

**“The Knife of Daily Repentance”:
Toward a Religious History of Calligraphy and Manuscript
Illumination in German-Speaking Pennsylvania, ca. 1750-1850**

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Abstract: The calligraphic art and illuminated manuscripts of Pennsylvania’s early German-speaking residents, and Mennonites in particular, have long captured the attention of collectors, museum curators, and scholars for their aesthetic qualities and spiritual overtones. Yet foundational questions about the artworks remain inadequately explored in the literature. What motivated Pennsylvania’s German-Protestant settlers to embrace calligraphy and manuscript illumination, and apply those arts to religious texts? And how do artfully rendered texts fit into the long, transatlantic history of German-Protestant spiritual devotion? These questions can best be answered by analyzing the texts’ function as spiritual artifacts. This article explores connections that early modern German-speakers forged among the textual, visual, and spiritual dimensions of the word. It then presents elements of early-modern German mysticism before examining select examples of the manuscript art form, with a focus on pieces connected to Pennsylvania’s Mennonite, Schwenkfelder, and Ephrata communities. Finally, the essay proposes a research agenda that aligns Pennsylvania-German material culture studies with history of religion and history of the book.

Many regions of Germany and Switzerland proved inhospitable to the visual arts during the Protestant Reformation. As reforming zeal swept across the German-speaking lands in the early sixteenth century, iconoclasm—or the destruction of religious iconography such as paintings and statues—erupted in numerous European cities, including Martin Luther’s Wittenberg and Ulrich Zwingli’s Zürich.¹ Radical theologians railed against the laity’s reliance on imagery when their attentions should rightly focus on Scripture. Mobs responded by destroying ornately decorated churches and monasteries. “All those who worship God in

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1. Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 83; Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 79, 93.

images, worship in lies," proclaimed Andreas Karlstadt, a colleague of Luther at the University of Wittenberg in 1522. "That which God alone effects, no image can do."² Many scholars judge the Reformation to be a low point in German art, when the Protestant embrace of the word sapped the visual arts of their appeal in favor of an inward-looking spirituality grounded in the letter of Scripture.³

Outbursts of iconoclasm at Protestantism's seminal moment highlight one of Christianity's longstanding tensions: whether and how to make use of external tokens of piety without violating the Old Testament commandment against false idols. Judaism and Islam dealt with similar questions surrounding religious imagery by banning figurative representations of God altogether, and regulating the use of all pictures.⁴ Medieval Roman Catholics embraced religious art but engaged nonetheless in long debates regarding the place of artworks in spiritual experience.⁵ Martin Luther, who "restored a biblical theology" to the church by advocating "Scripture alone" as the source of spiritual knowledge, accepted images for religious instruction, but not for outright worship.⁶ Swiss reformers led by Zwingli proved even more hostile.⁷

As Protestant traditions matured, however, most groups gradually accepted instructional religious pictures when paired with explanatory text.⁸ Indeed, images such as woodcuts proved essential to the Reformation's spread.⁹ And some Anabaptist groups, particularly the Dutch Mennonites, also embraced the evocative power of visuality, as pictures in the *Martyrs Mirror* make plain.¹⁰

2. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany*, 33.

3. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 27.

4. Ilana Tahan, *Hebrew Manuscripts: The Power of Script and Image* (London: British Library, 2007), 8; Terry Allen, "Aniconism and Figural Representation in Islamic Art," in *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Sebastopol, Calif.: Solipsist Press, 1988), 17-37.

5. Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 16-27.

6. James Atkinson, *Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 52; Christensen, 46-52; Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 27.

7. C. Scott Dixon, *Protestants: History from Wittenberg to Pennsylvania 1517-1740* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 27.

8. Nigel Aston, *Art and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 19, 24; David Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

9. Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

10. Sarah Covington, "Jan Luyken, the *Martyrs Mirror*, and the Iconography of Suffering," *MQR* 85 (July 2011), 443-445. Covington notes that the *Martyrs Mirror* "provided an example of a book whose illustrations could shape the Protestant mind visually as well as textually." She concludes that "Protestant, and especially Mennonite, attitudes toward art could be complex." For more on the history of that book, see David Luthy's richly illustrated *A History*

But among the religions of the book, which place Scripture at or near the center of faith, text need not simply explain pictorial artwork. Text could *be* the artwork. For centuries, Jews, Muslims, and Christians used calligraphy to depict God's word. Why not construct art out of the very writings deemed theologically safe to venerate? "All the arts are as dust in vain where there is not faith in Christ," read a Swiss manuscript made in 1743. "He who knows Jesus Christ correctly has learned the best art."¹¹ The presence of this maxim on a manuscript filled with religious texts encapsulates the utility of calligraphy for Scripture-based faiths: artful writing employed aesthetic beauty to focus attention on God's message.

Manuscript art proved especially well-suited for Protestants, among whom the word served as the ideal medium for personal spiritual exploration. Between ca. 1600 and 1850, Protestants in Switzerland, the Rhineland, and other German-speaking regions employed calligraphy and manuscript illumination as art forms suited to spiritual expression within their Bible-centered faith. The "word" became both a theory of grace and an object of veneration. "For Protestants figurative art was always the handmaiden of the Word, but in practical terms there was no escaping the image," wrote Nigel Aston.¹² By means of calligraphy, word and image could be one in the same.

German-speaking Protestants carried this embrace of word-as-image with them around the world. One hundred and fifty years after Martin Luther, Protestants sailed for the English colony of Pennsylvania in North America, where they employed calligraphy and illumination as part of their popular piety. The documents they created, often called "fraktur," figure prominently in the history and culture of the colony-turned-state. These evocative manuscripts have often been appreciated as works of folk art. But they should also be studied within the history of iconoclasm and text veneration, and interpreted as a careful balancing of textual primacy with a thirst for spiritualism beyond the text, as manuscript makers and users sorted out the nature and meaning of their word-based faith.

The rewards of approaching the documents this way are manifold. Placing Pennsylvania-German manuscripts within the analytical context of Protestant devotion helps us reconsider the role of letters as arbiters of spiritual experience. Commonly, letters held a symbolic meaning, revealing information through their external referents, or the words and

of the Printings of The Martyr's Mirror: Dutch, German, English, 1660-2012 (LaGrange, Ind.: Pathway Publishers, 2013).

11. "Vorschrift des Steffen Barandun von Feldis," 1743, B/N 647, Staatsarchiv Graubünden, Chur, Switzerland. Original German: "Alle Kunst Sind Eitell Staub Wo Nicht An Christum Ist der glaub. Wer Jesum Christum Recht Erkennt, Der Hatt Die Beste Kunst Ehrlehrt!" Author's transcription and translation.

12. Aston, *Art and Religion*, 39.

ideas they signified. For example, the letters “G,” “o,” “t,” and “t” were meaningful because they spelled the word *Gott* (God). For many Mennonites and other German-speakers, however, letters held intrinsic significance as vessels of spiritual experience dependent on the letters’ visual character. “G,” for example, was the first letter in *Gott*; but when presented calligraphically it also became an ornamental object, a contemplative artwork. This distinction between text as signifier and text as iconography helps explain the importance of devotional manuscripts and hand-embellished printed ephemera to Pennsylvania-German spiritualism. The same pull toward the inner spirit that inspired Protestants to retreat from images allowed Pennsylvania Germans to embrace calligraphy and manuscript illumination as favored practices.

The interpretation of the role of calligraphy and manuscript illumination in the popular piety of Mennonites and other Pennsylvania Germans articulated above runs afoul of prevailing approaches to the documents. Most scholars consider the manuscripts as works of rustic folk art characteristic of the early Pennsylvania countryside, not transatlantic literature vested with rich intellectual-historical meaning. Such assessments, derived from years of inquiry into the documents by devotees of decorative art and folk culture, possess merit and have produced a rich scholarship. Indeed, rigorous research undertaken by analysts including Donald A. Shelley and Frederick S. Weiser established study of these manuscripts on a firm intellectual footing.¹³ But the inward-looking nature of Pennsylvania-German decorative art studies and the association of the manuscripts with other types of handcrafts has stifled interpretive creativity with the primary sources. Unfortunately, studying religious manuscripts with the same set of tools brought to bear on artifacts like domestic architecture, furniture, and other household goods—the frequent fodder for material culture scholars—easily obscures the fact that the documents include highly sophisticated texts.¹⁴ With some

13. See, for example, Donald A. Shelley, *The Fraktur-Writings or Illuminated Manuscripts of the Pennsylvania Germans* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1961) and Frederick Sheely Weiser, *I A E S D: The Story of Johann Adam Eyer (1755-1837), Schoolmaster and Fraktur Artist; with a Translation of His Roster Book, 1779-1787* (Breinigsville, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society 1980).

14. Simon J. Bronner, “Folklore and Folklife,” in *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, ed. Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 361; Shelley, *Fraktur-Writings or Illuminated Manuscripts of the Pennsylvania Germans*, 1; Henry S. Borneman, *Pennsylvania German Illuminated Manuscripts: A Classification of Fraktur-Schriften and An Inquiry into their History and Art* (1937; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 2; John Joseph Stoult, *Pennsylvania Folk-Art: An Interpretation* (Allentown, Pa.: Schlechter’s, 1948); Don Yoder, “Fraktur in Mennonite Culture,” *MQR* 48 (July 1974), 306-307; Michael S. Bird, *O Noble Heart/O Edel Herz: Fraktur and Spirituality in Pennsylvania German Folk Art* (Lancaster, Pa.: Heritage Center Museum, 2002); Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 143-144; Lisa Minardi, “An Introduction to

notable exceptions, few scholars have used the documents as primary sources to interpret broader issues of spiritual and devotional praxis in Europe and early America.¹⁵ This could—and should—change.

Pennsylvania German Fraktur," in *Drawn with Spirit: Pennsylvania German Fraktur from the Joan and Victor Johnson Collection* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2015), 17-43); Lisa Minardi, "Fraktur and Visual Culture," in *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, ed. Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 264-280; Kenneth L. Ames, *Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition* (Winterthur, Del., and New York: The Winterthur Museum and W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 99. Traditional approaches to the manuscripts reflect varying interpretive emphases and diverge widely in their focus on the documents' component parts, namely text and image. One school of thought downplayed the notion of the manuscripts' possessing spiritualistic qualities, going so far as to consider scribes copyists who simply created decorative art using well-known spiritual texts that lost much of their spiritual resonance along the way. The concepts of folk art, folk life, and preindustrial folkways—much in vogue in the mid-twentieth century—shaped many early interpretations, encouraging a renaissance of inward looking among scholars of Pennsylvania-German genealogical and cultural background that emphasized a sense of unity and cohesion among the Pennsylvania Germans themselves—not cross-cultural comparison or contextualization. The salient and extremely important literature written from this perspective drew most attention to the Pennsylvania Germans' early history in pre-industrial culture. "No other phase of early American arts and crafts is better characterized by the term 'Folk Art' than that produced by the German-speaking immigrants who settled southeastern Pennsylvania," wrote Donald A. Shelley, one acolyte of the folk perspective, highlighting the notion of manuscript production as a craft, not unlike needlework or carpentry.—Shelley, *Fraktur-Writings or Illuminated Manuscripts of the Pennsylvania Germans*, 1. An earlier study by Henry S. Borneman that embraces the folk studies perspective even turned to John Ruskin and William Morris for insights when studying pre-industrial German culture.—Borneman, *Pennsylvania German Illuminated Manuscripts*, 2, 5. Some scholars attuned to the introspective and meditative impulses of early modern German religion took issue with these interpretive assumptions, arguing that Pennsylvania German calligraphy and manuscript making constituted a highly spiritualistic enterprise grounded in complex religious symbolism. In his thought-provoking *Pennsylvania Folk-Art: An Interpretation*, John Joseph Stoudt explores the complex issue of relationships between text and symbolic imagery, late medieval and early modern German religious literature, and radical spiritualistic traditions before drawing these strands together in analytical chapters titled "Symbol, Image and Literary Expression" and "Symbolism and Folk Art." Other commentators have sought to strike a balance between approaches that either disregard the religious nature of the documents entirely or see spiritual meaning in every stroke of the scribe's pen. Don Yoder, for example, conceptualizes the manuscripts in four ways: folk art, Pennsylvania German art, religious art, and Protestant art.—Yoder, "Fraktur in Mennonite Culture," 306-307. More recently, Michael S. Bird's *O Noble Heart/O Edel Herz: Fraktur and Spirituality in Pennsylvania German Folk Art* highlights manuscripts' religious texts, and religious historian Jeff Bach wrote that "scribes drew on familiar decorative motifs, but employed them in a context where at times some specific images also corresponded with important metaphors in their religious life."—Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 143-144. The folk art methodological perspective does have much to recommend it. Nonetheless, studies rooted in decorative and folk art mentalities lend themselves more to analysis of aesthetic and craft than intellect and spirituality. For summaries of the current state of Pennsylvania German manuscript and print culture studies, see Lisa Minardi's essays "An Introduction to Pennsylvania German Fraktur," (2015) and "Fraktur and Visual Culture" (2017).

15. The most notable exception is Jeff Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, which incorporates the manuscripts into an analysis of religious life at Ephrata. Another important religious-historical analysis is Michael S. Bird, *O Noble Heart/O Edel Herz: Fraktur and Spirituality in Pennsylvania German Folk Art*. John L. Ruth also incorporated interpretation of the making

Recently, innovative fields of scholarly inquiry including book history and lived religion have developed fresh perspectives and approaches relevant to the Pennsylvania manuscripts—chiefly a focus on how material production and reader consumption of texts informed the perceived meaning of literary works.¹⁶ Placing the spiritual manuscripts in an analytical framework that emphasizes their transatlantic origins, text contents, connections to spiritual life, and value to the study of religion opens new interpretive possibilities for a field of material culture study sorely in need of a more robust theoretical underpinning. This essay seeks the realignment of Pennsylvania-German manuscript studies, away from decorative art and toward lived religion and reader reception. The analysis that follows conceptualizes the place of the documents in devotional life, analyzes examples of the art for clues regarding Pennsylvania-German spirituality, and poses ideas for new interpretive directions in the field.

“THE SPIRIT THAT NO ONE CAN WRITE”? THEOLOGY, PIETY, AND GOD’S WORD

The first step of this proposed realignment is to contextualize the documents’ makers and users in their transatlantic intellectual heritage, namely an understanding of the theology, literature, and aesthetic traditions that undergirded the relationship of Pennsylvania Germans to religious texts. Scribes may have produced their manuscripts in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century America, but the documents’ notable attributes had roots in European culture and aesthetics that flourished between 1500 and 1700. The very scripts they employed—Frakturschrift, Cantzlei, and Currentschrift, all updated versions of medieval gothic hands—were developed at the turn of the sixteenth century.¹⁷ Moreover, the Protestant groups that produced the manuscripts coalesced early during the Reformation, in parts of Europe locked in social

and use of religious manuscripts and artworks into his magisterial publication *Maintaining the Right Fellowship: A Narrative Account of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1984), 129, 166-168, 172.

16. David D. Hall, *Ways of Writing: The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Matthew P. Brown, *The Pilgrim and the Bee: Reading Rituals and Book Culture in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Recent studies of New England Puritan book culture, with their focus on using material evidence to inform understandings of everyday religious culture, offer a roadmap for Pennsylvania-German manuscript studies. Hall’s and Brown’s works are especially relevant examples.

17. Lisa Minardi, “Fraktur and Visual Culture,” 264-265. The most prominent of these, Frakturschrift, gave the Pennsylvania documents their colloquial name, “fraktur.”

upheaval.¹⁸ Trends in theology and spirituality from the late Middle Ages through the early eighteenth century shed light on the significance of these American documents as spiritual artifacts.

The early German settlement of Pennsylvania, and the religious and spiritual traditions carried on by those settlers, were characterized by both variety and commonality: variety in that the groups represented a great diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, and approaches to faith; commonality in that they all drew from a shared source of German-Protestant theological and cultural heritage. Between 85,000 and 100,000 German-speakers settled in Pennsylvania during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; by 1790, they composed at least one-third of Pennsylvania's population.¹⁹ Almost all were Protestant. Around 90 percent were members of Lutheran or Reformed churches, while approximately 10 percent adhered to sectarian, dissenting, or separatist communities.²⁰ Some of the earliest arrivals were millennialists who fled to the Pennsylvania wilderness to await the end times.²¹ More numerous were the "plain" peoples, including Anabaptists (both Mennonites and Amish), as well as Dunkers, or members of the Church of the Brethren, who adhered to a version of the Anabaptist tradition. Hailing from Switzerland, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, Anabaptists modeled their faith practices on the early Christians, strictly followed biblical teachings, emphasized an inner faith experience, and sought in their everyday existence to honor the "holiness of life."²² Swiss Anabaptists in particular were noted for a "profound biblicism," which their descendants carried to Pennsylvania.²³ The Dunkers, who immigrated to America in 1719 and 1729, shared close theological ties to the Mennonites. Other sectarian groups included the Moravians, who settled Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1741; the Schwenkfelders, a band of mystics who arrived in 1734; and the

18. Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2-3, 9.

19. Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Pennsylvania's Crazy Quilt of German Religious Groups," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 68:1 (Winter 2001), 8, 15.

20. Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717-1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 103.

21. Elizabeth W. Fisher, "'Prophesies and Revelations': German Cabbalists in Early Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 109:3 (July 1985), 299-333.

22. John Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 175-176; Durnbaugh, "Pennsylvania's Crazy Quilt of German Religious Groups," 8-30; C. M. Dent, "The Anabaptists," in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 352.

23. Dixon, *Protestants*, 103.

residents of Ephrata Cloister, a monastic community founded in Lancaster County in 1732.²⁴

Devotional calligraphy and manuscript practices varied among these groups. For many radicals, it was a vital component of spiritual life.²⁵ For others, including Lutherans and Reformed, it exercised less importance. While far from the only German-speaking Pennsylvanians to produce Frakturschrift illuminated manuscripts, Mennonites numbered among the most copious creators of the documents. In a touchstone article published in 1974, folk historian Don Yoder identified “Mennonite fraktur” as “a school of fraktur production within the larger Pennsylvania German culture.”²⁶ Artworks produced by early Pennsylvania Mennonites who resided in the Franconia Conference—figures like schoolteacher Christopher Dock—resonate as among the finest examples of the art form, as do pieces originating in Lancaster County, central Pennsylvania, and farther afield in Ontario.²⁷ The Amish, while not generally recognized as especially avid producers of the manuscripts, also engaged in the practice.²⁸ The art form cannot necessarily be traced to one region of Europe or to one isolated group; both Dutch and German Mennonites produced these documents, and highly similar manuscript forms were common across Switzerland, reflective of the vibrant manuscript culture of the early modern period.²⁹

24. Numerous other movements contributed to the variety of faith traditions. Cf. Stephen L. Longenecker, *Piety and Tolerance: Pennsylvania German Religion, 1700-1850* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 47-53; Douglas H. Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 16.

25. Alejandro Zorzin, “Reformation Publishing and Anabaptist Propaganda: Two Contrasting Communication Strategies for the Spread of the Anabaptist Message in the Early Days of the Swiss Brethren,” *MQR* 82 (Oct. 2008), 503-516. It is interesting to note that, quite removed from later Pennsylvania Mennonites’ calligraphic endeavors, manuscript dissemination of religious texts had played a key role in the early spread of the tradition in Europe, when Anabaptists often lacked easy access to printing presses.

26. Don Yoder, “Fraktur in Mennonite Culture,” *MQR* 48 (July 1974), 306-307. For Yoder, the religious affiliation of the creators of the documents played a definitive role in classifying the texts. “Fraktur is Pennsylvania German manuscript art, but this art includes within it Mennonite and Schwenkfelder and Lutheran and Reformed fraktur,” he wrote (306).

27. *Ibid.*, 307.

28. *Ibid.*, 307. Yoder noted that, in 1974, the Old Order Amish in Lancaster County continued their traditional practices of decorating Bible records and family registers. For examples of Amish manuscripts and other material culture, see David Luthy’s remarkably in-depth *Amish Folk Artist Barbara Ebersol: Her Life, Fraktur, and Death Record Book* (Lancaster, Pa.: Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1995).

29. Ethel Ewert Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schönschreiben: The Fraktur Art and Penmanship of the Dutch-German Mennonites while in Europe, 1700-1900* (North Newton, Kan.: Mennonite Press, 1980). Scholars have undertaken considerable work examining individual Mennonite artists and communities, shedding light on Mennonite embrace of the art form.

Despite their great diversity, all of the Pennsylvania-German groups described above dealt with similar questions of how to know God and achieve salvation. In many cases, they made use of similar scriptural and devotional sources for answers. Such sources included writings influenced by mysticism and eighteenth-century German Pietism, both of which predicated personal salvation on the believer's inner experience of faith. With German Pietist and mystical source materials in hand, settlers explored how to generate spiritual meaning and experience from their religious texts. Their focus on how texts opened God's truths likely shaped their own devotional text-making practices.

Six underlying commonalities in the German-speakers' interpretive approaches to Scripture and other devotional literature can help us make sense of the manuscripts they produced, and place those documents in the broader context of Pennsylvania-German popular piety. The six points represent the fundamentals of a system of meaning-making that allowed word-centered theology to transform spiritual texts into devotional artworks and artifacts. Just as "fraktur" scholars have developed taxonomies and stylistic checklists to analyze the documents' decorative design, this list could be employed as a template to assess the texts' sophisticated spiritual messaging of calligraphed and illuminated texts.

First, all Pennsylvania German religious groups sought to unlock meaning from, and cultivate faith through, engagement with the written word. This is an elementary but essential point to bear in mind when studying the manuscripts, as it reminds us that the texts such documents bore figured in a much larger spiritual enterprise grounded in Scripture and other literature. Second, Pennsylvania Germans considered how the human senses, which were fallible and prone to worldly corruption, both informed and obstructed experience of the divine. Third, like other people during the period, they viewed religious knowledge as necessary to understand the entire world, so religious writings often addressed access to wisdom as well as to faith. Since divine wisdom was secret or hidden from view, humans could not find it via their own cognition. They had to rely on "the fear of the Lord" to open wisdom to them and frequently looked to apocryphal wisdom literature for guidance.³⁰ Fourth, this focus

See, for example, E. Reginald Good, *Anna's Art: The Fraktur Art of Anna Weber, a Waterloo County Mennonite Artist, 1814-1888* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pochauna Publications, 1976).

30. Mark Thiessen Nation, "The 'Fear of the Lord' Is the Beginning of Anabaptist Wisdom," *MQR* 84 (July 2010), 399; Loren L. Johns, "Reading the Maccabean Literature by the Light of the Stake: Anabaptist Appropriations in the Reformation Period," *MQR* 86 (April 2012), 151; James Stayer, "Research Note: The Varieties of Anabaptist Biblicism: The Weight of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha in Several Sixteenth-Century Anabaptist Groups," *MQR* 88 (July 2014), 365, 368. The Old Testament Apocrypha, and the Wisdom Books in particular, figured prominently in Mennonite devotional life from the Reformation's early days, and illuminated manuscripts show how those texts remained vital in eighteenth-

on sense perception and hidden wisdom figured in a dichotomy that structured much theology and devotional writing of the period: the gap between interior and exterior lives. True spirituality was an internal experience. Affairs of the world only distracted the spirit from its work. Fifth, many writings employed metaphors of space and geography (gardens and paths, for example) when describing spiritual experience. Salvation involved exploration across space and time. Scribes and printers sometimes represented this journey on the page by abandoning linear text to take readers on a visual-spiritual adventure via winding lines of text and image. Sixth, meditative engagement with God by means of prayer, singing, reading, and writing were strategies to open the heart and mind to texts' meaning. The "word" thus resonated among German-speakers as both a conceptual approach to faith and a medium for devotion bound up in the visual composition of a text.

Pennsylvania German manuscripts were sophisticated religious writings created in Protestant communities. The religious literature that those communities embraced, dating from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century, went to great lengths to clarify the place of words in faith and grace. "We must distinguish between the grammatical and outer meaning of the divine Word and the spiritual, inner and divine meaning," wrote seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian Johannes Andreas Quenstedt. "The first can be grasped even by any unregenerate man; the latter, however, cannot be received except by a mind which has been enlightened." Touchstone theological texts for understanding Pennsylvania German spirituality reveal how the six themes outlined above stirred spiritual experience—and may have contributed to how Pennsylvanians interacted with texts in the realm of Christian devotion.

One important influence in Pennsylvania-German devotional culture was mysticism, an approach to spirituality possessing ancient roots. Often situated at the fringes of theology and devotional practice, mysticism was continually present throughout the history of Christianity. In the Middle Ages, some embraced mysticism as a reaction against rigid scholasticism and the externalism of late-gothic popular piety.³¹ Mystics sought to find wisdom by closing out the world and opening the mind and heart to God's

century America. According to Johns, "Their use and valuation of the Apocrypha had more in common with the mother church than it did with other Protestants. . . . Most of the writings of Anabaptists throughout Europe quoted the Apocrypha positively and appreciatively in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, treating it as authoritative." Stayer writes: "Later Mennonites were criticized by the official Protestant disputers for their free use of apocryphal books."

31. Atkinson, *Martin Luther*, 27; Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 16.

action from within.³² The *German Theology*, a highly popular tract written in the late fourteenth century, articulated the mystical perspective. In the text, mortals wonder if they can enter God's wisdom through earthly study: "If the soul is to attain [eternal happiness], it must be pure and free from all images and detached from all created things, especially from itself."³³ Indeed, the soul must "sink" into sadness.³⁴ "A man is made new when he turns inward, and enters into the temple of his own soul with all his faculties," wrote the German medieval mystic Johannes Tauler, whose works were known in Pennsylvania.³⁵ In this perspective, external images hindered the ability of the Holy Spirit to act upon the believer. "God needs no aid of images or instruments at all, not even of one," wrote Tauler.

Be assured that when the soul is freed from all images and intermediaries, God can for that reason join it to Himself directly. . . .

God acts upon the soul directly, without image or figure; yea, upon the soul's deepest depths, into which no image has ever penetrated.³⁶

Mystical ideas enjoyed relevance throughout the late medieval and early modern periods and beyond. Martin Luther studied both Tauler and the *German Theology*,³⁷ and early Anabaptists like Hans Denck and Hans Hut "represented a medieval mystical legacy within the Reformation context."³⁸

While mysticism may seem to be in tension with the emphasis of German-speakers on the role of the word in spiritual enlightenment, in fact it infused Protestantism with a deeper sense of the importance of introspection in unlocking divine experience. This necessitated personal cultivation of faith via language. The inward-looking devotion

32. Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), 10-13.

33. *Theologia Deutsch – Theologia Germanica: The Book of the Perfect Life*, trans. and ed. David Blamires (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 36-37.

34. *Theologia Deutsch: Die leret gar manchen lieblichen underscheit gotlicher warheit und seit gar hohe und gar schone ding von einem volkomen leben. Neue nach der einzigen bis jetzt bekamten Handschrift besorgte vollständige Ausgabe* (Stuttgart: n.p., 1851), 54.

35. Johannes Tauler, *The Sermons and Conferences of Johannes Tauler of the Order of Preachers Surnamed "The Illuminated Doctor" Being His Spiritual Doctrine. First Complete English Translation with Introduction and Index*, trans. Walter Elliott (Washington, D.C.: Apostolic Mission House, 1910), 271. The Schwenkfelder Caspar Schultz, for example, owned a 1713 edition of Tauler's work, which was bound with a prayer book.—Johannis Thauleri [Johannes Tauler], *Helleleuchtender Hertzens-und Andachts-Spiegel, . . .* 4th ed. (Amsterdam and Frankfurth: Johann Felix Bielcken, 1713), L1925.09, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa.

36. Tauler, *Sermons and Conferences* (1910), 77.

37. Atkinson, *Martin Luther*, 41-42; Wood, *Captive to the Word*, 164.

38. Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1977), 176-177.

recommended by mysticism also posited a strategy for the acquisition of wisdom. Mysticism encouraged practitioners to strive toward ecstatic experiences that would bring about “an intimate understanding of GOD and divine things, through which the spirit of the reborn person is illuminated,” wrote early modern mystic Gottfried Arnold, whose books were known and published in Pennsylvania.³⁹ In other words, mysticism offered access to God, and to knowledge of God’s creation. The purpose of the word, in Arnold’s estimation, was to illumine the path toward grace and wisdom.⁴⁰ The writings of German mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), whose works were highly influential in early Pennsylvania, echo this connection between faith and wisdom, identifying God’s word as the blueprint of the universe.⁴¹ Drawing upon alchemy and astrology, Böhme peered through the veil of the observable world to a latent divinity that held the universe together.⁴² The life of humankind in the world was “the consecrated word of divine knowledge” and thus reflected divine will.⁴³ “The hidden God, who didn’t only reveal Himself in nature, also resides there,” he claimed.⁴⁴

The mystical idea of latent divinity shrouded by observable reality bears on Böhme’s understanding of Scripture’s role in faith experience. As part of observed reality, the texts of Scripture were imperfect

39. Gottfried Arnold [Gottfried Arnold], *Gottfrid Arnolds Historie und beschreibung der Mystischen Theologie/ oder geheimen Gottes Gelehrtheit, wie auch derer alten und neuen Mysticorum*. Franckfurt: Thomas Fritschen (N.p.: n.p., 1703), 34. Original German: “. . . eine göttliche und geheime Weißheit von GOTT und Göttlichen Dingen / dadurch das Gemüth eines wiedergeborenen Menschens erleuchtet . . .” Author’s transcription and translation. On Pennsylvania pieces: Gottfried Arnold, *Die Verklärung Jesu Christi in der Seele, Aus den gewöhnlichen Sonn- und Fest-Tags-Episteln auf dem Fürstlichen Schlosse zu Allstedt gezeigt durch Sel. Hrn. Gottfried Arnold, Inspect. Nebst dessen kurtzen Anmerckungen über die Passion, und einem Anhang vieler auserlesenen Predigten von allerley erbaulichen Materien. Mit nützlichen Registern versehen* (N.p.: n.p., 1721), L1924.06. Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa.; Gottfried Arnold., *Die Erste Liebe. Das ist: Wahre Abbildung Der Ersten Christen nach ihrem Lebendigen Glauben und Heiligen Leben . . .*, 5th ed. (Leipzig, Germany: Samuel Benjamin Walther, 1732), L2006.0130, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa.; *Ibid.*, L2007.0283, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa. A 1721 edition of Arnold’s *Die Verklärung Jesu Christi in der Seele* descended in the Kriebel family of Pennsylvania. A 1732 edition of *Der erste Liebe, das ist*, published in Leipzig, has a Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, provenance. Jonas Bechtel acquired a copy of *Die Verklärung Jesu Christi in der Seele* published in Germantown in 1796.

40. Arnold, *Gottfrid Arnolds Historie und beschreibung der Mystischen Theologie*, 108, 406.

41. Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), 6; Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, 31.

42. *Ibid.*, 33, 39, 46-48.

43. Jacob Boehme [Jakob Böhme], *Der Weg zu Christo, Verfasset in neun büchlein* (N.p.: n.p., 1732), 201. Original German: “Es ist das gebildete Wort Göttlicher Wissenschaft . . .” Author’s transcription and translation.

44. *Ibid.*, 191. Original German: “. . . der verborgene GOtt, der sich hat in Natur gebracht, in ihr wohnet . . .” Author’s transcription and translation.

representations of God's truth. Meaning was hidden in Scripture. The believer's task was to follow traces of the divine in Scripture beyond the veil of literal words or observed reality to a deeper truth. "Just as there is no sight without the spirit, so can there be no spirit without sight." Human perception of the divine emanated from one's own "center or heart, whence the sight of eternity always comes," wrote Böhme.⁴⁵ "What humans hear, desire and see only hinders one from truly seeing or hearing God."⁴⁶

While a comparatively small number of Pennsylvania Germans were outright mystics, mystical ideas and language infused Protestantism and certainly influenced spiritual practice among many. An engraving published in an 1811-1812 Pennsylvania edition of Böhme's *The Way to Christ*, for example, encapsulated the mystic's message of retreat from the worldly. The engraving depicted a skull balanced between two worlds: the earthly realm and the divine. Humans who tried to gaze on both the worldly and divine suffered "disorder, unrest, constant anxiety and antipathy," the accompanying text explained. "Indeed it is better," wrote Böhme, "that the eye of vexation be plucked out," so that the soul can find eternal life.⁴⁷

The quest for divine meaning in which Böhme engaged occupied many German-speakers, including Lutheran Pietists headquartered at the University of Halle in Germany, whose movement toward a Lutheran religious experience grounded in feeling, sentiment, and service exercised considerable influence over early Pennsylvania by means of the pastors and missionaries Halle sent to North American shores.⁴⁸ August Hermann

45. Jakob Böhme, "Sex puncta theosophica. Oder: Von sechs theosophischen Punkten Hohe und tiefe Gründung," in *Jakob Böhme's sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. W. Schiebler (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1846), 6:327-410. Original German: "Denn kein Sehen ist ohne Geist, so ist auch kein Geist ohne Sehen . . ."; "Also erscheinet der Spiegel des ewigen Auges im Willen, und erbiert ihm selber einen andern ewigen Grund in sich selber: derselbe ist sein Centrum oder Herz, daraus das Sehen von Ewigkeit immer urständet . . ." (333). Author's transcription and translation.

46. Böhme, *Der Weg zu Christo* (1732), 165. Original German: "Dein eigen Hören, Wollen und Sehen verhindert dich, daß du GOtt nicht siehest noch hörest." Author's transcription and translation.

47. Jakob Böhme, *Christosophia, oder Der Weg zu Christo . . . nebst einem von G. Terstegen: Auch ein wichtiges Zeugniß von Gottfried Arnold* (Ephrata, Pa.: Jacob Ruth, 1811-1812), plate 4. Original German: "Zerrüttung, Unruhe, stete Angst und Widerwille" ("disorder, unrest, constant anxiety and antipathy"); "Denn es ist besser daß das Auge der Aegernüß ausgerissen werde . . ." ("Indeed it is better that the eye of vexation be plucked out . . .") Author's transcription and translation.

48. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the most notable early-American Lutheran clergymen, was a Halle-trained Pietist and was succeeded by numerous other clergy of similar background and persuasion. Cf. Paul P. Kuenning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist Heritage* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 33-35, 44-48. Writes Kuenning: "Pietim's accent on missions accounted for its early arrival in colonial North America. Missionaries from the University of Halle were primarily

Francke, the leader of Halle Pietism, organized his book *A Guide to the Reading and Study of the Holy Scriptures*, published 1693, around a distinction between the letter and spirit of the word.⁴⁹ "All Reading . . . respects either the LETTER or the SPIRIT of the Inspired Writings," Francke asserted. "Separate from the latter, the former is empty and inconsistent; but when both are united, the study of Divinity is rendered complete."⁵⁰ The Holy Spirit rouses emotions that help reveal Scripture's meaning as believers become immersed in faith.⁵¹ Francke warned against an overly-logical approach to Scripture that detracts from the power of the Word to impress readers' sensibilities.⁵²

The book *Light of Wisdom*, written in 1726 by German Lutheran theologian Martin Musig, articulated a similar distinction between divine and human wisdom.⁵³ "One takes its origin from the revealed word of God, the other from the light of nature; one has an oppositional purpose, principally godly and eternal things, the other has for its purpose that which is more visible and temporal," Musig wrote. Cold intellect alone could not lead the human mind to understanding. "One is not a correct skill if the Holy Spirit itself has not ignited it through God's word in our hearts."⁵⁴ Scholars may debate the widespread relevance of mystical thought, but the letter/spirit dichotomy articulated by early mystics and Anabaptists infused many Protestant groups, including mainstream confessions.⁵⁵

responsible for the growth of the Lutheran church in the Western Hemisphere. For seventy-five years they continued to arrive from the center of Lutheran Pietism's activity on the continent" (33).

49. *Ibid.*, 14-18, 82; Peter C. Erb, "Anabaptist Spirituality," in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 117. Pietism rehashed some old Anabaptist priorities, including the ideas of spiritual regeneration and pious living.

50. Augustus Herman Franck, *A Guide to the Reading and Study of the Holy Scriptures*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. William Jaques, (London: D. Jaques, 1813), 1-2.

51. *Ibid.*, 151.

52. *Ibid.*, 67.

53. Berthold Litzmann, *Zur Textkritik und Biographie Johann Christian Günther's* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1880), 86; Yvonne Wübben, "'Ich bin alles, was da ist'. Zur Auslegung der Isis-Inschrift bei Schiller und Reinhold," in *Krisen des Verstehens um 1800*, ed. Sandra Heinen and Harald Nehr (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 137-138.

54. Martin Musig, *Licht Der Weisheit, In denen Nöthigsten Stücken der wahren Gelehrsamkeit/ Zur Erkenntniß Menschlicher und Göttlicher Dinge . . .*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt and Leipzig: n.p., 1726), 1:8. Original German: "Jene nimmt ihren Ursprung aus dem geoffenbahnten Worte GOTTES; diese aber aus dem Licht der Natur; jene hat zu ihren Entgegenwurf, fürnehmlich die göttlichen und ewigen Dinge, diese hat mehr ihre Absicht auf das, was sichtbahr und zeitlich ist: jene ist nicht rechter Art, wenn der Heilige Geist selbige nicht durch sein Wort in unsern Herten entzündet . . . jene hat einen aufrichtigen Endzweck, nemlich die Ehre GOTTES . . ." Author's transcription and translation.

55. Erb, "Anabaptist Spirituality," 102.

These perspectives found rich expression in popular devotional literature. No work better illustrates the relevance of such thought on Pennsylvania Germans than Johannes Arndt's *True Christianity*, written 1605-1610, which was the most popular German Protestant book ever published.⁵⁶ The tome was so beloved by German-speakers that, for a time, its popularity threatened to outpace that of the Bible itself.⁵⁷ *True Christianity* retained its importance throughout the eighteenth century and was widely read by early Pennsylvania Germans, so much so that Benjamin Franklin printed the first American edition of the book in 1751.⁵⁸ It went through numerous later German-language American editions, and was still being published in Pennsylvania in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Arndt grounded *True Christianity* in mystical ideas of yieldedness to the Holy Spirit, rebirth as a follower of Christ, and union with the divine, arguing that faith emanated from within the believer.⁶⁰ Advocating interiority and introspection as the gateway to salvation, the book offered readers contemplative prayers and devotional imagery designed to facilitate interior spirituality and open hearts to Christ.⁶¹ One image placed Arndt's approach to faith on clear display, granting us vision into two young women's hearts (fig. 1). In one of the hearts Adam, the Tree of Knowledge, and Satan in the form of the snake appear. "I slay him daily," the woman says, pointing a long knife directly at the Adam in her heart, referring to her overcoming of original sin. Christ appears in the other woman's heart. "I live not," she says, "but rather Christ lives in me." Adam should be "killed with the knife of daily repentance," reads further explanatory text. Indeed, "in the death of the old Adam and the inception and growth of the new person originates true Christianity."⁶²

56. Carl Lindberg, introduction to *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 6; Shantz, *Introduction to German Pietism*, 29.

57. Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 6.

58. Johann Arndt, *Sämtliche Sechs geistreiche Bücher Vom Wahren Christenthum . . .* (Philadelphia.: Benjamin Fräncklin und Johann Böhm, 1751).

59. Some copies of Arndt's work even descended through families, like the Arnold volume mentioned above.—Johann Arndt, *Sechs Bücher vom wahren Christenthum . . .* (Allentown, Pa.: Gräter and Blumer, 1833), L1923.11, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa.; Johann Arndt., *Sechs Bücher vom Wahren Christenthum . . .* (Nürnberg: Johann Andreä Endterischen Buchhandlung, 1762), L2004.0227, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, Pa..

60. Johannes Wallmann, "Johannes Arndt (1555-1621)," in Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 22-30; Peter C. Erb, *Pietists, Protestants, and Mysticism: The Use of Late Medieval Spiritual Texts in the Work of Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714)* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 56.

61. Erb, "Pietists, Protestants, and Mysticism," 58; Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 6.

62. Arndt, *Sämtliche Sechs geistreiche Bücher Vom Wahren Christenthum* (1751), frontispiece and explanation, Book 1. Author's transcription and translation. See note 149 accompanying the image of the frontispiece for the original German found on the engraved image. The "Erklärung des Haupt-Bildes zum Ersten Buch" ["Explanation of the Frontispiece to the First



Fig. 1. Johann Arndt, frontispiece to Book 1 of *Sämtliche Sechs geistreiche Bücher vom Wahren Christenthum* (Collected Six Spiritual Books of True Christianity) (Philadelphia: Benjamin Fräncklin [Franklin] and Johann Böhm, 1751). 6 5/16" x 3 3/8." Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection, Winterthur, Del.⁶³

book"], found on the other side of the leaf containing the engraved image, states that Adam "mit dem Messer der täglichen Busse soll getödtet werden" ["should be killed with the knife of daily repentance"]. The text continues: "Denn in der Tödtung des alten Adams und in der Lebendigwerdung und Wachsthum des neuen Menschen bestehet das gantze Christenthum" ["Indeed in the death of the old Adam and the coming into being and growth of the new person originates true Christianity"].

63. Text on engraving reads: "I Buch. [Over head of first maiden] Ich Tödtete ihn täglich. [Over head of second maiden] Ich Lebe doch nicht ich sondern Christus Lebet in mir. [Verse

The new birth was engendered by “faith, word, and sacrament,” with the word at the center of the process.⁶⁴ “This word awakens faith, and faith adheres to this word.”⁶⁵ But word and faith needed to exist within the believer.

Since the word is the seed of God within us, thus it must grow in us into a spiritual fruit, and must be revealed through faith, that which the Scripture bears witness to and teaches. Otherwise it a barren seed and bears no fruit. I must sense with consolation in spirit and faith, that which is also stated in the word.⁶⁶

Arndt concluded that “God did not reveal the Holy Scripture that it should lie as a dead letter on the paper; rather it should live within us in spirit and faith, and should emerge from a new inner person, or the word is of no use to us.”⁶⁷

Just as the Lutheran Arndt had internalized certain aspects of mystical and spiritualist approaches to devotion, foundational early Mennonite texts also reveal links to the wider spiritual world of the period. They likewise used metaphors of the material presence of the word to explain processes of text interpretation. This strategy is deftly employed in *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, a European Anabaptist book dating to 1702 that was republished at the Ephrata Cloister in 1745.⁶⁸ The book, comprised largely

below image] So bald sich Adam regt, mit seinen bösen Lüsten / Ruff ich zu Jesu Christ, das er mich möge rüsten, / Zu tödten täglich ihn, damit Er in mir Leb, / Und stets mit seiner gnad, in meinem Hertzen schweb.” (“Book 1. [Over head of first maiden] I slay him daily. [Over head of second maiden] I live not but rather Christ lives in me. [Verse below image] As soon as Adam attacks me with his evil lusts / I hasten to Jesus Christ, so that He may arm me in defense / To slay him daily, so that He [Christ] may live in me, / And constantly stir my heart with His grace.” Author’s transcription and translation.

64. Johann Arndt, *Sämtliche Bücher Vom Wahren Christhthum* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1753), 3, 5, 12, 107. Original German: “Die neue Geburt ist ein werck GOTTes des Heiligen Geistes, dadurch ein Mensch aus einem Kinde des Zorns und Verdammniß ein Kind der Gnaden und Seligkeit wird; Aus einem Sünder ein Gerechter durch den glauben, Wort und Sacrament . . .” (p. 12). Author’s transcription and translation.

65. *Ibid.*, 12. Original German: “Dis Wort erwecket den Glauben, und der Glaube hält sich an dis Wort . . .” Author’s transcription and translation.

66. *Ibid.*, 26. Original German: “Denn die weil GOTTes Wort der Saame GOTTes in uns ist, so muß er ie [sic] wachsen in eine geistliche Frucht, und muß das daraus werden durch den Glauben, was die Schrifft äusserlich zeuget und lehret, oder es ist ein todter Saame und todte Geburt. Ich muß im Geist und Glauben tröstlich empfinden, daß dem also ist, wie die Schrifft saget.” Author’s transcription and translation.

67. *Ibid.*, 26-27. Original German: “Es hat auch, GOTT die heilige Schrifft nicht darum offenbaret, daß sie auswendig auf dem Papier als ein todter Buchstabe soll stehen bleiben; sondern sie soll in uns lebendig werden im Geist und Glauben, und soll ein ganz innerlicher neuer Mensch daraus werden oder die Schrifft ist uns nichts nütze. . . .” Author’s transcription and translation.

68. John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship: A Narrative Account of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1984), 176;

of epistles and devotions written by Anabaptist martyrs, emphasized the importance of cultivating a “living” and “active” faith by means of Scripture.⁶⁹ A prayer in the book asked God to make His word “enlivened, strong, and genuine within all of our hearts.”⁷⁰ The book also mused on how to comprehend texts. An editor’s conclusion to a confession by sixteenth-century martyr Thomas von Imbroich urged readers to look past the “mere letters” (*blossen Buchstaben*) to reveal a text’s true meaning:

God-loving reader, just as you have read through the aforementioned writings and exhortations with diligence and understanding, so penetrate into your innermost soul and compare the texts with each other . . . and look at the writings with the eyes of the spirit in godliness and all fear of the Lord, and understand them not as the mere letters that one finds everywhere else, but rather judge them in the sense of Christ and the exegesis of the Holy Spirit.

If this process were followed, the conclusion asserted, “then one should completely understand the text through the letters. God hid His secret will and word underneath the letters.”⁷¹ This stirring metaphor about hidden meaning echoes Arndt’s call not to allow the word to remain a “dead letter on the paper” but rather to uncover the meaning letters contained—or obscured.⁷²

Marcus Meier, “Research Note: Golden Apples in Silver Bowls and the Relationship of Swiss Anabaptism to Pietism,” *MQR* 82 (Oct. 2008), 591, 597.

69. Meier, 591-592, 596; *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls: The Rediscovery of Redeeming Love*. 1702, ed. Leonard Gross, trans. Elizabeth Bender (Lancaster, Pa.: Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1999), 8, 255, 342. Original German: “. . . wünschen wir Gnade und Friede von GOtt dem Vatter und dem HErrn Jesu Christo / darzu auch einen lebendigen [living] und durch die Liebe thätigen [active] Glauben der in der Prob bestehe . . .” —*Güldene Aeppfel* (1745), 255. Author’s transcription and translation.

70. *Güldene Aeppfel in Silbern Schalen Oder: Schöne und nützliche Worte und Warheiten Zur Gottseligkeit . . . 1702* (Ephrata, Pa.: Verlegt durch etliche Mitglieder der Mennonisten-gemeine, 1745), 460. Original German: “Und wir bitten dich auch lieber barmhertziger Vatter, du wollest doch dein gehörtes und empfangenes Wort nun in unser aller Herten lebendig, kräftig und würcklich machen . . .” —*Güldene Aeppfel* (1745), 460. Author’s transcription and translation.

71. Christian Neff, “Imbroich, Thomas von (1533-1558),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. (accessed Oct. 26, 2015).—[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Imbroich,_Thomas_von_\(1533-1558\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Imbroich,_Thomas_von_(1533-1558)); *Güldene Aeppfel in Silbern Schalen* (1745), 217-218. Original German: “Gott-liebender Leser / so du die vorgemeldte Schrifften und Ermahnungen mit Fleiß und Verstand durchlesen has / so gehe hinein in das innerste deines Gemüths / und vergleiche die Schrifft gegen einander . . . und mit den Augen des Geistes / in aller Furcht und Gottseligkeit / ansehen / und nicht also nach dem blossen Buchstaben allenthalben verstehen, sondern nach den Sinn Christi und Außlegung des Geistes urtheilen / Joh. 7. 2. Corinth. 3. Dann soll man die Schrifft nach dem Buchstaben durchauß verstehen. . . .Dann GOtt hat sein Geheimniß Willen und Wort / under dem Buchstaben verborgen . . .” (*Güldene Aeppfel* 1745 217-218). Author’s transcription and translation.

72. Arndt, *Sämtliche Bücher Vom Wahren Christenthum* (1753), 26.

Musings on how to unlock the meaning of texts found expression in printed ephemera accessible to Pennsylvania's German-speakers. In 1748, for example, Germantown printer Christoph Saur published a broadside titled "Foundational Instruction to a Holy Life, from a Long-Dead Spiritually-Minded Teacher." The passage offered advice on reading strategies:

We should often read such books that are useful to our condition, and often during the reading wait a little and be silent to allow a place for the spirit, which pulls the mind inward; two or three meaningful and simple words, which are full of the spirit of God, they are the secret manna, and even though we may soon forget these words, they continue to effect us within. Thus the soul is fed and nourished.

Such reading encourages "union of the souls with God," a concept central to the mystical books Saur himself published.⁷³

Pennsylvania-German spirituality, like all Protestantism, was predicated on the fundamentally flawed tool of language. "The word" provided an external catalyst for cultivation of internal faith; but, because it existed outside the believer, it could not complete the process of spiritual union with Christ. What is more, once the inner working of the Holy Spirit was achieved, words could not depict the regenerative process that occurred in the believer. "O that I had but the pen of man, and were able therewith to write down the Spirit of knowledge," wrote Jakob Böhme. "I can but stammer of the great mysteries like a childe that is beginning to speak; so very little can the earthly tongue expresse what the Spirit comprehendeth."⁷⁴ Johann Arndt articulated the same thought: "All the words of which I speak are but a shadow, for the most precious thing I

73. "Gründliche Anweisung zu einem Heiligen Leben. Von einem Geistlich-gesinneten lang verstorbenen Lehrer. Übersetzt 1747" (Germanton[sic], Pa.: Christoph Saur, 1748), Am.1748.Gru.2940.F. Library Company of Philadelphia. Original German: "Wir solten ofte solche Schrifftten (Bücher) lesen, die zu unserem Zustand dienlich sind, und unter dem Lesen öfters ein wenig warten und stille halten, um dem Geiste, der das Gemüth inwendig ziehet, Platz zulassen; zwey oder drey deutliche und einfältige Worte, die aber voll sind von dem Geist GOTTes, die sind das verborgene Manna, und ob wir die Worte schon vergessen, so würcken sie doch im Verborgenen, und die Seele wird damit gespeiset und genähret." "Vereinigung der Seelen mit GOTT" was translated as "union of the souls with God." Author's transcriptions and translations. Other mystical tracts published by Saur include Johannes Hildebrand, *Mistisches und kirchliches Zeuchnüß der Brüderschaft in Zion, von dem wichtigsten Puncten des Christenthumsnebst einem Anhang* (1743), Thomas à Kempis, *Der kleine Kempis, oder Kurze Sprüche und Gebätlein* (1750), and *Ein Mystischer das ist ein vor der alten Natur und Vernunfft und Eigenheit verborgener Seelen-Spiegel* (1748).

74. Jacob Behmen, *Concerning The Three Principles of The Divine Essence of the Eternall, Dark, Light, and Temporary VVorld . . .* (London: M.S. for H. Blunden at the Castle in Cornhill, 1648), 49.

feel in my soul, I cannot express adequately in mere words."⁷⁵ And equally so for Reformation-era mystic Sebastian Franck, who called inner truth "the spirit that no one can write."⁷⁶ As philosophy, theology, and a medium of devotion, the "word" always fell short. Why, then, did German Protestants continue to embrace the word-centered arts of calligraphy and manuscript illumination as part of their artistic traditions and popular piety?

LETTERS AND WORDS AS VISUAL ARTWORKS

The very imperfection of letters and words in communicating the will of God recommended calligraphy and manuscript illumination as means of spiritual exploration. Calligraphy, manuscript illumination, and reader engagement with ornamented texts brought writer and reader closer to the word's truth by using visually captivating designs to catalyze the sensory state necessary to render text meaningful, and to open the soul to God. Scribes used devotional texts and artful letters to stir the interior flames of faith kindled by the Holy Spirit. This quest to unlock the spiritual meaning of words represents a basic function of Pennsylvania-German devotional calligraphy. It directed a meditative mind toward clearing that "place for the spirit," which Christoph Saur's long-dead spiritual teacher had described.⁷⁷ Despite Protestantism's frustration with the ability of language to bring about true spiritual experience, German settlers possessed no significant alternative path to wisdom and grace.

"Regardless of their semantic meaning, words—and, by extension, sacred texts—exist in and through their material, mediated forms," wrote the scholar of American religion S. Brent Plate.⁷⁸ The word was an inescapable aspect of Christian life. Even radical dissenters who questioned Scripture's ability to bring about salvation plumbed its depths for meaning. "The sweet source [or fountaine] which is generated in the centre from the light, it is the Word or heart of God. . . in this you must dwell, if you will be in paradise," wrote Jakob Böhme.⁷⁹

Early modern German-speakers developed numerous strategies to access the meaning hidden in holy text. The most extreme was rooted in

75. Arndt, *Sämtliche Bücher Vom Wahren Christenthum* (1753), 332. Original German: "Alle Worte, die ich davon rede, sind nur ein Schatten: denn das köstliche, das ich in meiner Seele empfinde, kan ich nicht ausreden" (Arndt 1753, 332). Author's transcription and translation.

76. Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 161.

77. "Gründliche Anweisung zu einem Heiligen Leben."

78. S. Brent Plate, "Words." in "Key Words in Material Religion," ed. Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, special issue, *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 7, no. 1 (2011), 157-158.

79. Behmen [Böhme], *Concerning The Three Principles of The Divine Essence*, 73-74.

the Jewish practice of cabala, or mystical letter interpretation. Jakob Böhme himself was deeply influenced by cabala. An English translator of Böhme offered an overview of the practice in 1648: "The *Cabala* [consists] in knowing how the words and formes of Things expresse the Reality of the Inward Myserie. . . . There is no tittle of any Letter, that is proceeded from that Eternall Essentiall Word." The fundamental premise of cabala is that the wisdom God poured into Scripture also structured the natural world. Thus, understanding one could open understanding of the other. To understand the language of nature, one must unlock "the Spirit of the Letter," the editor of Böhme's *Three Principles of Divine Essence* explained.⁸⁰ While of ancient origin, cabala inspired some of the earliest German-speakers in Pennsylvania.⁸¹

The "spirit of the letter" occupied a fundamental place in early modern German conceptions of language beyond the activities of mystics like Böhme, or other radical spiritualists. Contemporary theories regarding the origins of language and "secret meanings" of letter forms share commonalities with Böhme's understanding of divine wisdom. Thinkers of the period embraced language and written text as a cryptological key to meaning beyond the words themselves, sharing an assumption that languages functioned because they represented a universal truth grounded in God. One print publication, titled *Grammatologia, or a Broad Analysis of the Magical Science of Letters*, published in 1773 by the Roman Catholic Ignatius Dominicus Schmid of Bavaria, taught religious lessons through the secret meaning supposedly bound up in letters. It began with an overview of the history of letter forms and then provided riddles and poems based on each letter of the alphabet. Next, Schmid offered readers devotions including a "Spiritual ABC," a "Golden Alphabet for Christian Perfection," a "Sin and Vice List," and a "Virtue Alphabet."⁸² At least one Pennsylvania manuscript quoted a devotional writing in the book, underscoring broad interest in language's spiritual resonances during the period.⁸³

Manuscripts made by German-speaking scribes underscore just how widespread Schmid's assumptions about letters as devotional tools were. One written in 1730 in Graubünden, a region of Switzerland with mixed Catholic and Protestant populations, drew on the same logic as Schmid's

80. *Ibid.*, ii-iii.

81. See Fisher, "Prophesies and Revelations," 299-333.

82. Ignatio Dominico Schmid, *Grammatologia, Oder hinlängliche Untersuchung der Geheimnißvollen Buchstaben-Wissenschaft, wie solche aus den bewährtesten Philologis und Historicis entdeckt worden* (Regensburg: n.p., 1773), 3-10, 74, 80, 107, 111, 129, 143, 147-148, 156.

83. Vorschrift, "Pracht in Gebärden . . .", ca. 1800. Ink and watercolor on paper. Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center.

book. Called by its scribe a revelation from the *Himmels Register* (Book of Life), the text provides a key to Scripture's teachings about how to enter heaven, grounded in a procession through the alphabet. The recto of each leaf features Frakturschrift capitals and religious words that begin with the depicted letters. The letter A, for example, begins "Abrahams Shoßling" ("Abraham's shoot"), and P "Paradieß" ("paradise"). Each letter and associated term is followed by a Scripture citation. Final pages offer moral maxims.⁸⁴ The visual focus of each recto is colorful Frakturschrift, but the scribe packed the versos of the manuscript's first five leaves with dense Currentschrift organized around the ABC's. The text articulates qualities required for salvation. In an entry for the word "Hörer" ("hearer"), for example, the manuscript reads: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God," quoting Luke 11:28.⁸⁵ Individual letters serve more than a decorative purpose; they structure and inform the entire reading experience. The manuscript is, in a sense, a guide to Scripture, and the scribe embraced the idea that letters reveal linkages between spiritual concepts.⁸⁶

Many letter-based devotional writings proceeded page by page or line by line through the alphabet, offering scriptural or devotional verses beginning with each letter. One such piece, called by its scribe a *Vorschrift* (handwriting sample) and perhaps made and used in southern Germany around 1730, featured a dedication asking readers, most likely children, "to regulate life and work after the Word's example" before proffering moral guidance from biblical and apocryphal texts.⁸⁷ A "golden ABC" made by Jakob Hutzli in Bern, Switzerland, around 1700 featured religious writings rich in "moral exhortations."⁸⁸ The scribe of another early eighteenth-century golden ABC likely made in Graubünden clearly intended the texts for devotion. At the top of each leaf, the scribe wrote supplications such as, "In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen," which appeared above John 3:16, or the shortened "In

84. Schriftenvorlagen (writing sample book), VI.53, 1730, pages 1-18. Ink and watercolor on laid paper. Rätisches Museum, Chur, Switzerland.

85. Original German: "Im. H. gehen hinein die Hörer: Seelig sünd die Gottes Wort hören." Author's transcription and translation.

86. Schriftenvorlagen (writing sample book), VI.53, 1730, pages 1-18.

87. Calligraphic manuscript, Augsburg, ca. 1720-1730. Pen and ink on paper. Private collection. Original German: "Der Herr verleihe, daß alle die so dise Vorschrift brauchen, nicht nur deraus erlernen, recht zu schreiben. Sondern auch diese heilige und Herliche Wort, auf eine Gottselige weise, in daß Hertz zu faßen, und Jehr [sic] Leben und Wandel, darnach einrichten" (Vorschrift ca. 1720-1730). Author's transcription of the full primary source from which the short excerpt quoted in the text was drawn.

88. Jakob Hutzli, *Neuw verfertigtes grosses güldenes ABC. In welchen vielfürtreffliche Sittenlehren vermahnungen Zur Tugendt, Und Abmahnungen von den Lasteren Enthalten sind* (Canton Bern, Switzerland: ca. 1700), watercolor and ink on paper, Burgerbibliothek Bern, Bern, Switzerland, Ek. 1975 / 343 Mss. h.h. Ll. 167.

the name of God, Amen," which appeared above a supplication asking God for constancy in faith.⁸⁹ These calligraphic artworks were thus framed as prayers—the "daily bread" of pious Christians.⁹⁰ Given their colorful calligraphy, the prayers possess both visual and verbal components.

The attention lavished by Pennsylvania German printers and calligraphers on golden ABC's suggest that they, like their European counterparts, also embraced the alphabet as a tool to structure and reveal divine wisdom. A golden ABC printed in Pennsylvania between ca. 1770 and 1800 offered instructions on use of the document:

In this German alphabet
are written many wonderful teachings.
It is arranged with much diligence
in short and lovely rhyming maxims.
Therefore everyone should gladly read it
and put to use what is written within.⁹¹

The document does not teach the alphabet so much as spirituality by means of the alphabet.⁹²

Similar ABC's appeared in Pennsylvania in manuscript form. One crafted in 1809 by the Schwenkfelder Susanna Heebner carried on the old-world tradition of proffering spiritual guidance through a succession of Frakturschrift letters.⁹³ Heebner's rhyming text begins with the letter A, "Am Ersten solt du Gottes Fürcht han, / so wird aus dir ein Weiser Mann" ("First of all you should have fear of God / thus you will become a wise man"), and continues in this fashion to the end of the alphabet.⁹⁴

89. Vorschrift/Golden ABC, ca. 1700. VI 30. Rätisches Museum, Chur, Switzerland. Original German: "In dem Namen Gottes des Vatters, des Sohns, und des Heiligen Geists Amen"; "In dem Namen Gottes Amen" (Vorschrift/golden ABC, ca. 1700 1-2). Author's transcription and translation.

90. Gerhard Tersteegen, *Geistliches Blumen-Gärtlein Inniger Seelen . . .* (Germanton, Pa.: Christoph Saur, 1747), 55. Original German: "Verlängnung ist die Speiß, Gebät das täglich Bro . . ."—Tersteegen (1747), 55. Author's transcription of the source from which the shorter quote in the text is excerpted.

91. Original German: "In diesem deutschen Alphabeth, / Viel schöne Lehr geschrieben steht. / Es ist gestellt mit ganzem Fleiß, / Kurz und lieblich, Reimenweiß. / Drum solls es ein jeder lesen gern, / Und was darin ist, daraus lern." Author's transcription and translation.

92. "Im Nahmen der aller heiligsten Dreyfaltigkeit. Das goldene ABC für jedermann, der gern mit Ehren wollt bestehn." N.p.: n.p., ca. 1770-1800. 9523.F (Roughwood). Library Company of Philadelphia.

93. Susanna Heebner, *Religious Text, The Golden ABC (A-M)*, Worcester Township, Montgomery County, Pa., 1809, 13 3/8" x 8 1/8", 2-029a / 1920.25.125, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Schwenksville, Pa.

94. Dennis K. Moyer, *Fraktur Writings and Folk Art Drawings of the Schwenkfelder Library Collection*. Pennsylvania German Society 31 (Kutztown, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society 1997), 90.

Not all calligraphed devotional texts made use of a simple procession through the alphabet, but all attempted to elevate letters and words to the status of artwork. Language was simply an unavoidable part of spiritual cultivation, so striving toward its effective use through creative employment of visually arresting manuscript techniques became a feature of German Protestant spiritualism. This drive to express God's message visually as well as verbally, through ornate letters, words, and excerpts from holy and devotional texts, underlies spiritual calligraphy and devotional manuscript making. German mystic and cabbalist Georg von Welling, who was influenced by Jakob Böhme and may have been known in Pennsylvania, noted that God sent His law to earth in the form of "lebendigen Buchstaben," or "living letters."⁹⁵ The term is an apt descriptor not just for Christ Himself, but also for the holy writings that carried His message. These words were unavoidable, if flawed, vessels of God's message to earth. Aesthetically rich presentation of letters could enhance their interpretive value.

An evocative exposition of the power of "living letters" to deliver God's message is found in a 1713 edition of Gottfried Arnold's *The First Love*, a book about early Christianity. The capital "E" that opened the text (attached to the word "euch," meaning "to or for you") offered a visual articulation of the place of letters in pious writings (figs. 2-3).



Fig. 2. Gottfried Arnold, *Die erste Liebe; das ist. Wahre Abbildung der ersten Christen. . .* (The First Love: That is, True Portrayal of the First Christians . . .), (Frankfurt am Meyen: C. Bensch, 1712), "Zuschrift" ("Epistle"), 1. 13 ¼" x 8". Courtesy of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

95. Georgii von Welling, *Opus Mago – Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum Deme noch beygefüget : Ein Tractätlein von der Göttlichen Weisheit ; und ein besonderer Anhang etlicher sehr rar- und kostbarer chymischer Piecen* (Frankfurt und Leipzig: Fleischerischen Buchhandlung, 1760), 513; Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 124-127.

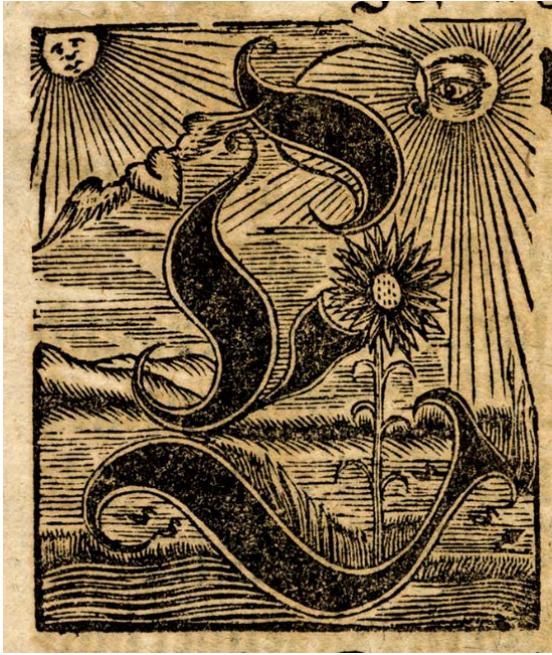


Fig. 3. Detail, Gottfried Arnold, *Die erste Liebe; das ist, Wahre Abbildung der ersten Christen. . .* (*The First Love: That is, True Portrayal of the First Christians . . .*), "Zuschrift" ("Epistle"), 1. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, The Ohio State University.

The Frakturschrift letter is set in sylvan surroundings; mountains and a body of water appear in the background, and a solar logos, or sun with a face, casts rays upon the letter. A heart with wings flutters between the sun and the letter, perhaps representing the Holy Spirit sent to invest the text with divine meaning. In the upper-right corner, a great eye gazes at the letter, from which sprouts a flower, a symbol of living faith. The growth of the flower from the letter suggests that the mingling of the Holy Spirit with the human senses through text catalyzes the rebirth Arndt and so many others described—with letters and words at the center of the process. The very existence of an instructional image centered on a letter demonstrates the power early modern German-speakers invested in words to reveal the route to faith. A book titled *Little Spiritual Garden of the Inner Souls* by Gerhard Tersteegen, a favorite author among German Mennonites, features an epigraph that echoes the visual metaphor of the

blossoming letter seen in Arnold's book.⁹⁶ "These little flowers [of faith] stand here planted on the page as if God Himself drew them, watered them, and sent the sun to shine on them," Tersteegen wrote. "May the heart be God's soil, and may every little flower in all that you read lead you to truth, strength, and being itself!"⁹⁷

Scholars have traditionally highlighted the work of scribes at Ephrata Cloister as the most salient examples of Pennsylvania-German calligraphy and manuscript illumination laden with spiritual significance.⁹⁸ Indeed, the documents, which gracefully combine ornamental letter forms and supporting pictorial images that celebrate the contemplative value of letter designs, exemplify the immersive quality of the letter veneration described above. Manuscripts made at Ephrata comprise the earliest extant Pennsylvania pieces. Religious manuscripts often called wall charts covered the walls of Ephrata's rooms. The writings "served them on the path to sanctification for the crucifixion of nature," according to a period source.⁹⁹ In the community's *Schreib-Schule*, or writing school, scribes spent hours creating the manuscripts they pinned to the walls, gave or sold to outsiders—or, as in the case of musical manuscripts, used in singing. Indeed, residents considered writing and singing comparable in their ability to bring them to God. Conrad Beissel, the leader of Ephrata Cloister, personally pointed community members toward both activities.¹⁰⁰ According to Beissel, "each [scribe] has the birthing work in himself" after mystical awakening.¹⁰¹ One eighteenth-century Ephrata manuscript in particular implemented to great effect the epistemological system diagrammed in the large printed letter "E" in Arnold's tome, revealing how community members presumed letters to support devotion and cultivate spiritual wisdom. Indeed, with their calligraphy, the anonymous scribes who crafted Ephrata's *The Christian ABC* in 1750 recorded with every stroke of their quills the extent to which the Ephrata residents embraced letter designs and associated manuscript

96. For more on Tersteegen's resonance among German Mennonites, see Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, s.v., "Germany," accessed July 16, 2017.—<http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Germany>.

97. Tersteegen, title page verso. Original German: "Die Blümlein stehen hier / Gepflanzet aufs Papier: GOtt wolle selbst sie mahlen, / Begiessen und bestrahlen ; / Das hertz sey seine Erd, / Und jedes Blümlein werd' / Zur Warheit, Krafft und Wesen, / In allen die sie lesen!" Author's transcription and translation.

98. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 141-145.

99. *Ibid.*, 141.

100. Henry S. Borneman, *Pennsylvania German Illuminated Manuscripts: A Classification of Fraktur-Schriften and An Inquiry into their History and Art*. (1937; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 5; Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 141.

101. Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves*, 144-145.

illuminations as a form of all-encompassing, immersive iconography to surround and structure spiritual experience.

While the *Christian ABC* functioned on a basic level as a calligraphic style or exemplar book, the scribes vested their designs with intrinsic contemplative and spiritual value.¹⁰² Indeed, they expressed their devotional aims in the manuscript's full title: *The Christian ABC: Is Suffering, Patience, and Hope, He Who Has Achieved These Has Reached His Goal*. The manuscript proceeds through seven Frakturschrift upper- and lower-case alphabets of various sizes and levels of detail, as well as Arabic and Roman numerals. The scribes employed each of the large and ornate upper-case letters that comprise the first two alphabets in the book as individual works of contemplative iconography, often incorporating human figures into their elaborate drawings of each letter. The presence of angels, biblical characters, and even Ephrata Cloister brothers and sisters ensconced deep within the curves of the Frakturschrift designs underscored the primacy of letters as contemplative tools as well as the utility of the visual form of letters and words to the process of spiritual exploration. In effect, letters became metaphorical and actual windows into biblical tales and Ephrata's lived worship experience, tying scriptural lessons and everyday personal piety together via calligraphy (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Anonymous scribes, Frakturschrift capital letter G, *Der Christen ABC (The Christian ABC)*, Ephrata Cloister, Ephrata, Pa., 1750, leaf 10. Iron gall ink on laid paper. Approximately 12 5/8" x 14 1/8". EC75.4.16. Courtesy of the Ephrata Cloister, Ephrata, Pa.; Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Ephrata manuscripts, with their rich theological context and provenance, align nicely with European antecedents in letter veneration. But the employment of similar aesthetic motifs on spiritual manuscripts by those outside of Ephrata confirms that a wide cross-section of

102. Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732-2000* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 7.

Pennsylvania Germans held high regard for letters' revelatory power. Mennonites in particular embraced the manuscript enterprise, especially in the context of their school system. Mary Jane Lederach Hershey has attributed a 1768 handwriting sample made for a Mennonite student to the Lutheran schoolteacher-scribe Herman Ache.¹⁰³ The manuscript quite literally pointed to letters as a prime teaching tool in his composition: Ache employed a manicule (or pointing finger) to urge the student, in Latin, to "mende morum," possibly meaning "mind your manners" or "watch your behavior."¹⁰⁴ Both the manicule and the maxim appear within a richly illustrated "I," the first letter in the word that opens the main text. (see fig. 5).¹⁰⁵



Fig. 5. Herman M. Ache (attr.), *Vorschrift*, Skippack/Salford, Pennsylvania, 1768. Ink and watercolor on laid paper. 7 15/16" x 12 1/2." Courtesy of the Mennonite Heritage Center Collection, Harleysville, Pa. Gift of Hiram and Mary Jane Lederach Hershey.¹⁰⁶

103. Mary Jane Lederach Hershey, *This Teaching I Present: Fraktur from the Skippack and Salford Mennonite Meetinghouse Schools, 1747 – 1836* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2003), 74, 195.

104. Author's transcription and translation.

105. Hershey, *This Teaching I Present*, 74, 195; Herman M. Ache (attr.), *Vorschrift*, Skippack/Salford, ink and watercolor on paper, Pennsylvania, 1768, Mennonite Heritage Center Collection, Harleysville, Pa..

106. Original German: "Mende Morum [in capital I]. Ich hab Einen Schatz Erfunden besser als viel gutt und gelt wer Jesum Christi alle stunden stets in Seinen Herten hält, Der ist glücklich Der Kann stehn und durch alle wetter gehn ob auch gleich wohl alle noth, und ich lage im Tod, so könt es doch Jesus werden und zu meinem Besten Wardein ob auch gantzem strom und wellen grosser Wieder wärtigkeit, über mich zusammen schwellen, Wird doch Gott in allen leyd mich erhalden Kräftiglich Das die wasser wogen mich nicht umstossen noch ertrincke; ob ich gleich ein wenig sincke, Lass darzu die Welt auch schmähen

In another manuscript, a letter takes on human qualities and offers the reader its own spiritual advice. Probably made by a Mennonite for use by a child in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the manuscript began with the lines “Reflect on what you must avoid—it is sinfulness; on what you must do—it is obedience to God’s commands; on what you must fear—it is the cross, death, eternal damnation.”¹⁰⁷ The most visually engaging element of the manuscript is an elaborate initial “B,” beginning the word *bedencke*, meaning “reflect,” “consider,” or “ponder.” The scribe incorporated two human figures into the letter’s design, one wearing a long buttoned coat and both wearing tricorne hats. One of them speaks to the reader-viewer, saying the word *thut*, or “do,” and pointing to the word *Busse*, or “repentance” (see fig. 6). This call to repent complements the text’s longer admonishment for reflection.¹⁰⁸

While human figures on devotional manuscripts are relatively rare, angels do sometimes appear.¹⁰⁹ The top line of a writing sample made by a scribe in Montgomery County in 1815 is carried by two angels. This imagery is appropriate, as the German-language line consists of an abbreviated version of perhaps the most famous words ever spoken by angels: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which

Hassen und verfolgen mich, Ja, nach gut und Ehr der stehen Toben wuten grausamlich, Wird jedoch zu ihrer Trutz, mich verbergen Gottes Schutz, Und mit seinen Fügeln decken (numbers 1 to 36) Janr Febr Mertz April Mey Juny July Augst 7ber, 8ber, 9ber, December (lower case alphabet) Recte fatient oneminem Timias, Soli Deo Gloria Ora et Labora Dethe und arbeite Diese Vorschrift gehörte Vor und ist ihm gemacht worden zur Lehr 1768.” (“Mind your manners [in capital I]. I have found a treasure better than many goods and gold. He who holds Jesus Christ firmly in his heart every hour is fortunate. He can stand and endure in all kinds of weather. If in extreme need, or if I lie in death. So Jesus can appraise it and still be my best judge. If whole streams and waves of great opposition totally flood over me, God will keep me powerfully in all conditions of sorrow, so that I will not be pushed over by the billows let alone drown, though I nearly sink a little. Let the world also abuse, hate and persecute me. Yes, after good and honor stands here, frenzy storms violently, and after its offensive God’s defense will conceal me, and cover me with His wings. January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December. [The Latin may be a variation on the phrase ‘*Recte faciendo neminem Timeo.*’] I fear none in doing right, to God alone the glory, pray and hard work, pray and work. This writing sample belongs to [space left blank] and was made for him for instruction. 1768”) (transcription/translation mostly from Hershey 2003 195; author’s translation of “mende morum.” That Latin phrase has frequently been mistranslated to something along the lines of “remember death,” when it might be more accurately rendered as “mind your manners” or “watch your behavior.”).

107. Original German: “BeDencke Was du fliehen must das sind alle sünden was du thun must das sind die gebotte gottes was du fürchten must das ist das Creutz den Tod.” Author’s transcription and translation.

108. Religious text, “Bedencke was du fliehen muß . . .” Pennsylvania, ca. 1800, ink and watercolor on paper, 12561, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Author’s transcription and translation.

109. Bird, *O Noble Heart/O Edel Herz: Fraktur and Spirituality in Pennsylvania German Folk Art*, 63.

shall be told to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior. . . ."¹¹⁰ Non-scriptural text below the verse reinforces the Bible lesson: "He has found a treasure better than Arabian gold. That gift is this Jesus."¹¹¹ An angel lovingly embraces the capital "S" on *Schatz*, or "treasure," thus itself forming a part of the letter.¹¹²



Fig. 6. Religious text, "Bedencke was du fliehen muß. . ." ("Reflect on what you must avoid. . ."), Pennsylvania, ca. 1800. Ink and watercolor on paper. 8 2/5" x 13 1/8". 12561. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.¹¹³

110. Translation from Luke 2:10-11 (KJV). Original German: "Siehe ich verkundige euch eine grosse freude die allem volck wieder fahren wird Denn euch ist [Heute] der Heyland." Author's transcription and translation.

111. Original German: "Der hat Einen Schatz Erfunden Besser Als Arabisch gold Dem Bescherd ist dieser Jesus." Author's transcription and translation.

112. Jacob Hümmel, Writing sample (Vorschrift), ink and watercolor on laid paper, 1961.0209 A, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Del.

113. Original German: "thut busse [in capital B] BeDencke Was du fliehen must das sind alle sünden was du thun must das sind die gebotte gottes was du fürchten must das ist das Creutz den Tod Und die Ewige VerDamnniß, Was du begehren und hoffen Must, Das sind die geistliche güther in diesem, und die Ewige in dem Zukunfftigen leben, andacht haben bey dem gebet, gedult, bey dem Creutz Daß hertz bey dem Worten, Ein gut geWissen bey allem Thun, Daß, bestehet für Gott und Menschen, Dann Wie, Du glaubst so lebst du, Wie du lebst so, stirbst du Wie du stirbst so fährest du, Wie du fährest so bleibst du, hilfst dann, Lieber Gott daß Wir so glauben und leben, Das Wir unß Nicht fürchten zu sterben, Die Zeit geht hin wo fürt sie unsern Wandeln hin, sind Wir auf der Rechten bahn Nach dem Himmlichen Canaan im Storck und Cranich ist bereit, er Merckt Mit fleiß auf seine Zeit, Des gleichen schwalb und Turteltauben Die Lasten sich die Zeit Nicht Rauben, die kleine Thür und Was Noh Mehr die Geben Uns ein schöne lehr. Wie Wir in Dieser gnade Zeit sollen sammeln auf die Ewigkeit, Matthai. 25. Kan Man sehn und finden es geschrieben stehen Wie

Printed spiritual literature and manuscript devotionals reveal the vitality of the word, its study, and its artistic presentation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German-speaking Europe and Pennsylvania. But questions remain. To what extent was manuscript production in Pennsylvania a unified, coherent artistic enterprise? Can we assume that the same spiritual yearning inspired many or most of the documents' producers and users? Answers to these questions depend in part on how we characterize theological relationships among various Reformation groups. Historians have long sought to construct taxonomies of the various groups that emerged during the Reformation, efforts which have lent both clarity and confusion to the history of the Protestant movement. In the nineteenth century, Ernst Troeltsch asserted that Anabaptists and spiritualists—both well-represented in Pennsylvania—comprised fundamentally different approaches to Protestantism. This position was reaffirmed, with some modification, by George Huntston Williams in the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ For Williams, the key markers of Anabaptism were its primitivism, biblical literalism, disciplined communal life, and adult baptism, whereas spiritualists focused almost entirely on what could be learned from the spirit.¹¹⁵

Weil es an, Der Zeit gelegen, Drum um die Zeit sehr Wohl in acht und sey mit fleiß Dar auf bedacht wie du die Selb bringest Zu da Mit du komst mit ihr zu ruh Nach Jesu zu. Ich liebe die mich lieben und die mich frühe suchen finden mich, Spriche Salomonis am 8. Cappitel vers. 17." Translation: "Reflect on what you must avoid—it is sinfulness, on what you must do—it is obedience to God's commands, what you must fear—it is the cross, death, eternal damnation, what you must desire and hope for—it is spiritual gain in this your present and in eternal life. Be devout in your prayers, exhibit patience before the cross, reveal your heart in your words, maintain a good conscience in your dealings with others. That will thus put you in good stead with God and man. For one's beliefs are how one lives. How one lives determines how one dies. How one dies is how one departs. And how one departs is how one spends the hereafter. Help us, dear God, that we believe and live in such a way that we fear death not. Time passes quickly here, whereto the many changes? Are we on the right path, leading to heavenly Canaan? The stork and crane prepare, well aware their time is nigh, so too the swallow, turtle dove, diligently do make ready, wasting not their time nor strength, to reach that little/narrow door. The valuable lesson left for us, anxious travelers all, is we should also be like them, and know to gather all we need in this our own blessed time toward our eternal goal. Matt. 25. One can find it written there, how time passes quickly and we should pay close attention to it, and use it wisely, that you reach a state of peace in the end with Jesus. I love those who love me, and those who seek me early will find me. Proverbs 8 v.17." Author's transcription and translation.

114. George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962). For a summary of Williams's work, see Aart de Groot, "The Radical Reformation Revisited?" *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History* 73:2 (1993), 199-207. Steve Ozment discusses issues of classification in his book *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 344. Williams acknowledged that all radical reformation movements amounted to a common reaction against traditional state-supported religion.

115. Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 345; Erb, *Anabaptist Spirituality*, 84. Peter Erb notes that spiritualists "neglected, as a result, formal ecclesiastical structures, such as church,

This formulation would put three of Pennsylvania's scribal groups—the Ephrata Cloister, the Schwenkfelders, and the Mennonites—in theological opposition, as the first two were spiritualist and the third Anabaptist in origin. Top-down taxonomic classification, however, does not necessarily account for lived experience. Pennsylvania Schwenkfelders and Mennonites, for example, established working relationships in educating their children, and schoolrooms became sites for the manuscript arts.¹¹⁶ Key Mennonite texts were printed at the Ephrata Cloister, indicating a high level of contact between the groups.¹¹⁷ And, even though Anabaptism's pneumatology has received less scholarly attention than its ecclesiology, the movement did indeed possess spiritualist elements.¹¹⁸ Prominent early Anabaptists cultivated a mystical approach to faith, and Swiss Anabaptists influenced by Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer strove to unlock meaning and spiritual awakening from texts.¹¹⁹ Anabaptism is well-known for leitmotifs of martyrdom and community identity; but it has also long emphasized the role of the "living spirit" in religious life.¹²⁰ Adherents interpreted Luther's principle of "sola scriptura" to mean that the Holy Spirit and letter of Scripture had to come together to render a holy text meaningful—a belief that echoed mystical theology.¹²¹ Anabaptists, then, engaged deeply in spiritual exploration, and spiritualists found value in the letter of Scripture.¹²² It seems, then, that the manuscript arts represent a point of devotional convergence among sects, a shared hermeneutical method in the midst of theological

sacraments, the words of Scripture, creeds and symbolic books"—hardly the attitude of keen calligraphers and manuscript artists.

116. For an example of a Schwenkfelder manuscript with Mennonite connections, see Hershey, *This Teaching I Present*, 81.

117. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, 122-126.

118. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), 87. Writes Snyder: "Anabaptism of all kinds was based on a lively pneumatology, on the expectation that God's Spirit needed to work in the hearts of human beings in order to initiate and sustain the life of faith. This is visible even in Hubmaier, who was one of the least 'pneumatic' of Anabaptist leaders."

119. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement*, 27; Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 62.

120. Erb, "Anabaptist Spirituality," 87, 94, 114; Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 29; Dent, "The Anabaptists," 352. Writes Erb: "The Supper and the images of community and of willingness to die are the central themes treated and the themes which mark the tone of Anabaptist spirituality" (94). And "a distinctive Anabaptist piety was expressed less in acts of worship and devotion than in the whole of life," Dent has noted.

121. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 43, 87-88. As C. Arnold Snyder wrote, "The Anabaptist emphasis on the active working of the spirit of God meant that Anabaptist 'biblicism' always was mediated by the expectation that the Spirit would illuminate and provide the proper understanding of scripture."

122. *Ibid.*, 35.

and ecclesiological diversity.¹²³ Devotional manuscripts provide useful source material to explore this topic.

This convergence was doubtless rooted, in part, in the unavoidable materiality of the word-based Protestant devotional experience—a matter of the innermost spirit but nonetheless dependent on printing press, paper, ink, and quill. Whatever the wider implications of spiritual manuscript art, scribes clearly appreciated both the materiality and deeper devotional resonance of their work. “Paper is my field, therefore am I in good spirits,” wrote a calligrapher in the tiny village of Feldis, high in the Swiss Alps, in 1743. “The quill is my plow, therefore am I so smart. The ink is my seed that brings me wealth honor and fame.”¹²⁴ The manuscript also featured religious text, reading: “Come here, you children, to hear me,” quoting Psalm 34:11, and continued with an admonition to “learn the fear of the Lord.”¹²⁵ The verse comparing paper to a field and ink to seed also appeared on a manuscript made in Lancaster County in 1832.¹²⁶ Germans on both sides of the Atlantic vested artful letters with cultural and spiritual significance in an era when text production was a prolonged and personal activity.

THE WORD IN THE WILDERNESS:

DEVOTIONAL MANUSCRIPTS IN EVERYDAY MENNONITE LIFE

Pennsylvania’s Mennonites and adherents of other Protestant traditions drew from a rich literary source base in their devotional practices. Some even produced their own copies of spiritual literature in manuscript form, wielding color, line, image, and letter as mutually supportive elements of a devotional experience bound up in engaging with meaning-laden texts. Such manuscripts and related print documents filled homes across early southeastern Pennsylvania, pulsating with a

123. Scholars have found spirituality a difficult concept to define and study, especially for Anabaptists. “Any discussion of Anabaptist spirituality,” writes Peter Erb, “raises problems because of the problem of the definition of spirituality itself, because the theme has not been extensively studied in regard to the Anabaptists, and because of the problems inherent in any classification of the Anabaptists themselves.”—Erb, “Anabaptist Spirituality,” 81.

124. Original German: “Papir Ist Mein Acker. Darum Bin Ich So Wacker. Die Feder Ist [Mein/en] Pflug. Darum Bin Ich So Klug. Die Dinten Ist [Mein/en] Samen. Daß Bringt Gut Ehr Und Namen” (Canton Archives of Graubünden B/N 647). Author’s transcription and translation.

125. Vorschrift des Steffen Barandun von Feldis; Reproduktion. 1743. B/N 0647. Staatsarchiv Graubünden, Chur, Switzerland. Original German: “Kommt Her Ihr Kinder Hort Mir Zu Spricht David. Die Forcht Deß Herren Lernet . . .” Author’s transcription and translation.

126. Frederick S. Weiser, *The Gift is Small, the Love is Great: Pennsylvania German Small Presentation Frakturs* (York, Pa.: York Graphic Services, Inc., 1994), 78.

kind of popular spiritual-devotional sentiment laid bare by the texts that scribes and printers chose to showcase in such artful fashion. The presence of handwritten spiritual texts in everyday Pennsylvania-German life illuminates the existence of a spiritual world bound up in the material word. Written words are not just artworks and literature; they are also artifacts. A trip to the Susquehanna River in Lancaster County more than 200 years ago shows how three Mennonite families—the Carlis, Hirschis, and Schencks of Manor Township—filled their heirloom Bibles with devotional prints and manuscripts, creating for later generations a cache of artifacts that opens a window on lived religion in the heart of German Pennsylvania. This glimpse into the material world of the Pennsylvania Mennonites suggests how calligraphy and manuscripts fit into devotional life.

The spiritual books and documents of these three families suggests that, despite their rural surroundings, they were well-connected within the wider German Protestant world and local manuscript culture.¹²⁷ All three of the Mennonite families owned German-language Bibles printed in Europe that enjoyed household use over several generations in Pennsylvania. In 1973 the Carli family donated their Bible, which had been printed in Zurich in 1536 by Christoph Froschauer, along with the documents stored inside of it, to the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (fig. 7). Inside, curators found family records such as calligraphed endpaper genealogies and birth certificates written in Frakturschrift dating as late as the 1830s and 1840s, showing how calligraphic proficiency lent artistic elegance to the preservation of family history data. That families literally inscribed their names into the Holy Book in elegant calligraphy suggests the centrality of the material word to their conceptions of personal and filial identity. Their ability to beautify such records using Frakturschrift, alongside Scripture also printed in Fraktur, further associated their family with the cosmological narrative of grace and eternal life found in the Bible. Curators also uncovered a colorful penmanship sample made for 9-year-old Anna Carli

127. The spellings of old Pennsylvania Anabaptist names changed between the early modern era and the twentieth century, particularly as families Anglicized their surnames. The Carli family eventually changed their surname to Charles, Hirschi to Hershey, and Schenck/Schenk to Shenk. Period spellings are used whenever possible here. For purposes of accessibility, in citations, spellings abide by catalog conventions at the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society (hereafter referred to as LMHS). Institutional collections are often organized by Anglicized surnames.

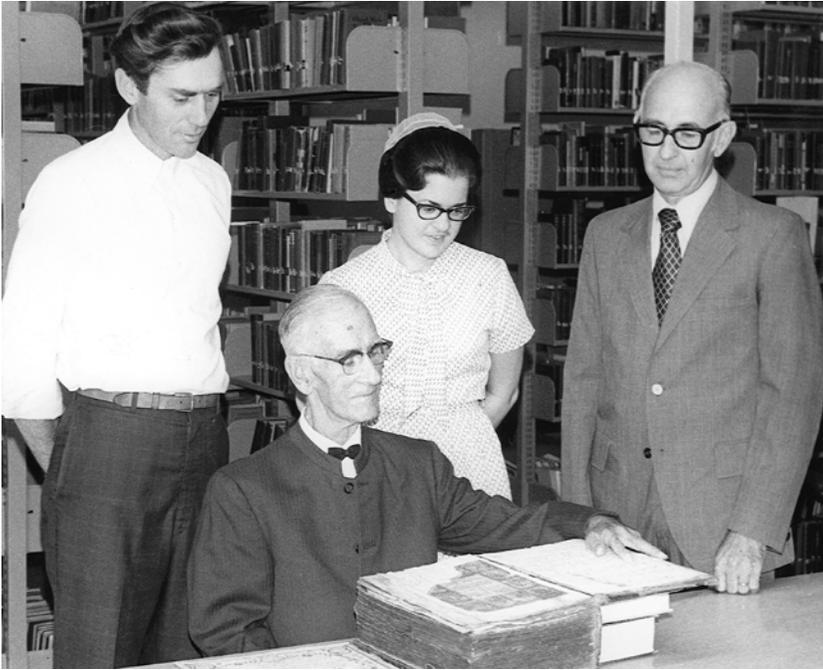


Fig. 7. Carli (later anglicized to Charles) family Bible donation to the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1973. Note the manuscript documents lying beside the Bible. Pictured (from left to right) are Abram H. Charles, David G. Charles, Carolyn L. Charles (now Wenger), and J. Robert Charles. Courtesy of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, Lancaster, Pa.

on March 8, 1775, and one for her 10-year-old brother Johannes, from 1791.¹²⁸ Anna's resplendent sample offered scriptural and apocryphal lessons drawn from the books of Sirach, Psalms, and Revelation before proceeding to a hymn that read "I am a poor child of man, sick at heart and my vision blinded," touching on the common theme of the weakness and fallibility of the human senses in comprehending God's greatness and

128. *Die gantze Bibel/das ist alle Bücher allts vnnnd neuws Testaments/den ursprünglichen Spraachen nach auff's aller treüwlichst verteüschet. Darzu sind yetzund kommen ein schön vnd volkom[m]len Register odler] Zeyger über die gantzen Bibel. Die Jarzal vnnnd Rächmung der Zeyten von Adamen bis an Christu mit sampt gwißen Concordantzen, Argumenten, Zalen vnnnd Figuren* (Zürich, Switzerland: Christoffel Froschouer, 1536), Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS, Lancaster, Pa. (hereafter cited as LMHS); Charles family record, Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Charles Family Record [Color], Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Christian verse "In Gottes Namen . . .," Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Birth certificate for John H. Carle, Aug. 13, 1843, Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Carl F. Seybold, birth certificate for David H. Carle, Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Jacob Botz, Vorschrift for Anna Carli/Charles, Lancaster County, March 8, 1775, Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; Carolyn L. Charles, "Katie's Family Tree," in "Katie Hess Reminisces," by A. Martha Denlinger, *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 1:4 (Oct. 1978), 8-9.

grace.¹²⁹ A host of other documents also figured in the cache,¹³⁰ including a 1791 manuscript that opens with a verse from the Gospel of John, urging a pious lifestyle, before proceeding to nonscriptural texts of praise presented in Frakturschrift.¹³¹ A verse from Sirach also appears that echoes the common theme of accessing hidden wisdom via faith in God: "Consider that I labored not for myself only, but for all them that seek learning."¹³² Colorful illuminations including vines, linear patterns, a dove, and an angel surround and interlink short texts scattered across the page, leading the eye on a journey of spiritual discovery.

Documents found in the Hirschi and Schenk Bibles offer similar evidence of the spiritual significance of artful writing among Pennsylvania German Mennonites. Prints and manuscripts once housed in the Hirschi volume include a genealogical record, a child's penmanship sample featuring religious texts, a marriage certificate, and a broadside featuring lyrics of a hymn that begin: "He who has ears to hear, mark what I tell you. I want to teach you about my Christ, which may help you a lot," addressing how human senses inform or obstruct experiences of the divine.¹³³ The presence of the printed document intermingled with manuscripts highlights the symbiosis enjoyed by the two modes of text

129. Jacob Botz, *Vorschrift für Anna Carli/Charles, Lancaster County, March 8, 1775*; Johann Riggenbach, ed., *Hieronymus Anoni: Ein Abriss seines Lebens sammt einer Auswahl seiner Lieder, bearbeitet durh Ehr. Joh. Riggenbach, Prof.* (Basel, Switzerland: Verlag christlicher Schriften, [für den Buchhandel bei G. Detloff], 1870), 110. Original German: "Ich bin ein armes Menschen Kind, am Hertenzen kranck an augen blind." Author's transcription and translation.

130. For a printed example, see: Broadside, folder "Broadside: 'Abschiedsworte des Ehr. Johannes Geil an seine Gemeinde,'" by Johannes Geil. Doylestown, Pa: M. Löb, [Nov. 32, 1852 or later]," Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS.

131. Religious manuscript for Johannes Carli, "Meine Hoffnung . . .", March 2, 1791, Charles, David G., Collection, LMHS; John 13:17 (KJV).

132. Sirach 33:17 (KJV). The manuscript cites the verse as 33:18. The King James Version abides by a different verse numbering system. Original German: "So sehet ihr das ich nicht allein vor mich arbeite sondern auch vor alle die die da gerne lernen wollen."

133. *Die gantze Bible / das ist alle bücher altes und neüwes Testaments . . .* (1536; repr., Strasbourg, France: Simon Kürbner/Cantzley-Buchdr., 1744), Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Collection, LMHS; *Vorschrift für Catharina Huber, April 22, 1775*, in folder "Vorschriften (3)," Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Papers, Box 002, LMHS; Christian Strenge, *Vorschrift für Christian Hershey, 1808*, object 2007.081, Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Papers, LMHS; "Hershey, Christian, Oct. 20, 1755 (Bible)," genealogy cards, no. 2, "8. Christian, Sept. 30, 1796 – Apr. 1, 1836," LMHS; Marriage certificate, in folder "Marriage Certificate: John Appel and Anna Elizabeth Gorges..." , Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Papers, Box 002, LMHS; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Broadside, in folder "Broadside: 'Ein schön Lied,'" Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Papers, Box 002, LMHS; "Briefleinn" by or for Abraham Heebner, March 11, 1804," Hershey, Christian (1755-1800) Papers, Box 002, LMHS. Original German: "Wer ohren hat zu hören, der merck was ich ihm sag, mein Christ ich will dich lehren, was dir viel helfen mag . . ." Author's transcription and translation.

production in the period, as well as the fact that both could hold artefactual significance to religious readers.¹³⁴

The Schenck/Shenk family Bible housed its own share of treasures, including a penmanship sample and an ornately written manuscript copy of Psalm 150, which urges readers to wield the psaltery and harp in praise of God.¹³⁵ The manuscript's grandiose presentation of biblical text was its own form of praise—as much a feast for the eyes as the harp was for the ears.

The documents tucked into these aged and travel-worn Bibles shed light on a vibrant culture of popular piety in Manor Township long ago. Understood simultaneously as word, image, and artifact, the Frakturschrift texts of Pennsylvania-German religious life went a long way toward constructing the spiritual world their makers and users inhabited.¹³⁶ These and other forms of manuscript and paper-based artworks—including hymn tune books, house blessings, New Year's wishes, family registers, spiritual mazes, provenance marks inside books, and scissor cuttings—also populate southeastern Pennsylvania's special collections libraries and museums.¹³⁷ Such artifacts, both religious and secular, underscore the vibrancy of a broader manuscript culture during the period, as well as the colorful form that popular piety could take in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pennsylvania.

134. Hermann Wellenreuther, *Citizens in a Strange Land: A Study of German-American Broad-sides and Their Meaning for Germans in North America, 1730-1830*, Max Kade German-American Research Institute Series (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 140-142. Wellenreuther's book is an excellent introduction to broadside studies, as is Don Yoder's *The Pennsylvania German Broadside: A History and Guide* (Philadelphia and University Park, Pa.: The Library Company of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

135. *Biblia Das ist/alle bücher alts unnd neüws Testaments . . .* (Zürich, Switzerland: Christoffel Froschower, 1580), Shenk Collection 2006.006, LMHS; Vorschrift by or for Henrich Schenck, Lancaster County, 1767, Shenk Collection 2006.006, LMHS; Vorschrift by or for Andreas Hirschi/Hirshi, Lancaster County, ca. 1770s, Shenk Collection 2006.006, LMHS; "Shenk, Henry, Jan. 2, 1756 - , s Immigrant John Shenk" genealogy card, LMHS. See also Joanne K. Hoover, "Michael Shenk of Warwick Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania: His Descendants and Some of their Lands," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 32, no. 4 (Oct. 2009), 16-27; Manuscript copy of Psalm 150, ca. 1760s/1770s, Shenk Collection 2006.006, LMHS; Religious manuscript for Barbara Hostatern, Shenk Collection 2006.006, LMHS; Psalm 150:1-3 (KJV).

136. David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17. "The significance and power of popular religious imagery resides precisely in its contribution to the social construction of reality," notes David Morgan. "Worlds are constructed of both the ordinary and the extraordinary, and images serve to configure each aspect of experience."

137. For more, see Minardi, "Fraktur and Visual Culture," 264-280, and Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schönschreiben*, 3-6.

CONCLUSION

"It is . . . arguably this very ambivalence of the image, its manifest status as an artifact alongside its unsettlingly vivid evocation of a sacred 'presence,' which is crucial to its role in religious practice," wrote art historian Robert Maniura. "Whether affirmed or denied as valid foci of worship, images are difficult to get away from."¹³⁸ In crafting calligraphed texts, Pennsylvania Germans harnessed the tension between symbolic representation and sacred presence to advance their spiritualistic faith commitments. The challenge Pennsylvania Germans and other Protestants faced when they engaged with Christian writings was how to implant "the spirit of the letter"—that is, the divine knowledge texts could evoke—within their own souls, at least partly by means of the empty shells of letters and words. The lavishing of artistic energy on an ornamental presentation of religious literature could help facilitate the movement of textual messages into the dark recesses of the heart, where the Holy Spirit could inflame faith and understanding. Visual design became an integral part of a text's meaning.

In a strictly theological sense, Pennsylvania-German devotional manuscripts represent an imperfect compromise between unmediated, internal spirituality and the desire for external sensory aids to religious experience—an ornamented approach to text-centric Protestantism. The manuscripts should be interpreted as external artifacts of internal spiritual experience. At the very least, ornamental letter forms and illuminations employed on religious manuscripts served as pedagogical devices, focusing reader attention on the messages of wisdom and grace delivered by the text selections that scribes showcased and embellished. At most, ornamental Frakturschrift letters and supporting illuminations served as devotional images, revealing the wisdom bound up in holy texts via the words' visual grandeur and artefactual presence.

The purpose here is not to insist that all Mennonites and other Pennsylvania Germans interpreted the documents in the same way, but rather that the documents themselves figure in a long history of text-based Protestant popular piety and should be studied in this light. Scholarship examining the documents clearly ought to pay as much attention to the texts that scribes deemed worthy of including on the manuscripts as to the artworks' folksy decorative aesthetics. Analyzing their texts reveals just how central the documents were to the popular piety of the period. The books, prints, and manuscripts employed in this analysis, which represent just a fraction of the extant source material available to historians, offer

138. Robert Maniura, "Icon/Image," in "Key Words in Material Religion," ed. Birgit Meyer, David Morgan, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, special issue, *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 7:1 (2011), 53, 55.

starting points for inquiry into how the word was made manifest in the material world.¹³⁹

A research agenda grounded in lived religion and book history may seem like a significant shift away from the current focus of most scholarship on fraktur, but it has its roots in observations made long ago by Don Yoder. In an essay from 1974, Yoder called on scholars to look beyond collecting and display of Pennsylvania-German manuscripts and to focus instead on teasing out their meaning. "I applaud the collecting as a first step," Yoder noted, but to venerate manuscript art primarily for its aesthetic qualities, to "frame it in period frames and hang it on our walls for decorative purposes," did not make full use of its research value.¹⁴⁰ Engagement with the documents as literary and anthropological evidence was in order, Yoder concluded. "The values of the culture of our Mennonite forefathers would become obvious to us from fraktur, even if we had no hymnbooks and prayer books and other pieces of devotional literature to go by," he noted.¹⁴¹ Yoder recognized then, as we should today, that "the key to the fraktur lies in the texts."¹⁴² He offered up a tantalizing new question to guide manuscript study: "What can these silent pieces of fraktur tell us of the Mennonite life, the Mennonite faith, the Mennonite world view of our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forefathers? This should be our real task."¹⁴³

Yoder's question still resonates today because it has not been fully answered. To address it, this essay has proposed a framework for understanding the word in early Pennsylvania-German life that recognizes, and reckons with, the multiple roles texts played as abstract communication systems, visual artworks, and material artifacts. Such an approach to the word as manifested in devotional manuscripts shifts the interpretation of the documents away from decorative arts toward transatlantic religious, literary, and book history. This expands the relevance of the sources to larger and more pressing historical conversations and addresses an urgent need in American Mennonite history: inspiring broader interest in the topic.

In 2007, Mennonite historian Theron F. Schlabach asked a pragmatic question about next steps for Anabaptist studies. The future of the enterprise depends on the existence of "a demand for history," Schlabach

139. For an analysis that adopts a similar interpretive perspective for a different, though related, topic, cf. Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

140. Yoder, "Fraktur in Mennonite Culture," 308.

141. *Ibid.*, 310.

142. *Ibid.*, 309.

143. *Ibid.*, 309.

noted. "What do we do, practically, to create that demand?"¹⁴⁴ The complex history and theology of early-modern religious groups lends itself to abstraction. An approach to religious history informed by the visually-evocative materials of everyday spiritual practice might enliven interest in esoteric topics like theology and hermeneutics by giving general audiences appealing and relatable "hooks" into the study of this history, in the form of artifacts of spiritual life among ordinary people in times past. "This emphasis on what religion looks like, more than what religion says, promises to add much to Mennonite studies," posited historian David R. Swartz.

If historians wish to impress upon modern observers the richness of the early-American Mennonite experience, they need look no further than the visually engaging spiritual manuscripts Mennonites and others made and used.¹⁴⁵ Approaches derived from book history and lived religion offer useful starting points for this work because they help us rethink the nature of religious experience. "Powerful practices," or the things we do as part of our spiritual meaning-making, "press and stitch together aspects of the psychological and visceral to the social and concrete," observed theologian Christian Early.¹⁴⁶ They can render the ethereal material. One such practice was the praise and glorification of the Lord, "both day and night without ceasing"—or so a Swiss scribe wrote on an eighteenth-century manuscript.¹⁴⁷ If understood as contemplative objects of divine glorification and praise, then Pennsylvania-German religious manuscripts likewise seem, in the words of Second Corinthians, to have been "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."¹⁴⁸

144. Theron F. Schlabach, "The Historiography of Mennonites and Amish in America: Reflections on Past and Future," *MQR* 81 (Jan. 2007), 66-67.

145. David R. Swartz, "New Directions in North American Mennonite History," *MQR* 81 (Jan. 2007), 69.

146. Christian Early, "Dreaming of Life in Babel: Toward an Anabaptist Philosophy of Religion," *MQR* 89 (Oct. 2015), 582.

147. *Schriftenvorlagen* (writing sample book), VI.53, 1730, ink and watercolor on laid paper, Rätisches Museum, Chur, Switzerland, page 6. Original German: "Daß sie bey Tag u[nd] Nacht, ohne Underlaß Gott loben und Preisen werden." Author's transcription and translation.

148. 2 Cor. 3:3 (KJV). The conclusion to the confession of Thomas von Imbroich in the first American edition of *Güldene Aepffel in Silber Schalen*, published in Ephrata in 1745, references (but does not directly quote) 2 Cor. 3 in its description of searching for meaning in the written word.—*Güldene Aepffel* (1745), 218.