

Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata. By JEFF BACH. Pennsylvania German History and Culture Series, Number 3. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press and the Pennsylvania German Society. Pp. xx, 282. \$35.00.)

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Finding documentation about the Ephrata Cloister is difficult, and deciphering the mystical prose used by those who created the community is even more daunting. In this long-needed ethnography of Ephrata, Jeff Bach sets out to contextualize and explain the theology that drove Conrad Beissel to establish his community of celibate Protestant mystics along the Cocalico Creek in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the 1730s. To do so, he relies not only on a broad knowledge of early modern Lutheran Pietist movements in Europe and North America but also on archaeological evidence that permits him to look into the daily lives of the Ephrata community with greater insight than strict reliance on written documentation would allow. Primarily interested in asserting the place of Ephrata under the Protestant Pietist umbrella, Bach also aims to correct the work of Julius Sachse in *German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania, 1694–1708* (1895).

Bach's introduction offers a working definition of terms, including mysticism, a fleeting overview of the development of Pietism in early modern Germany, and a brief narrative history of the Cloister. He then moves on to seven ethnographic chapters. The first two deal specifically with religious thought, one focused on the personal theology of Ephrata's founder Conrad Beissel (1691–1768). His contemporaries and successors share a second chapter. The subsequent five chapters analyze the theological underpinnings of Ephrata's ritual, gender relations, language, art, and magic. The ethnographic format necessarily leads to some repetition, particularly of theological concepts, but the utility of understanding each concept in its particular context makes the repetition worthwhile.

Beissel emerged from the unstable world of late seventeenth-century Germany. He was born in the Electoral Palatinate, which Bach emphasizes was significantly influenced by Pietism. Like many of those who would eventually flee to Beissel's Cloister on the Cocalico, the group's founder was orphaned; he had to fend for himself as an itinerant baker's apprentice. Part of his itinerancy resulted from a tendency to become involved in radical Pietist circles. And, at least once, Beissel's master's wife desired more than his bread, and the master sent Beissel packing. Critically, Beissel was at best a journeyman, never a master, until he founded his Cloister.

Bach hypothesizes that Beissel likely became familiar with the mysticism of Jacob Boehme while working for a baker in Heidelberg. Although previous authors accepted a link that Sachse drew between Beissel and the amorphous Rosicrucian movement, Bach argues that Boehme's mystic Protestant Pietism served as the fundamental source for the beliefs and practices adhered to by Beissel and others at the Cloister. However, the overlap between Boehmist and Rosicrucian mystic imagery implies that they are not mutually exclusive categories. Could Beissel have been a Boehmist and a Rosicrucian?

Bach dismisses any parallels between Ephrata and medieval Catholic monasticism. Although he focuses on the early Christian origins of Ephrata's monastic practices, including tonsure, Bach notes that some celibates objected to aspects of Ephrata's ritual life they considered overly Catholic. Additional social history would add clarity to this aspect of Bach's analysis. Beissel and many of his followers came to Ephrata from the Palatinate, where Catholics and Protestants lived cheek by jowl. Bach identifies Catholic Pietist movements and argues that Beissel may have migrated to Pennsylvania to avoid renewed confessional conflict in the Palatinate. How committed were Beissel and his cohort to an overtly Protestant identity? How exposed to Catholic theology and practice were they? Was Beissel's mystic devotion sufficiently ecumenical that he would adopt practices he understood to be Catholic, if he thought they would help him achieve his spiritual goals?

Bach's detailed exposition of Ephrata's gender theology makes an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the Cloister. Beissel's desire to form a spiritual union with the mystic Virgin Sophia is beyond doubt. First Boehme, then Beissel and his followers, believed that Adam was androgynous before the fall. Indeed Adam's fall was twofold. He fell first when he observed the animals and wished that he too could have a carnal mate. Until this desire overcame him, Adam contained in him the feminine element and its inherent wisdom: the Virgin Sophia. While Adam slept, not only did God make Eve from his rib, but he also removed the Virgin Sophia through the same incision and left Adam a gendered male. The second fall, involving forbidden fruit, was merely the nail in Adam's spiritual coffin. Adam and Eve then had gendered bodies and knew how to use them. To Beissel, the rest of human history was a quest to restore humanity to its androgynous prelapsarian state. Beissel believed that Jesus uniquely regained Adam's androgyny when the Virgin Sophia entered his body through his side wound. While other European Pietists engaged in free love in their attempt to reunite the genders, Beissel's Cloister was dedicated to wooing the Virgin Sophia with celibacy and asceticism.

External responses to the Cloister fall outside the scope of Bach's study. Nonetheless, this reader would like to know how Ephrata's neighbors and contemporaries reacted to the idea of an androgynous Adam and a community of celibate men and women hoping to achieve the same state through a mystic, quasi-erotic union with the Virgin Sophia. Aaron Spencer Fogleman's recent essay on the Moravians' feminized conception of Jesus and the vitriolic response it evoked from eighteenth-century Lutheran and Reformed clerics and congregants indicates how these same Protestants might have reacted to the equally radical theology of Beissel's Cloister.¹

Ezechiel Sangmeister's embittered account of life at Ephrata offers a counterpoint to the Cloister's official histories. Sangmeister fell out with Beissel and started his own Ephrata colony in western Virginia. Sangmeister accused the supposed celibates of Ephrata and even his own off-shoot

group of sexual behaviors and perversions that would have provided excellent fodder for anyone raising opposition to the Cloister.² The reality of daily life at Ephrata presumably lies somewhere between mystic utopia and carnal depravity. Bach's familiarity with the archaeological sources allows him to determine the variance in the celibates' diet and other aspects of daily life over time. However, he cannot confirm or deny Sangmeister's accusations of liaisons between Beissel and at least one of the sisters. "Beissel's persistent erotic imagery could only inflame passions" (p. 113). The question remains whether those passions were repressed or expressed.

The existence of the Ephrata Cloister ultimately rested on a paradox. Conrad Beissel created a community based on pre-Enlightenment theology that could only exist in a colony thoroughly grounded in Enlightenment principles, including tolerance. Jeff Bach allows us to understand the ingredients of Ephrata's theology and challenges us to explore how these peculiar Protestant Pietists fit into the religious smorgasbord that was colonial Pennsylvania. *Voices of the Turtledoves* answers many questions and raises still more. Were the mystics of Ephrata holdouts against eighteenth-century rationalism? Were they an unexpected product of the Enlightenment they rejected? Was it possible to be both?