

Professional Development Grant Final Report

# The Eucharistic Theology of Solomon Stoddard and the Promotion of Indian Evangelism in New England

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For this professional development project, I organized a conference panel titled “New Horizons of Evangelicalism in the Eighteenth Century” for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies conference, held in Denver, Colorado on March 20-23. At the meeting, I presented my paper, “The Eucharistic Theology of Solomon Stoddard and the Promotion of Indian Evangelism in New England” as part of my ongoing book manuscript revisions. Below is a summary of the results of these professional activities.

### **A. Restatement of Research Problem**

In my paper I explore the intersection between Solomon Stoddard’s theology of the Eucharist (communion or the Lord’s Supper) and Indian evangelism within New England during the early eighteenth century. Stoddard’s decision to open communion to all church members in good standing is a familiar moment in New England’s ecclesiastical history that has not been adequately integrated into the ongoing missionary projects that spanned the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By examining the significance of Stoddard’s various ecclesiastical and sacramental writings, I hoped to demonstrate that Stoddard also understood the significance that his arguments held for providing avenues by which Indians could enter Congregationalist churches. What I found is that Stoddard’s influence extended to missionary supporters like Stephen Williams who entertained the notion of allowing individual Indians into his church, and to full-time missionaries like Experience Mayhew who acted as spokespersons or advocates for Indians and missions as a whole.

### **B. Brief Review**

Scholarship on New England’s Indian history tends to fall into either the seventeenth century or the eighteenth century, with little continuity or synthetic analysis regarding the history of missionary activity and interaction within the region across the broader span of colonial

settlement. My research into Stoddard represents one aspect of my ongoing book manuscript project, focusing on his intellectual influence prior to the Great Awakening. Three representative examples highlight the problem that I hope to combat with my wider research. First, Richard Cogley's seminal book titled *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians Before King Philip's War* concludes roughly at the end of the seventeenth century with Eliot's death in 1690. By contrast, Linford D. Fisher's *the Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* provides an introductory chapter or two on seventeenth century missionary activity while focusing predominantly on religious history and missions from roughly 1730 onward. Likewise, John Wood Sweet's *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* adopts a wider chronology that spans the Revolutionary period with only a cursory nod to the long continuities and disruptions in regional missions.

The article presented at the ASECS conference attempts to bridge this gap in the literature by exploring the period of 1700 to 1730 in New England missionary history in detail. It also seeks to connect Stoddard's religious writings with the history of missions – something that scholars have acknowledged but failed to see as an outgrowth of his changing beliefs regarding the sacraments and the makeup of the church.

### **C. Summary of Findings and Experiences**

My research suggests that Stoddard's thought on the role of the sacraments in Congregationalist ecclesiology and church membership also led him to promote Indian evangelism within the colony at a time when churches and ministers took an increasingly dim view of the prospects of missions. In his *Question Whether God is not Angry with the Country for doing so little towards the Conversion of the Indians?* Stoddard suggests that the colony has failed to properly evangelize Native Americans, and that punishment in the form of ongoing war

with France provides the clue that evangelism needs to be a greater priority. At the same time, a section of the *Question* inverts the standard formula (by this point) that civilization of Indians needed to occur before conversion, suggesting that conversion and church membership should come first. I demonstrate through a close reading of Stoddard's other religious writings that this can be linked to the evolution of his decision to open the Lord's Table to all who could take communion in good conscience, and his belief that communion itself could aid an individual in his or her conversionary process.

Stoddard famously subverted the Congregationalist norms in this area: most churches restricted communion to only those who had attained the approval of ministers and fellow congregants as "godly walkers." Stoddard's proposition exploded the potential for church membership, and his rhetorical use of heathen/Gentile archetypes and examples from the bible could also be read as support for Native Americans when applied to a missionary context. Furthermore, my analysis of the writings of Experience Mayhew, missionary to the Aquinna Wampanoag on Martha's Vineyard, suggests that Mayhew incorporated Stoddard's thinking and applied it to his own missionary work to promote Indian conversions as authentic. I am confident that I will be able to publish my results as a chapter within my book manuscript with further revisions.

Attendance and participation at the international conferences for ASECS provided me the opportunity to present research to my fellow colleagues and network professionally with a number of scholars who were in attendance. As a faculty member in the early stage of my career, these connections will prove invaluable moving forward. In particular, I established a connection with the panel chair that I secured, University of Richmond professor Douglas Winiarski. I had previously reviewed Dr. Winiarski's new monograph *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light*:

*Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England*, which was recently awarded the Bancroft Prize in history for what is arguably the seminal work on the Great Awakening in New England. Our correspondence leading up to the conference has provided me the opportunity to solicit Dr. Winiarski's help in revising and developing my book manuscript, titled *A Communion of Churches: Indian Christians, Puritan Ministers, and Congregations in Early New England, 1600-1775*. I also connected with my fellow panelists, Jacob Blosser (Texas Woman's University), Sam Smith (Liberty University), and Ryan Carr (Queen's College, CUNY), and have agreed to swap manuscripts with Dr. Carr and to keep in touch with Dr. Smith because of our mutual interest in Loyalists during the Revolutionary period. Dr. Blosser and I already have a long history of working together from my time as a Master's student, but he suggested that he might connect me with the leadership body of the Phi Alpha Theta history honors society, which he currently manages as Vice President of the national office, which will aid in the development of ATU's chapter in the coming years. All told, it was a fruitful opportunity to network and expand my scholarly connections at the conference.

#### **D. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overall, the funds from my ATU professional development grant allowed me to attend a stimulating conference within my profession, and to make connections with a preeminent scholar in the field of early American religious history. I received positive feedback on the paper presentation from Dr. Winiarski, as well as suggestions on how to enhance the paper by exploring the region's ecclesiological practices related to Indians (and Stoddard's conceptual understanding of the church body) in detail. As I continue to develop my book manuscript, these insights will result in a stronger chapter and contribution to the field.