CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNAL DIVERSITY
IN RADICAL GERMAN PIETISM:
CONTRASTING NOTIONS OF COMMUNITY IN CONRAD
BRÖSKE AND JOHANN HENRICH REITZ

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This study investigates notions of Christian community among Radical German Pietists, or Philadelphians, in the Wetterau in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with particular focus on Conrad Bröske and Johann Henrich Reitz. From 1686–1713, Bröske enjoyed the secure position of Court Preacher to Count Johann Philipp II of Ysenburg-Offenbach. Bröske offered Reitz asylum in Offenbach after Reitz’s dismissal from his position as Church Inspector and Court Preacher to Count Wilhelm Moritz in Solms-Braunfels. Reitz resided intermittently in Offenbach for three years, from 1700 to 1703. During his stay, Reitz composed a substantial part of his Historie der Wiedergebornten in which he documented the Christianity of the conventicle, women, and the unlearned for the edification of German Philadelphians.¹

This personal connection raises the question of similarities and differences between Bröske and Reitz and their respective notions of Christian community. The present study examines both the experiences and reflections of the two men on the issue of Christian community in order to bring some nuance to previous assumptions of a uniform “separatist” ecclesiology among radical German Pietists.²

¹ See Douglas H. Shantz, ““Back to the Sources:” Gottfried Arnold, Johann Henrich Reitz and the Distinctive Program and Practice of Pietist Historical Writing,” in Commoners and Community, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, 2002), pp. 75–90, there 80–81.
² The discussion of Bröske’s understanding of Christian community in this chapter draws on my recently published book, Between Sardis and Philadelphia: the Life and World of Pietist Court Preacher Conrad Bröske (Leiden, 2008).
Conrad Bröske on Christian community

1. Bröske’s experience of community

Conrad Bröske (1660–1713) the mayor’s son was born in Balhorn on March 23, 1660. After four years at Philipps University in Marburg, and academic trips to Geneva, Utrecht, Leiden, Oxford, and London, in 1686 he was appointed Court Preacher to Count Johann Philipp II of Ysenburg-Offenbach. Bröske served in this role until his death 27 years later at age 53. Besides the title of Court Preacher, Bröske also held the office of First Preacher in the new city residence of Offenbach. After two years of joint rule, in 1687 Johann Philipp and his brother Wilhelm Moritz decided to divide their father’s inheritance. Johann Philipp made Offenbach his official residence—a town, which at that time, comprised some 63 households.

Bröske and the Count enjoyed a close and trusting relationship, as evidenced when, in 1692, the Count gave his half-sister Luise as wife to his court preacher. As a result, Bröske was more than a servant to his prince; he belonged to the Count’s family circle. Bröske’s close relation with the Count is also illustrated in a letter Bröske wrote on the 24th of February, 1705:

By God’s providence, as long as I have been in this land, I have found to my great comfort and pleasure that Your Worship has been well-disposed towards me with much favor. Not only was Your Worship the first who

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3 Wilhelm Diehl, Pfarrer- und Schulmeisterbuch für die hessen-darmstädtischen Souveränitätslande: Hessia Sacra, vol. IV (Darmstadt, 1930), p. 394. The second preacher, from 1687–1698, was his relative Johann Christoph Bröske and, from 1698 until 1706, his own brother Johann Hermann Bröske, a student of Heinrich Horch.


5 Schrader, Literaturproduktion (see above, n. 4), p. 134.

6 Decker surmises that a portrait of a pastor from this time period, contained in the Ysenburg family collection, may well be a picture of Conrad Bröske. See Decker, ‘Graf Johann Philipp’ (see above, n. 4), p. 124, n. 166.