a deserter would diminish the dignity of military chaplaincy as a valid Lutheran call and thus threaten the Pennsylvania Ministerium's relationships with consistories throughout Germany, including the Francke Institutes. Melsheimer was welcomed as a "friend" whose "merits we appreciate," but he could not be rostered in the Pennsylvania Ministerium without a letter of discharge from his regiment.[70]

No discharge was ever processed. The issue was resolved only with the victory of the patriots and the departure of all royalist forces in November 1783. At the synod's annual convention in 1785, Melsheimer once again applied for admittance. He had now served with them six years and attained a reputation as a preacher-in-demand. His application was taken up as the first item of business, and the vote of acceptance was unanimous.[71] He then signed his name to the Constitution of 1781/2,[72] a document that systematized several of Philipp Jacob Spener's six points for a renewed Lutheran Church.[73]

Melsheimer went on to a distinguished career in the United States. He served in executive leadership for the synod[74] and brought the parish of Hanover, Pennsylvania, through successive building programs of a parsonage and a stone church.[75] Publishing articles and books in both science and theology, he became a member of the American Philosophical Society in 1795.

[69] Spaeth et al., *Documentary History*, 156.
[70] Ibid., 178.
[71] Ibid., 199.
[72] Ibid., 169.
[73] The Constitution of 1781/2 codified spiritual formation and evidence of sanctification in the clergy: "Every minister professes that he holds the Word of God and our Symbolical Books in doctrine and life" (Ch. 6, Sec. 2); "No minister is allowed to conform himself to the world in his walk and conversation" (Ch. 6, Sec. 5). Ibid., 175.
[74] Melsheimer served as secretary of the synod 1788–1790. Ibid., 219–29.
[75] Frederick S. Weiser, *The Lutheran Church on the Conawego at Hanovertown* (Hanover, PA: St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, 1993), 35–36.

Triebner: The Halle Hessian

The third Pietist chaplain of the Revolutionary War is Christopher Frederick Triebner, a bona fide Halle Pietist whose choice was opposite than Christian Streit's and who moved in the opposite direction from Frederick Melsheimer. After teaching at the Francke Institutes, Triebner was sent as a missionary to the Lutheran Pietist community of Ebenezer, Georgia, arriving in 1769. Triebner's story is summarized in the final chapter of George Fenwick Jones's *The Salzburger Saga*.[76] Triebner is a major figure in Muhlenberg's *Journals* and in Kurt Aland's German compilation, *Die Korrespondenz Heinrich Melchior Mühlenbergs*.[77] In his writings, Muhlenberg does not paint a flattering picture of Triebner, as his relationship with him soured from early on.

Ebenezer was established in 1734 as a community of Protestants that had been exiled from the Catholic state of Salzburg, an Alpine realm ruled directly by an archbishop. Most Salzburgers were sponsored by the king of Prussia to settle Prussia's frontiers in eastern Europe.[78] The Francke Institutes in Halle, a city in Prussia, negotiated with the king of England for the settlement of a few hundred in the new colony being created on North America's Atlantic seaboard. Although death rates were high for immigrants to the southern colonies, reaching 50 percent for newcomers in their first year, the community thrived as subsequent transports brought new settlers.[79]

By the end of the 1750s, three Halle pastors were serving the Ebenezer community, reaching a sustainable clergy-parish ratio in large contrast to the underserved Lutherans in Pennsylvania. In the mid-1760s, two of these pastors died.[80] As sponsors of the community, the directors of Halle Pietism finally settled on sending Christopher Triebner to Ebenezer despite their concerns about his significant liabilities, particularly that he was "selfish."[81] Even so, they did not make clear the hierarchy of Ebenezer's

[76] Jones, *The Salzburger Saga*, 121–28.

[77] Muhlenberg, *Journals*, vol. 2, 596–677.

[78] Mack Walker, "The Salzburger Migration to Prussia: Causes and Choices," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity: New German Settlements in Eighteenth Century Europe and America*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, and Renate Wilson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 74.

[79] James Van Horn Melton, *Religion, Community, and Slavery on the Colonial Southern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On the Pietist vision, see pp. 98–137; on death rates, pp. 154–56.

[80] Ibid., 260–64.

[81] Jones, *The Salzburger Saga*, 121.

pastors. Though by far the junior associate by both age and experience, Triebner instead insinuated himself in the senior role, leading at once to conflicts with the long-serving pastor Christian Rabenhorst (d. 1776).

Triebner's ploy was to call into question the arrangements Rabenhorst had made to alienate the mill on his glebe land from the cooperative economy. The arrangements had been approved by the former pastors, both of whom were now deceased.[82] Triebner played on the deep-seated suspicions and resentments in the community, particularly those who had been its early settlers and were committed to the communitarian vision of its founding. This fostered an atmosphere of mistrust, which finally led to schism when the two pastors excommunicated each other. At this point the European directors implored Henry Muhlenberg to travel to Georgia to reconcile the parties.[83] Muhlenberg arrived in the fall of 1774 and stayed until the following spring.

Triebner cooperated with the compromises Muhlenberg imposed.[84] Having made fast friends with Rabenhorst, Muhlenberg faithfully made his reports to Europe and returned to Pennsylvania just as war was breaking out. Shortly after, the conflict took new turns, as Triebner was accused of adultery. Refusing orders from Europe to stand trial, he was removed from the pulpit in Ebenezer.[85] But there was another twist: Rabenhorst died in late 1776, leaving no trained clergy in call in Ebenezer. Furthermore, one of Rabenhorst's major allies, John Adam Treutlen (1733–1782), was elected the first patriot governor of Georgia. Triebner avowed himself as a loyalist and refused to swear allegiance to Treutlen's government. Standing on this principle, he was arrested. "[E]ventually he was forced, at swordpoint, to abjure his oath to the king."[86]

In late 1778, British regulars, loyalist units from New York, and German auxiliaries, all under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell, invaded Georgia and occupied Savannah. They were welcomed by Triebner as liberators. On January 1, 1779, the royalists extended their control to include Ebenezer, with Triebner acting for them as a

[82] Ibid., 122.
[83] Ibid., 123.
[84] Ibid., 124.
[85] Ibid., 125. A more thorough discussion of the charges awaits another project. However, Triebner's chief accuser was his opponent John Treutlen; the woman involved pleaded Triebner's innocence and accused another man of sexual assault. No one in power, in Georgia or in Halle, took her point of view into account when putting Triebner under suspension.
[86] Ibid., 126.

guide on the trail.[87] On January 3, Triebner was reinstalled by the British commanding officer at Jerusalem Church. The church book of Ebenezer, kept by Triebner from 1779 into 1782, shows that he had a busy ministry of baptisms and burials; however, no marriages are recorded in the record book after 1778.[88] The war's fortunes, however, turned against the royalists. After the defeat at Yorktown in 1781, the royalists departed Ebenezer, and Triebner went with them. He enlisted as a chaplain with Hessel-Cassel's Knoblauch Garrison regiment. These German soldiers were stationed in Savannah until 1782 and then in St. Augustine, Florida. Triebner's call was confirmed by the regiment's executive officer, Colonel von Porbeck.

The British had suspended offensive operations, and the outcome of the war was a foregone conclusion. Perhaps Triebner felt he had few options. Since he was alienated from Ebenezer in Georgia and estranged from Muhlenberg in Pennsylvania, he might look to the non-affiliated Lutherans of Virginia and the Carolinas as one prospect, but victorious patriots in those congregations could hardly be expected to receive him. Canada might have been an option had he not already befriended the Hessian officers who had expressed an evident need for his ministry.

The list of Hesse-Cassel's regiments with chaplains reproduced by Bruce E. Burgoyne shows that the garrison regiment was served by the Reformed chaplain Johann Conrad Grimmel (1753–1789).[89] Although most of the Hesse-Cassel auxiliaries were Reformed, the corps included thousands of Lutherans in its ranks. The diaries of other German auxiliary chaplains show that while in New York Lutheran and Reformed chaplains frequently exchanged themselves to each other's regiments to perform communion and liturgies for the other's minority religious populations.[90] Colonel von Porbeck, executive officer of the garrison in Savannah, found it to his advantage to retain Triebner as a Lutheran.

Triebner's call to the chaplaincy was likely on the terms of the other chaplains of Hesse-Cassel, with an expense allowance in addition to the

[87] Archibald Campbell, *Journal of Lieut. Colol. Archibald Campbell* (Darient, GA: Richmond County Historical Society, 1981), 33–34.

[88] *Ebenezer Record Book*, 1754–1781, ed. and trans. George F. Jones and Sheryl Exley (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1991). For birth registry and baptisms, see pp. 74–83; burials, pp. 140–41; marriages, p. 104.

[89] Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains*, xiv.

[90] Philipp Waldeck, *Eighteenth Century America: A Hessian Report on the People, the Land, the War*, ed. and trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2008), 56–63.

salary, and the assignment of an enlisted man as a personal servant or assistant.[91] For regiments on garrison duty, the churches of the city were used for worship services. Attendance at Sunday service was required for the Hesse-Cassel troops,[92] thus Triebner had a dependable congregation filling a church building every Sunday and ministered to their needs during the week. A diary kept by Gottlieb Johannes Braunsdorf, a Lutheran colleague stationed thousands of miles north in Quebec, shows that for a garrisoned regiment there was a steady rate of civilian pregnancies, marriages to the soldiers, and baptisms of the infants—frequently in that order.[93] Deaths by natural causes diminished after acclimation in Canada; however, in Georgia and Florida the diseases endemic to the warm climates had von Porbeck himself comment that life-expectancy was only forty years.[94] Lutheran chaplain Philipp Waldeck of the Waldeck Battalion, while stationed in Pensacola, Florida, noted in his diary, "I fear we will lose many men. Every regiment that comes here dies out in a few years and we will not be an exception. We have already experienced it."[95] Meanwhile in Canada, the incidents of attempts to desert and of suicide increased with the length of deployment, especially after the Battle of Yorktown.[96] Even with the cessation of combat operations, it is quite likely that Triebner, together with Grimmel, had his hands full with funerals. Despair at the length and futility of the deployment finally overtook Waldeck several months before the Battle of Yorktown. His journal entry of December 31, 1780, reads: "Another year is at an end and if it will be the last one in Florida, we need not know. It is all immaterial. All is in vain."[97] If this was typical of the morale of the German auxiliary chaplains in the southern theater, it provides us fresh insight into Triebner's usefulness to Porbeck as a fresh face and attitude to present to the troops.

[91] Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains*, vii.
[92] Ibid., ix.
[93] Ibid., 115–31.
[94] Atwood, *The Hessians*, 168–69.
[95] Waldeck, *Eighteenth Century America*, 170.
[96] Chaplain Johannes Braunsdorf kept a death register in which he notes the causes of death in the Anhalt-Zerbst regiment and its civilian followers. The regiment was garrisoned in Quebec City from their arrival in 1778 through the duration of the war. On surviving the first year, the overall drop in the death rate is steep for the acclimated soldiers; however, incidents of unnatural death increase, and suicide rates climb through to the end of the deployment in 1783. See Burgoyne, *Hessian Chaplains*, 66–109.
[97] Waldeck, *Eighteenth Century America*, 172.

At the war's conclusion Triebner wrote to Ebenezer, asking if he might return to them. Their reply was that he was welcome to come back if it was his desired to be hanged.[98] One German auxiliaries chaplain took a parish in Nova Scotia at the war's end,[99] but Triebner sailed for England instead and succeeded in London as a long-serving pastor until his own death. His published theological works rival Melsheimer's output, but Triebner wrote in English.[100]

Muhlenberg's one-sided account of Triebner's behavior in Ebenezer tells only part of the story. If we read the hostile accounts with suspicion of their authors and empathy for Triebner, we find that a young pastor had risked an ocean crossing in the belief that he had been called to a particular pastoral office. Like Melsheimer, Triebner was frustrated that he could not execute his office as he had understood it. Like Melsheimer, he had an increasingly conflicted relationship with his first charges and was finally alienated from them. It is a tribute to Triebner's character that he repaid everything that had been loaned to him by the Francke Institutes for his missionary journey to Georgia, despite the gossip among his opponents.[101]

Of the Halle missionaries sent by the Francke Institutes to America, Triebner was the only one to serve as a chaplain in the Revolutionary War, and that was for the Hessians. He was not willing to be martyred for King George, but, like thousands of others under duress, he abjured his oath to the king only at sword point. Nevertheless he proved consistent in his loyalism, and he served out his chaplaincy to the end of the war in spite of the lost cause.

Conclusion

In highly charged partisan atmospheres, non-partisan neutrality is often misunderstood and unappreciated. It is more viscerally satisfying to embrace the story of Thomas Allen and imagine the evangelical pastor rushing the battlements of tyranny with sword in hand. As the Evangelical

[98] Jones, *The Salzburger Saga*, 130.

[99] Johann Conrad Döhla, *A Hessian Diary of the American Revolution*, ed. and trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 234, n. 6. The memoir by Karl Bauer inflates the promise to 3,000 acres for officers to settle in Nova Scotia or Canada, Karl Bauer, *Journal of a Hessian Grenadier Battalion*, ed. and trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2005), 176.

[100] E.g., Christopher Frederic Triebner, *An Essay, to lay open the gospel in its original purity, by a twelvefold paraphrase on the first gospel promise…* (1788; reprint, the Bibliolife Network: Eighteenth Century Collections Online Print Edition).

[101] Jones, *The Salzburger Saga*, 130.

Covenant Church had once cultivated ties with the Congregationalists, it can be argued that Allen belongs to its past, too; for the Covenant in the United States, a stronger case can be made for institutional succession from the Congregationalists than either Halle or Herrnhut. At the same time, an ethos came to be shaped within the Covenant that deliberately held the Congregationalists at arm's length and chose rather to remember its spiritual forebears in the pietisms of a German past. Within that Pietistic Lutheran past, the clerical office was esteemed as one that was (1) loyal to the sovereign state and (2) non-partisan in the politics of representative governments wherever those existed. These values were variously expressed as is shown by this study of three Lutheran military chaplains and their relationships to their communities of discipline and call.

Christian Streit, the pastor who became chaplain to the patriots, is the exception that proved the rule in the Pennsylvania Ministerium. Although predominantly patriotic in private, the Lutheran clergy in Pennsylvania were true to a public stance of neutrality to the end. Streit received an endorsement only for his first tour of military chaplaincy, before Freylinghausen's letter from the Francke Institute's was received, and Streit did not receive an endorsement for his second tour. When Frederick Melsheimer found the demands of military duty, especially to plunder civilians, irreconcilable to Christian duty, he experienced a pietistic ethical awakening. His journey from royalist to naturalized immigrant did not, therefore, land him with the ideologues of patriot partisanship; rather, he found among the Moravians of Bethlehem and the Pietists of the Pennsylvania Ministerium an opportunity to serve a non-violent call in a non-partisan fashion. Christopher Triebner, the only Francke Institutes missionary to serve a chaplaincy in the Revolutionary War, did so for the Hessians. In serving his king, Triebner is a more genuine reflection of the Lutheran Pietist ethos than is Christian Streit.

These three stories—of ardent patriotism, of a journey to non-partisanship, and of ardent loyalism—show how difficult it is even for clergy from within the same theological tradition to come to godly unity on partisan questions. Efforts to find compromise on partisan questions might therefore be misplaced. Rather, today's heirs to Pietism might consider reclaiming a framework of non-partisanship, that is, of political non-alignment, as we wrestle with and proclaim the ethical demands of justice, holiness, grace, duty, biblical hermeneutics, and conscience. Such a stance has been, is, and will be misunderstood when a society's

politics become rancorous and mutually alienating. In such seasons the posture of engaged neutrality might be more important than ever, with the understanding that such a stance does not avoid a cross; it lifts high the cross.

As we have seen in this study, it is possible that no three military chaplains, even within the same theological tradition, will agree on any given question of ethics and conscience. In some cases, a choice made by a military chaplain for conscience's sake may need to be given an unwavering endorsement by Covenant leadership even if such an endorsement appears partisan: Muhlenberg knew no other way to ratify Streit's call on behalf of the Pennsylvania Ministerium. In some cases there may be need for censure: Triebner was made to understand that he had permanently and irrevocably alienated his faith community by his choices, so he moved on to a different community and ministry. In some cases, the one that sticks most consistently to a non-partisan view of their service may be the one who is constrained to leave the military outright: this was Melsheimer's journey, and he found a home in the Pennsylvania Ministerium.

In all cases, the choices between duty and conscience, and between partisanship and vocation, do not come easily. As military duties have evolved, new rights are being claimed and enforced in the US armed forces that may well cause a crisis of conscience for Covenant chaplains. Hopefully the Covenant, by remaining grounded in its affirmations, can be the support its military clergy need as they navigate their duties and their call; hopefully the Covenant will offer a collegial reception when conscience requires that the uniform be resigned or retired.

To those of a partisan frame of mind, Francke Institutes director Freylinghausen's letter is little more than a string of pious phrases from an out of touch bureaucrat. Read from a premise that clergy should be neutral in the midst of partisan conflict, perhaps this missive from a Halle Pietist contains wisdom and hope for today: though conflicts and ethical dilemmas shift with the partisan tides, the church remains the rock of salvation for the repentant.

Responses to Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, "Covenant Freedom: Freedom for All or Free-for-all?"

In the previous issue of this publication, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, professor of theology and ethics at North Park Theological Seminary, contributed a historical survey of Covenant freedom, followed by a proposal for faithful dissent amid conflicting biblical interpretations.[1] In that same issue, we invited responses to Clifton-Soderstrom's article.[2]

We originally invited a number of pastors and theologians to apply Clifton-Soderstrom's proposal to a variety of specific ethical issues (divorce, women in ministry, same-sex marriage). We are grateful for those who responded to these invitations: Brian Bantum, Steve Bilynskyj, Scott Erickson, and Klyne Snodgrass. As responses came in, same-sex marriage emerged as the dominant issue. Because many who were invited were unable to participate, we opened the invitation broadly. Mark Safstrom responded to this general call.

The *Covenant Quarterly* is a forum for charitable, critical dialogue on relevant issues in pastoral theology. We hope the dialogue printed here will generate further conversation in that same spirit, to the end described by Clifton-Soderstrom: "that we speak well of those in our communion, that we speak directly to those with whom we have issue, and that we commit to each other as members of the same body. This calls for charity in all things, and real charity requires courage to work through conflict over the long-haul."

[1] Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, "Covenant Freedom: Freedom for All or Free-for-all?" *Covenant Quarterly* 75:3–4 (2017): 34–54.

[2] Hauna Ondrey, "Comment," *Covenant Quarterly* 75:3–4 (2017): 3.

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The term "covenant" holds both complexity and possibility. Tracing the invocation of covenantal language throughout Scripture reveals God's perpetual presence and desire to be with humanity. Covenant is faithfulness that is reciprocated and mutual. And yet in Scripture covenant is at times paradoxical. It is irrevocable and constant, but it also cannot be completely known. Fundamentally, covenant is not simply about law, about what to do and what not to do. Covenant is about relationship, about *how* we are with God and with one another. Covenant is sometimes about *who* we are with. Sometimes that means exclusivity, and sometimes it means radical and scandalous inclusion, but these facts are never static. They shift and slip along a deeper claim about what it means to be with God and for God to be with us. In Scripture, whenever Jews who confessed Jesus as Lord began to define covenant around questions of *what* and *who*, God seemed to insert the troubling question of *how* into the image of what faithfulness could begin to look like.

I came to Christ in a Southern Baptist church and was somewhat of a theological wanderer during college and seminary. In my wandering, I become more and more aware of the ways theology and theological dogmas served as easy devices of rupture and distinction. From this background, the Evangelical Covenant Church's recognition of both infant and believer's baptism spoke to me of the *how* at the center of God's covenantal presence.

Now, as a systematic theologian who works in questions of identity, anthropology, and Christology, I find myself returning to questions of covenant, faithful dissent, and the implication of Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom's article for how we account for the faithfulness of LGBTQ persons in our midst. My framing of this question is intentional. As Clifton-Soderstrom recounted the history of faithful Covenant pastors struggling to discern questions of baptism, the ordination of women, and just war and pacifism, I was reminded that these struggles were not only questions of beliefs or dogma, but rather questions regarding how we understand the faithfulness of the people who hold those beliefs.

This struggle to account for the faithfulness of those whom we encounter lies at the center of the covenantal *how*. Whether Ruth or Rahab,

the Ethiopian eunuch or Cornelius, Scripture points to the possibility of faithfulness, of God's covenantal *how*, being reflected in those who were seemingly excluded from the covenantal *who* or *what*. In a very real way, Scripture is a testament to God's faithful dissent—God's refusal to allow those whom God loves to be hemmed in, confusing the *how* for the *who* or the *what*.

The question of faithful dissent and its legacy in the Evangelical Covenant Church presses us to dig deeper as we confront spaces of disagreement. Some critical beginning points are the questions of what is being dissented, how we are defining our terms, and whether we are attributing to concepts some sense of shared meaning. Baptism raises fundamental questions regarding the nature of the elements: What is happening as we partake in them? How does that practice shape our lives with Christ and our discipleship? The example of pacifism and just war raises questions of practice and understanding: What can we understand about ourselves? What is faithful action to take or not take?

Similarly, beneath the questions of who we are and what constitutes faithful life, we see interrelated ways that LGBTQ persons confront us with certain problems with how our categories shape what we believe and how we read Scripture collectively as we seek guidance:

- What is a human being, and how do we account for gendered difference?
- What is covenant? What are the limits or possibilities of covenant?
- Who is God? Is God a God of law and obedience? What ethics follow from this? Is faithfulness a question of obedience in Scripture? Is there another way of seeing Scripture?
- How are categories of persons always cultural, and how is Scripture a cultural book in ways that are illuminating and limiting?

As Clifton-Soderstrom has pointed out in her article, it is more likely than not that we will disagree in how we answer the above questions. At the same time, it is entirely possible that we will also begin to see new possibilities for connection and fellowship. We might even discover the possibility of a fellowship of freedom that allows some congregations and persons to discover the *how* of covenantal freedom in ways that are faithful even as they differ from others.

There are many ways of answering the above questions, and a short response does not allow me to elaborate on how we might navigate some of these questions. But I am not sure the question Clifton-Soderstrom's larger framework of Covenant freedom presses us with actually concerns

the particulars of the argument. One question her historical account raises is why we allow freedom in so many areas but choose a dogmatic legalism in issues of LGBTQ persons, as though these people are reflecting faithfulness and unfaithfulness in ways that are fundamentally different than heterosexual Christians do every day.

I came to the Covenant with more conservative views regarding LGBTQ people. I came to the Covenant because of its deep commitment to racial reconciliation and the ways the denomination sought to foster an image of racial and ethnic diversity in God's kingdom. But in order to do this, questions of culture and theological heritage had to be reimagined. Faithfulness was not simply about certain hymns or church policies or gatherings. What made this openness possible was a willingness to recognize the ways different people embodied faithful responses to God's presence in their lives and in the stories they held.

While many may see questions of race/ethnicity and sexual orientation as fundamentally different, I wonder whether we can separate them any longer. By this I simply mean, if we are open to the radical transformation that a racially and ethnically diverse denomination necessarily requires, we have already suggested that certain forms of faithfulness are subject to change—that they can be reinterpreted and understood in more expansive and inclusive ways. I wonder whether we have opened ourselves up to the same process of listening and discernment with those from the LGBTQ community and those in our congregations. What would we find if we began to hear their understandings of faithfulness? Would they be so different from what we might imagine if we considered faithfulness beyond the biological genders of the participants?

As the Covenant continues to wrestle with questions of marriage and inclusion of LGBTQ people in congregations, I wonder if we might also struggle with more than law, more than dogmatic notions of sex and gender. I wonder if we might become more open to the ways those very people who were seemingly outside the covenant also display marks of faithfulness, that their perpetual presence might reveal to us all just how radical and ordinary God's covenant is.

In the end, I wonder whether the Evangelical Covenant Church's belief in a freedom centered in *how* we are together in Christ might become a critical way forward in displaying what God's faithfulness in us might look like.

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Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom has long been an able spokesperson for, and defender of, our "last but not least" Covenant Affirmation of freedom in Christ. She has also been my friend and colleague in teaching and ministry. So I appreciate the opportunity to respond to her formal theological exposition of that freedom in regard to the practice of faithful dissent. While the paper certainly has application to other areas of practical theology and Christian ethics, I have been asked to interact with it particularly in regard to the issue of human sexuality.

Having said the above, I do not believe that sexual ethics is simply one of many topics toward which the conclusions of Clifton-Soderstrom's essay might be directed. No, the paper is clearly aimed at clearing a space for faithful dissent in regard to the Covenant position on the morality of homosexual practice. I say this not to diminish the excellent historical research and theological reflection on Covenant freedom the author has offered, but simply to place what has been presented properly in the context of what is surely one of its main purposes.

I take up the task of responding with some trepidation. Since 1996 I have been actively involved in Covenant discussion around human sexuality, beginning with serving on the Christian Action Commission, which prepared and presented the 1996 Resolution on Human Sexuality. That resolution has guided and sparked denominational discussion ever since. Beginning in about 2000 and for sixteen years, I taught about this issue in the Covenant Orientation program in two or three different classes, most recently in Covenant Theology. As president of the Covenant Ministerium (2009–2012), I was pulled into several discussions about human sexuality. While Ministerium president, I served on the Board of the Ordered Ministry, where policy on human sexuality was discussed and implemented in the care and discipline of our clergy.

Through it all, I have consistently explicated and defended the conservative but gracious position sketched in the 1996 Resolution on Human Sexuality. I believe that position to be thoroughly biblical and theologically sound. I would say the same of more recent policy developed by the Board of the Ordered Ministry, which aims to carefully and lovingly implement our biblical and theological position in ministerial ethics, practice, and discipline and to some degree in local congregational practice.

From the beginning, my soul has been pained by disagreement with our position on human sexuality, particularly when those expressing such disagreement are loved and respected friends and colleagues like Clifton-Soderstrom, because I fear that disagreement will lead to breaking of fellowship. In what I take to be the spirit of charity and unity she seeks to embody in her paper, I have been troubled while at the same time wanting very much to maintain friendship and fellowship.

Nonetheless, I feel that opening her paper on Covenant freedom with the Doughty incident may, perhaps unintentionally, paint those who dissent from the conclusions of her paper as present-day "Doughtys," unable and unwilling to be charitable toward those who disagree with them. I have that fear specifically in regard to those who wish to create theological room to extend Covenant freedom to accepting homosexual practice as morally benign. Offering them a heartfelt negative response seems to run the risk of being regarded as uncharitable, mean-spirited, and, worst of all, not really Covenant in regard to Christian freedom. Despite the fears I've named, I will proceed to offer a few points of reflection and critique regarding Clifton-Soderstrom's paper and what I take to be its implied goal in regard to human sexuality.

I begin with the general observation that Covenant freedom has never been meant to embrace, and likely never will embrace, the full range of possible biblical theological positions. This is a mistake that laypeople and Covenant clergy often make, imagining that if a viewpoint is theologically and/or biblically possible within the wider range of the Christian Church as a whole, then it must be an acceptable viewpoint within Covenant life and practice.

The paper itself touches on examples that clearly demonstrate that the Covenant does not and cannot embrace the whole of Christian theological freedom. Clergy are not free in the Covenant to espouse and practice a theology of complementarianism nor a baptismal theology that does not recognize as valid the baptism of infants, though both of those viewpoints are certainly present among faithful believers in the larger house of God's people in the world. But the list of theological positions unacceptable—and therefore not covered by our affirmation of freedom in Christ—in the Covenant is much longer.

To begin with, we explicitly reject atonement theology that requires penal substitution to be the primary or only metaphor for the work of Christ, though such a view is quite prevalent among evangelical and even Catholic Christians in the larger church. To the list of established Chris-

tian theological positions beyond the bounds of Covenant freedom we could randomly add Sabbatarian seventh-day observance, the veneration of and prayer to the Virgin Mary, and the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. There are many other such examples.

Any Covenant ordination candidate espousing and proposing to teach and encourage, or even openly and favorably discuss, any of the positions identified above would certainly have a difficult interview and would likely be denied ordination. Yet I challenge anyone to deny that there are many Christians outside the Covenant who hold these positions while still growing in the faith and experiencing the Lord's redemptive power. The range of Covenant theological freedom is simply not identical with the range of Christian theological freedom as a whole but is much narrower.

Many Covenanters have been misled into thinking that Covenant freedom allows us to hold what C.S. Lewis called "mere Christianity," a pure theology centered on the essentials and allowing complete freedom in regard to non-essentials. That is a worthy ideal, but it has never been an adequate description of Covenant theology. As C.S. Lewis himself said, "mere Christianity" is only an entrance hallway from which branch doorways into rooms that are the many different forms and denominations of Christianity. One cannot live in the hallway but only in one of the rooms, says Lewis. The Covenant is only one of the many rooms of the Christian Church. As such it has its theological boundaries and limits, and its expression of Christian freedom must be somewhat circumscribed.

This brings me to my next critique in regard to a central theme espoused explicitly as guideline number three for faithful dissent: a principle of inclusivity. Clifton-Soderstrom states that, "The ECC has historically sought to err on the side of inclusion, especially as it pertains to marginalized groups." She adduces historical examples in which the Covenant encouraged inclusion of various classes of people and varieties of theological positions. My previous point should be enough to demonstrate that the inclusion of various theological positions is not without limit, even when such positions are expressed as faithful dissent.

With regard to the inclusion of marginalized peoples, the Covenant indeed does have a stellar history of seeking to be as broad and welcoming as the kingdom of God is as a whole. As Clifton-Soderstrom's article quotes from a 1959 report of the Committee on Freedom and Theology in regard to, "other races, religions, and classes, the Bible reminds us that these are persons whom God created and for whom Christ died" (p. 50). However, we must be clear about what such inclusion entails specifically.

Surely an inclusive spirit toward those of other, non-Christian religions does not mean that we wish them to continue to live without faith in Christ. No, we send missionaries and engage in cross-cultural ministry so that they may accept Jesus, be transformed in their thinking, and set aside those other religions.

So any principle of inclusion in Covenant theology and mission does in fact have limits. And one of those limits is moral. As the report on *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* states, "Our statement of faith also means that we believe the Bible stands in judgment upon our sinfulness. Its message is the story of God's love for the world, of his calling us from our sin…."[3] The Covenant's position and policies in regard to human sexuality recognize that the Bible stands in judgment on our sexual sinfulness and seeks to deal with that reality graciously and redemptively, seeking new life in Christ also in this area of human life.

Jesus's own "principle of inclusion" clearly had moral limits. Jesus ate and fraternized with marginalized people such as tax collectors, prostitutes, and others described simply as "sinners." He proclaimed in Matthew 21:31 that some of these would enter the kingdom ahead of seemingly more righteous people. Yet in none of that is there any implication, nor has any genuine Christian community ever drawn the conclusion, that Jesus's inclusiveness in regard to these classes of people condoned or legitimized their sinful behavior. Tax collectors who followed Jesus were expected to cease their fraudulent extortion, and prostitutes who came to Christ were to cease selling their bodies. Other Christians were expected not to begin engaging in these sinful activities. Likewise, the Christian church throughout history has expected those who experience same-sex attraction to cease from or never begin homosexual behavior.

Of course, the disagreement within the Covenant and within the larger Christian church concerns whether it is in fact true and biblical that homosexual behavior is sinful, as the Covenant position asserts. It is freedom for dissent from that position Clifton-Soderstrom wishes to allow as a consequence of Covenant freedom. To that end she presents another historical example of apparent allowance in an Annual Meeting resolution of significant moral disagreement in regard to just war and pacifism.

One might point out that this example merely presents a case from a non-binding resolution, while the Covenant's position on human sexu-

[3] *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, reprinted in *Covenant Quarterly* 75:3–4 (2017): 21.

ality has been raised from resolution status to a guide for policy and practice by the action of the Annual Meeting in 2004. However, it is also worth noting that other resolutions do take firm, one-sided moral stances with little room for dissenting opinion. Annual Meeting resolutions on abortion have been fairly firm in rejecting a purely "pro-choice" perspective as morally acceptable. Thus, one simply cannot derive from a single resolution that acknowledged moral disagreement is a general Covenant practice or principle that would allow theological disagreement in regard to another moral issue like homosexual behavior.

In conclusion, despite her careful scholarship and depth of research into our Covenant history regarding the theology of Christian freedom, I do not believe that Clifton-Soderstrom has provided a basis for anything like widespread, public expression within the Covenant of alternative theological viewpoints that countenance homosexual behavior as an acceptable form of Christian life. Our clergy are expected to live and teach in accordance with Covenant theological positions and ethical guidelines, and that surely includes our established ethic in regard to human sexuality.

That being said, there is still room, as there is on almost any Covenant theological point, for a private, more or less silent dissent. On that same sort of basis, dissenters from our positions on women in ministry and on baptism have long been present and served among us. Their private opinions on these matters simply do not enter into the public exercise of their ministries. I am sure the same will continue to be true in regard to dissenters from our ethic of sexuality.

Having said all this, I return to the fear I mentioned at the beginning. Expression of the conviction that Covenant freedom is bounded in the ways I describe may, in the eyes of some, cast me as yet another "Doughty" defender of a restrictive theology destined to land on some footnote scrapheap of Covenant history. I hope that this is not so, and I hope to remain firmly within the friendship of Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom and other colleagues who agree with her.

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My task is to test Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom's paradigm of faithful dissent on the issue of homosexuality. I will offer three suggestions based on theological reflection and historical observation. My focus is homosexuality specifically, not sexuality generally, because the broader issue of human sexuality has diluted the conversation in churches. The real problem is the place of gays and lesbians in church life—ordained and lay—and what to do with homosexuality as an issue of Christian ethics.

I want to be upfront about my autobiography as a third-generation Swedish immigrant whose family has been associated with the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) for more than a century. My grandparents embraced the spiritual renewal led by Mission Friends and became leaders in the rural Iowa Covenant church where I was baptized and confirmed. Never did I imagine leaving the ECC until faced with a theological quandary: God was calling me as a gay believer to ordained ministry. Since I found it impossible to faithfully follow God's call in the ECC, I joined the Episcopal Church and have been a priest for more than sixteen years. It was heartbreaking to leave the denomination that not only shaped my Christian upbringing but also provided the topic of my doctoral dissertation on David Nyvall. So, like many others who are gay or who know Christians who are gay, I have personal experience with faithful dissent.

Regarding homosexuality, the underlying challenge with a model of faithful dissent is theological. Said another way, the heart of the problem is how the ECC exercises a theology of Christian freedom in relationship to homosexuality, not as a result of homosexuality. I believe the ECC is trying to solve the wrong problem (homosexuality) when a clear, renewed theological statement and implementation plan on Christian freedom is what's most needed. Clifton-Soderstrom references a landmark denominational study from 1963, but there has been little in-depth reflection and writing on this theological concept in the last half-century. It's promising news that the ECC has commissioned a new paper, announced at the 2018 Annual Meeting, but the obvious deficit over several decades means that this new project has little fresh material to build on. I believe the theological context for faithful dissent, i.e., Christian freedom, is not clear or deep enough within the denomination to sustain dialogue

on homosexuality. For this reason, my first suggestion is for the ECC to launch an in-depth theological project on Christian freedom that specifically addresses how to handle homosexuality.

We face another challenge with the model of faithful dissent because of the denomination's current stance on a static authority of Scripture. I am not questioning the authority of Scripture per se, but rather the weight of that authority in the theological work of the church and how to deal with different points of interpretation. Paul Peter Waldenström, a Covenant founder, cast aside theological methodology with one question: "Where is it written?" Note that he did not ask, "What is the meaning of what's written [in the Bible]?" Waldenström's question espoused a static authority by implying that Mission Friends should quote the Bible literally rather than wrestle with its interpretation. His position aligned with the American evangelical movement of the nineteenth century. The result over time is that the ECC has relegated authority to a holy document rather than sustaining an active and lively discussion about the theological interpretation of Scripture within the body of believers. It is frankly foolish to believe we're finished—or will ever be finished—with the task of biblical interpretation on homosexuality and gay marriage, as some have argued. We should never finish our discussions on the meaning and interpretation of God's word. Culturally, the ECC has had difficulty rethinking its approach to biblical authority even if its leaders no longer quote Waldenström or nineteenth-century evangelicals.

Sociologist Richard Sennet has written an important work on authority and the importance of the "emotional bonds of modern society." He notes that the "bond of authority is built of images of strength and weakness; it is the emotional expression of power."[4] Sennet's point is that authority requires emotional commitments, that is, human-to-human relationships not possible for a sacred document. Covenant framers would agree with Sennet because they understood that power relegated to the Bible's authority has been constructed by humans. The authority of Scripture can become its own power play or hierarchy, even used as an excuse to suspend dialogue and to avoid consideration of theological change. In ECC tradition, this means that faithful dissent on homosexuality can be too easily, and mistakenly, characterized as dissent against Scripture itself. Instead, Clifton-Soderstrom's framework would be best understood

[4] Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Norton, 1980), 3–4.

as faithful dissent vis-à-vis denominational policy, the official stance of church leaders, and biblical literalism.

Here again, as a paradigm for dealing with homosexuality, faithful dissent is difficult to sustain in the ECC. Readiness for theological dialogue and change will not happen by endlessly quoting passages of Scripture on homosexuality. The central question is whether a document—even a sacred document like the Bible—should be given so much power over a gathered body of believers who agree and dissent on many theological topics. My second suggestion is for the ECC to study and define more clearly how authority is exercised: Bible, Annual Meeting, local congregations, and church policy versus personal belief.

My final point is a historical one. The faithful dissenters of yesterday become the mainstream today. That's true of Maria Nilsdotter, grandmother of North Park founding president David Nyvall, whom Clifton-Soderstrom holds up as a model of faithful dissent in the increasingly difficult spiritual environment of mid-nineteenth-century Sweden. Nilsdotter listened closely to God and was open to the Holy Spirit calling her in a different direction. Her faithful dissent was part of the Mission Friends movement that energized the eventual founding of the ECC. She became the mainstream of the new movement. This begs a question: Must faithful dissent result in the formation of a new church body?

The answer is partly affirmative because Mission Friends founded a new church body, having been increasingly rebuffed in their reform attempts within the Church of Sweden. Since its founding, however, the ECC has found ways to be the body of Christ by creating space for starkly different theological views, for example, modes of baptism, theological training for pastors, biblical interpretation, civil rights, divorce and remarriage, and women's ordination. Clifton-Soderstrom notes more recent ECC resolutions that have successfully addressed other thorny topics with theological discussions that have included multiple voices and opinions.

So this begs another question: Is homosexuality too thorny a topic to create space for starkly different theological views? We can return to Clifton-Soderstrom's framework to seek an answer. If we apply her five criteria "for gauging the faithfulness of dissent," it is clear that faithful Christians can (and, indeed, do) hold starkly different views on homosexuality within the same body of Christ. Yet faithful dissent on homosexuality has not yet resulted in the level of dialogue and reforms requested by the dissenters. By leaving the ECC, they could respond as I did, yet it should not be the goal for people to leave the ECC.

My third suggestion is therefore to develop a new theological model, "faithful belonging," that incorporates the theological concepts I've discussed here. I believe that faithful dissent is a helpful paradigm to fuel dialogue, empower the theological process, and engender new ways of responding to the gospel. But perpetual dissent on homosexuality is not a reasonable goal or outcome, nor does dissent represent the nonconfessional Covenant Church that has debated other theological topics—even changed its mind—and has absorbed opposing views. Why, then, has homosexuality become such a hot button issue?

Faithful belonging should be the goal. If we really believe in the body of Christ and the kingdom of God, theological issues should be de-emphasized in favor of an inclusive ecclesiology. If we, like Maria Nilsdotter, are listening closely to God and are open to the Holy Spirit, then faithful belonging is really the only theological goal we can have.

Developing a theology of faithful belonging

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Among the many things that make the Evangelical Covenant Church unique in the landscape of American Christianity is the fact that, unlike some evangelical churches, the Covenant has a robust ecclesiology. This ecclesiology is rooted in four hundred years of Pietist practice in conventicle-based Christian community and activism, deep reflection on New Testament congregational life, and Lutheran understandings of vocation, conscientious dissent, faith-as-paradox, and academic freedom. From its inception, the tiny Mission Covenant denomination began discussing how to draw from this heritage in charting a course that was both *bound to Scripture* and also *free from binding confessions*. This tiny body has generated a great corpus of writings, reflecting the sage wisdom of people like Carl Johan Nyvall and David Nyvall, Paul Peter Waldenström, Karl A. Olsson, Donald Frisk, and so many more. These authors have not all spoken with one voice, but, as Olsson suggested, they have usually spoken "by one Spirit."[5] This has more often been an irenic spirit than a combative one, an inclusive spirit more than an exclusive one. It is a spirit that has sought an interpretive approach to Scripture that could handle the divisive cultural debates that have so often wrecked denominations throughout American history.

For many years, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom has spoken by this same spirit as she has urged fellow Covenanters to claim their theological heritage and preserve space in the Covenant for faithful dissent. In the previous issue of the *Covenant Quarterly*, Hauna Ondrey and Clifton-Soderstrom both re-center the discussion about freedom, drawing from one of the most important documents of the church, *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, from 1963. Christian freedom is not an afterthought to Covenant ecclesiology. Rather the very kernel, the central idea, of the historical polity of this church is that people would be able to gather in the same congregation, read and discuss Scripture, agree and disagree about it, and yet find ways to remain in one body. This is not a concession to relativism or a low view of Scripture; rather, as Clifton-Soderstrom demonstrates

[5] Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1962).

through numerous examples, the Covenant leaders of past generations held stubbornly to the ideal that "[t]wo faithful readers may differ in their interpretations and still both hold a high view of the authority and place of Scripture" (p. 51). This aspect of Covenant ecclesiology facilitates a pathway to Christian maturity by embracing freedom and the tensions inherent to that freedom. As Clifton-Soderstrom is keen to point out whenever she speaks on the six Covenant Affirmations, there is a natural progression from "the centrality of Scripture" to "freedom in Christ." The Covenant Affirmations are not a confession (articles to be professed) but rather an embodiment of a Covenant way of being together.[6]

Yet this is not without challenges. Without romanticizing Covenant freedom, Clifton-Soderstrom draws from many Covenant authors from the 1940s to the present to identify past conflicts and outline a framework for understanding what faithful dissent can look like in practice. Rather than a heavy theological treatise, Clifton-Soderstrom has produced a highly practical and readable document. Drawing from historical cases in which Covenant freedom was under pressure, Clifton-Soderstrom shows us how Covenant leaders sought "to protect the right of sincere dissent" (p. 44). Her organization of Covenant values into five principles for discerning what makes faithful dissent faithful serves as a significant complement to *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, filling a need for practical guidelines for church leaders and congregants to understand better the mechanics of how Covenant freedom can work in practice. For instance, she provides answers to questions like, "How can 'sincere dissent' be identified?" and "What is the difference between policy and theology?" (p. 46).

The definitions Clifton-Soderstrom provides are anchored in the historical literature of the church and, as such, provide a much-needed service to the Covenant in filling a void apparent in many key denominational resources on sexuality from the past few years, which have often neglected to define this issue in relation to ecclesiology. The denomination's online "Embrace" documents and webinars, for example, would be greatly strengthened by reflection on Covenant ecclesiology through

[6] The six Covenant Affirmations are articulated in the 28-page document, *Covenant Affirmations* (Chicago: The Evangelical Covenant Church, 2005), and clarified in James Bruckner et al., eds., *Living Faith: Reflections on Covenant Affirmations* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2010).

historical Covenant literature, currently absent.[7] The historical material Clifton-Soderstrom draws on are similarly absent in the 38-page resource paper, *God, the Bible, and Human Sexuality*, written by three faculty members at the seminary. The closest the authors come is to cite *Called and Gifted* (1987) and Klyne Snodgrass's "A Case for the Unrestricted Ministry of Women" (2009).[8] Pietism is invoked once in this document, and "where is it written" three times, but without further comment.[9] In like manner, in his otherwise eloquent and charitable webinar on sexuality,[10] Klyne Snodgrass refers to the centrality of Scripture and the slogan "where is it written" but without further comment.[11] As such, it is valid to ask whether these responses to "revisionist readings" are better reflections of the Reformed and Baptist traditions of biblical hermeneutics than the Covenant's hermeneutical tradition. What is distinctive about Covenant ecclesiology in regard to dissenters?

This lack of attention to historical ecclesiology is an unfortunate omission, as attention to it could provide the church significant resources for how we can resolve, or at least diminish, current disputes and be as

[7] Available at https://covchurch.org/embrace/. Accessed October 14, 2018.

[8] *God, the Bible, and Human Sexuality: A Response to Revisionist Readings* (The Evangelical Covenant Church, 2017), 6–7. Available at https://covchurch.org/embrace/wp-content/uploads/sites/92/2018/08/NPST_Paper-FINAL2-web-updated.pdf.

[9] Ibid., 3, 8, 31–32.

[10] "Embrace Webinar #4: Who God Says You Are: Christian Identity and Human Sexuality," https://covchurch.org/embrace/webinar-4/.

[11] When Covenanters today cite Waldenström's maxim, "where is it written," as a defense of "a discerned position" on sexuality, I wonder whether they know how sophisticated Waldenström was in his own ecclesiology and in his ability to engage cultural challenges faced by the church in his day. Even in the 1880s, Waldenström envisioned an ecclesiology that included Catholics—unheard of in most Protestant circles at the time—and articulated a deeply pastoral treatment of issues related to young people's sexual health in the 1860s. I entreat those who use Waldenström's phrase to read his writings deeply and broadly in order to avoid misappropriation of these words. The founders of the denomination may have been biblicists at times, but they were not unreflective. See Mark Safstrom, "Making Room for the Lost: Congregational Inclusivity in Waldenström's *Squire Adamsson*," *Covenant Quarterly* 71:3–4 (2013): 52–72; Safstrom, ed. and trans., *The Swedish Pietists: A Reader—Excerpts from the writings of Carl Olof Rosenius and Paul Peter Waldenström* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 189; Harry Lindström, *I Livsfrågornasspänningsfält*; *Om P. Waldenströms Brukspatron Adamsson—populär folkbok och allegorisk roman* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1997), 235; Waldenström, *Om ungdomens farligaste fiende; Ett ord till Föräldrar och Lärare* (Lund: Berlingske, 1867), 46. For Waldenström's extended explanation of congregational polity, see, *Den kristna församlingen* (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundets Förlag, 1931).

welcoming to divergent views as possible. The ongoing relevance of *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* has even been called into question in recent years. In a question-and-answer session at the 2017 Annual Meeting, former president Gary Walter said of the 1963 report, "It was a good faith effort that really didn't go anywhere. And so we need to be circumspect in ascribing a stature, a standing, or a standard it never really had."[12] I believe that accepting a "that was then, this is now" paradigm deprives us of a critical opportunity for productive discussion. The authors of *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* present depth of insight and a careful treatment of freedom. This document and other literature on Covenant ecclesiology is extraordinarily prescient, timeless, and relevant to today's debates regarding sexuality. James Hawkinson's anthology of Covenant literature, for example, is saturated with examples of a rich, nuanced understanding of Covenant ecclesiology,[13] and the Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature offers a treasury of digitized historical writings.[14] Covenant ecclesiology matters because we must understand not only what the Bible says about sexuality but also what it says about the congregation and how we are to make room for dissenters and seek unity in our diversity of conclusions about what the Bible says.

The resource paper on freedom and responsibility recently commissioned by the Covenant Executive Board provides a timely opportunity to explain, clarify, and build on historical Covenant ecclesiology. It will also be important that this group meet the high bar set by the 1963 committee that produced *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* in terms of breadth of

[12] The footage begins around minute 11:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeizdgIo2ZU&index=26&list=PLwMP3X7S7cpJVjScf2h6J-2-aMrJDyaxZ. Walter references historian Karl A. Olsson's reflections on the 1963 report and its immediate reception, in *Into One Body…By the Cross,* vol. 2, pp. 360–61. While it is true that Olsson regards with disappointment that the committee's work did not result in more thorough engagement by the Council of Administrators and Executive Board and caused "barely a ripple" at the time, Walter points to this as evidence that the committee's work had no normative or lasting import. Yet Walter also (rightly) acknowledges that the continued lack of clarity after the 1963 report led to the formation of the Commission on Covenant Doctrine that produced Covenant Affirmations thirteen years later. The work of the 1958–63 committee made the 1976 document possible, and both were accepted by Annual Meetings.

[13] James R. Hawkinson, ed., *Glad Hearts: Voices from the Literature of the Covenant Church* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2003), 351–77.

[14] The Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature, hosted by the F. M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections, is available at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/npu_swecc.

authorship and length and transparency of deliberation. *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* (1963) involved nine authors (eleven including the two who resigned; none were women), and the document was accepted at an Annual Meeting. Comparably, *Covenant Affirmations* (1976, 2005) involved thirteen authors in total (one woman), and the document was accepted at two Annual Meetings. By contrast, *God, the Bible, and Human Sexuality* (2018), involved only three unnamed authors, none of them women. This document has not been accepted at an Annual Meeting. These comparisons are worthwhile contextualization on the origins of our guiding documents and the representative authority with which they can speak. Trust and transparency will be better served if the freedom and responsibility writing team follows the Covenant Committee on Freedom and Theology in being comprised of a similar size (a dozen) of diverse people (to avoid the pitfalls of "groupthink"), conducting their work for a similar duration (five years) in a manner valuing transparency of process and authorship, and seeking approval for their work at an Annual Meeting.

In a highly polarized conversation, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom's article offers an essential reminder that the Covenant's historical theology is directly relevant to understanding how the Covenant's approach to divisive ideological conflicts must be distinct from that of other evangelical churches, because our ecclesiology is different. Without trivializing the importance of clarity in denominational policy, she clarifies that theology and policy are distinct realms of inquiry, admitting that "[p]olicy must take into account institutional survival in ways that theology does not" (p. 46). Yet Covenant leaders in the past have had a clear sense that theology, unlike policy, is not subject to popular vote and that "[t]he majority opinion is not always the correct or most vital interpretation" (p. 40). Quoting Karl A. Olsson, Clifton-Soderstrom reminds us that the Covenant does not have a tradition of formally excommunicating dissenters; "no one has ever been defrocked for heresy" and "only those have been brought under serious censure who have questioned the orthodoxy of someone else" (p. 47).

This is one of the aspects of the Covenant Church that makes me incredibly proud to be a Covenanter and a Pietist. An ecclesiology can be lost. But an ecclesiology can also be reclaimed if the leaders of the church today truly seek to understand the institutions they have inherited. It is imperative that leaders seek a longer institutional memory, beyond the past few decades. There is still time for all of us to start reading.

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A focus on freedom is one of the treasures of the Covenant Church, one that rightly attracts many people.[15] Freedom in Christ *from sin* and *for service* is the focus of the sixth Covenant Affirmation. It is rooted in the other five affirmations and seeks unity rather than division. I value this freedom, but from my early years at North Park I have said with some regularity that the Covenant is very good at talking about freedom but does not do well talking about the limits of freedom. Freedom only exists within context and with responsibility.

Dissent—faithful dissent—is crucial and essential, for communities often go off the rails. Dissent has marked my life. It is my heritage as a Baptist, especially with predecessors like Roger Williams, who was expelled from Massachusetts by Puritans and founded a new religious community in Rhode Island to enable freedom of conscience (1636). I have frequently, even regularly, dissented from my own denomination's stance and practices, mostly because I felt they failed its own heritage and the directives of Scripture. I have dissented often from the "assured" results of my discipline, and as a Baptist I have dissented from the Covenant's stance on baptism, loyal though I have been to the Covenant and loyal the Covenant has been to me, for which I am extremely grateful.

With regard to faithful dissent, several questions and comments are in order. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom's article analyzes Covenant freedom in relation to the centrality of the word, the necessity of new birth, and faithful dissent, all said to be essential to sustaining Christian freedom. As much as I want to guard dissent and do see it as necessary, it is not one of the Covenant Affirmations, as are the centrality of the word and the necessity of new birth. The article claims that a "diversity of viewpoints within the communion creates potential avenues for renewal" (p. 38). The New Testament focus is more on unity, including unity of thought. If one sought to justify dissent scripturally, it would not be easy. One can only point to examples of prophets standing against the nation, to ideas of the faithful remnant, to Jesus and his followers standing against certain religious practices, or to differences about adiaphora, such as

[15] I acknowledge the benefit of conversation with family and friends in thinking about this response. Such conversation is part of the gift of life.

what people eat or days they observe (Romans 14:1–15:13). Positive statements about dissent you will not find. In fact, dissent is frequently disallowed. Paul did not allow dissent in Galatia or elsewhere, and even when stressing his own independence, he took pains to emphasize his unity with the traditions of the church. How do we guard the role of the prophetic voice while recognizing the frequency of false prophets?

I cannot help but think of Karl Olsson's comment long ago that the Covenant has always been more tolerant of the loyal heretic than the disloyal orthodox. That was easier when the Covenant was fairly monolithic ethnically and culturally. Is it still true given the wide diversity in the Covenant?

If we are to speak of faithful dissent, we must ask, "Faithful to what?" To Scripture? To the Covenant? To some ideology or to something else? For me it must be faithful to Scripture above all else. However, being biblical is hard work, and simplistic answers will not do. Surely one of the main tasks of the church is enabling people to read wisely and with sensitivity. I will return to this below.

In her article, Clifton-Soderstrom refers to the threefold meaning of the term "word": of Christ Jesus the incarnate Word, of Scripture, and of proclamation of the good news. We are told, "These three intersecting yet distinct aspects of the word ground the authority of the Bible in ways beyond a commitment to the text alone and protect interpretation from being insular" and that the purpose of Scripture is "a renewing work even above a repository of doctrinal truths" (p. 37). There are indeed three uses of "word," but this does not lead to something beyond a commitment to the text alone. There is no knowledge of Christ apart from Scripture, and legitimate proclamation is based on Scripture, so what authority is there beyond the text alone? Indeed the text is about a renewing work above doctrinal truths, if it is about doctrinal truths at all. Yet the relation of life and "doctrine" bears reflection. The "principle of life before doctrine" is a squishy expression. Its emergence in Pietism, if I understand things, was in reaction to a doctrinal scholasticism that lost the focus on life. But life is drawn from the Spirit's instilling and enacting theological truths, not from magic or a theological vacuum. One could not say "life before truth," for life is drawn from the truth of God's being and acts. We know the regeneration of the Spirit because of truths about the resurrected Lord who gives the Spirit. That resurrected Lord is the Jesus of Scripture, and unless we are to create an idol, the texts inspired by the Spirit are our only means of knowing who he is.

Issues about access to life emerge in other ways in the article. Relying on the 1963 report *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*—a very good report—Clifton-Soderstrom distinguishes between human reason, which Scripture does address, and the inward work of the Spirit in our minds and hearts. What is the relation of human reason and the inward work of the Spirit in our *minds*? The article suggests a distinction between reading for truth claims through exegesis, original languages, and authorial intent and reading for spiritual sustenance and conversion, evaluated by how the good news has taken hold of and molded the life of the believer. I reject the dichotomy. There is an implicit exegesis in any interpretation or grasping of the text, and we do not do one kind of reading when studying and another when reading devotionally, although different concerns may be foregrounded. Even more important, Clifton-Soderstrom does not do justice to the commitment to Scripture in the 1963 report, for the paragraph immediately following the focus on the Spirit's inward work sets boundaries for any dissent. It states:

> Because there is no other channel through which redeeming knowledge of God is now disclosed to humanity, the church is *bound to the Scriptures*. Only in and through them does the church find the source of its life. Therefore, its faith, its worship, its conduct, its fellowship, and *its freedom must all arise out of, be judged by, and be renewed by the Scriptures.*
>
> Because the Scriptures have arisen within history and are transmitted to us through historical processes, the church in its educational task is obliged to use the best available methods of scholarly research to answer questions pertaining to text, authorship, circumstances of origin, content, and meaning.
>
> *Because the Bible is the word of God, the church is obliged to treasure its message, guarding against every temptation to obscure its plain teaching or evade its truth and humbly submitting itself to responsive obedience in the Holy Spirit.*[16]

Another point requiring comment is that the topics Clifton-Soderstrom gives as examples of Covenant dissent are quite divergent and should not be lumped together: just war and pacifism; baptism; women in ministry; different views on eschatology, the charismatic movement, and inspiration; the affirmation of a restorative process for those who

[16] *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, 20–21. Emphasis in all cases mine.

have committed crimes; and LBGTQ issues. Quite different interpretive processes are at play in these varied topics. For some, biblical texts stand in tension with other biblical texts, and for some, convincing explanations can be made for different views. While a biblical defense can be made for both sides of some of these issues, for others that is not the case.

With regard to the "just" war issue, I dissent against the language of just war. There are no just wars. There may be necessary wars, but "just" war suggests the hands of those involved are clean and the violence is okay, which is never true. Still, while Scripture is not as clear as one might want, one could make a case both for resisting evil with force and for pacifism. On the other hand, the New Testament witness against violence is overwhelmingly strong.

With women in ministry, texts stand in tension with other texts and must be seen in context. One can make a biblical case for the unrestricted ministry of women or for restrictions on their ministry, although I passionately argue for the former on good hermeneutical grounds. Different views of eschatology can be supported biblically, even though the Bible's concerns are foreign to many of these views. The same can be said for views of inspiration. One will have a hard time biblically prohibiting charismatic emphases, even though excesses are problematic; nor is the restoration of those who have committed crimes a debated issue in Scripture. The baptism issue is different. In my mind it is difficult to make a biblical case for paedobaptism, but one can make a case from the church's history. With LBGTQ issues, however, everywhere the issue of same-sex relations is treated in the Bible, the *practice* is rejected. There is no tension between texts, nor is there any question regarding whether the biblical writers rejected the practice of same-sex intercourse. Freedom to disagree about interpretation is not the same thing as freedom to disregard all plausible exegesis in favor of contemporary cultural values.

Inclusivity is an important theme, but what are the limits of inclusivity? Inclusivity is absolutely crucial because the gospel is for all people, but the gospel is distorted if inclusion affirms sinful behaviors. It is one thing to speak of inclusivity of other races, but quite another if one is thinking of ethical boundaries. Sexual practice is not the same as skin color. If the church is not going to be marked by ethical difference, why should anyone bother? If in the name of inclusivity we accept practices contrary to Scripture, we violate the Covenant's stance on freedom we were trying to guard.

The Covenant accepts both sides of the baptism debate and requires

ordinands to be willing to administer both avenues of baptism. While it affirms without qualification the ministry of women, it does not require acceptance of this view. Why is this different from the approach to baptism? Eschatology, inspiration, charismatic approaches, and just war/pacifism do not seem to be issues of much current discussion. On what grounds does the Covenant decide which topics fall outside the bounds of legitimate freedom? In the past, Scripture itself was the determining factor—and as far as I am concerned, it must continue to be so. I do not argue for the unrestricted ministry of women in spite of Scripture but because of it. The Covenant needs to discuss the boundaries of freedom much more than it ever has.

This takes us back to the issue of interpretation of Scripture. Clifton-Soderstrom claims, "Because the Covenant is non-confessional, no question of interpretation is off the table" (p. 43). Do we really want to say that, or are some proposals for interpretation so contrary to the text that they must be rejected outright? Communal hearing and discernment and humility are crucial, but if interpretation is so open, why are we even reading? Are there no interpretations that are out of bounds? Surely we would not say one may interpret the death and/or resurrection of Jesus as unimportant. So how does one decide that an interpretation is out of bounds and that further dialogue is unhelpful? Nor can we say that simply because a group advocates a position there is therefore a basis for that view, for groups can be in error as much as individuals. Where and on what basis is an interpretation disallowed? I have always argued strongly for the ongoing interpretive task of the church. We do indeed need to keep listening to the Spirit instructing our own time, but that will not be in opposition to the text.

This raises the issue of the limits of dissent and the question of the basis of deciding those limits. For me the limits to dissent are the clear meaning and focus of Scripture, and while being biblical is not easy, neither is it beyond the abilities of general readers. The message of Scripture is quite clear with regard to the central tenets of faith and practice.

One more thing needs to be said about dissent. As important as the issue of dissent is within the community of faith, I am much more concerned with dissent from the views and practices of our society and culture in general, not merely with issues pertaining to the LGBT discussion, but also heterosexual practices, attitudes toward women, materialism, violence, racism, and a host of other ethical issues. It was not for nothing that Paul stressed to the Roman church "Do not be conformed…" (Romans 12:2).

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I offer my deepest gratitude for my colleagues in ministry and in academia, along with the *Covenant Quarterly*, for providing a forum for collegial discussion on important topics. Over two years ago I was asked by the editor to contribute my research on Covenant freedom, and I was delighted to accept. The respectful dialogue modeled in this issue is very much in line with the Covenant's heritage. The friendship shared between myself and each of the respondents is invaluable and underscores the importance of charity in all things.[17] I begin here with some general replies to my respondents, then address some of their specific critiques of my interpretation of Covenant freedom in the subsequent sections.

The intention of my proposal, drawing on archival sources, is not to adjudicate a conversation around any one particular moral issue.[18] Rather, the intent is to describe Covenant freedom historically and to raise questions regarding the limits of this freedom. While my proposal has relevance for many ethical topics, far more is at stake. Specifically, if the Covenant determines that its long-cherished freedom is no longer a viable way forward in all matters of life together—perhaps most especially in those matters over which there is present conflict—we move decidedly in the direction of becoming a confessional church requiring doctrinal adherence.[19] In 1928, in the midst of calls that the Covenant adhere to the Five Fundamentals, biblical scholar Nils Lund warned, "If

[17] As I note in my article, William Doughty was censured not for the content of his views but for his uncharitable manner of procedure. Far from Bilynskyj's concern that I intend to cast those who disagree with my argument as "modern-day Doughtys," only those who proceed uncharitably can rightly draw the comparison, irrespective of their position on whatever issue is under discussion.

[18] Though I recognize some respondents were originally asked to apply my proposed criteria to a particular topic (see introduction to responses). While human sexuality is arguably the most contentious issue facing the church at this time, history demonstrates that there will always be contentious matters facing the body, and the Covenant's postion on freedom is meant to transcend any one topic facing the church at a particular time.

[19] By "confessional" I mean that particular doctrines and confessions of faith become the basis for membership. Safstrom uses the helpful language for non-confessional churches such as ours, "bound to Scripture and also free from binding confessions." In the litany for a public declaration to the congregation included in the *Covenant Book of Worship*, candidates pledge a fourfold commitment: confessing Jesus Christ, accepting Holy Scriptures, proclaiming the good news in word and deed including striving

we move on in this way, we will land where the so-called orthodoxism within Lutheranism landed, namely, in a sterile, bone-hard, and spiritless orthodoxy. The emphasis on doctrine above the spiritual life will be one of the earliest results. The hunt for heretics will begin again. The Bible will be used as ammunition in theological conflicts but not as food for the spiritual life."[20] Lund here cautioned the Covenant against abandoning its founding commitment to Scripture's authority alone by adopting any confession or confession-like position, referencing the conflict and violence enabled by seventeenth-century Lutheran confessionalization.

Because Covenant freedom thrives only in relation to Scripture, I framed my proposal for freedom primarily *in relation to Scripture*. Historian of Swedish Pietism Mark Safstrom rightfully highlights ecclesiology as the necessary arena in which this relationship plays out, reminding us that freedom constitutes the very kernel of Covenant polity. In part this means that a primary activity of congregations is to gather together around the word, to read and discuss, agree and disagree. Relationships are essential, as these activities take place primarily within local congregations. I wholeheartedly agree with professor emeritus Klyne Snodgrass's use of the quote from *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* regarding Scripture as the boundary of freedom.[21] Covenant freedom—freedom

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for justice and peace, and supporting the church's ministries, which historically refers to financial support. These are vows that members take, but they are not the kind of confessional requirements that members of Lutheran or Reformed traditions make upon church membership. *The Covenant Book of Worship* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2003), 360–61.

[20] Nils W. Lund, "The Authority of Holy Scriptures," *Covenant Quarterly* 30:4 (1972): 22. Lund also held that the movement's "requirement to be received as the only representation of orthodoxy in our day can impress only those who lack historical orientation," p. 22.

[21] Snodgrass referred to the following quote: "Because there is no other channel through which redeeming knowledge of God is now disclosed to humanity, the church is bound to the Scriptures. Only in and through them does the church find the source of its life. Therefore, its faith, its worship, its conduct, its fellowship, and its freedom must all arise out of, be judged by, and be renewed by the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures have arisen within history and are transmitted to us through historical processes, the church in its educational task is obliged to use the best available methods of scholarly research to answer questions pertaining to text, authorship, circumstances of origin, content, and meaning. Because the Bible is the word of God, the church is obliged to treasure its message, guarding against every temptation to obscure its plain teaching or evade its truth and humbly submitting itself to responsive obedience in the Holy Spirit." *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, 21.

from binding confessions—*preserves* Scripture as the highest authority for all matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct, as Safstrom also notes. The founders of the Covenant were convinced that when an ecclesial community places one interpretation over Scripture itself, it runs the danger of human interpretations being more authoritative than God's word. In other words, if a community truly believes that Scripture has authority and power to transform those open to its truths, then the real work of communions such as ours is in faithful, communal, rigorous, charitable, and holistic reading, as the Covenant Resource Paper on the Bible outlines.[22] Theologian Brian Bantum urges such a reading when he notes that when faithful Covenant people disagree about important things, this can open "new possibilities for connection and fellowship."

Covenant freedom is for the whole church, and while freedom functions in a more limited way for clergy, freedom is fundamentally a baptismal and catholic reality in the Covenant. Contrary to Covenant pastor Stephen Bilynskyj's claim that Covenant freedom "does not and cannot embrace the whole of Christian theological freedom," historically this is precisely what Covenant freedom has meant.[23] Bilynskyj also notes that clergy have fewer freedoms than lay people when it comes to issues such as baptism, women in ministry, and atonement. This is only partially true. Clergy are currently asked to uphold three positions adopted by the Annual Meeting, those regarding women in ministry, baptism, and human sexuality. While credentialed clergy may disagree on any or all of these three issues, their individual interpretations are not to overshadow the adopted positions. As such, all clergy must, for example, preside over an infant baptism when asked and refrain from participating in a same-sex wedding. Bilynskyj's longer list of Christian views that he claims are "outside the range of Covenant freedom" may have anecdotal evidence, but they have no backing in history or policy. Many Covenant clergy hold to penal substitutionary views of atonement, and penal substitution has not been "explicitly rejected" by the ECC. Nor have the other examples he offers.

[22] These are the five ways the paper encourages Covenanters to read and interpret Scripture. The primary writers of the resource paper were Bilynskyj and Snodgrass. "A Covenant Resource Paper: The Evangelical Covenant Church and the Bible" (Evangelical Covenant Church, 2008). Available at http://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2010/05/Covenant-Resource-Paper.pdf, accessed October 23, 2016.

[23] Olsson, *By One Spirit,* passim.

While Covenant freedom is extended to clergy despite their being bound to policies in ways lay people are not, it is important to remember that the Covenant Affirmations, including the "reality of freedom in Christ," are not written exclusively to or even primarily for clergy. The Affirmations are for the whole Covenant community, the majority of whom are lay people. As lay people, Covenanters are free to hold a complementary view of gender, a penal substitutionary view of atonement, and either an exclusively infant or believer view of baptism. It is also the case that none of the above viewpoints, including those on Bilynskyj's list, exclude Covenant people from membership. Bantum's words are apropos: "I wonder if we might become more open to the ways those very people who were seemingly outside the covenant also display marks of faithfulness, that their perpetual presence might reveal to us all just how radical and ordinary God's covenant is." This is an important question for us to address. Our theology of membership suggests that, at least in theory, Covenant freedom is indeed able to withstand a wide range of biblical and theological viewpoints on any number of doctrinal and ethical topics.

Unity of Thought

I appreciate Snodgrass's opening description of how he himself has dissented from conclusions of his own academic discipline of New Testament studies, from positions and practices of his Baptist denomination, and from certain practices and theologies of the Covenant (the latter made possible by Covenant freedom). Dissent, Snodgrass claims, has marked his life, and without it "communities often go off the rails." Yet, despite his own embrace of dissent, Snodgrass goes on to question whether diversity of viewpoints is actually a sign of renewal. He highlights instead the New Testament's focus on unity of thought.

I agree that unity is crucial, even essential. But unity of *thought*, of beliefs and doctrines, is a complex, perhaps unattainable reality this side of heaven, as evidenced by the great number of confessional Christian traditions that exist today. The unity proclaimed in the New Testament is unity *in Christ* rather than in human agreement with one another. Our Pietist forebears understood this well, even as they strove for unity in contentious times. George Scott and C.O. Rosenius wrote,

> It would not be probable to expect that all Christians, despite being enlightened by the same Spirit, should come to com-

> plete agreement on all spiritual matters here on earth, where we understand and prophesy in part….Therefore, instead of saying like the one Corinthian: I hold myself to Paul, the second: I hold to Cephas, the third: I to Apollos, if we all seek to come closer to Christ, we will be raised above the earthly opinions that will lead to discord and instead truly thrive in the clean air of Christ's undivided authority. If all Christians seek to come closer to their center point—Christ—the inevitable result will be that they will also come closer to one another in mutual love, which is the true sign whereby to recognize a disciple (John 13:35).[24]

Nils Lund framed it similarly: "At times, of course, differing interpretations can break against each other, but it ought to be possible for Christians to 'speak the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15), and in that way grow in all things up to him who is the head—Christ. While we thus in love learn and grow, we will find that we grow into unity with each other. But this can happen only on the condition that Christ is allowed to keep the love [of] our hearts and that his work remains our greatest interest in life."[25]

Christians do not find our fundamental unity in one another.[26] The baptismal liturgy in Ephesians 4 emphasizes that our unity is in and through one Lord—Father of all, Christ as gift, Spirit as bond of peace. When we seek unity in agreement with one another instead of in Christ, we wrongly ascribe divine power to human beings. This also moves toward addressing another important question Snodgrass raises regarding what faithful dissent is faithful *to*. In short, dissent that is faithful is first and foremost faithful to Christ. In explaining the second criterion of faithful dissent (Is the person or group sincere in their commitment to Christ and to the body?), I discuss the importance of genuine commitment to Christ and to the community of faith.

[24] George Scott and C.O. Rosenius, "Pietism," in Safstrom, trans. and ed., *The Swedish Pietists*, 34–35.

[25] Lund, "The Authority of Holy Scriptures," 23.

[26] The commission argued that, "In the basic and central affirmations of the Christian faith there must be unity, but in their expression and interpretation there is room for wholesome divergence," *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, 26. Further, they argued that freedom should be a creative avenue for addressing new issues that arise within the church over time, requiring that each generation extend freedom to the next as new questions emerge.

As far as corporate unity is concerned, one could arguably say that faithful dissent or disagreement *engenders* Christian unity in that one of its criteria, emphasized in *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom*, is sincerity in personal relationships, showing the courtesy of listening to others, exercising care in our words, never using disagreement for advancement, refraining from public shaming, and in all things reflecting commitment to Christ.[27] Such practices are the building blocks of unity, and they have great potential to move us from the ease of sameness that a monolithic culture affords to the difficult but valuable work of embracing the diversity of a multicultural communion.

Inclusivity

This brings me to the excellent questions raised by several respondents around my third criterion, Does the dissenting position relate to the dominant position by being more or less inclusive? Bilynskyj rightly notes that inclusion has limits. He clarifies that inclusion of all *people* does not mean including all theological viewpoints. Similarly, Snodgrass writes that "the gospel is distorted if inclusion affirms sinful behaviors." These points are well-taken. Inclusivity *in itself* and by itself is not a criterion for the boundaries of dissent. Inclusivity is only a helpful criterion if it is tethered to the other four criteria, most especially to faith in Christ and the recognition of the centrality of the word.

The role of inclusion in the Covenant warrants more thorough treatment than I have given it, and Bantum's response points to a significant blind spot in my analysis of Covenant freedom. The Covenant prides itself in its diversity. It is friendly to ecumenism, and many pastors and lay people join the Covenant from a variety of ecclesial backgrounds. We call ourselves a multiethnic movement with ministries on five continents, and we claim that our strength comes from "unity within diversity."[28] Bantum writes that the Covenant's "deep commitment to racial reconciliation" and "fostering racial and ethnic diversity" were singificant reasons he joined the denomination. Yet he also questions whether the Covenant has fully opened itself to diversity. If we take to heart Snodgrass's comment about loyalty being "much easier in a monolithic community," it is easy to see why a necessary aspect of genuine

[27] Ibid.

[28] This language comes from the Covenant's homepage, https://covchurch.org, accessed November 6, 2018.

diversity—"reimagination" in Bantum's language—must be ongoing work that opens the Covenant to "the ways different people [embody] faithful responses to God's presence in their lives and in the stories they [hold]." Bantum calls this kind of openness "radical transformation" and concludes that such transformation is a crucial sign that a denomination is truly diverse. Bantum makes explicit what Snodgrass implies, namely that when we move from a monolithic culture to a heterogenous one, life together must be examined anew.

Is Dissent Biblical? On Primary and Secondary Matters of Faith

I wholeheartedly agree with Snodgrass that dissent is infrequently affirmed in Scripture. This recognition leads me to insist that dissent alone is not the goal; it is *faithful* dissent I seek to preserve by providing the strict parametres of the five criteria I outline.[29] In fact, the scriptural examples Snodgrass offers are excellent examples of what I have in mind: minority voices dissenting in a way that keeps the community on its "rails": "prophets standing against the nation,…ideas of the faithful remnant,…Jesus and his followers standing against certain religious practices, or…differences about adiaphora." However, this raises the question of what is rightly classified as adiaphora, requiring further explanation of my fifth criterion, Is the dissenting position a central issue of faith, or it is a secondary issue?

Snodgrass rightly argues that a group's advocating for an interpretation is not sufficient grounds for claiming legitimacy; groups can be in error. How do we determine which interpretations are so essential to Christian faith as to be beyond the scope of debate? Christian orthodoxy revolves around two questions: Who is God, and who is Jesus Christ? The Nicene Creed offers a boundary for orthodoxy that is both historical and ecumenical and provides "Common Christian Affirmations" recognized by the Covenant: "The Covenant Church considers itself a part of that catholic tradition and recognizes its indebtedness to the early creeds and confessions of the church as concise statements

[29] The five criteria I develop in the article (pp. 45–53) are (1) Are those with the dissenting view following policy? (2) Is the person or group sincere in their commitment to Christ and to the body? (3) Does the dissenting position relate to the dominant position by being *more* or *less* inclusive? (4) Does the person/group agree that Scripture is authoritative for the argument? (5) Is the dissenting position a central issue of faith or it is a secondary issue?

of biblical faith. We refer especially to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed...."[30] The primary areas of Christian faith are explicitly named by the authors of *Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom* and echo these historical creeds, centering on God's nature and work in Christ.[31] Beyond these statements of faith, the report goes on to *affirm* discussion regarding Scripture's teaching in all other matters of faith and practice. In fact, one might even say the Covenant welcomes those discussions because areas of disagreement in matters of interpretation draw readers more deeply into the word.

Snodgrass holds that diverse viewpoints are acceptable *if* a biblical argument can be made to support multiple conclusions.[32] Yet Snodgrass himself recognizes historical precedent as a warrant for the Covenant's practice of infant baptism, even though he does not believe the practice claims a scriptural basis comparable to believer baptism. In this he acknowledges that history can be a helpful arena of adjudication in the case of absences in Scripture. On the specific questions of LGBTQ-related topics raised by several of the respondents, Snodgrass claims that "everywhere the issue of same-sex relations is treated in the Bible, the *practice* is rejected" (emphasis original); therefore, to accept biblical exegesis in favor of same-sex marriage is to "disregard all plausible exegesis in favor of contemporary cultural values."

Two things are problematic with this statement. First, some biblical scholars do see texts in tension within one another on the question of what constitutes a Christian marriage.[33] While many may disagree with the conclusions of such exegetical work, the mark of scholarship is not one scholar's views (or even the majority view) but rather the guild as a whole. Second, it is neither helpful nor clear to pit plausible exegesis

[30] *Covenant Affirmations*, p. 4.

[31] See pp. 23–24, "On the central issues of our faith, doctrine, and conduct the biblical message is sufficiently clear: the creation of all things by God, humanity made in the divine image but fallen in sin, their consequent moral inability to achieve redemption, the incarnate and sinless life of Jesus Christ the Son of God, his atoning death and resurrection, redemption through faith in him, the regenerative and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of Christ's coming again to consummate his kingdom and judge the world. These affirmations constitute the essential core of the biblical message and are sufficiently clear for our salvation."

[32] I make this exact claim in discussing my fourth criterion.

[33] The Society of Biblical Literature accepts papers on LGBTQI hermeneutics and other related topics and publishes scholarship such as *Bible Trouble: Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

against cultural values as a general rule. Culture, its values, and Christians' relationship to culture all need further definition. Culture is an extremely useful and valuable aspect in historical-critical interpretive methods, and a rich understanding of the cultures surrounding the worldviews of the biblical authors even illumines the meaning of texts. Surely a rich understanding of the culture within which readers seek to *apply* a text also has great potential to illuminate faithful application. Culture and text are not always antithetical to one another.[34] In short, cultural influences have at times driven solid exegetical conclusions. The relationships between both biblical authors and culture and also readers and culture, therefore, must be further clarified before making claims that definitively pit culture against plausible exegesis.

In this vein, I have been asked whether the question of women's ordination should be on the table for discussion. In all honesty, I believe that if some question the biblical affirmation of women in ministry, we should make space for their questions to be navigated in the open. This allows anyone who is unsure to remain in dialogue with the broader communion. Faithful dissent is, in other words, possible on this topic. Engaging an area of biblical interpretation in which there is difference affords an opportunity for growth and learning. Reading together is a more faithful (and difficult!) solution than asking those who disagree to leave the Covenant or to tacitly agree with a position without genuinely working through their doubts and questions. I recognize that not all women are in a place of being able to engage this conversation, for their own valid reasons. Yet I always want to engage those who disagree *charitably* and as a result of faithful biblical reading. Doing so is a powerful way to let the word work in those who come to Scripture earnestly and genuinely, with deep commitment to Christ and to one another.

Conclusion: What Can Covenant Freedom Withstand?

The primary reason I hear pastors give for transferring into the Covenant is their love of its historical freedom. The variety of responses to my research shows the range of views regarding what that freedom is. Historians Mark Safstrom and Scott Erickson argue that the Covenant

[34] Historically, Christians have not been particularly counter-cultural on marriage: contemporary cultural values largely favor marriage between one man and one woman; most Christians agree.

needs a renewed understanding of freedom that honors historical work and conclusions while re-examining its contemporary role. Further, they believe the Covenant would benefit from a widespread conversation on the role of the body of believers in interpreting Scripture. These words resonate with me as one who grew up in the Covenant and has experienced the diversity it has to offer. Perhaps the single most haunting question comes from Erickson, who asks whether faithful dissent *must* result in the formation of a new church body. His conclusion is "partly yes." Yet he goes on to say that the one thing that could foster ongoing union is a model of faithful belonging.

I have sat with Erickson's question for some time, and, in humility and with some fear, I wonder whether the language of faithful dissent can have the hoped-for impact of ongoing renewal. Faithful dissent is not, nor should it ever be, an end point. Rather, the measure of dissent's goodness is when it leads to faithful dialogue and discernment, bringing the body of believers together rather than tearing it apart. When faithful dissent leads to factions, splits, and the hunt for heretics—what Lund warned against close to one hundred years ago—then it has not fulfilled its purpose of renewal.

Erickson's call for a concept of faithful belonging has great potential, and perhaps both historical and more contemporary resources could be synthesized to bring Covenanters to some kind of unity around belonging. The Covenant Resource Paper on the Bible has much to add to the idea of faithful belonging as it relates to our identity as readers. It calls the Covenant to a diverse readership and a charitable stance toward those who think differently. In practice, faithful belonging might be characterized by patience, by allowing voices that have been marginalized to speak, by addressing problems of insider/outsider culture, by treating our fellowship as a school of forgiveness and repentence, and by continuing to reimagine diversity beyond simply participation to actual power.[35] This might mean that we speak well of those in our communion, that we speak directly to those with whom we have issue, and that we commit to each other as members of the same body. This calls for charity in all things, and real charity requires courage to work through conflict over the long-haul and to see what God might be doing in our midst. I began teaching at North Park Theological Seminary over fifteen years

[35] See the "Five-fold Test," available at https://covchurch.org/resources/five-fold-test/.

ago, and when I started, I had very little understanding of racism and white privilege. Had I not had colleagues and students of color who stuck with me over time, as painful as that may have been for them, I would never have seen the depth of racial sin nor would I continue to grow in this area as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We need each other, and most especially those who are willing to stick with each other in being challenged around the word.

With an eye toward renewal through the conventicle-like work of reading together, I ask readers to wonder with me: Does the Covenant need to take a step back and refocus our energy on building and rebuilding relationships with one another rather than foregrounding doctrinal and moral disputes in our life together? Do we need a radical transformation and reimagination of who we are as a body of faith, as Bantum suggests? If lay people, leaders, pastors, and teachers could overwhelmingly say "yes" to this kind of renewal—not one of *doctrine* but of renewed relationships—Covenant freedom may be the very thing that saves the mission of those who have historically been friends.

Book Reviews

James A. Swanson (1937–2018), Covenant pastor, chaplain, and first chair of Covenant Disabilities Ministry Resource Committee

Robert McGee, PSWC children and family ministry coach, children's pastor, Life Community Church, Roseville, California

John E. Phelan, Jr., president and dean emeritus, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

John F. Kilner, editor, *Why People Matter: A Christian Engagement with Rival Views of Human Significance* (Baker Academic, 2017), 223 pages, $26.99.

While many schools of thought affirm human significance, the philosophies underlying this affirmation vary greatly. Are all philosophies equally adequate and compatible with a Christian perspective? This is the primary question of this volume, edited by John F. Kilner. The book addresses five different outlooks, dividing them into those grounded in humanity—utilitarianism, collectivism, and individualism—and those grounded in science—naturalism and transhumanism. Christian ethicists interact with each of these viewpoints in turn, comparing them to a biblical outlook, noting both commonalities and differences.

Part one addresses secular viewpoints grounded in humanity. Gilbert Meilaender interacts with utilitarianism, arguing that, against utilitarianism's concern with the maximum benefit ("utility") for society in general, no individual's good is simply part of an aggregate good; each individual is distinctive, singular, and unrepeatable before God. Amy Laura Hall contrasts collectivism with the sanctity of each individual human being apart from any category or group. She reminds us, for instance, that during the Third Reich, science and popular writings encouraged humans

to see one another as a different kind of human. She also provides a military example of how one can be a part of a larger regime that renders the individual as a tool. Individualism roots human worth in individual values and preferences, which determine what is right for each person, writes Russell DiSilvestro. He reminds readers that from the Christian perspective all humans have worth and dignity that is based not in our individual selves but in God.

Part two turns to scientifically based views. Naturalism has no room for what is beyond the observable within the material world, such as a transcendent source, a soul, or the notion of the image of God. Scott Rae writes that naturalism is the dominant worldview but is limited by its inability to explain how consciousness, rationality, or moral reason could originate from matter alone. Transhumanism moves into the area of becoming more than human, seeking the acceleration of intelligent life beyond its current forms and limitations. The scope of transhumanism can vary from the radical extension of the human lifespan to superintelligent machines that may seem humanlike but are not biological. Here Patrick Smith builds a case that people matter as they are, having a dignity from the creator, despite limitations and vulnerabilities that come with being finite, embodied beings.

Part three offers two chapters that seek to ground human significance not in humanity itself or in science, but in God, drawing from an explicitly Christian ethic. John Kilner expounds on the meaning and implications of humanity's being created in God's image, differentiating between Jesus *being* God's image and humans being *in* God's image. He notes that humanity's being in God's image is not determined by any particular attributes or abilities. A chapter by David Gushee builds arguments from both Old and New Testaments, showing that God is concerned with human dignity; with justice, love, and mercy; and with those who are vulnerable and victimized. Gushee highlights Jesus's inclusive and special care for those who especially need such inclusion and care and expounds on the ideal of shalom, where all people made in the image of God will finally come together in one peaceable community.

A summary chapter by the editor further develops the importance of a Christian ethic of human dignity, concluding that only a Christian outlook can adequately support the premise that people matter.

Reading this book illuminated for me different ethical perspectives, juxtaposed with a specifically Christian perspective. This book would be valuable for students of philosophy or ethics at the university level,

for those studying pastoral ethics at the seminary level, and for pastors and chaplains dealing with contemporary values and evaluating their underlying ethical presuppositions. In one sense the book might have been stronger if adherents of each position represented were able to write their own chapters, with responses from Christian ethicists. Such a format would offer an opportunity for further secular-Christian dialogue on human value. Perhaps the editor will someday convene such a symposium and produce a sequel book. The book is exceptionally well footnoted and is indexed by subject and person. Each chapter concludes with extensive documentation and helpful recommendations for further reading.

JAMES A. SWANSON

Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Baker Books, 2016), 336 pages, $19.99.

In an age where scores of books on church growth are published every year, it is refreshing to read a book that focuses on a specific age group within the church. Countless studies conclude that "40 to 50 percent of youth group seniors—like the young people in your church—drift from God and the faith community after they graduate from high school" (p.17). Most pastors, leadership team members, and volunteers agree that reaching young people is a priority, but the path forward can sometimes be confusing. In *Growing Young*, Powell, Mulder, and Griffin offer an inclusive book that analyzes the generational gaps hindering spiritual growth in youth and suggests strategies for developing youth into lifelong disciples of Christ.

Each of the book's "six essential strategies" encapsulates a multitude of small pivots that any church can apply at some level and, over time, see tremendous results in reaching young people. These strategies encourage the church, and every generation within it, to embrace change as it moves from good intentions to active participation: "It's one thing to say a practice is important, another thing to be intentional to think and talk about it, but when we put our hands and feet to work, that's when churches change" (p. 217).

And the changes are profound, perhaps more so for those further removed from youth culture. For instance, the authors are keen to point out that shared access to church responsibilities, such as holding keys to

the children's ministry closet or playing a major role in hosting events held at church, provides pathways for young people to commit to the church. The authors also recommend presenting a gospel message centered on the person of Jesus Christ and a clear mission that focuses on partnering with other organizations for social change in local and global contexts. In other words, greater responsibility for youth, a love for people, and the message of Jesus Christ can be just as attractive and effective in youth ministry as any new staff hire or building campaign.

Another essential strategy the authors emphasize is creating space for authentic conversation. In searching for the "right" answers, the church has often overlooked the fundamental issue surrounding youth ministry: the need to create space for dialogue. The authors argue that genuine conversations—where youth are able to ask questions and youth workers are willing to address these questions without judgment—yield significant benefits. Providing opportunities under the unflinching acceptance of Christ and the church creates the kind of "cultural warmth" that Christ always intended his church to convey—the kind of warmth that comes from people remembering the names of new families or supporting those who have faced specific tragedies. It is the incredibly simple task of making others feel noticed and known. This feeling of a church being a family—not an ancient institution—is something that resonates deeply with young people.

Developing such an environment often entails a change that requires a kind of "patience for the organic," a need for adaptive rather than technical change. "Most of the important obstacles faced by churches that want to grow young involve a shift in the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the people in the congregation" (p. 281). One wonders if understanding these changes deserves a book of its own. Instilling a new shared vision and the idea of vision-building *together with* intergenerational voices in leadership deserve more attention, as do testimonies of churches that represent the implications of not growing young.

The stories collected by the authors underscore the significance of their findings and make the book more a warm series of testimonies than an endless drone of data. The authors' findings are significant, but the book could have expressed greater urgency for their application today. I would recommend this book to everyone involved in ministry, not only to those who specifically engage with youth. It is trustworthy in its findings and will inspire readers to reach new generations of Christ-followers. The authors could have been critical of old-guard mentalities of church ritual

and tradition, or of older generations in general. Instead, *Growing Young* offers a fresh take on reaching and keeping young people in church. It may just be easier than you think.

ROBERT MCGEE

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (paperback, Penguin, 2005), 864 pages, $24.

DM, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (paperback, Penguin, 2011), 1184 pages, $28.

DM, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (paperback, Yale University Press, 2017), 704 pages, $25.

DM, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (paperback, University of California Press, 2002), 302 pages, $27.

DM, *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life* (Viking, 2018), 752 pages, $25.

Theological libraries require up-to-date commentaries and monographs on the biblical text; cutting-edge historical, theological, and ministerial resources; and grammars, lexica, and other tools for the reading of original texts. They should also include the best of contemporary cultural, political, and social thought along with a full complement of novels, poetry, essays, general history, and science. Preparation for preaching and teaching requires that a pastor be theologically learned, culturally informed, and engaged with stories, words, and wonder.

Within these larger groupings of resources, as a pastor and teacher I have found certain types of books particularly helpful. I am a great fan, for example, of dictionaries, both multivolume and single-volume, and they are often my first port of call in any task. I am also fond of one-volume introductions to topics and issues that could take up many volumes. The best of such works are comprehensive without attempting to be exhaustive. Unlike a dictionary, such introductions present a consistent narrative or outline that enables the reader to follow the author's argument without getting lost in the weeds—and they encourage the reader to want to learn more.

In this brief article, I recommend two important works in the category of one-volume introduction and three works written for those who want to learn more. All five books would make wonderful additions

to a pastor's library, and all were written by the distinguished historian Diarmaid MacCulloch. MacCulloch is professor of the history of the church at Oxford University and a deacon in the Anglican Church. In addition to his many award-winning books, he is highly regarded for his documentary and television work. The following paragraphs are not intended as reviews per se (some of these books I have reviewed elsewhere) but as an invitation to works I have greatly valued in my work. Several of the earlier works on this list have recently been reprinted in paperback, making them far more affordable.

The two general works I recommend are *The Reformation: A History* and *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years.* These are substantial books: *The Reformation* runs to 832 pages and *Christianity* to 1161. Don't be intimidated by their length, however; they are eminently readable. MacCulloch has an eye for a good story. He clearly knows how the personal narratives of the characters involved give the story depth and humanize it—and the Reformation is as much a story of the personalities and peculiarities of individuals as it is of a dramatic social movement. Because of the printing press, we know more about the personalities and thought of the key figures of the Reformation than their predecessors. (In the case of Martin Luther, we know rather too much!) I read *The Reformation* straight through when it first came out. I found it a lively and engaging read full of those robust characters that made Protestantism what it is, for better and for worse. I have since used it as a resource when I need to remember exactly who Andreas Osiander was or what really brought on the Peasants War. Just recently I consulted it on Luther's views on the Jews. The book was the winner of the National Book Critics Award in 2004.

Christianity is also an award-winning volume, having been awarded both the Hessell-Tolman Prize and the Cundill Prize in 2010. It contains the same lively storytelling and interest in individuals that I find so helpful in *The Reformation*. Protestant lay people, and for that matter students and pastors, may be familiar with church history up to the council at Nicaea at most. After that their knowledge lapses until Martin Luther, with perhaps side glances at St. Francis and John Wycliffe. Many of us growing up in Protestant congregations learned little or nothing about the rise of the papacy, the emergence of Islam, or Orthodox Christianity. *Christianity* covers the entire history of the church in manageable segments, with attention to the personalities and social contexts impacting the church in each particular area and era. I found the final section of

the volume, "God in the Dock" particularly fascinating. MacCulloch has an eye for what and why the western church is the way it is today. This is also a volume I have frequently consulted. I have found the table of contents and the indices very helpful whenever I have needed to refresh my understanding of a particular period, issue, or personality.

The three more focused volumes I would like to recommend are all concerned, more or less, with the English Reformation. The first volume, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, is a biography. Cranmer was the archbishop of Canterbury who lead his church through the turbulence of Henry VIII's reign and the all-too-brief reign of Henry's unfortunate son Edward, and ended his life in a dramatic martyr's death under Henry's Roman Catholic daughter Mary. Cranmer was an erudite man, a careful and thoughtful man, and, when he needed to be, a bold man. To me he is one of the more attractive figures of the Reformation. Not perfect, certainly—he could be both gently compassionate and unnecessarily vindictive—but he gave us some of the most beautiful prayers in the English language through his editing and composing of *The Book of Common Prayer*. First published in 1996, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* remains the definitive biography of the reformer and a wonderful, engaging read.

The second volume of this triptych is *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*, originally published in 1999. It is less of a biography and more a description of the efforts of the young king, Cranmer, and his associates to reform the English Church in ways not possible under the religiously conservative Henry VIII. This reform required a good deal of sparring with more conservative church leaders and restraining of the more radical reformers. Edward's early death left the task unfinished. When his efforts to pass his crown to his Protestant cousin Lady Jane Gray failed, his older sister Mary sought to roll back the Reformation in blood and fire. Her early death brought the Protestant Elizabeth to the throne. She sought a middle way to hold her kingdom together. Had Edward lived, MacCulloch suggests, the English Church might have turned out more like the Reformed churches of Basel and Geneva—plainer, simpler, and stripped of rituals, ornamentation, and elaborate clerical garb.

The final work is the most recent: *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life*. How does a biography of Henry VIII's "fixer" belong on this list? Cromwell must be seen along with Cranmer as one of the architects of the English Reformation. His efforts on behalf of the king—engineering the break with Rome, dissolving the monasteries, and marginalizing

recalcitrant priests, monks, and bishops—stemmed from his Protestant convictions and not simply his support of the king. Already *Cromwell* has been called the definitive biography of this controversial and enigmatic figure. Cromwell has undergone of bit of a rehabilitation of late with the superb novels of Hilary Mantel and the miniseries based on them. *Cromwell* has all the superb storytelling and attention to personal detail I have loved in MacCulloch's other works.

So why should American Protestants, other than Episcopalians, be interested in the English Reformation? There is, of course, the fact that the Tudor period is inherently interesting and one of the great historical hinges of the English-speaking world. It is also a cracking good story! But for the American Protestant church there is more. The English reformers were impacted more by the Calvinists of France and Switzerland than by the Lutherans of Germany. The "Puritan" element of the Edwardian church asserted itself in the seventeenth century and became dominant under Thomas Cromwell's distant relative Oliver. Puritans had already made their way to America and were attempting to establish their new community as a "light on the hill." Oliver Cromwell would seek to establish in England a republic and a church that reflected a Puritan vision. The failure of the Commonwealth did not mean the failure of that vision. Oliver Cromwell became one of the heroes of the American revolutionary thinkers. A line can be drawn from Cranmer and Cromwell, through Edward and his church and Cromwell's Commonwealth, to the American Revolution and the formation of an American Church. For better and for worse, that legacy is with us to this day. To understand the conflicts and confusions of American Protestantism, we would do well to start with Henry VIII, Edward VI, Thomas Cranmer, and Thomas Cromwell. Diarmaid MacCulloch is a wonderful guide to them all.

JOHN E. PHELAN JR.

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