

2013

Making Room for the Lost: Congregational Inclusivity in Waldenström's Squire Adamsson

Mark Safstrom

Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/scanfaculty>

 Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Safstrom, Mark. "Making Room for the Lost: Congregational Inclusivity in Waldenström's Squire Adamsson" (2013). *Scandinavian Studies: Faculty Scholarship & Creative Works*.

<https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/scanfaculty/2>

This Published Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Scandinavian Studies at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scandinavian Studies: Faculty Scholarship & Creative Works by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Making Room for the Lost: Congregational Inclusivity in Waldenström's *Squire Adamsson*

Mark Safstrom, lecturer in Scandinavian literature, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

When Christ was asked hard questions, his usual response was a parable. Allegorical responses like these answer questions indirectly, alienating the listener from the topic at hand in order that the matter can be considered in a different, but parallel context. The listener may well be puzzled and prompted to ask, “what does this have to do with my question?” or “is this about me?” Allegory, when done well, defers authority to the listener to come to the conclusion subjectively, by drawing on his or her own past experiences and wrestling with the problem. Interpreting an allegory requires maturity, but it also can cultivate maturity through training in critical thinking.

In the Scandinavian Lutheran world in the early 1800s, and especially among the Pietists, allegory was a mainstay in preaching and reading strategies. For example, preachers often explained Old Testament stories as allegories for New Testament truths rather than explaining the historical or cultural context.¹ A rich allegorical tradition from the Middle Ages had established an informed listening and reading public experienced at identifying symbols and “solving the puzzle.” For Pietists interested in applying faith to their lives, there was an added subjective intensity to interpreting allegories. Thus, it is entirely natural that when debates arose in the 1860s over defining the nature and limits of the congregation, Paul Peter Waldenström (1838-1917) resorted to writing an allegory. The result was one of the most widely read novels in nineteenth-century Sweden,² and today is an excellent resource for contemporary Covenanters who wish to explore a foundational text in the construction of the congregational polity of their denomination.

It was 150 years ago that Waldenström's novel appeared in bookstores, bearing the title *Squire Adamsson, or, Where Do You Live?*³ This book initially appeared in late 1862 as a series in the newspaper *The Stockholm City Missionary*. When the expanded book version came out the next year, it launched Waldenström into prominence within the spiritual awakening. The themes of the novel were an articulation of the theology of one group of dissenters in the Lutheran state church, the so-called "new evangelical" school (*nyevangelismen*) surrounding Carl Olof Rosenius (1816-1868).⁴ There are a variety of themes that can be drawn out of this text, but perhaps none so timeless and timely as the unique presentation of congregational life. In particular, there is no better way to become familiar with the mood and experience of life in the Pietist conventicles and mission meetings of the 1840s-1870s than to eavesdrop on the characters Squire Adamsson and Mother Simple as they discuss hard life questions.

One of the most difficult dilemmas that congregations face is the question of where to draw the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, membership and exclusion, assurance and reprimand. This question is at the heart of Mother Simple's ministry as she takes her stand in defense of God's limitless grace. As this is an allegory, no specific answers are provided for how to act in a given situation. For the allegorist, the point is to create a parallel universe of symbols and general truths and leave it to the reader to connect the dots to his or her own experience. The reader is left to ask questions such as, "Where do *I* live?" as well as, "How shall *I* act?" and, "How shall *we* define and build community?" This article will explore Waldenström's vision for congregational life as symbolized in *Squire Adamsson*. Overall, it will identify a strong narrative of inclusivity, contextualize this within Waldenström's career and writing, and make comparisons to other historical articulations of inclusivity by Covenant authors.

The City "Evangelium" as Reflection on Congregational Discipline

The world of *Squire Adamsson* is comprised of a number of cities, each representing spiritual states of being. Though Adamsson starts out on an estate called "Industriousness," his poor bookkeeping lands him in debt and he is arrested by "Moses" and thrown into prison, "Sinai." After realizing there is no way out other than to accept the grace of his master, "Justus All-Powerful," he is freed by "Immanuel" and then moves

to “Evangelium.” Throughout the novel, Adamsson finds guidance from a little old woman named Mother Simple, who time and again reminds him that there is nothing he himself can do to deserve grace; the only thing is to accept it. Nevertheless, Adamsson is a restless soul who is never content to remain very long in Evangelium, choosing instead to try his fortune in other cities, like “The World,” “Theology,” “Loose Living,” and “Self Righteousness.” As his character develops and changes, he also changes names back and forth, from Adamsson to “Abrahamsson” and “Hagarsson.”⁵ At the end of all his life’s wanderings and struggles, Adamsson is finally transported by Immanuel to “Holiness,” the final destination of the redeemed. In all of these moves, the city that appears most positively is Evangelium.

When compared with Waldenström’s definition of the congregation elsewhere, there is strong resonance with the depiction of Evangelium. He expounded his theology in a lecture series at the seminary at Lidköping, later published in the book *Biblisk troslära* in 1914 (“Biblical Faith Doctrine”). A pet concern of his was his belief that it was unbiblical to differentiate between church denominations (*kyrkosamfund*) on the one hand and individual congregations (*den enskilda församlingen*) on the other.⁶ “Congregation” is a collective term that applies both to the local congregation and all congregations taken as a whole.⁷ The congregation is referred to as a body, “an organic whole” (*ett organiskt helt*), comprised of many limbs, which is not divisible.⁸ This conception of the universal congregation extends to the saints in every age, and the unity of the local congregation thus becomes the greatest visible expression on earth of the communion of saints.⁹ Waldenström also repeats his perennial critique against both state churches and sects, which impose artificial boundaries,¹⁰ and instigate demoralizing divisions, party politics, and personality cults.¹¹

For congregations, the question of how and when to discipline membership can be a knotty, painful problem, and here in Evangelium it is no different. The residents come into conflict with one another when deciding whether to accept or reject new members. Within Evangelium, there is no governing body apart from Immanuel, and since he is invisible much of the time, decisions have to be made by the residents. This organizational structure resembles an extreme low-church congregation, with no clergy except for a handful of mature “teachers.” There is no apparent system for discipline, and so the residents hash out their opinions in a sort of informal, messy democracy, the result of which is

that popular consensus serves to shame misfit members into leaving. Mother Simple remains resolute in her defense of free grace, and speaks out passionately against this kind of exclusion by shame. In her view, the people in most need of reprimand are not the “lost” or “fallen,” but instead those who wish to draw lines and *seek to exclude* the lost and fallen. Mother Simple’s argument resonates strongly with Waldenström’s sentiments in *Biblsk troslära*.

The right to membership in a Christian congregation belongs to each and every one, who with their mouth confess belief in Jesus and walk in such a life, that, as far as the congregation can judge, confirms the truth of his confession.[...] To the extent that his life confirms or contradicts the verbal confession, this is left to the congregation to judge. If the person, despite the verbal confession of Christianity and the manifestation of this in his life, remains yet a hypocrite, then the judgment is left to God alone, who sees through to the heart. Humans can only see that which is plain to the eye.¹²

In answer to critics who would say that this might accidentally allow hypocrites to remain and cause problems, Waldenström responds: “To have a hypocrite in one’s fellowship is less dangerous by far than to exclude a truly believing person by mistake” (“*Att ha en skrymtare i sin gemenskap är vida mindre förligt än att av misstag utesluta en verkligt troende*”).¹³ The statement does not mean that congregations should give up on striving after purity (*renhet*), since this struggle is an essential part of being an authentic Christian congregation.¹⁴ Waldenström admonishes those who declare themselves “free” of these concerns not to wash their hands of responsibility, reminding them that it is every member’s task to engage in building up a unified congregation. Furthermore, members who set themselves apart cannot truthfully claim to still be part of the congregation.¹⁵ In matters of discipline and reprimand, the teacher (*läraren*, i.e., the pastor) must not place himself over the congregation, otherwise this will amount to a new estate of the clergy (*prästvælde*), and neither should he become the congregation’s slave. His rightful place is to be as a member like all the rest, with a level of authority corresponding to that of others in service roles.¹⁶ Congregational discipline is decentralized and is worked out through dialogue among the membership.

In this model, the evaluation of the veracity of each member’s confession of faith must err on the side of grace, as the congregation takes each

person at his or her word. So long as a person expresses genuine belief and the desire to belong and be sanctified, this stated intent would seemingly trump even persistent examples of sinful behavior. Mother Simple is a bottomless well of grace, who explains that even when people year after year cannot seem to overcome their sins, “We have not yet seen the end.”¹⁷ Being a member of the congregation is a process of becoming. Nevertheless, Mother Simple is also the agent of discipline, as she delivers two kinds of reprimand to Adamsson (as well as others). The first kind applies whenever he strays into legalism and works righteousness.¹⁸ The second kind applies whenever he seeks to exclude others from Evangelium, or tries to place limits on grace. In neither case is the reprimand based simply on incorrect theology alone or behavior alone. Rather, the greatest threat is incorrect theology that *causes harm* to the congregation. If the congregation is a living organism, as Waldenström suggests, then it would follow that the exclusion of members (limbs) would be a sort of amputation, which is life threatening to the body and should only be done as a last resort.

One cannot discuss Waldenström’s view of the congregation without acknowledging that he himself was often the cause of theological controversy and division. Perhaps it was the awareness of his role in these divisions within the Church of Sweden and the various Scandinavian Lutheran synods in North America that he developed such a strong interest in ecumenism and a generous definition of congregational membership. Historian William Bredberg has pointed out that Waldenström reacted strongly against the evangelical orthodoxy that had swept across his home province in Northern Sweden in his childhood,¹⁹ and it is not a stretch to imagine that it was this aversion to dogmatic conflict that led him to be drawn into the circle around Rosenius. The “new evangelicalism” of Rosenius featured a strong ecumenical message and a commitment to keeping the Pietists united within the Church of Sweden and avoiding separatism. When Waldenström’s theory of the atonement sparked vigorous debate in 1872, he remained on the sidelines as the fallout led to the exodus of the “Waldenströmiens” from the Church of Sweden in 1878. For the rest of his career, he appears to have been seeking to fix this separation by promoting ecumenical cooperation.²⁰ He also came to staunchly defend his Rosenian credentials, which ultimately brought him into greater conformity with his mentor. Even though Evangelium can be seen as an allegorical representation of the ideal congregation, Evangelium should not be conflated with “True Christianity.” Even though

Waldenström's sympathies are with the congregational mission societies and critical of the state church, Evangelium is at best only an imperfect manifestation of the ideal congregation. The universe of *Squire Adamson* demonstrates a pluralistic situation in which it is evident that none of the characters, not even Mother Simple, has a complete view of who God is (Justus All-Powerful). Evangelium is the preferred city, but since its residents continue to struggle even after their arrival, and since their experiences differ, it becomes clear that it is not the definitive, end-all and be-all version of Christianity.

In constructing this pluralistic world, Waldenström seems to be drawing on a similar notion of "tropes" that was articulated by his eighteenth-century predecessor in the Pietist school of thought, Count Zinzendorf. According to Zinzendorf, the various denominations and church institutions in the world were like so many perspectives on Christianity, each with their own merits and shortcomings.²¹ Waldenström believed that these different tropes should not be kept separate, but instead that a diversity of tropes could exist *in the same* local congregation. In this way, the diversity of the local congregation could reflect the greater diversity of the universal congregation. Though the congregation is a frail and imperfection institution, he retains his optimism in its ability to manifest the unity of all believers. On the one hand, this position conjures up the traditional distinction of the "visible church" and "invisible church" made by Augustine and then resurrected and debated by the Protestant reformers. However, Waldenström actually takes issue with the idea of the invisible church, pointing out that, although it is an interesting theological idea, it is not practical, since by virtue of its being invisible and abstract, it therefore cannot be identified or addressed.²² All that people have to work with are actual visible churches, and so the task remains to strive to make those actual institutions into authentic expressions of the universal congregation.²³ To his critics who say that this precludes the realization of any congregations at all, he responds that:

The situation is not so dire. There *do exist* congregations of believers who make room for each and every person who can be regarded as a true Christian. Every such congregation is a Christian congregation in the biblical meaning.²⁴

Congregations are warned not to define themselves based on various perspectives on doctrine in the attempt to avoid controversy and make for a pleasant environment. The function of a congregation is not to be

“pleasant,” he says, but instead:

... to build up and cultivate [people] for heaven, and in order for this to happen, believers of various ages, classes, educational levels, and perspectives on doctrine must be *one* in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Only in this way can a *melting together* [*sammansmältning*] take place.²⁵

Adamsson’s restless personality makes it so that he has difficulty being content in Evangelium, and he never gains any closure about his situation, even when he is finally transported to Holiness. Evangelium is not the destination, but a (recurring) stop on the way. Evangelium is also a congregation in the midst of an ongoing process of becoming. Mother Simple’s ministry to her fellow residents, particularly Adamsson, seems to be a model for constructive congregational reprimand, and her vision for Evangelium is to be a place for people with different experiences to be built up and bonded together.

Reading “Simply” and Reading Allegorically

Waldenström is often subject to the critique that his biblical reading strategy (“Where is it written?” “*Var står det skrivet?*”) amounts to naïve literalism or fundamentalism.²⁶ However, Waldenström seemed to be aware of this potential pitfall, evident in his twofold approach to interpretation of Scripture. Arne Fritzson has theorized that Waldenström’s “simple” reading strategy served to keep his theology in balance.

Simplicity [*enfaldighet*] is a theological or spiritual virtue that Waldenström champions, which appears, among other places, in the fact that the heroine in *Squire Adamsson* is called Mother Simple. In this way, tradition/revelation becomes a corrective for the universally human way of thinking. The method of theological argumentation that Waldenström uses here can be characterized as orthodox. On the other hand, he argues against the objective atonement motif by referring to universal human experience. He talks about how inappropriate we would regard it if a human being were to act in the same way as God acts, according to the objective atonement motif. Here Waldenström uses methods for his theological argumentation that can be called integrating/correlating [*integrerande/korrelerande*].[...] In the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden there is both a tradition of “simply” [*enfaldigt*]

reading what is written [*som det står*] and of using integrating/correlating methods for theological argument.²⁷

The integrating/correlating model might also be explained as being dependent on analogy, and therefore optimal for understanding allegory. In this light, the various situations Adamsson experiences are like so many hypothetical experiments that continually test orthodoxy. Mother Simple's championing of her one orthodox truth, the freeness of grace, becomes the constant in this experiment. Thus, Waldenström is testing where the balance lies between objective orthodoxy and subjective experience. However, Mother Simple perhaps should not be seen as pure "orthodoxy," since she is vocal in her opposition to the characters who represent legalism, and since she too encourages Adamsson toward an experiential understanding of grace (attending the class of "Father Experience"). I would suggest that Mother Simple demonstrates a similar duality as the one that Fritzson sees in Waldenström overall.

Literary scholar Harry Lindström notes that "simple" (*enfaldig*) is used in its most positive sense, reflecting the sincerity of the heart (*hjärtats enfaldighet*), as in Acts 2:46, and the revelation of spiritual wisdom to those who are like children (*de enfaldiga*), as in Matthew 11:25. Waldenström's naming of "Mother Simple" seems to have been done with full awareness of the different interpretations of this word. In Rosenian circles, being "simple" was a positive trait, whereas among cultural elites, being "simple" was a pejorative associated with ignorance and anti-intellectualism. Mother Simple is "simple" in her maintenance of first principles, but she is far from unreflective and is occasionally shaken in her trust in grace.²⁸ The search for truth amidst doubt and pluralism presents a commentary on the age-old tension between rhetoric and logic, as well as the Pietist tradition of seeking truth through experience.²⁹ Academics and theologians do not fare well in this allegory, as through their false confidence they manage to pull people away from Evangelium and obscure the truth. Mother Simple cautions Adamsson that these men have a dangerous "poison,"³⁰ evident whenever their qualified definitions of grace actually end up dismantling it.³¹ Understanding exactly how grace works is left to Immanuel alone.³²

Mother Simple comes to the conclusion that grace is great enough to cover any ailment, and that all people who wish to come to Evangelium should be allowed to do so. The other residents are not so sure. Adamsson questions whether people who are sick should remain, and takes it upon himself to reprimand two of them, Depraved and Vile, who

subsequently move out of the city.³³ After reprimanding Adamsson for his grave mistake, Mother Simple is also confronted by Councilman Cautious, who raises similar concerns about another resident, Fallen. Councilman Cautious maintains that it is harmful for Mother Simple to overstate the case of grace, but she rebukes him saying: “Then the Councilman does not want us to give this poor man *any firm word of grace to cling to*, but instead means that he should be abandoned to *doubt and uncertainty!*”³⁴ Councilman Cautious points out that others have been healed, while Fallen’s condition has not changed, but Mother Simple counters that it was not through shaking their confidence in grace that the others became well again. Such a qualified version of grace would only end up preventing it from being useful at all. It also casts doubt on everyone else in Evangelium.

“That is a question that we will have to leave to Justus All-Powerful,” answered Cautious, though overcome by indecision. “No,” interrupted Mother Simple, “*it is we* who need to know your answer to this question. For if anyone, despite being a true resident in Evangelium, can still be thrown into Gehenna, then we are all lost. Then we have no sure hope. Or has the Councilman by now conquered all his sins, such that he can never fall for any of them anymore?”³⁵

Mother Simple here demands that Councilman Cautious make the correlation that since all of the residents of Evangelium continue to sin, expelling Fallen and the others would indict the rest in the same guilt. However, she also presents the “simple” orthodox Lutheran mantra of “grace alone, faith alone.” This is one of many examples of how the residents of Evangelium attempt to discern truth through discussion and debate over orthodoxy, as well as finding correlations with their subjective experiences.

Living in Evangelium is not easy or pleasant, but instead is depicted as being an occasion for a profound existential crisis (*anfåktelse*—crisis of temptation) through which the individual can mature toward an increasingly nuanced view of the truth. Lindström identifies this existential tension as a pronounced theme within classical Pietism and new evangelicalism and evident in both Rosenius’s and Luther’s writings. In Waldenström’s theology, human experience is suspended between two poles, *uselhet* and *sällhet* (wretchedness and blessedness),³⁶ in which the believer is simultaneously tempted to doubt and to have faith. This

kind of tension is one of the reasons why Lindström sees a great deal of sophistication in *Squire Adamsson*, as it demonstrates the turbulent nature of coming to faith in the midst of cultural upheaval and pluralism of the nineteenth century.

The book's presentation bears witness to a well thought out awareness of culture, an attempt to discern the alternative worldviews of pluralism and take a position on them. Not least interesting is the fact that the author provides the reader with so many objections to the culture of Evangelium and so many attractive arguments for alternative cultures.³⁷

It is by simultaneously reading allegorically *and* reading simply that the reader can approximate this dynamic tension, and hopefully arrive at new insights.

Making Room for a Diversity of Experience: The Case of Sexuality

It was by reading Psalm 86 that Waldenström received the inspiration to write *Squire Adamsson*. As he was preparing a sermon on this psalm, the thought occurred to him that “this psalm is like a room for the lost.” The mission of the allegory, therefore, is to make room for a diversity of people and their experiences with faith. Evangelium demonstrates at least four different types of diversity. Two of them are not treated in this essay, but are worth passing mention. The first is that the pride of place that Mother Simple and her female companions occupy demonstrates an affirmation of women as teachers and spiritual counselors that was far ahead of its time. Mother Simple represents the insights and participation of generations of women in the Pietist revivals. The second kind of diversity is socio-economic. Adamsson is a “squire” (*brukspatron*) while Mother Simple is a “cotter” or “crofter” (*torpare*), and, furthermore, a vulnerable widow. The fact that these two intimate friends come from opposite extremes of the social hierarchy was also provocative. In both of these cases, Waldenström is reflecting the fact that the religious awakening in Sweden was characterized by its extreme democratization of religious practice. (For more extensive treatment of both these topics, see the introduction to the 2013 edition of *Squire Adamsson*.) The third kind of diversity is theological, and has been treated already above, most notably in Waldenström's firm belief that the local congregation should have room for all believers, regardless of theological allegiances.

This section will address the fourth kind of diversity, which is a diversity of experience. Mother Simple is generous in her acknowledgment that believers will differ in their experiences with faith. One person may strive to overcome a specific sin and succeed, while others may not. Space must be reserved in the congregation for all believers, regardless of the status of their progress toward sanctification. This assertion faces its greatest test in chapter 12, when newcomers arrive in Evangelium from the so-called “Hidden District.” The residents of Evangelium have to decide whether to welcome these newcomers whose illnesses (sins) are not healed before their arrival in Evangelium (“Miserable,” “Depraved,” and “Fallen.”) There is room for speculation as to what Waldenström intended their sin to be, but it is described as a taboo that is not appropriate for public discussion and must be kept secret, even from parents. Lindström has suggested that this sin is reminiscent of the debates about sexual health in the 1860s. Notable here is the speculation within medicine at the time that masturbation (*onani* / *självbefläckelse*) was linked to insanity and deviant lifestyles, and which was also condemned due to scriptural taboo against it.³⁸ Waldenström weighed in on the topic of sexual health and youth in an article in a pedagogical journal, later as a booklet called *Om ungdomens farligaste fiende* in 1867 (“On the Most Dangerous Enemy of Youth”), so this is entirely plausible. Though masturbation is likely the specific issue that inspired chapter 12, the insights can rightfully be extended to sexuality generally. The scriptural taboos against “*onani*” refer to Genesis 38:9 and the displeasing actions of Onan, who refused to impregnate the wife of his deceased brother. So more generally this calls into question all expressions of sexuality that are literally “unproductive,” and which conflict with the duty to build families. Most important to note here is that this sin is so shameful that it is never spoken of, causes general revulsion, and can lead to ostracism. It is in contrast with the long list of sins that Waldenström included just prior, which grave as they may be, are not stigmatized to the same degree since they can at least be discussed.

As this sin is left unnamed, the allegory bears eternal relevance because this can symbolize absolutely any sin that people attempt to hide from public view and the judgment of the congregation. It also astutely identifies the perennial problem that congregations have in deciding how and when to accept people as members; do people need to have overcome their sins and non-normative behavior before entry, or afterward? What happens if they don't improve? Should they be allowed to stay? Is this a

defense of sin? Mother Simple's response is to assert that she is defending grace, not sin. There is also the acknowledgment that even people who profess faith will continue to struggle with sin, and the clarification that this is not a matter of "living in sin," but of "falling into sin."³⁹ (The Lutheran doctrine at the time did not address this grey area, but, according to Waldenström, maintained that the sinning person exits the state of faith and sanctification.)⁴⁰

The prime concern here is a practical one, namely how to minister to people who are struggling with sin by meeting them where they are. Lindström sees both Waldenström and Rosenius as reflecting the revolutionary perspective that sexual deviance was evidence of a biological impulse or medical condition, rather than sinfulness.⁴¹ (This was later also Waldenström's opinion of alcoholism.)⁴² Furthermore, Waldenström was opposed to the treatment prescribed by medical professionals who attempted to discourage this behavior "by inspiring anxiety" in their patients.⁴³ He warns that institutionalizing patients risks driving them to suicide, and gives the example of one such sixteen-year-old who tragically ended his life in the hospital after such treatment.⁴⁴ Lindström concludes his evaluation of Waldenström's preference of assurance over anxiety by saying:

Waldenström's literary action on behalf of those who were condemned sexually, who were oppressed by their own consciences and self-loathing, was bold and purposeful, characterized by his own experiences, new evangelical faith in grace, and pastoral-psychological intuition. He brought a storm of indignation upon himself and initiated an intense theological debate. He appeared to many to be a new evangelical iconoclast, a preacher of loose-living, and a dangerous author. For young people who were struggling with these sexual questions, he became an understanding friend and a helper who brought liberation.⁴⁵

In reading "On the Most Dangerous Enemy of Youth," the contemporary reader might find this discussion alternately quaint and disturbing. There is a strong degree of sensationalism typical for the period, demonstrating just how little sexuality had been researched by the 1860s. However, Waldenström only briefly summarizes the medical information, deferring to experts (C. S. Kapff and Karl Ludwig Roth). Waldenström's primary focus is on cultivating perceptive and loving parents and

teachers, and in this respect his message is quite timeless. He starts out by asking parents how much they attend to the spiritual well-being of their children, pointing out that “raising” children is more than simply feeding and clothing them.⁴⁶ He suggests that there is much at stake for the youngest generation, acknowledging that for children the issue of masturbation and sexuality can often be a source of shame, depression, and lack of enthusiasm for life. Parents need to overcome their reluctance to talk to their children about this, and to do so in a way that does not make the shame worse. Above all he underscores that no scolding or spanking will help in this case. (*Inga bannor och ingen aga vill här hjälpa.*)⁴⁷ Medicine will not help either. The best recourse for parents is to focus on building up spiritually mature children, who are assured that they are cared for and can be directed toward positive lifestyles. The primary concern is that children have a foundational relationship with Jesus, so that they can depend on him when they make mistakes. (*Först och framförallt viktigt både för lastens förekommande och botande är då, att barnen tidigt föras till Jesus, som ensam kan beware dem från fall och hjälpa dem upp, sedan de fallit.*)⁴⁸ He scolds parents who develop the attitude that once their children are teenagers they no longer need to pray together, and says that parents never stop being responsible for their children’s spiritual upbringing and counseling (*själavård*).⁴⁹ Though faith is the best recourse in life’s questions, he notes that Christianity is not a “system” and should not be treated as such; instead, it is a way of living. (*Christendomen är ej ett filosofiskt system, nej, christendomen är först och sist ande och lif.*)⁵⁰ Parents and teachers have a responsibility to be the presence of Christ to their children and students (*afspegla i ditt eget wäsende och umgänge med barnen denna Jesu kärlek*).⁵¹ As such, parents need to address these topics, not as though superhumanly detached from the situation, but by admitting their own mistakes and offering insight into how they themselves have dealt with similar situations.⁵² Parents should know where their children are and who they are keeping company with, as well as what books they are reading.⁵³

This was an age when local opportunities for education were limited and it was rather common to send children away to school to live on their own in a boarding situation. Thus, parents needed all the more to have a sense of what their children were experiencing, and Waldenström also stresses the important role that teachers play in the upbringing of the children as proxy parents. (*Läraren är ej blott underwisare, han är ock uppfostrare.*)⁵⁴ Teachers should know more about their students than

simply their names and their grades. The school community should be cared for as a unified, living “organism.”⁵⁵ Though teachers may feel too busy for this level of engagement, Waldenström explains that “love and interest make time,” and that it is far better to invest in students before, rather than after they have fallen into sinful lifestyles.⁵⁶ It is stressed that sexuality is not inherently bad, but instead that it is “a natural law, the source of which is the holy and righteous God himself.” (*Könsmotsatsen och den derpå grundade könsdriften är ju ej något i och för sig ondt eller osedligt utan en naturlag, hwars upphof är den helige och rättfärdige Guden själv.*)⁵⁷

When children come to their parents or other adults with questions about sexuality, the worst responses that a parent can have is to blush, turn away, or laugh. Keeping these matters secret only serves to increase curiosity, and Waldenström warns that if children don't get an answer from their parents, they will find someone who will answer them, and it may be someone with less than honorable intentions.⁵⁸ In the school environment, he suggests that teachers find clever ways of integrating the discussion of sexuality into the lessons, with natural segues, such as in the context of discussing the sexual life of plants and animals, or in the context of religious instruction, such as when the stories of the Bible contain sexual content (in contrast to the impulse to prudishly gloss over these stories).⁵⁹ Waldenström's primary occupation was as a teacher, and he speaks here with obvious self-reproach for his own mistakes in addressing his students' questions in the past, particularly in one instance when he had sensed that there was something wrong with a student, but waited until the student was at the point of despair to talk to him about it.⁶⁰ Above all, students who come to teachers for guidance should never be embarrassed or shamed publicly in front of the class, but should be answered one-on-one, and should be lovingly reassured that they have the unconditional forgiveness of Jesus.⁶¹ Finally, Waldenström expresses great concern over the practice of hospitalization for sexual deviancy, since it causes anxiety and can lead to despair and suicide.⁶² The preferred approach is through offering assurance through counseling, and the most successful treatment will be based in the remaking of the heart and the strengthening of the moral character of the whole person (*hjärtats omskapelse och hela människans sedliga upphöjande och stärkande*).⁶³ Overall, parents and teachers are charged to “wake up” and not cover their eyes, but to look after their children. (*Här duger det då icke att blunda. Wak upp och se till dina barn!*)⁶⁴ In Waldenström's view, Christian parents, teachers, and students collectively comprise an organic community, in

which it is essential that room be made for a variety of experiences and that discussion of these experiences be conducted openly and lovingly.

Unity in Diversity: A Covenant Narrative?

This allegory reflects a reality typically faced by Pietists since the 1600s, which was that theological controversy often followed in the wake of the religious awakenings within German and Scandinavian Lutheranism. For one group, the Moravian Brethren, this was of particular concern, such that they adopted the motto, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” This slogan was an assertion of the importance of agreeing upon a core set of values, and a relaxation on peripheral matters, and a preference for dialogue when various opinions clashed. Certainly, however, there always remains the potential for heated arguments over what constitutes “essential” and “non-essential” issues. In his allegory, Waldenström articulates support for this “unity in diversity” principle, at the same time as he is modeling, through the tribulations of his characters, how difficult it is to actually live by it. Waldenström saw biblical interpretation as an attempt to navigate between the extremes of fundamentalism and universalism, acknowledging that complete understanding of truth was elusive to the human mind, and asserting that subjective experience was often a better schoolmaster than objective rationalism and orthodoxy. This is evident in Mother Simple’s advice to Adamsson:

“There are many different opinions that hold sway here in this city, the Squire is well aware of this. This is something one has to tolerate. For we all understand in part; and we all in one way or another make our mistakes. But everything will go well, as long as everyone is *standing on the foundation*. But those, who tear away at the foundation, those people are not to be tolerated.”⁶⁵

Waldenström actively passed on this heritage to the denominations he played a formative role in founding. However, tracing this narrative of inclusion in the early history of the Covenant can sometimes be “hit and miss.” Despite the desire to appeal to this irenic spirit of inclusivity as a “Covenant distinctive,” when revisiting the literature from the formative decades of the denomination, it is apparent that in the Covenant, as in Evangelium, there are actually multiple opinions that have held sway.

As the Covenant celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1910, a book

was published containing essays written by several collaborators on different aspects of the church's history (*Missionsförbundets Minneskrift 1885-1910*). It fell to Secretary E. G. Hjerpe's lot to explain the Covenant's definition of the congregation in a chapter called "God's Congregation." Hjerpe starts out by invoking the twofold definition of the congregation that was so important to Waldenström; that the congregation was both the collection of all saints in all ages and places, as well as the believers gathered in the local congregation.⁶⁶ After explaining the characteristics of the congregation, Hjerpe arrives at the topic of congregational discipline (*församlingstukten*).

It is sin which corrupts the human being, and when a member of the congregation has fallen into sin, then this sin must be separated from him. If this cannot be done, then this person must be expelled from the congregation.[...] For it is plainly evident that if one person can be allowed to live in sin and yet at the same time be a member of the congregation, then other people might also be able to do so, and then the question remains: Where is the boundary? But furthermore, when congregational discipline is neglected, then the doors of the congregation are also opened for people who are complete strangers to God and lack any spiritual life.[...] If the congregation neglects this, then it will not be long before the spiritual life has departed, and instead of a Christian congregation there will simply be a crowd of people who are spiritually dead.⁶⁷

It is noteworthy that Hjerpe's discussion lacks the nuanced perspective brought by Mother Simple, that is, the discussion of what to do when a person desperately wishes to belong to the congregation, professes belief, but cannot seem to overcome their sin. Mother Simple articulates a view of the sinful individual as being in an unfinished process of becoming, and would urge erring on the side of grace, and not risk shutting out a true believer by mistake. Hjerpe's words here would fit better in the mouth of Councilman Cautious.

At this moment in 1910, it seems that the priority of the Covenant leadership was to define its congregations as "pure" congregations of believers only, rather than as being inclusive of "all believers." In the same anniversary text, Axel Mellander wrote a summary of the events leading up to the formation of the Covenant. In it he includes an excerpt from a

letter written in 1885 sent by Andrew Wenstrand on behalf of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Synod in order to urge its congregations to prepare for integration into the newly formed Covenant. Chief among the concerns is the idea that congregations should review the membership and discipline and expel members who are spiritually idle or divisive. “In the event that serious warnings, correction and discipline do not achieve the desired effect, are the congregations, in accordance with the word of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:13), expelling from themselves all those who are wicked?”⁶⁸ It is as though Wenstrand recommends a housecleaning of the membership rolls, perhaps with the principal targets being the complacent Lutherans on the one hand, and the “Free faction” on the other, both of which had resisted the formation of the Covenant. Why in 1910 did Mellander wish to draw attention to this episode from 1885, if not to underscore the idea that Covenant congregations from the beginning were comprised purely of believers? These are admittedly not the sum total of Mellander’s and Hjerpe’s writings, which have their depth and nuance. However, it is surprising that in this widely distributed anniversary text, written for the rank-and-file Covenanter, there would be a narrative of Covenant history that altogether lacks the nuanced perspective offered by Mother Simple. One wonders if Waldenström read it as he was being paraded around Chicago as the guest of honor at the anniversary events that year.

However, despite moments of conspicuous absence, Mother Simple’s spirit has managed to survive. In Covenant historiography, no account is complete without paying homage to F. M. Johnson’s invocation of Psalm 119:63 (“I am a companion of all them that fear thee”) at the organizational meeting in 1885. This is taken as symbolic of the idea that, as James R. Hawkinson has framed it, Covenant congregations are open to “Only Believers, All Believers.”⁶⁹ In his anthology of excerpts from Covenant authors, Hawkinson includes statements by Hjerpe as well as C. V. Bowman to this effect.⁷⁰ But in these texts, neither Hjerpe nor Bowman problematizes this stance to the degree that Mother Simple does. Scott Erickson⁷¹ and Kurt Peterson⁷² have each pointed out that the earlier generous vision of congregational inclusivity inherited from Pietism was challenged in the first half of the twentieth century by strains of American fundamentalism. Both also indicate that David Nyvall is primarily to be thanked for the preservation of the earlier “Mission Friend” heritage. In general, there seems to be a tradition of favoring Nyvall over Waldenström, a view perhaps pioneered by Karl A. Olsson, who was

perennially reluctant to give too much credit to Waldenström. Olsson did not have a favorable opinion of *Squire Adamsson*, primarily because its emphasis on simplicity cast doubt on seminary education.⁷³ Maybe this preference is due to the fact that Nyvall was better at *acting like* Mother Simple than Waldenström was. Nevertheless, Mother Simple lives on, as evident in more recent descriptions of Covenant identity, such as Paul Larsen's words written in the 1980s.

The Covenant has attempted to take a middle course between "churchly" inclusivism and "sectarian" exclusivism. It is on this precarious tightrope that the Covenant over the years has sought to stand. And on this stand it need make no apology to those churches who feel the Covenant's insistence on conversion is too narrow and romantic. Nor does the Covenant need to be apologetic about receiving anyone into fellowship solely on the basis of simple trust in Jesus Christ.⁷⁴

The Covenant certainly has plenty of precedents for claiming this narrative as foundational to its identity. The salient point here is that this has not always been self-evident, and at various points in history there have been strong pulls toward greater exclusivity. The persistence of the "Mother Simple Narrative" is due to the fact that periodically, Covenanters have immersed themselves in the original texts from the 1840s-1870s and the circle around Rosenius, including champions of this identity such as C. J. Nyvall,⁷⁵ Amy Moberg,⁷⁶ and Lina Sandell.⁷⁷ Few texts from this period were as widely read as *Squire Adamsson*.

In reading Waldenström's allegory for the first time, the uninitiated may find the emotional melodrama and anxiety exhibited by Adamsson and Mother Simple to be a bit over the top and perhaps borderline heretical. However, taken in the historical context of Lutheran Pietism and all the turbulence brought about by the religious awakenings, Mother Simple's resolute stance on inclusivity and search for harmony may make more sense. Philip J. Anderson has explained the preoccupation with harmony among these early leaders as evidence of spiritual maturity and an ambitious vision.

Early Covenanters spoke repeatedly of the need for *harmony* in the church and among the churches.[...] Even a passing acquaintance with Covenant history reveals how painful and problematic has been the challenge of living into this mature ideal of life together. How can Christians, who are the friends

of Christ, the beloved community, regardless of their structure
conduct their life together in any other spirit?⁷⁸

When seen in this light, the trials and tribulations of Mother Simple and Adamsson as they seek truth and explore community in Evangelium can be an excellent starting point for understanding the challenges and blessings of being part of a Covenant congregation.

Endnotes

1. Harry Lindström, *I Livsfrågornasspänningsfält; Om P. Waldenströms Brukspatron Adamsson—populär folkbok och allegorisk roman* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1997), 40-42, 70; Gunnar Hallingberg, *Läsarna: 1800-talets folkväckelse och det moderna genombrottet* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2010), 346-48. Peter Fjellstedt is a prime example of a preacher who drew from the allegorical tradition of interpretation from Luther and St. Paul.

2. Lindström, 10; Hallingberg, 354.

3. Waldenström, *Squire Adamsson: Or Where Do You Live?* Translated with commentary and notes by Mark Safstrom, foreword by Gracia Grindal (Seattle: Pietisten, 2013). All quotations are from this translation, but the page numbers are the from the 2003 Swedish edition.

4. William Bredberg, *P. P. Waldenströms verksamhet till 1878; Till frågan om Svenska Missionsförbundets uppkomst* (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundet, 1948), 55-56, 64; Bredberg identified *Squire Adamsson* as reflecting “Rosenius’s “own melody” and serving as “a useable compendium in Rosenian dogma.” One of Rosenius’s few criticisms of the allegory was that he wished that Waldenström would have gone further by emphasizing themes from Romans 8.

5. Galatians 4:30-31.

6. Waldenström, *Biblisk troslära* (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundet, 1918), 117.

7. *Ibid.*, 123.

8. *Ibid.*, 124.

9. *Ibid.*, 140-41.

10. *Ibid.*, 126.

11. *Ibid.*, 127.

12. *Ibid.*, 121.

13. *Ibid.*, 122.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 129.

16. *Ibid.*, 134. Waldenström’s assumption that the pastor is male reflects the practice of his time.

17. Waldenström, *Brukspatron Adamsson: Eller var bor du?* 11th edition (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundet, 2003), 162.

18. *Ibid.*, 19.

19. Bredberg, 10, 13.

20. For instance, Waldenström maintained his ordination in the state church until 1882, and remained active as a layman representative in the church’s governing body, the Church Assembly (*Kyrkomötet*), as late as 1910.

21. Eric W Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 155.

22. *Biblisk troslära*, 123.

23. Waldenström argued that even the state church could be built up from within. *Arvet från Waldenström*, ed. Erland Sundström (Falköping: Gummessons, 1978.), 106.

24. *Biblisk troslära*, 128.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Gritsch, 193.
27. Arne Fritzson, "En Gud som är god och rättfärdig," in *Liv och rörelse: Svenska missionskyrkans historia och identitet*, Hans Andreasson, et al (Stockholm: Verbum, 2007), 360-72.
28. *Brukspatron Adamsson*, 101.
29. Zinzendorf articulated this supremacy of experience in "Thoughts for the Learned and Yet Good-Willed Students of Truth," in which he states "Religion must be a matter which is able to be grasped through experience alone, without any concepts." *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 291.
30. *Brukspatron Adamsson*, 75.
31. *Ibid.*, 94.
32. *Ibid.*, 62-63.
33. *Ibid.*, 163.
34. *Ibid.*, 167-68.
35. *Ibid.*, 170.
36. Lindström, 170-75.
37. *Ibid.*, 16.
38. *Ibid.*, 221.
39. *Brukspatron Adamsson*, 170-71.
40. Lindström, 228.
41. *Ibid.*, 235.
42. Ragnar Tomson, *En politisk vilde i 25 riksdagar; P. P. Waldenström i Sveriges Riksdag 1885-1905* (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundet, 1942), 22.
43. Lindström, 238.
44. Waldenström, *Om ungdomens farligaste fiende; Ett ord till Föräldrar och Lärare* (Lund: Berlingske, 1867), 46.
45. Lindström, 242.
46. *Om ungdomens farligaste fiende*, 2.
47. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
48. *Ibid.*, 6, 9.
49. *Ibid.*, 10.
50. *Ibid.*, 12.
51. *Ibid.*, 14.
52. *Ibid.*, 17.
53. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
54. *Ibid.*, 21.
55. *Ibid.*, 23, 25.
56. *Ibid.*, 26-27.
57. *Ibid.*, 29.
58. *Ibid.*, 28.
59. *Ibid.*, 30.
60. *Ibid.*, 31.
61. *Ibid.*, 36, 39.
62. *Ibid.*, 46.
63. *Ibid.*, 18.
64. *Ibid.*, 34.
65. *Brukspatron Adamsson*, 98.
66. E. G. Hjerpe, "Guds Församling," in *Missionsförbundets Minneskrift 1885-1910* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1910), 57.

67. Ibid., 60.
68. Quoted in Axel Mellander, "Svenska Evangeliska Missionsförbundets i Amerika Uppkomst och Utveckling," in *Missionsförbundets Minneskrift*, 35.
69. James R. Hawkinson, *Glad Hearts: Voices from the Literature of the Covenant Church* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2003), 360.
70. E. G. Hjerpe, "The History and Principles of Our Denomination," in *Covenant Roots: Sources and Affirmations*, ed. Glenn P. Anderson (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1980, 1999), 97; C. V. Bowman, "About the Principles of the Missions Friends," in *Covenant Roots*, 80-81.
71. Scott E. Erickson, *David Nyvall and the Shape of an Immigrant Church: Ethnic, Denominational, and Educational Priorities among Swedes in America* (Uppsala, Sweden: University of Uppsala Press, 1996), 212-22.
72. Kurt Peterson, "Reclaiming a Pietist Heritage: The Evangelical Covenant Church during the Fundamentalist Era," unpublished paper, Elgin, Illinois, not dated.
73. Karl A. Olsson, "Paul Peter Waldenström and Augustana," in *The Swedish Immigrant Community in Transition*, ed. J. Iverne Dowie and Ernest M. Espelie (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Historical Society, 1963), 110.
74. Paul E. Larsen, *The Mission of a Covenant* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1985), 12-13.
75. C. J. Nyvall, *Travel Memories from America, 1876*, trans. E. Gustav Johnson (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1959), 21-22.
76. Bredberg, *Waldenströms verksamhet*, 145.
77. Anne-Marie Riiber, *Lina Sandell* (Uppsala, Sweden: Lindblads, 1950), 129-30.
78. Philip J. Anderson, "The Community of Friends in Christ: Order and the Evangelical Covenant Church," in *Servant Leadership, Volume One: Authority and Governance in the Evangelical Covenant Church*, ed. James R. Hawkinson and Robert K. Johnston (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1993), 111-12.