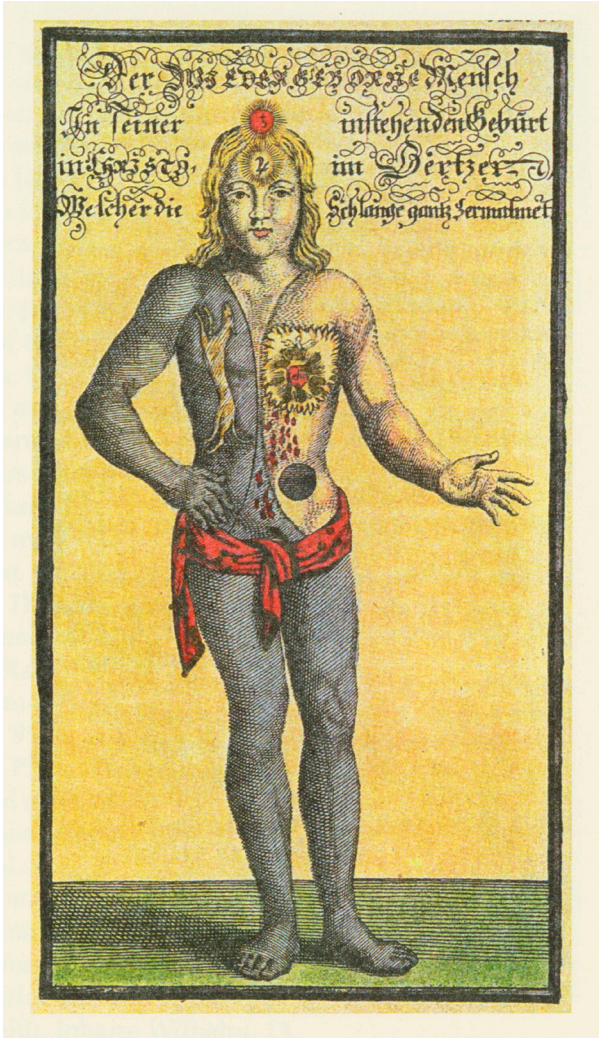


**Natural Man Illumined: Johann Gichtel's
Mystical Figures at Ephrata**
Nick Siegert



*Figure 1, [Plate 2]
Johann Georg Gichtel:
Awakening Man
(1696)*

Prelude

Question: What does **the** figure 1 (above) have in common with figure 2 on the next page?... Up until recently, as far as was known, nothing, but after a recent chance discovery, they actually appear to be the same subject separated by about seventy years. Recently, a new examination of some



Figure 2.
Jacob Martin:
Mystical Figure
(1760s.?)

Image courtesy
Pennsylvania Historical
and Museum Commission,
Ephrata Cloister.

illustrations found in the papers of Jacob Martin, a member of the eighteenth-century Ephrata Community, have turned up some interesting results that may shed more light on the beliefs and world views of the Ephrata Community and one of its more interesting members.

Introduction: The Ephrata Community

The Ephrata Cloister, now a historic site and museum administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, began as a religious communal society (one of America's earliest), founded by Georg Conrad Beissel on the banks of Cocalico Creek in 1732. Born in Eberbach, Germany, in 1691, Beissel immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1720. Before 1724 he moved into an area drained by the Conestoga River, seeking to live in a small fellowship of hermits. Eventually he became involved with the Brethren, or Dunkers, a group founded in 1708 in Schwarzenau, Germany. In 1724, Beissel was baptized into this new group and became one of their ministers. Beissel emphasized unusual practices, such as worship on the Sabbath and the superiority of celibacy. This caused a break from the rest of the Brethren in 1728. In 1732 Beissel abandoned his small break-away congregation and moved to the banks of Cocalico Creek. Here he joined Emmanuel Eckerlin, one of his members who was already living beside the Cocalico. Soon three celibate men and two celibate women followed Beissel to his new location. The group built cabins and launched the nucleus of what would become the Ephrata community, named by its members the "Camp of the Solitary." Beissel gave the community the name of Ephrata in 1736. Soon more people followed, seeking celibate lives under Beissel's leadership. Married families, known as householders, also came. They settled on farms around the monastic community. The community achieved a pinnacle of artistic achievement in its ornamented calligraphy (*Fraktur*) and original music compositions and hymn text writing around 1750. The community was also distinguished by its highly developed printing operation, one of the largest in the colonies before the Revolutionary War. This period from 1745 to 1750 also marked the peak membership, with about eighty celibates and approximately 220 people in householder families. By 1760 decline set in, accelerating after Beissel's death in 1768. The death of the last celibate sister in 1813 marked the end of Ephrata's monastic celibate community.¹ The householder families reorganized the congregation into the German Seventh Day Baptists and formed a bond with English Seventh Day Baptists in the nineteenth century. The German Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata were never a large congregation, and by the early twentieth century had slipped into decline and internal disputes. Finally, the property, buildings, and surviving artifacts were sold to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Historic Commission took over the site in 1941, embarking on a long restoration

process that resulted in the current museum. Today the thirty-acre site is available for tours, special events, and ongoing research opportunities.

The hand drawn illustration (fig. 2), which for the sake of convenience, I will refer to as the “Mystical Figure,” comes from the Ephrata Cloister collection and is part of the papers of Jacob Martin, a married member of the Ephrata Congregation. Little is known about Jacob Martin before his association with Ephrata which can be documented no earlier than 1761. He was born in Europe on June 10, 1725, and died as a “Good Christian” (as stated on his tombstone) on July 19, 1790. The tombstone also states that he was a “High Philosopher.”²

The papers of Jacob Martin contain essays about spiritual rebirth and creation, some notes on astronomical observations, excerpts from alchemical manuals, and writings on theosophical and astrological themes. Many of Martin’s writings, part of the Pennypacker Papers at the Ephrata Cloister, have been translated by Elizabethtown College professor, Jeff Bach.

The religious world view of Ephrata is complicated. It contains strong Anabaptist, Pietist, Christian mystical, and Protestant Christian beliefs, but it also contains a healthy sprinkling of Radical Pietist beliefs, including disciplines of hidden knowledge such as alchemy, astrology, numerology, folk magic, and Christian Kabala. Various individuals and groups at Ephrata applied different elements of these practices, some of them even coinciding. While some writings exist that give a good idea of the religious themes and beliefs at Ephrata, no concise systematic record of Ephrata’s creed was ever recorded. Not everyone at Ephrata shared the exact same beliefs nor were they all consistent across the board.

While a good deal of time and study went into the writings of Jacob Martin, little attention was given to the illustrations in the collection. When Dr. Bach first encountered the figure,³ he recalled being struck by the planetary symbols associated with different body parts and felt there might be some kind alchemical or spiritual rebirth and illumination elements associated with it. However, there were questions as to who actually created the image and Bach decided to set it aside for later consideration.⁴

My first encounter with this figure occurred when I was researching possible connections between Ephrata and the early Mormon Church. In Michael D. Quinn’s book, *Early Mormonism and the Magical World View* (1987), an important book in Mormon scholarship, Quinn explores magical and folk beliefs in early eighteenth and nineteenth century America, and

their possible influences on the early Mormon Church. Quinn conducted research for his book at Ephrata in the 1980s and included the image of the Mystical Figure (fig. 2, page 83). Regarding this figure, he wrote,

A member of the Rosicrucian Ephrata commune, in Lancaster Pennsylvania, in the late 1700's drew a picture of a man wearing a religio-magical garment featuring a salamander. The astrological symbol for Saturn was on the man's crown and the symbol for Jupiter on his forehead. On the left breast of his garment, surrounded by flames, was the Sacred Heart of Jesus with a stick figure of an ascending bird (apparently either the Christian symbol of a dove as the Holy Ghost or the mythical Phoenix symbol of resurrection), and on the garment's right breast was a stick figure of a four footed reptile – obviously a salamander, which figured prominently in the Rosicrucian philosophy of elemental spirits that the Ephrata commune had mixed with its Christian mysticism.⁵

Earlier scholarship on Ephrata was greatly influenced by the German-American historian, Julius Sachse;⁶ however, some of his conclusions and claims, based on questionable, manipulated, or undocumented evidence, leads to the conclusion that his writings must be read carefully. Many subsequent writers seemed to take Sachse completely at his word, and Quinn appears to be following in this vein. Quinn goes on to write,

At the crown of the head is an astrological symbol for Saturn, on the forehead the symbol for Jupiter. Over the left breast, surrounded by flames, is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is dripping sanctifying blood upon the planet earth. From the heart is the stick figure of an ascending bird (the Christian symbol for the Holy Ghost or the mythological Phoenix). Over the right breast is the stick figure of a four-footed reptile (representing the Ephrata Commune's Rosicrucian theology of the salamander as the elemental spirit of fire). The sash belt reflects descriptions of both biblical and magic vestments. However, the Ephrata garment was of skin-tight, wrist to ankle construction, with fastening seam from chest to navel.⁷

Although fascinating, some elements of what Quinn wrote regarding this figure appeared to me to be incorrect. Subsequent scholarship on Ephrata has called into question the Rosicrucian connection,⁸ and the actual description of this “religio-magical” garment featuring the salamander was extremely questionable. There is simply nothing like that garment in any of the depictions of Ephrata clothing or garb, neither at the time, nor in the art work where the clothing of the members is depicted, nor in any firsthand accounts of what they wore. The heavy emphasis on the salamander is also not present in Ephrata writings. I assumed that Quinn was following earlier Ephrata research based on Julius Sachse, which will be discussed later on in this paper. While looking through the Jacob Martin papers in the Ephrata collection, I finally saw the actual illustrations (featured on pages 83, 88, and 89).

I thought the illustrations were colorful, enigmatic, and interesting, but at the time, I was more interested in other things Quinn had to say about the early Mormon Church, so I set aside my interests the Mystical Figure. This paper will address only figures 2 and 3. Figure 4, although not discussed here, was from Jacob Boehme’s treatise, *Six Theosophical Points*.⁹ The fact that Jacob Martin chose to depict it, suggests that it had significant meaning for him and lends possible support to the claim that Jacob Boehme, as well as Johann Gichtel were significant influences on Jacob Martin and the thought of Ephrata.

While reading Arthur Versluis’s book, *Wisdom’s Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition*, I was startled to find figure 1 staring back at me. I immediately realized that figure 1 and figure 2 were depictions of this same thing. This marked the real beginning of my research which resulted in this paper. Figure 1 is actually one of a series of four plates that come from a treatise published by Johann Georg Gichtel in 1696: *Einekruz Eroffnung und Anweisung der drei Prinzipien und Weltenimim Menschen* – “A Brief Opening and Demonstration of the Three Principals and Worlds in Man.”¹⁰ (The four plates from Gichtel’s book are shown on pages 91, 94, 99, and 100).

Johann Gichtel (1638-1710) was a writer, visionary, and theosophist, who promoted and published the work of early seventeenth-century visionary and mystic Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). Gichtel compiled the first complete edition of Boehme’s works. He also distilled the ideas and writing of Boehme and was extremely important in spreading Boehme’s ideas and thought to Conrad Beissel and other radical pietists.¹¹ He was also a significant theosophical writer and mystic in his own right,



Figure 3. Jacob Martin, (1760s?)

Image courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Ephrata Cloister.



Figure 4. Jacob Martin, [based on an illustration from Jacob Boehme's treatise, Six Theosophical Points] (1760s?)

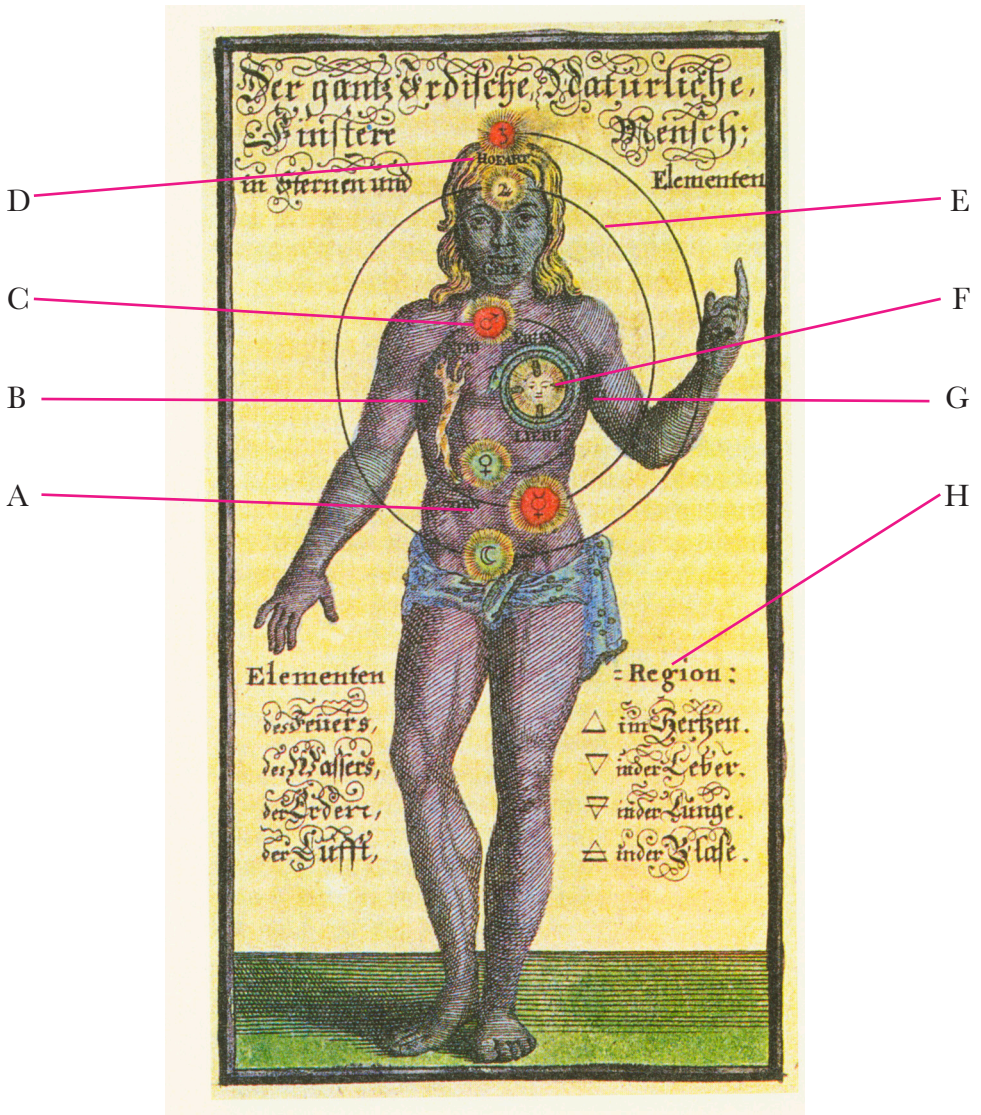
Image courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Ephrata Cloister.

and a commentator on spiritual alchemy, which draws heavily from the work of Boehme. According to Arthur Versluis, these illustrations and accompanying treatise by Gichtel depict planetary symbolism and the process of spiritual transformation on the body.¹² The Mystical Figure from the Jacob Martin papers, (fig. 2, page 83) is clearly a reproduction of the Gichtel's, "Awakening Man" (plate 2, page 94). Because Jacob Martin reproduced two of the figures from this Gichtel treatise, it must have held some special significance for him. It is my purpose to describe what meaning Johann Gichtel attributed to these figures in his treatise, then to explain the meaning they had for Jacob Martin, and more largely, Conrad Beissel and the Ephrata Community. The majority of information for this analysis comes from the book, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (1999), by Arthur Versluis. I am also indebted to Dr. Jeff Bach from Elizabethtown College for his knowledge, generosity, and assistance.

According to Arthur Versluis, these are very rare illustrations, as these are the only illustrations he has encountered that depict both the planetary symbolism of the human body and its relationship to the entire process of spiritual transmutation.¹³ It has been observed that some of the plates, especially plate 1 (page 91), resemble Chakras from the Tantric tradition. However, Versluis cautions against applying eastern disciplines to a subject better addressed in the sphere of Christian Theosophy.¹⁴ Gichtel probably had no knowledge of eastern or tantric disciplines; at least there is no evidence of it. I will now concentrate on describing what Gichtel depicted in the four plates. Captions beneath each plate will assist in the understanding of these illustrations.

Plate 1. *Der finstere Mensch* – Earthly Darkened or Sinister Man

The illustration opposite shows plate 1, *Der finstere Mensch* – Earthly Darkened or Sinister Man. This is man in the unregenerate state. In this condition man is subject to his human nature, his elemental self. In this state the planetary energies dominate. This illustration is not clear, but specific negative emotions are written in different areas on the body. The labels and arrows indicate them clearly. These planetary energies/influences are manifested as ambition in the head, jealousy in the chest, and anger in the abdomen.¹⁵



A) Anger in abdomen; B) Dog symbolizes desires, animal self and is turned toward the heart influencing it; C) Jealousy in chest; D) Ambition in the head; E) Spiral extending inward from top of head (Saturn), down through hand and arm to lower abdomen (moon), up through forehead (Jupiter), down to the umbilical region (Mercury), up to the upper chest (Mars), down to the solar plexus (Venus), and finally around to the heart (Sun); F) Love in heart; G) Cold damp serpet encircling heart so that it cannot radiate warm dry love; H) Four Elements have an effect on certain organs or regions of the body: Heart associated with Fire; Liver associated with Water, Lungs related to Earth; Bladder associated with Air.

A dog symbolizing desire and the animal-self is turned toward the heart, influencing it negatively. *Der finstere Mensch* also has love in his heart, a positive emotion, but as the illustration shows, a cold damp serpent encircles the heart so that it cannot radiate warm dry love. *Der finstere Mensch* is capable of love, but he has not yet realized this potential in himself. To realize this, he has to turn anger into love; he must transform negative emotions into positive ones through a process of spiritual transmutation. Unregenerate man possesses the potential for spiritual realization for which he must strive. Gichtel's four illustrations depict this process of striving.¹⁶ If I were to give this process another name, I would call it spiritual alchemy—a process of transmutation of the soul—changing the spiritual body to a higher state, as opposed to physical alchemy where base metals and other substances are changed to higher ones. Both spiritual and physical alchemy appear in Gichtel's works, although Gichtel regarded spiritual alchemy as far superior.

A planetary spiral extends inward from the top of the head (Saturn), down through the hand and arm to the lower abdomen (moon), up through forehead (Jupiter), down to the umbilical region (Mercury), up to the upper chest (Mars), down to the solar plexus (Venus), and finally around to the heart (Sun).¹⁷ The planetary symbolism is also linked in a particular order: the inward spiral shown above also extends in an outward direction starting from the sun. The spiral moves outward from sun (masculine) to Venus (feminine) to Mars (masculine) to Mercury (feminine) to Jupiter (masculine) to the Moon (feminine) to Saturn (masculine). So, this spiral path follows a natural and astrological polarity both inward and outward¹⁸ as well as a gender polarity from masculine to feminine and vice versa.

Besides the planetary influences, the four elements also had effects on certain organs or regions of the body: the heart is associated with fire. The liver is associated with water. The lungs are related to Earth. The bladder is associated with air. The planetary symbolism of the body also has a relationship to the elements: The moon is related to the generative organs which are associated with water. The sun is related to the heart (the body's center) which is also associated with love.¹⁹

This concept of astral bodies and elements influencing human bodies is closely related to the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. It refers to a vision of the cosmos where the part (microcosm) reflects the whole (macrocosm) and vice versa. It appears to be a feature present in many esoteric schools of thinking, and is linked to theories of

astrology, alchemy, and sacred geometry.

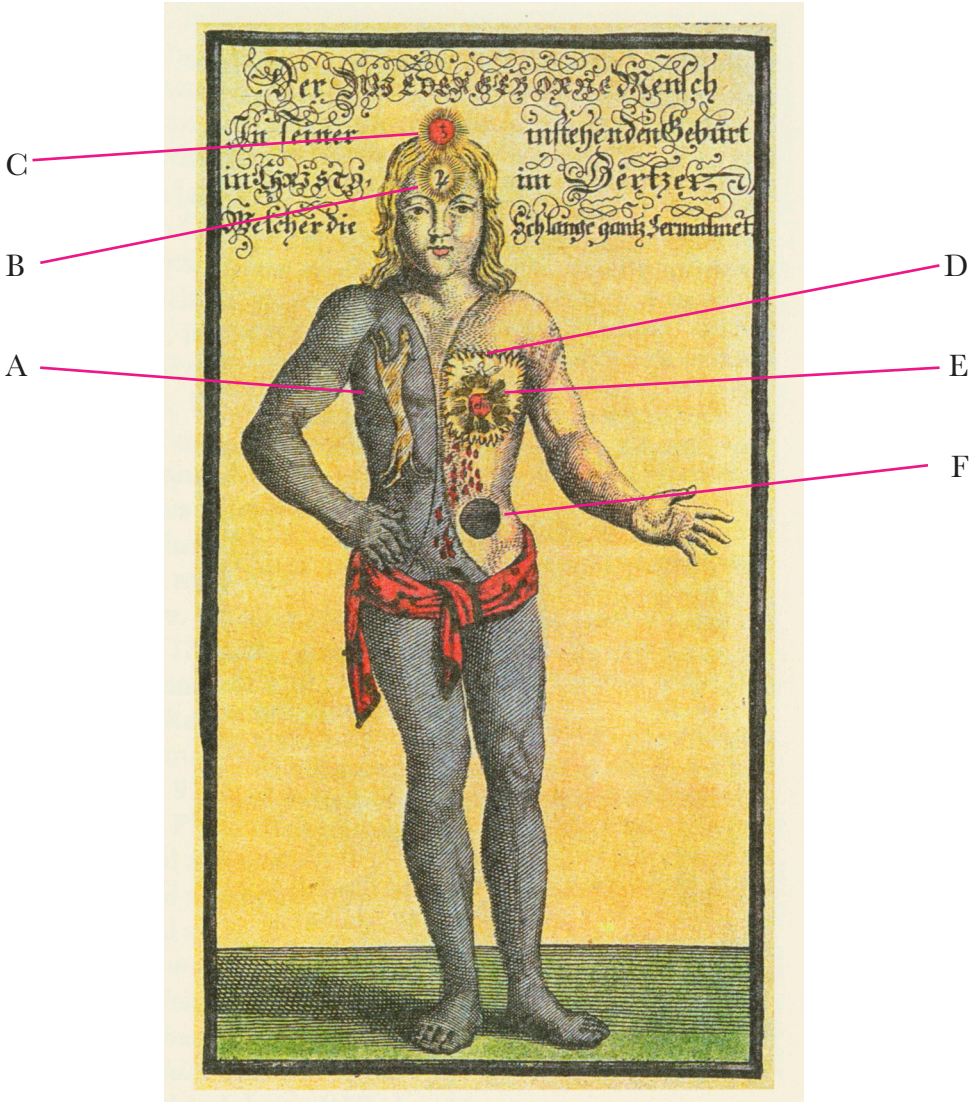
Arthur Versluis also observes that the seven planets correspond to the seven forms or emanations of eternal nature. Jacob Boehme describes them as the seven properties or qualities of eternal nature.²⁰ This is a very significant part of Jacob Boehme's philosophy, which heavily influenced Ephrata.

Another way to think of Gichtel's publication is to think of it as guide along a spiritual path that he himself followed from the dark or wrathful world of fallen man to divinely regenerated man. According to Versluis, this treatise contains a good deal of Gichtel's own autobiography. As a youth his unconventional spirituality brought him to the attention of church and city authorities who

“mocked, insulted, and humiliated me, led me over the streets and wanted to force my head down, but because they could not ultimately agree, they finally took everything from me and banned me eternally from the city.....So now I lay in a stinking hole, locked up, tempted by the devil and tested by gruesome doubts, so much so that I grasped a knife and would have, in order to save my anxious life from suffering, brought my life with a stab to a quick end.”²¹

But, instead of committing suicide, Gichtel experienced a vision that inspired him to follow a long and difficult path of poverty and spiritual struggle toward Sophianic illumination.²²

Plate 2. Awakening Man



A) The dog representing his animal nature is now turned outward, away from the heart; B) Jupiter; C) Saturn; D) Serpent no longer circles the sun which now drips blood downwards; E) The heart inscribed “Jesus” shows a bird, maybe phoenix, eagle, or dove representing the Holy Spirit rising out of its light; F) Only planet now visible below the heart is Mercury which receives the blood.

Plate 2 shows Awakening Man – engaged in spiritual struggle. As the illustration shows, his body is now only partly subject to the *finstere Welt* or “dark world.” In this illustration, man is striving toward spiritual illumination. He has made vast improvements, but he still has a way to go towards full spiritual illumination. As the illustration shows, the planetary influence is not nearly as strong as it was. The planetary spiral is gone. Awakening Man is no longer influenced by seven, but only four planets or celestial bodies: Saturn, Jupiter, the Sun, and Mercury. The cold damp serpent no longer circles the sun which can now radiate warm, dry love. In the center of the sun, now appears a heart which drips blood down onto Mercury.²³ The dog, representing man’s animal nature, which appears very clearly in this illustration, is now turned outward, away from the heart, exercising less negative influence upon it. The heart inscribed “Jesus” shows a bird, maybe a phoenix, maybe an eagle, or maybe a dove, representing the Holy Spirit rising out of its light.²⁴

Examination of Michael D. Quinn’s Interpretation of Jacob Martin’s Mystical Figure in light of Gichtel’s Awakening Man

How similar was D. Michael Quinn’s interpretation of Martin’s Mystical Figure to Gichtel’s interpretation of Awakening Man?²⁵ The first part of Quinn’s description of the man or figure wearing a religio-magical garment is correct. Both the Mystical Figure and Awakening Man have the astrological symbol for Saturn on the crown of the head and the symbol for Jupiter on the forehead. Quinn was also fairly accurate regarding the depiction of the figure emerging out of the heart of the figure, especially considering the primitive nature of the illustration he had to work with.²⁶ Enlarged mid-section images of Gichtel’s Awakening Man and the Mystical Figure are shown **below**.

Quinn is also correct about the blood dripping from the heart of Jesus, however; the recipient of that blood is actually Mercury, not the planet Earth. The four-footed creature on the right breast is actually a dog, not a salamander, although the crude style of the artist and previous Ephrata research may have lead him to make that assumption. Quinn’s description of the sash belt reflecting both biblical and magic vestments is interesting. Whether the sash has any meaning in the Gichtel illustration is unclear. It may simply serve as covering for the loin area. Quinn describes this sash as part of a skin-tight garment with wrist to ankle construction, and a fastening seam from chest to navel.²⁷ In the Gichtel illustration, Awakening

Man's garment disappears. The upper and lower halves of the body appear unclothed, and the torso appears to be split into a “dark vs. light” spiritual division.

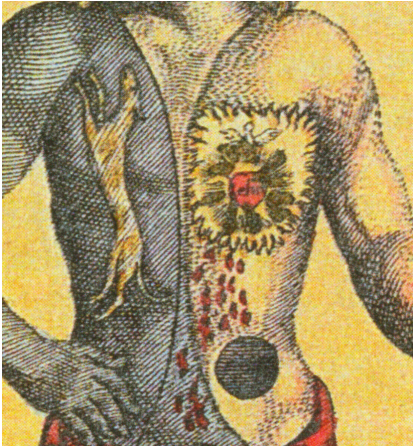


Figure 5.
Gichtel:
Awakening Man,
Mid-section, detail from plate 2.



Figure 6.
Martin:
Mystical Figure,
Mid-section, detail from figure 2.

Even if we did not have the Gichtel illustration with which to compare, it is clear that Quinn’s description of this “religio-magical garment” simply does not fit. As stated earlier, there is nothing like that garment in any of the depictions of Ephrata clothing or garb at the time, neither in the art work, nor in any firsthand accounts of what they wore. One very interesting aspect of the Jacob Martin illustration, not mentioned by Quinn, and not appearing in the Gichtel illustration or treatise, is the overly emphasized hairy left arm (fig. 2, page 83). In the Jacob Martin illustration, the arm is almost mammalian. Could this symbolize the “base” animal instincts that human beings strive to suppress? Spiritual and religious literature throughout history has examples of this tendency.

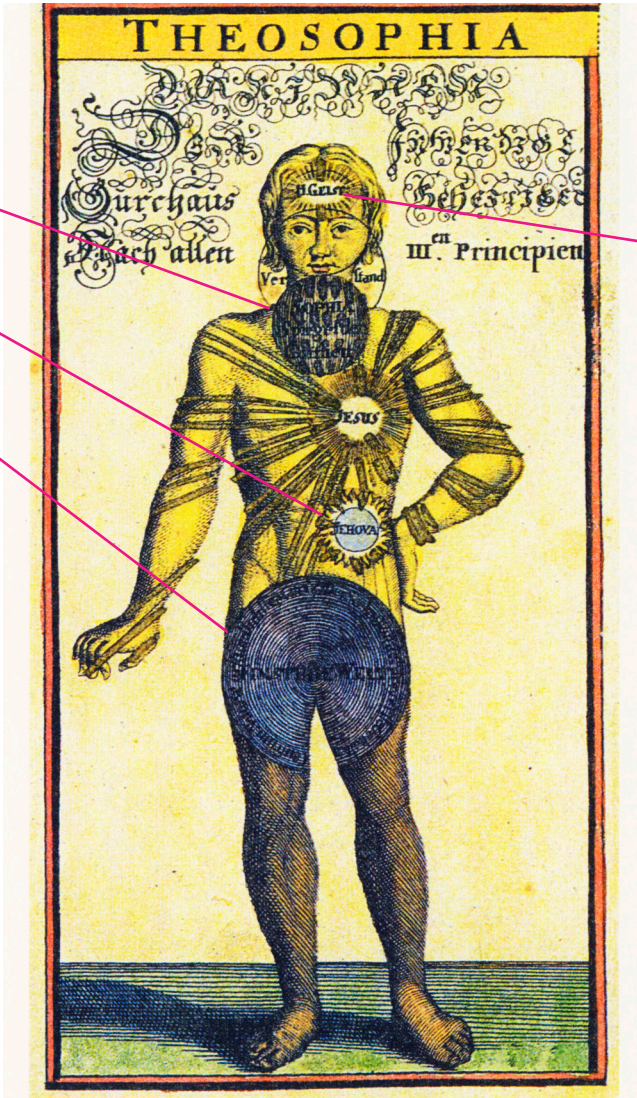
Quinn’s association of the Mystical Figure with Rosicrucian philosophy is understandable. The theory that Ephrata was a Rosicrucian order most likely emerged from the work of Julius Sachse. Sachse was an amateur historian and important antiquarian of the late 1800s. He can be credited with saving and disseminating much of the early history of Ephrata. He was

also an excellent photographer, responsible for recording and preserving many of the earliest and best photographic images of Ephrata and its spinoff, the Snow Hill Monastery, in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. His contributions to Ephrata research cannot and should not be discounted. However; Sachse was not above elaborating, bending, manipulating, and even fabricating facts and evidence to make a good story.²⁸ One should not forget that his massive two volume history of Ephrata is subtitled *A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers*. His book is a serious piece of research, but it was written in a more romantic literary style than the modern academic history of today, and it must be read with a critical eye. His book also contains few footnotes or citations, making the verification of some of his claims difficult if not impossible. It is unlikely that Julius Sachse was familiar with Jacob Martin's *Mystical Figure*, however; the strength of his interpretation and his dominance in Ephrata research up to that point obviously influenced Quinn's perception. Unfortunately, many other subsequent historians researching Ephrata seemed to take Sachse completely at his word. In 1985, E. G. Alderfer published, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counter Culture*. This book was written in a modern academic style, but the great majority of its evidence comes from Sachse, and other authors that took him at his word. It has also been alleged that Alderfer didn't even visit the site while researching his book.²⁹ Quinn possibly accepted Alderfer's book as the newest and most reliable source of modern scholarship on Ephrata, and his frequent use of term "commune" suggests that he was influenced by Alderfer's book.³⁰ Based on the previous accepted research, Quinn created a narrative for the *Mystical Figure* that fit his understanding of the evidence. Thus, Sachse and Alderfer continue to affect interpretations of Ephrata to this day.

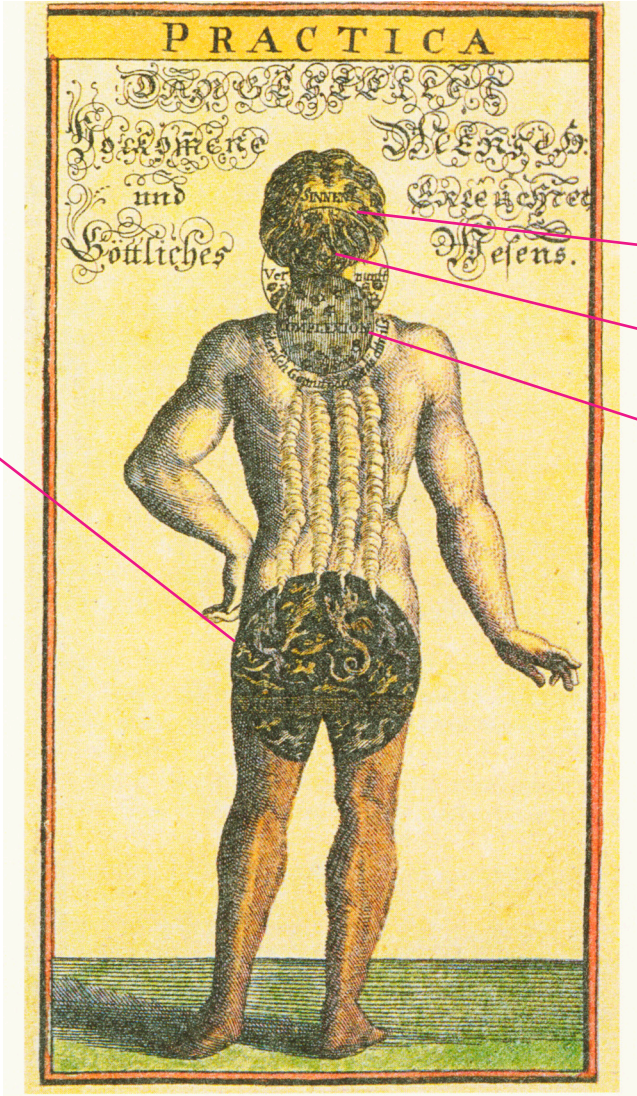
Plates 3 & 4. Theosophical/Regenerated Man

Now we move to the last two plates in Gichtel's treatise. In these plates (plates 3 & 4) we see Illuminated, Regenerated, or Theosophical Man from the front and back. Jacob Martin also depicted the **front and back views of this figure**, in his papers (see fig. 3). In these plates we see more spiritual improvement. Regenerated Man is no longer subject to the planetary influences. Saturn and Jupiter have been replaced by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is located in the upper region of the head because the Holy Spirit inspires the divine intellect in human beings. Mars has been replaced by Sophia. Sophia is in the throat because through prayer, fasting, and invocation, human beings come to realize Christ. Sophia is associated with the word, and with breath, through which human beings live, and through which they can return to a state of spiritual realization and unity like that enjoyed by Adam before the fall. Mercury has been replaced by Jehovah. Jehovah/God/The Father is represented in the abdomen (where formerly anger resided), because human anger is like a distorted reflection of divine wrath, which belongs to the Father. Thus, Jehovah is just above the dark world, which is divine wrath incarnate. You will also notice that the Heart Sun that resided in "wakening Man" has been replaced by Jesus. Jesus illuminates the whole body with his rays. The heart is the place of central illumination in the human being just like the sun is the illuminating center of the solar system. Jacob Boehme also stressed repeatedly that Jesus is the heart of the father.³¹ It is then through prayer that the heart reveals or illuminates Christ to us. Now in Illuminated Man, we have a representation of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as well as Sophia.³²

But beware! All is not well. Hell, Satan and the "finstere Welt" (the Dark World) still remain in the generative regions of the body. So, man is never completely free from the dark regions and influences, as illustrated by the lines of smoke that reach up from below. This constant danger of the influence of the dark or generative regions of the body is a distinctive trait of Johann Gichtel. Gichtel weaves much of the thought of Jacob Bohme into his writing, but this focus on the danger of the sexual organs is uniquely Gichtelian and will be discussed in more detail further on. Plate 4 also shows three circles near the head. The lowest is "complexion." The circle in the middle is "reason," and above them all is "intellectual sense." In this illustration, man is no longer subject to planetary influences only. He has gone beyond this limiting factor to a higher spiritual level. The process of regeneration and transmutation to a higher state has gone as far as it can within the human body.³³



A)Hell, Satan, Dark World in the Regenerative Regions; B) Mercury Replaced by Jehovah; C) Mars Replaced by Sophia; D) Saturn and Jupiter Replaced by the Holy Spirit; E) The heart inscribed “Jesus” shows a bird, maybe phoenix, eagle, or dove representing the Holy Spirit rising out of its light; F) Only planet now visible below the heart is Mercury which receives the blood.



A) Hell, Satan, Dark World in the Regenerative Regions; B) Intellectual Sense; C) Reason; D) Complexion; E) Lines of Smoke From the Dark Regions.

Some Observations Concerning These Illustrations

In these illustrations and the writings that accompany them, Gichtel is saying that we need to undertake an inward journey and go through a process of spiritual realization:

When the wisdom loving reader seeks God, in his wonders, and wishes to see his hidden Trinity in himself, he must contemplate all things in himself, must learn to experience in himself the threefold birth and life; he must come to know God's eternal likeness and image is in himself.³⁴

In another quote emphasizing this inward nature of the spiritual journey, Gichtel writes:

As human beings, we are created in the divine image even though we may be soiled by sin and ignorance. We also have within us the wrathful or dark world of sin and ignorance. How we live determines which of these worlds and/or planetary influences gains dominion, not only during the existence of the body, but after death as well. To practice Theosophy is to move toward illumination and joy. To live for the body and for this world is to move towards darkness and wrath.³⁵

Another interesting aspect of these illustrations emphasized by Arthur Versluis is how they depict the process or physiology of the soul and spirit. They represent a form of spirituality not separate from the body as in earlier Christian mystical accounts of the spiritual process. These illustrations represent a spirituality firmly grounded in the body. With these illustrations, Gichtel is saying that the body need not be rejected. Great spiritual truths can be realized here on earth in our current human bodies.

The Ephrata Connection

So, what does all this mean? We have a good idea of what Gichtel intended to portray with these illustrations and his treatise. We also know the interpretation that Quinn attributed to the Mystical Figure. But what meaning did it have for Jacob Martin, Conrad Beissel, and the Community of Ephrata? In order to address these questions, I turned to the Jacob

Martin papers in the Ephrata collection (Bach translated approximately eight works or treatises by Martin). The papers are convoluted and difficult to follow. Reading Jacob Martin is far more difficult than reading Conrad Beissel which is itself a challenge. I believe that Martin's treatise, *A Christian Explanation on the Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer and Adam,* was the most concise and clear to follow. My interpretations are shaped partly by conversations with Bach.

My first question pertained to the Mystical Figure itself. Was it a direct copy of Gichtel's Awakening Man from the 1696 treatise? I felt that it was a direct copy. Apparently at some time, this treatise was somewhat widely known. Jacob Martin at least had knowledge of its meaning. After reading the Martin papers and conferring with Jeff Bach, there don't appear to be any writings by Jacob Martin that pertain directly to *A Brief Opening and Demonstration of the Three Principals and Worlds in Man*, however; there are writings in the Martin papers that reflect the ideas of Boehme and Gichtel. Distinguishing between the Gichtel and Boehme influences in Martin's writings can be a challenge because they are sometimes intertwined and blended together. Martin is not copying Boehme or Gichtel. He is obviously generating his own interpretation, but drawing generously on both Boehme and Gichtel, using vocabulary from both of them. One of the Martin treatises, *Concerning Divine Union*, I found particularly useful in illustrating the challenge of teasing out the Boehme and Gichtel influences on Martin. This treatise was particularly difficult to follow, so I paraphrase Jeff Bach's description of this treatise below:

The treatise starts with a Bohme-like theme and goes alchemical, and then full tilt mysticism till the end. In it the writer is trying to help the person move to a mystical union, the union of your essence with God's essence. That is his ultimate point and to do that he uses a number of paths. Boehme's androgyny is one path in. Alchemy is one path in. Astrology also plays a large role in this treatise and it too is a path in. They all serve the same purpose – to get to mystical union. The vocabulary is different and because Martin jumps between three avenues on the way in, it is difficult to follow. But those are his three main avenues to the mystical union: alchemy, astrology, and Boehme's androgyny. But, he so easily moves back and forth between those three paths, and he doesn't tell you when he is switching from one to the other.³⁶

I will now address these three topics of alchemy, sexuality, and astrology to see if I can determine the areas where Gichtel's influence was most profound. I will be drawing mainly on the treatise, *Concerning Divine Union*, but other treatises and materials as well.

Alchemy

I maintain that the strong alchemical language that appears in Martin's treatise, *Concerning Divine Union*, and in most of his other treatises, serves as an example of Johann Gichtel's influence. Both Boehme and Gichtel utilized alchemical terminology and metaphors in their writing; however, Gichtel had a more thorough knowledge of physical alchemy, and according to Arthur Versluis, knew many physical alchemists himself. Some of Gichtel's letters imply that he knew about and believed in actual physical alchemy, but he also knew about and derided charlatans of the trade. True alchemy, Gichtel emphasized, was spiritual alchemy, under the guidance of Holy Sophia.³⁷ Authentic alchemical mysteries could be understood, but only by working first inwardly. Those that worked outwardly, seeking only material gain through greed, were in grave error.³⁸ The mystical language of Ephrata contains numerous alchemical metaphors in describing the soul's transformation in spiritual rebirth and union with God. A former Ephrata member once described Conrad Beissel as a "spiritual alchemist," who dissolves words and "brings forth the spiritual body," or the "gold of faith," but who also deceives people.³⁹ While it is perhaps safe to assume that the alchemy practiced at Ephrata was more of the spiritual variety, physical alchemy at Ephrata cannot be completely ruled out, and if anyone was practicing physical alchemy at Ephrata, that most likely practitioner was Jacob Martin. Many of Martin's papers in the Ephrata collection contain notations about experiments with gold, salt, mercury, calcinated tartar, tirolit, ethyl alcohol, and a red tincture, which suggest that he was a practitioner, or at least dabbled in the art.⁴⁰ One of the Martin's papers also contains a sketch of a little vial with a globe-shaped base and narrow tubular neck, along with instructions as to how it is to be used.⁴¹ Earlier archeology at Ephrata also suggests that pieces of glass tubing found during excavations, might support claims of alchemy.⁴² Jeff Bach states that Martin also copied sources from typical sixteenth- and seventeenth-century alchemists, and the Martin papers contain a number of quotes and even page-numbered citations from Georg von Welling's *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum*.⁴³ It is known that copies of this book were at

Ephrata.⁴⁴ Julius Sachse claims that in 1762, Beissel authorized Martin to try to produce gold to provide new income, although no documentation exists to support this claim. Sachse makes numerous claims in his massive three-volume work that suggests Alchemy was practiced in Pennsylvania from the eighteenth up until the late nineteenth, and even the twentieth century. There is also evidence that alchemy and other elements of western esotericism were practiced by the Harmony Society of Georg Rapp, and while Harmony dates later than Ephrata, the possibility that alchemy also existed there suggests that it was fairly wide spread in Pennsylvania in the eighteenth and even into the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The evidence suggests that Jacob Martin had a thorough knowledge of spiritual alchemy and may have experimented with physical alchemy, but as of yet, no conclusive evidence has been found. Even if Martin did indeed practice physical alchemy at Ephrata, the extent to which it influenced Conrad Beissel or the community of Ephrata remains highly speculative.

Sex

When attempting to identify the Gichtelian influence in Beissel's and Martin's writings, one characteristic stands out above all. The main difference between Gichtel and Bohme is this whole problem with sexual desire. Unique to Ephrata's mystical language was its unusual construction of gender roles based on Beissel's belief that God possessed both male and female characteristics that existed in perfect balance. These ideas come from Jacob Bohme and are elaborated on by Johann Gichtel.⁴⁶ It was Boehme's view, which Gichtel followed, that the first human, Adam, was androgynous, as God was, and that he lacked genitals and intestines.⁴⁷ But, it is on the subject of sin and sexuality that Gichtel departs on his own unique line of thinking. For Jacob Boehme, the first fall was the sin of will; the desire to do what you will rather than God's will, but Gichtel alters that interpretation to say that the first sin, or fall, is sexual desire, man's desire for a sexual mate. Gichtel apparently had a much dimmer view of human sexuality than Bohme, who was married and had a family. Gichtel lived a celibate life and even wrote that God was disgusted by human sexual intercourse, purposely placing the sexual organs close to the organs of elimination because he "had no pleasure in these animal members."⁴⁸ Beissel's writing also reflects this sexual aspect of the fall. Beissel, like Gichtel, blamed the fall on Adam's observation of animals and his desire to be sexually differentiated like them, leading to "adultery" with Sophia,

Adam's intended spouse.⁴⁹ Here Gichtel's influence on Beissel and Ephrata is most clear. Jeff Bach even claims that in some of Beissel's writings that touch on sexuality, he is quoting Gichtel verbatim.

Astrology

In the area of astrology, determining the precise influence that Gichtel had on Jacob Martin, Conrad Beissel, and the community of Ephrata is difficult. Astrology was massively popular in Europe and in the early American colonies for practical purposes like agriculture, as can be seen in the popularity of almanacs, but also for spiritual purposes. According to Jeff Bach, there are places where Jacob Martin's writings overlap with Beissel's, but in the astrological references, of which there are many, he differs from Beissel. Beissel does not write a great deal on astrology, but Martin does. Beissel uses astrological metaphors and vocabulary in his writings as well, but not as much as Martin. It appears that Martin was a much better-informed student of astrology and Jacob Boehme than Conrad Beissel. There is no definitive evidence that Beissel read the works of Boehme, but he was most definitely influenced by his thought, and more likely, by the thought of the man who first published his work, Johann Georg Gichtel. Boehme's vocabulary and themes are much more apparent in Martin's writings than Beissel's. The fact that Jacob Martin created the Mystical Figure from Gichtel's *A Brief Opening and Demonstration of the Three Principals and Worlds in Man*, treatise with profound astrological meaning and symbolism, is evidence of Gichtel's astrological influence on Jacob Martin.

Other Sources of Evidence of Gichtel's Influence on Beissel and Ephrata

There is evidence of Johann Gichtel's influence on Beissel and the Community of Ephrata in sources other than the writings of Beissel and Jacob Martin. Several sources suggest the influence of Johann Gichtel on Ephrata. I will cite only four here, but there are others. I will not attempt to place these accounts in any particular context. They simply support the claim that others observed the influence of Johann Gichtel on Beissel and Ephrata.

First source: August Gottlieb Spangenberg (1704-1792) served as an assistant to Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf, the leader of the

Moravian Church beginning in 1733, and lived out his life as a Moravian missionary, church leader, and finally, successor to Zinzendorf as head of the denomination. He came to Pennsylvania first in 1736 and visited several German sectarian and Pietist groups. In May 1736, he visited the community of Ephrata and made the following observations:

- a. “They (the Ephrata Community) are ruled by Gichtel’s principles.”
- b. “They (the Ephrata Community) are Boehmist, but they also use scriptures.”
- c. “What is to be done about this? We cannot separate ourselves from these brethren, for they are very sincere and the Lord is with them. Nevertheless, we cannot join them either, because they seem to lean toward Gichtelianism.”⁵⁰

Second source: In *Chronicon Ephratense*, the chronicle of Ephrata’s history, edited by Peter Miller and first printed in 1786, the influence of Gichtel is cited at least twice. Early in the book, Conrad Beissel as a young man is coming into contact with various Pietist groups:

- a. “At Heidelberg he meets a learned scholar named Haller, a strong suitor for the Virgin Sophia, and also a correspondent of Gichtel. This man made him acquainted with the Pietists in Heidelberg, who all maintained a hidden walk with God.”⁵¹
- b. Towards the end of the book, during a kind of synopsis of Beissel’s life, the following quote can be found: “Before him the wisdom of God attempted to reveal the mystery of eternal virginity in the old countries, through many precious instruments, of whom those dear men of God, Godfried Arnold, and Georg Gichtel and many others may especially be mentioned. The latter’s success was great, and I may well say that he had borne the light before the Superintendent (Beissel).”⁵²

Third source: In *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, the influence of

Gichtel is cited by Christopher Sauer, an important Germantown printer, and one-time close associate of Beissel in 1739:

a. “But for myself, I can never be attached to him for the reason that I know that his teaching throughout has been a compound of Moses, Christ, Gichtel, and Conrad Beissel.”

b. “In many points he is close to Gichtel and still closer to the little beast, described in Revelations.”⁵³

Fourth source: Brother Ezechiel Sangmeister was a significant member of the Ephrata Community. He came to Ephrata first in March 1748.⁵⁴ At first a follower of Beissel, he later became disillusioned and left for Virginia in 1752. He returned in 1764 and remained until the end of his life. He eventually became a virulent critic of Beissel and his methods. He began writing his biography, *Leben und Wandle* in 1754, an intense, scathing, and detailed account of his life and spiritual journey which was published after his death in installments between 1825 and 1827. Although highly critical of Beissel and the community’s rituals, Sangmeister agreed with most of Beissel’s teachings. In one instance he cites the possible influence of Gichtel on the Ephrata Community:

a. “I did not say anything about this dispute to my two other Brothers since I well saw and perceived that the good God would come to help me and make the matter take a different turn, which I sincerely desired since these two people tested me severely and also made me suffer all these years. Anton began secretly going to the old Brothers now and then, who immediately perceived the dispute and worked their way in between us. Philemon said he and Haggai should diligently read Gichtel’s writings, and then they could set me straight. Had they obeyed Gichtel however, they would not have trampled upon me being the oldest, when from the bottom of my heart and out of love for God I served and also tended them.”⁵⁵

The exchange above involves a theological dispute between Sangmeister and other celibate brothers at Ephrata. In order to settle the dispute and

“set Sangmeister straight,” Brother Philemon (Johann Rissman) proposes that he and Brother Haggai read the works of Johann Gichtel, and then enlighten Sangmeister as to the error of his ways. This implies that the works of Johann Gichtel were not only readily available, but also highly regarded as a guide for correct theological thinking at Ephrata.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper has been to lend support to the already strong evidence citing Johann Gichtel and Jacob Boehme as the main theological sources for the religious thought of Conrad Beissel and Ephrata. An understanding of Gichtel’s *Three Worlds in Man*, especially when compared to D. Michael Quinn’s interpretation of the Mystical Figure, sheds significant light on how he arrived at his conclusions and weakens the argument made by historians like Aldefer and Sachse that Ephrata was a Rosicrucian community. Mormon historian D. Michael Quinn cited Jacob Martin’s Mystical Figure as evidence of Ephrata’s esoteric beliefs based on Rosicrucianism. This is a common claim, made with little actual evidence by Sachse, Alderfer, and others. Both Sachse and Alderfer cited Rosicrucianism as a source of the beliefs of Ephrata. Ephrata may have spoken the vocabulary of Rosicrucianism, but it was not Rosicrucian. My research which establishes the connection between Jacob Martin, the creator of the Mystical Figure, with an actual treatise by Johann Gichtel, lends support to my case. It can be said that when viewing Jacob Martin within the context of Ephrata, he tends to lean more towards the esoteric side. Strands of western esotericism are apparent at Ephrata as well as other communities like Johann Kelpius’s Women of the Wilderness and Georg Rapp’s Harmony, so it is understandable how the connections can be made, however; the strongest influence on Beissel and Ephrata came not from Rosicrucianism, but from Jacob Boehme’s brand of Christian mysticism translated through the lens of Johann Gichtel.

Notes:

1. Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2002), 16-24
2. Ibid., 176
3. There are other illustrations among the papers of Jacob Martin that I refer to in this paper, but the majority of my comments are dedicated to the Mystical Figure.
4. Jeff Bach's recollections of his first encounters with this figure comes from conversations I had with him in his office.
5. D. Michael Quinn, *Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1987. See section on illustrations whose pages are not numbered, between p. 228 and the bibliography.
6. Julius Friedrich Sachse. *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers* (Philadelphia, Printed for the author, 1899).
7. Quinn, *Mormonism and the Magic World View*, from caption under illustration of Mystical Figure.
8. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 181-90.
9. Thanks to Jeff Bach for recognizing this.
10. Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 180.
11. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 13. Also see Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2007), 109.
12. Versluis, *Wisdom's Children*, 180.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 182.
15. Ibid., 181.
16. Ibid. Jeff Bach made the following comment regarding this note: "I'm not sure Gichtel would say human striving is the way to attain spiritual transmutation. He would see this as the work of Jesus, apprehended through faith, just like Jesus brings about rebirth."
17. Ibid., 180.
18. Ibid., 181.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism*, 110.
22. Ibid.
23. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 181.

24. Ibid.
25. D. Michael Quinn is a fine Mormon Scholar and this book is an important piece of scholarship in Mormon Studies. I read it and intend using it in my further research on the early Mormon Church. However, the writing he did on the Mystical Figure or as he described it, “a man wearing a religio-magical garment” contains a number of inaccuracies, probably due to assumptions he made based on previous research.
26. Quinn. *Mormonism and the Magic World View* (from caption under illustration of Mystical Figure).
27. Ibid.
28. See Jeff Bach’s discussion of Sachse’s altering of Ephrata images in *Voices of the Turtledoves*.
29. Written comment made by Ephrata Cloister curator, Kerry Mohn, Sept. 29, 2017: “Clarence Spohn (former Ephrata Cloister educator) once told me Alderfer wrote the book and had not even visited the site.”
30. In *Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Quinn mentions Ephrata in the index six times. That includes a few entries on the same page. Of all those instances where Ephrata is mentioned, Julius Sachse is cited twelve times, Alderfer is cited four times, and esoteric historian Manly P. Hall is cited four times.
31. The Boehme comment is compliments of Jeff Bach.
32. Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children*, 187.
33. Ibid., 182
34. Ibid., 183.
35. Ibid., 188
36. This quote, which I paraphrase from Jeff Bach description of his notes on the treatise, also came from the meeting in his office at the Young Center on Nov. 11, 2015.
37. Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children*, 236.
38. Ibid., 237.
39. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 177.
40. Martin papers, Pennypacker Collection, Ephrata, “Spiritual Letter Concerning Rebirth,” Treatise “Concerning Divine Union,” and especially “Document by Jacob Martin p. 4 in Pennypacker Collection.”
41. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 178.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. A copy of Welling’s *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum*, owned by

- Sebastian Keller, can be found in the Ephrata Collection.
45. Arthur Versluis, "Western Esotericism and the Harmony Society," *Esoterica* (1999) 20-47.
 46. *Ibid.*, 97.
 47. *Ibid.*, 38.
 48. *Ibid.*, 104.
 49. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 99.
 50. All of the quotes from Spangenberg come from Donald Durnbach's, *Brethren in Colonial America: A Source Book on the Transplantation and Development of the Church of the Brethren in the Eighteenth Century* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1967), 272-74.
 51. Lamech and Agrippa, *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists* (1899; repr, [Bedford, Mass.]: AppleWood Books, 2009), 5.
 52. *Ibid.*, 286.
 53. Felix Reichmann and Eugene E. Doll, *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1952)
 54. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 61.
 55. Ezechieel Sangmeister, *Leban und Wandle: Life and Conduct of the Late Brother Ezechieel Sangmeister* (Ephrata, Pa.: Historical Society of Cocalico Valley, 1986), 9:73.