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The Practice of Pluralism: Congregational Life and Religious Diversity in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1730–1820

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in Lancaster, Pennsylvania,
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After the courts, the political authorities, and the Lutheran ministers had all failed to reach a settlement, the two parties took their case to the public forum of Christoph Saur's newspaper, *Pensylvanische Berichte*. In March 1746, Saur had published an "impartial" report on the dispute written by a man who allegedly preferred to stay away from the "many-headed Pennsylvanian religious monster" (in fact, Saur may well have written the piece himself). The report was critical of Nyberg, who was portrayed as a gifted man who had alienated his congregation with his Moravian sympathies and devious behavior. The article mirrored Saur's disdain for professional clergymen and lawyers and heaped sarcasm on the attorneys of both sides who, it claimed, suddenly became theologians and talked religion in court. The writer also poked fun at a layman, Christophel Franciscus, who got beaten up in front of the church despite the fact that he was rarely seen near it. The article also predicted that Nyberg's appeal to the Swedish archbishop would not work. In "our free Pennsylvania," it declared, "the people do not allow the clerics to lead them by the nose, and much less will the authorities be led in such a way—unless they do not know their powers, like wild horses are unaware of their strength."³⁰

This article provoked a letter to the publisher from four of Nyberg's supporters—Sebastian Graff, Michael Immel, Jacob Schlauch, and Matthäus Jung—that was printed two months later. Nyberg's party defended the minister and claimed that the Swedish pastor in Philadelphia had kindled the flames of contention. This was a rather oblique reference to the Wicaco conference. But

29. The preceding two paragraphs are based on Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:111–14, 164–66; Aland, *Die Korrespondenz*, 1:215–20, 253 (quote on 218); *Hallesche Nachrichten*, 1:146–49; cf. Splitter, *Pastors, People, Politics*, 72.

30. *Pensylvanische Berichte*, March 16, 1746. On Saur's social and political views, see Roeber, *Palatines*, 175–96.

Graff, Immel, Schlauch, and Jung reserved most of their criticism for Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg. The “black robe,” they claimed, had broken his promise to stay out of the Lutheran church and had cheated the Nyberg party when he delivered a sermon there on short notice.³¹ The opposing faction, represented by six elders and deacons, replied with a letter defending Mühlenberg and laying the blame on Nyberg, who became caught in the fire “on account of the Moravian fantasies and plans with which he went pregnant.” They chastised their opponents for their violent behavior—even insinuating that the Nyberg party planned to start a “Munsterian peasants’ war”—and accused the Moravian leader Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf of plotting to rule over the souls, bodies, and goods of the Pennsylvania Germans.³² Nyberg finally had to yield when the Lutheran consistory of Uppsala, Sweden, condemned his Moravian views, and he and his supporters withdrew from the Lutheran church and started their own congregation.³³

Historians of Pennsylvania German religion have noted the importance of the Lancaster schism in the context of the colony-wide struggle between Lutherans and Moravians for power and influence in the 1740s. They have also interpreted the conflict as a learning process in the course of which Pennsylvania Germans adapted to concepts of civil and religious authority very different from the ones they knew in the Old World. Lutherans and Moravians in Lancaster found that neither the provincial government and the courts nor European ecclesiastical authorities and colonial clergymen were able to offer them much help. As self-governing bodies, the churches essentially had to find their own ways of resolving such disputes. Since the laity was deeply involved in the conflict and a reconciliation of the opposing viewpoints proved impossible, the permanent split of the congregation became inevitable.³⁴ What remains to be explored, however, is the composition of the two factions. It has been demonstrated above that successful immigrants from the Kraichgau who had come to Pennsylvania in the 1720s and 1730s and maintained a close web of social ties among each other had dominated the affairs of the congregation during the first dozen years

31. *Pensylvanische Berichte*, May 16, 1746. On the Wicaco meetings, see Glatfelter, *Pastors and People*, 1:100–101.

32. *Pensylvanische Berichte*, June 16, 1746. Mühlenberg commented on this exchange: “So then, since the Zinzendorfers could not belabor me with their flails, they put me in the German newspaper and reviled and abused me to the best of their ability in signed articles, which the others moderately and discreetly answered in the next issue of the newspaper, making public the whole course of the affair” (Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:166).

33. Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:115; Glatfelter, *Pastors and People*, 1:100–101, and 2:106.

34. Glatfelter, *Pastors and People*, 2:105–6, 109–10; Müller, *Kirche zwischen zwei Welten*, 118–29.

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of its existence. How did the Moravian schism affect this early group of leaders and who were the people who sided with Nyberg?

Of the twenty-three men who have been identified as early Lutheran leaders, only two, Georg Graff and Wilhelm Ziegler, and the son of another, Martin Weybrecht Jr., clearly supported the Nyberg party.³⁵ According to the burial book of the Moravian congregation, Graff, a Lutheran elder in 1742, “was among our first brethren in Lancaster who were awakened by Br. Nyberg’s preaching and united with the Communion of the Brethren.” Since his brother Sebastian was a leader of the Nyberg party, family ties may have played a major role in bringing Georg Graff into the Moravian fold.³⁶ By contrast, eight of the twenty-six men whom Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg identified as Nyberg’s opponents were early Lutheran leaders. It thus appears that Nyberg was mainly supported by people who had not yet played leading roles in congregational affairs, while the “old” leadership group mostly opposed him.³⁷

In most other respects, however, a close look at the leaders of the pro- and anti-Nyberg camps reveals that they had very similar regional backgrounds and social profiles. Mühlenberg identifies five men—Sebastian Graff, Matthäus Jung, Michael Immel, Jacob Schlauch, and Leonhard Bender—as leading supporters of Nyberg, and all of them except Bender also signed the letter in defense of the Swedish pastor that appeared in the *Pensylvanische Berichte*. By contrast, the six Lutheran elders and deacons who rebuked Nyberg in the same newspaper—Philipp Schaufelberger, Ludwig Stein, Adam Simon Kuhn, Bernhard Hubele (Hubley), Jacob Yeiser, and Michael Gross—may be identified as his leading opponents.³⁸ Virtually all of these eleven men came from the wealthiest segment of the town’s population or were prosperous farmers in the vicinity, and immigrants from the Kraichgau and neighboring regions ended up on both sides of the divide.

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35. Long after the Moravian controversy in Lancaster had subsided, Mühlenberg claimed in 1753 that Jacob Beyerle, an early Lutheran leader who had relocated from Lancaster to Germantown, had been an “intimate friend” of Nyberg’s, but there is no corroborating evidence of his involvement in the controversy. His cousin Andreas Beyerle, by contrast, was a vehement opponent of the Swedish pastor (see Aland, *Die Korrespondenz*, 2:41; and Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:114).

36. Clyde L. Groff, Walter B. Groff, and Jane Evans Best, *The Groff Book*, vol. 1, *A Good Life in a New Land* (Ronks, Pa.: Groff History Associates, 1985), 25; *Moravian Burial Book*, 12; *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 1 (1858–76), 384–87.

37. Christoph Trenckel, Ludwig Detteborn, Philipp Rudesill, Philipp Schütz, Georg Honig, Philipp Schaufelberger, Jacob Lochmann, and Hans Georg Barth (Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:114).

38. Tappert and Doberstein, *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, 1:112–13; Aland, *Die Korrespondenz*, 1:216; *Pensylvanische Berichte*, May 16, 1746, and June 16, 1746.

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Three of the five leading Nyberg supporters came from regions of the Palatinate. The butcher Leonhard Bender was born in Kirchartdt in the Kraichgau in 1703 and immigrated to Pennsylvania before 1727. Two of his children were christened in Lancaster in 1730 and 1734, and his wife, a former Mennonite, was baptized as a Lutheran by Johann Caspar Stoeber in October 1737.³⁹ Matthäus Jung's brother, Marcus, was born in a village near Kreuznach in the Palatinate, so Matthäus probably also came from there. His age was given as twenty-one when the two Jung brothers came to Pennsylvania in 1732; he married three years later.⁴⁰ Jacob Schlauch, born in the village of Adelshofen near Eppingen in the Kraichgau in 1708, arrived in Philadelphia in 1728 and married Ursula Elisabeth Stein in Lancaster five years later. The couple had seven children, four of whom were still living at the time of Schlauch's death in 1750.⁴¹ Sebastian Graff, the son of a farmer, was born in Offenheim in the margravate of Ansbach, a Franconian principality, in 1711 and came to Pennsylvania in 1730. After surveying the opportunities in Penn's colony, Graff returned to his native land where he handled business transactions for Philadelphia merchant Caspar Wistar and married. In 1736 he returned to Pennsylvania with his wife and his brother Georg. The Graffs had seven children baptized in Lancaster between 1737 and 1747.⁴² Like Graff, Michael Immel may have been a native of Franconia. When Leonhard Immel, probably his brother, married in 1733, he was described as a farmer's son from the territory of the imperial city of Rothenburg. Michael Immel had arrived in Pennsylvania on the same ship with Leonhard and was the godfather of one of Leonhard's children. Michael had four children baptized in Lancaster between 1738 and 1745, with Sebastian Graff acting as sponsor for three of them.⁴³

39. Burgert, *Kraichgau*, 50; Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:8, 407.
40. *Moravian Burial Book*, 24; Strassburger and Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, 1:89, 91–92; Heisey, “Borough Fathers,” 49.
41. Burgert, *Kraichgau*, 320.
42. Lancaster Diaries, 1763, entry for October 8, Moravian Archives; Heisey, “Borough Fathers,” 48–49; Groff, *Groff Book*, 1:26–27; Jane Evans Best, *The Groff Book*, vol. 2, *A Continuing Saga* (Ronks, Pa.: Groff History Associates, 1997), 66–67; Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:24, 407–8, 415. On Graff’s career as a “newlander,” see Rosalind J. Beiler, “‘Smuggling Goods or Moving Households?’” The Legal Status of German-Speaking Immigrants in the First British Empire,” in *Menschen zwischen zwei Welten: Auswanderung, Ansiedlung, Akkulturation*, ed. Walter G. Rödel and Helmut Schmahl (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2002), 9–23, esp. 19–20; and Mark Häberlein, “Transatlantische Beziehungen im 18. Jahrhundert. Die Kontakte südwestdeutscher und Schweizer Einwanderer in Pennsylvania zu ihren Heimatregionen,” in *ibid.*, 45–60, esp. 45–46.
43. Strassburger and Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, 1:66, 69–70; Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:16, 24, 28, 43, 432.

Of these five men, Sebastian Graff and Matthäus Jung were particularly active in the economic and political life of the town. When Lancaster was incorporated as a borough in 1742, Sebastian Graff was appointed as burgess and Matthäus Jung as assistant burgess.⁴⁴ Sebastian Graff and his brother Georg were among Lancaster's early shopkeepers and "stocked a variety of wares in the establishments they opened before 1740." In January 1746, Sebastian Graff placed an announcement in the *Pensylvanische Berichte*, summoning his debtors to settle their accounts and declaring that he had given up his shop but was still selling sugar, wine, rum, and brandy. From the late 1730s, he accumulated sizable real estate and engaged in land speculation. By midcentury he was living as a "gentleman farmer" on a large estate in Manheim Township, where he ran a gristmill. When Graff made his will in 1763, he left to his wife and children four houses in Lancaster, his 140-acre farm in Manheim Township, and more than £5,000—certainly one of the largest estates in Lancaster County at that time.⁴⁵ Numerous mortgages entered in the Lancaster County Deed Books reveal Graff's importance in local credit networks.⁴⁶ The shopkeeper Matthäus Jung took up two lots in Lancaster in 1735 and had a female servant in 1745. According to historian Jerome Wood, he "appears to have traded extensively." After his death in 1749, his estate inventory, which "included large supplies of hardware and other items generally stocked by shopkeepers," was valued at £1,000 in goods and £1,200 in outstanding debts. Like Graff, Jung engaged in land speculation.⁴⁷

Like Matthäus Jung, Michael Immel—owner of a 260-acre farm in Manheim Township—obtained a female indentured servant in 1746. Five years later he recovered an inheritance that his parents-in-law in Franconia had left to his four children.⁴⁸ Jacob Schlauch (named Slaugh or Slough in English-language records)

44. Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 373; Heisey, "Borough Fathers," 48; Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 12 (B75); Wood, *Conestoga Crossroads*, 29, 32.

45. Wood, *Conestoga Crossroads*, 12, 29, 50, 174; *Pensylvanische Berichte*, January 16, 1746; Warrant Register, vol. 16, p. 75–76, nos. 118, 126, 181, Pennsylvania State Archives; Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 4 (A35), 9 (A200), 10 (A242), 16 (B275–277), 17 (B301), 77 (F409), 107 (H 290), 119 (I169); Lancaster County Tax Lists, Manheim Township, 1751, Lancaster County Historical Society; Lancaster County Will Book A-I-230, Pennsylvania State Archives.

46. Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 4 (A34), 17 (B307), 21 (B450, B461), 25 (B588), 27 (B641), 31 (C217), 40 (D48–50), 60 (D546), 66 (E213), 67 (E246, 248), 69 (E323), 86 (G318), 93 (H25, H30).

47. Heisey, "Borough Fathers," 61; Wood, *Conestoga Crossroads*, 100; George W. Neible, "Account of Servants Bound and Assigned Before James Hamilton, Mayor of Philadelphia," *PMHB* 31 (1907): 100; Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 13 (B120), 67–68 (E274), 71 (F88); Warrant Register, vol. 16, p. 241, no. 5, Pennsylvania State Archives; Lancaster County Will Book A-I-177, Pennsylvania State Archives.

48. Neible, "Account of Servants (1907)," 31, 355; Lancaster County Tax Lists, Manheim Township, 1751, 1756–59, Lancaster County Historical Society; Lancaster County Orphans Court Book, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 28; Lancaster County Will Book B-I-221, Pennsylvania State Archives.

was an innkeeper who also took advantage of opportunities for land speculation. Three hundred acres in Manheim Township were patented to him in 1747, and when Schlauch sold the property a year later, he took in more than £500.⁴⁹ According to the burial book of the Moravian congregation, Leonhard Bender was “one with the first here in Lancaster who became acquainted with the Brethren. In 1748 he was received in the Congregation in Bethlehem, as the first in Lancaster.” Bender owned a 215-acre farm on Conestoga Creek, which he mortgaged to Philadelphia merchant Caspar Wistar in 1752. The preaching schedule of two Moravian itinerants, Christian Rauch and Leonhard Schnell, for the summer of 1747 shows that the traveling preachers regularly held services “at Leonhardt Bender’s, 4 miles from Lancaster via Conestocke.”⁵⁰

In the late 1730s and 1740s these men frequently stood as sponsors of one another’s children. Sebastian Graff and his wife were godparents of Matthäus Jung’s son in 1745, while the Jungs were sponsors at the baptisms of three of Sebastian and Eva Graff’s children. Michael Immel and Sebastian Graff repeatedly picked each other as sponsors, and Jacob Schlauch and his wife became the godparents of Leonhard Bender’s daughter in 1745.⁵¹ But despite these ties, two of the five leading supporters of Nyberg had returned to the Lutheran fold by 1748. When Michael Immel and his wife brought a daughter to be baptized in the Lutheran church in November of that year, the new Lutheran pastor, Johann Friedrich Handschuh, personally acted as sponsor. From that time on, Immel regularly appears in the records of the Lutheran congregation until his death in 1758. Pastor Handschuh noted that Immel had reluctantly joined the congregation again and many people were against him because of his former support for the Moravian cause. Immel had realized, however, that the Moravians had “cheated” him and became a regular church-goer again.⁵² Jacob Schlauch was buried in the Lutheran churchyard in May 1750 “with an extraordinarily large funeral attendance of all sorts of persons.”⁵³ Even more ominously for the Moravians, their leader Matthäus Jung committed

1750 “with an extraordinarily large funeral attendance of all sorts of persons.”⁵³ Even more ominously for the Moravians, their leader Matthäus Jung committed suicide in 1749. For his fellow parishioners, this was “a Blow to our Happiness, particularly as such a thing is quite unheard of among Brethren,” and the

49. Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 51 (D360), 109 (H319b); Lancaster County Will Book A-I-204, Pennsylvania State Archives.

50. *Moravian Burial Book*, 13; Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 36 (C443); Rothermund, *Layman's Progress*, 158–59.

51. Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:24, 28, 415, 428, 431.

52. Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:64, 85, 97, 120, 122–23, 135, 137, 140, 245, 282, 299, 360, 378, 394; *Hallesche Nachrichten*, 1:532–33.

53. Smith and Weiser, *Trinity Lutheran Church Records*, 1:280.

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The dual concern for the discipline and welfare of congregation members became especially evident when Sebastian **Graff** proposed in 1758 that the council look after the affairs of widows and orphans “more precisely and carefully.

” **Graff** ...

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