“Prophesies and Revelations”:
German Cabalists in Early Pennsylvania

The millennium did not arrive in 1694. For Johannes Kelpius, who had come to Pennsylvania with a small group to await the reign of Christ on earth, the disappointment was sharp. "I went with joy into this desert, as into a garden of roses," he wrote in 1697, "and I knew not at that time, that it was the furnace of affliction in which the Lord was about to purify and to prove me . . . ." He accepted the delay with characteristic humility, for he surely could not know all of God's plans, and "though we have revelation hereof, this revelation cannot comprehend the spirit of the instrument . . . ."1

The original leader of the group, Johann Jakob Zimmerman, had predicted the advent of the millennium for the year 1694. In preparation for this event, he organized a "Chapter of Perfection" in Germany—a brotherhood of learned men, most of them Lutheran Pietists, who also believed in the imminent establishment of the Kingdom of God. When Zimmerman died in Rotterdam before embarking on the voyage to Pennsylvania, the group selected Kelpius as its leader. With the help of Benjamin Furly, William Penn's agent in Rotterdam, Kelpius and his companions finally sailed to the New

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1 Johannes Kelpius, Letter to Heinrich John Deichman, 24 February 1697, in “The Diarium of Magister Johannes Kelpius,” ed. and trans. Julius F. Sachse, Pennsylvania German Society, Proceedings and Addresses, 25(1914), 30; Kelpius, Letter to Heinrich John Deichman, 12 May 1699, in “Diarium,” 34-35. The manuscript copy of Kelpius's diary and letterbook is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. I have checked Sachse's translation against the manuscript and have found several errors, especially transcription errors. I have used Sachse's translation for quotations in English, but where his errors have confused or altered the meaning of a passage, I have inserted my own corrections in brackets.
World. They identified themselves as the women in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, who escaped into the wilderness to await her Bridegroom, Christ. Shortly after they arrived in Pennsylvania they built a large hall to live in—though Kelpius lived in a cave—and hoped that, through a discipline of celibacy, contemplative solitude, and observation of the signs of the heavens from their crude observatory, they would be ready for the dramatic events of the eschaton. But their vigil was not intended always to be solitary or exclusive. The “Society of the Woman in the Wilderness,” as outsiders called the group, also made efforts to prepare others for the appearance of Christ and his kingdom.

Members began to leave the group almost as soon as they arrived in Pennsylvania. Ludwig Biederman renounced celibacy and married Zimmerman’s daughter. Henrich Bernard Koster’s defection was more conspicuous. He became a vocal partisan of the Keithians and aggravated the turmoil within the Quaker community in the 1690s. Daniel Falkner, ordained in 1699, began to serve Lutherans in New Jersey, but not before he had engaged in a protracted and unseemly quarrel with Francis Daniel Pastorius over the Pennsylvania property of the Frankfurt Company. Daniel Falkner’s brother, Justus, accepted the pastorate of the Lutheran congregation in New York, and appeared to retreat into fierce polemical orthodoxy. By 1708, the year of Kelpius’s death, the brotherhood had diminished greatly. The few remaining members eventually left the group and married, or lived out their days as solitary holy men who associated occasionally with the Ephrata Cloister and the Moravians.²

This story of the Society of the Woman in the Wilderness has intrigued many and elicited a variety of responses. Some historians, primarily European scholars, perceive the Society as a separatist group, and most church historians of Wurttemberg present Zimmerman as a key figure in the growth of separatism that region.³

² For the discussion of the Society of the Women in the Wilderness, I have relied on Julius F. Sachse, The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania for the Chapter (Philadelphia, 1895), passim. Despite the weaknesses of Sachse’s work, he was one of the few historians to recognize the importance of the hermetic tradition.

³ See, for example, two major general church histories of Wurttemberg: Henrich Hermelink, Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Wurttemberg von der Reformations bis zu Gegenwart (Stuttgart, 1949), 182-83; and Hartmut Lehmann, Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung in Wurttemberg vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert (Stuttgart, 1969), 31-32.
and filiopietistic American historians, on the other hand, place the
group squarely within the Lutheran tradition, and go so far as to
credit some members of the group with the establishment of orthodox
Lutheranism in America. Given the various courses that members
pursued after leaving the group, it is not entirely surprising that
scholars should draw such widely divergent conclusions. Indeed, both
assessments of the Society contain elements of truth. Some members
later did become separatists, while Justus Falkner, if not a founder
of American orthodox Lutheranism, was the first German Lutheran
ordained in North America and an apologist for Lutheran doctrine.

These puzzling contradictions in Kelpius's story ought to force us
to question the narrow view of religion that has limited our under-
standing of the spiritual lives of men and women in colonial America.
Jon Butler has urged us to look more closely at those aspects of the
American religious experience—the study of the cabbala and the
practice of astrology—that have not traditionally fallen within the
province of church historians. Our bias in favor of institutional history
and our assumptions about what constitutes legitimate religious prac-
tice in our own day have predisposed us to place such things at the
margins of religion, if not outside it altogether. For many men and
women in Early Modern Europe, however, the "occult" and hermetic
sciences were central to their theology and spirituality.

Kelpius's odyssey takes us into this world—a world where interest
in the hermetic tradition brought together Lutheran church Pietists,
separatist Pietists, and Quakers, despite their differences in doctrine,
thoughtology, and polity. For them their study of the cabbala was of more
than academic interest—it nourished their dream of a Christendom
undivided by sect and confession, and it inspired their hope that the
millennium would soon arrive. If we explore this aspect of religion

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4 In addition to Sachse, German Pietists, see Theodore E. Schmauk, A History of the
Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania, vol. 1 (Vol. 2 never published); and Abdel Ross Wentz,

Historian Review, 84, no. 2 (April, 1979), 317-46. On the distinction between religion and
magic, or lack thereof, see the exchange between Hildred Geertz and Keith Thomas: Hildred
no. 1 (Summer 1975), 71-89; Keith Thomas, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic,
II," Ibid., 91-109.
and try to understand how cabbalistic studies contributed to the formation of this group of reformers, we can clarify much of the murkiness surrounding the Chapter’s existence and, perhaps more revealing, its dissolution. It is against this background—the mingling of a specifically Christian vision with a Jewish mystical tradition—that Kelpius’s story, so obscure when standing on its own, becomes intelligible.

The hermetic tradition knit together many strands of seventeenth-century reform thought, but perhaps the best place to enter the Kelpius’s corner of this intellectual universe is with the small group of Lutherans in Frankfurt that originated the reform movement within Lutheranism known as Pietism and later formed the core of the Frankfurt Company. In 1675 Philip Jacob Spener, the leader of this circle and the senior of the Frankfurt Lutheran ministerium, published *Pia Desideria*, the manifesto of Pietism. In *Pia Desideria*, Spener lambasted Lutheran orthodox theologians, who had so distorted Luther’s concept of justification by faith that they presented mere assent to pure doctrine as the key to salvation. Belief in doctrine, disguised as faith, had become the *opus operatum* of Lutheranism. The result was that “the teaching of an earnest, inner godliness is so unfamiliar to and strange to some people that those who zealously cultivate such godliness can hardly escape being suspected as secret papists, Weigelians, or Quakers.” Spener laid part of the responsibility for the spiritual malaise in the church and the ignorance of the laity...
at the feet of secular authorities who interfered too much in matters of faith. But clergy, Spener charged, had the most to answer for. "When you see that the people are undisciplined," he reasoned, "you realize that no doubt their priests are not holy." The root of this problem was that most preachers "are still stuck fast in the old birth and do not actually possess the true marks of a new birth . . . and the absence in them of the fruits of faith indicate that they are themselves wanting in faith." 9

The thrust of this criticism was not new; in many ways Spener simply recapitulated a familiar litany on the corruption of the church. Many of his solutions—especially the reinstitution of catechetical instruction—had been proposed throughout the seventeenth century. 10 The uniqueness of *Pia Desideria* lay in Spener's rejection of traditional Lutheran eschatology. The most important element in his recasting of Lutheran thought on the millennium was the suggestion that "the ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings" could serve as the key to church reform. The idea that a group of pious laymen could gather with their pastor after the Sunday service for devotion and the study of scripture was neither new nor threatening, but the proposal that such meetings could take place outside the context of the Sunday liturgy, and that these gatherings ought to serve as the seed for a general reformation, was new. Spener scrupulously guarded against the *collegia pietatis*, as he called these meetings, from becoming *ecclesiola*—little churches—but his model for church reform nevertheless raised the specter of separatism before the eyes of jittery church officials. 11

They had good reason to be nervous. When Spener linked the *collegia pietatis* to the apostolic church, he went far beyond proposing a model for reform; he turned the Lutheran understanding of church history on its head. Most Lutheran theologians, taking their cue from Luther, held that the end of this world was near but that there was no golden age to be expected because the signs of the millennium—

9 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 46; Ibid., 57.
in particular the conversion of the Jews and the fall of Rome—had already occurred. Spener argued that if “we consult the Holy Scriptures we can have no doubt that God promised his church here on earth a better state than this.” Although “Rome was given a decided jolt by the blessed Martin Luther, its spiritual power is still too great to permit us to claim that the prophecy in Revelation 18 and 19 has been completely fulfilled.” Spener also criticized “our otherwise esteemed Dr. Luther” for questioning whether Paul meant literally his prophecy that, after the full number of Gentiles came in, all Israel would be saved. Spener understood the passage very literally and asserted that “at least a perceptively large number of Jews” would have to be saved—not just a scattered few—for the prophecy to be fulfilled. Since the signs “promised to us by God” had not appeared, Spener argued, then “the fulfillment of the promise must necessarily fall in its time, inasmuch as not a single world of the Lord will fall to the ground and remain without fruit.” For Spener these promises opened up the possibility of a new world, a future that Christians should not merely await but should expedite by reforming the church, thus making it easier to convert the Jews and weaken the power of the papacy. To those who scoffed at this prophecy by pointing out that, if “one seeks perfection one must leave this world and enter the world to come,” Spener replied that, although complete perfection was not possible, nevertheless, “we are not forbidden to seek perfection, but are argued on toward it.” The early Christian church, moreover, was an example of what the church could be, and “what was then possible cannot [now] be absolutely impossible.”

Spener’s Christian future depended on institutional rebirth and also on personal rebirth for each Christian, an awakening that would serve as the foundation for the larger historical transformation. The collegia, as devotional groups, would support the Christian in the struggle for

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12 Ibid., 76. Many scholars have dismissed Spener’s eschatology as peripheral to his thought, but Wallmann, in “Pietismus und Orthodoxie,” 77-78, argues persuasively that it was in fact the linchpin of his thought. See also Martin Greschat, “Die Hoffnung besserer Zeit' fur die Kirche,” in Zur Neueren Pietismusforschung, 224-239. On Luther’s eschatology see George Forell, “Justification and Eschatology in Luther’s Thought,” Church History, 38, no. 2 (1969), 164-171.

13 Spener, Pia Desideria, 77; Ibid., 76.

14 Ibid., 116.
rebirth. What was possible for the whole church was also possible for the individual Christian, and though Spener admitted that a Christian "will never be farther removed from the illusion of perfection than when he tries hardest to reach it," nevertheless this perfection ought to be sought. Through the collegia, Spener linked his millennial vision—his view of history—to an internal and an historical spirituality.\textsuperscript{15}

The \textit{Hoffnung besserer Zeit}—the hope for a better time—that made \textit{Pia Desideria} both unique and important was not Spener’s alone. Both these millennial expectations and the proposal to start a collegium originated with a group of laymen in his congregation who had an interest in cabbalistic studies. In the summer of 1670 Johann Jakob Schütz, a jurist and close friend of Spener’s, came to him with the idea of forming a small group to read and discuss devotional literature and engage in edifying conversation. Spener approved on the condition that he lead the group—he did not want the other clergymen in Frankfurt to become unduly suspicious. This collegium met on Wednesday nights in Spener’s house, and contemporaries agree that Schütz played at least as large a role as Spener in leading these meetings.\textsuperscript{16} At first the group consisted of a small circle of friends, but it soon expanded beyond this core, and uneducated as well as educated laymen began to attend. The original members, however, wanted to preserve the "philadelphian" ideal of the group as a circle of friends, and wished to admit members only on the basis of true evidence of piety and rebirth. Spener was not averse to this restriction, but he wanted at all costs to avoid even the hint of separatism.

The centerpiece of \textit{Pia Desideria}—the juxtaposition of the ideal of fellowship and millennial expectation—in the end proved explosive and led to dissension in Spener’s own collegium. As the collegium grew, tensions developed between the original members of the group and Spener. Schütz and others became disenchanted with what they perceived as a corruption of the philadelphian ideal.\textsuperscript{17} Schütz’s model

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 80. See Schmidt, "Spener’s Wiedergeburtsslehre," in Greschat, ed. \textit{Zur Neueren Pietismus Forschung}, 9-33, for more on Spener’s idea of the new man.

\textsuperscript{16} See, for example, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, \textit{Lebens-Beschreibung Johannis Wilhelmi Petersen . . .} 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1719), 17-20.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 295-98.
for the philadelphian community came in part from the Labidists. From 1674 to 1678 he carried on an intensive correspondence with Anna Maria von Schurman, a prominent member of Jean de Labadie's separatist congregation. Schütz was especially interested in the Labadist Hausgemeinde—those members who had shown evidence of rebirth, exercised self-denial, and lived in complete trust with each other. After a while the people who were inspired by this ideal stopped attending Spener's group, and sometime after 1675 those later known as the Saalhof Pietists began to meet separately. Two years later Spener moved the collegium meetings from his house to the church, and the paths of separatist and church Pietism began to diverge.¹⁸

The rupture was not sudden, however. The chiliasm that crept into the Frankfurt circle of Pietists in 1673-74, before the group split, was more important than the schism in the long run. Before 1674 Spener had not commented on the millennium. One year later his thoughts on the millennium transformed Pia Desideria from a lively comment on church reform into a radical document. This chiliasm propelled both church and radical Pietism, even after the final break several years later.

Schütz's and Spener's friendship with Johanna Eleonora von Merlau was one source of the millennial ideas. Von Merlau was renowned for her brilliance and piety. As a young girl she had had extraordinary visions of the conversion of the Jews and the advent of the millennium, and she continued to have a strong chiliastic bent. She had corresponded with Schütz and Spener from 1672, and in 1675 she moved to Frankfurt and joined Spener's collegium. Her appearance in Frankfurt and her fervent chiliasm were important in the formation of the Saalhof group.¹⁹

Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-89), however, was perhaps the most important source of both the philadelphianism and millennialism of the Frankfurt Pietists. A Lutheran minister and hymnist in Sulzbach, Bavaria, Knorr von Rosenroth was also one of the most esteemed scholars of the cabbala in his day. He led the pansophical-cabbalistic group that Count Christian August von Pfalz-Sulzbach gathered in his court, and he stood at the center of that network of

¹⁸ Wallmann, Philip Jakob Spener, 277.
¹⁹ Petersen, Lebens-Beschreibung, 74-75.
reformers who saw the key to reform in a strange marriage of the cabbala and Christianity in seventeenth-century Europe.  

Fifteenth-century Italian neoplatonists were the first Christians to study the cabbala seriously, but the works of two early seventeenth-century scholars of the cabbala—Johann Valentin Andreae and Jakob Boehme—were the immediate inspiration for later interest in the cabbala. Andreae, a cousin of Schütz, was a leading theologian and reformer in Wurttemberg during the Thirty Years War. When he was in his early twenties he wrote three pamphlets—Fama Fraternitatis (1614), Confessio (1615), and Chymische Hochzeit (1616)—the manifestos of Rosicrucianism. Although he had written the pamphlets, he made it appear as though they had been written years earlier by a true Rosicrucian brotherhood.

In the Fama, or Discovery of the Most Noble Order of the Rosy Cross, Andreae created a fictitious character, Christian Rosencreutz, who had lived for one hundred and six years, from 1378 to 1484. The story held that Rosencreutz had been a great traveller, and in the course of his travels is in the Arab countries and Spain, he learned the “Magia and Cabala”—a “treasure surpassing that of Kings and Emperors.” But Rosencreutz believed that the time was not yet right to reveal this knowledge, and so he “appointed loyal and faithful heirs of his arts and also of his name”—a Rosicrucian fraternity—to guard this knowledge for posterity. These brothers were all evangelical Christians, and confessed “to have the knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

This secret knowledge was powerful; it gave the Rosicrucian brothers the ability to read “that great Book of Nature.” This book was open to all, “yet there are but few that can read and understand the same.” Borrowing the fundamental premise of the cabbala, the Rosi-

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21 Frances Yates, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment (London, 1972) is easily the most accessible work on Rosicrucianism. See especially pp. 41-58 and 91-102. Will-Erich Peuckert, however, is regarded as the pre-eminent historian of Rosicrucianism. See, for example, Das Rosencreutz (Berlin, 1973).
icrucians argued that God imprinted the same characters and letters that he had incorporated into the Holy Scripture “into the Wonderful Creation of Heaven and Earth.” Like astronomers and mathematicians who could predict eclipses, the Rosicrucians could “fore-see the darkness or obscurations of the Church and how long they shall last. We have borrowed our Magick writing, and have found out, and made a new Language for our selves in the which withall is declared the Nature of all Things.”

Nature was the key to knowledge, for God had revealed divine meaning in the hieroglyphic characters he had written in the Universe. Since his whole creation was harmonious, and the microcosm corresponded to the macrocosm, then men could attain knowledge of divine things through mathematical-magical systems. Man, being a microcosm, also contained that which was in the macrocosm, for “as in every kernel is contained a whole good tree or fruit,” explained the Rosicrucians, “so likewise is included in the little body of Man the whole great World, whose Religion, policy, health, members, language, words, and works, are agreeing, sympathizing, and in equal tune and melody with God, Heaven, and Earth.”

The Rosicrucians (or Andreae) did not intend to keep this knowledge secret forever; the purpose of the Rosicrucian brotherhood was not to perpetuate an esoteric theosophy. Though Christian Rosencreutz had been buried in a vault with his secrets, the recent rediscovery of the vault in 1604—in Andreae’s time—was the signal for a great reformation. “What before times hath been seen, heard, and smelt, now finally shall be spoken and uttered forth,” proclaimed Andreae in the Confessio, “viz. when the World shall awake out of her heavy and drowsie sleep, and with an open heart, barehead and barefoot, shall merrily and joyfully meet the new arising Sun.” When the brotherhood diffused this pansophy, it would become the foundation for a common Christianity and spark a general reformation. “It is only fitting,” proclaims the Fama, “that before the rising of the Sun, there should appear and break forth Aurora, or some clearness, or divine light in the sky.”

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25 “Fame and Confession,” 186.
26 Ibid., 177.
Andreae later claimed that he wrote the Rosicrucian manifestos as a joke. If so many took the joke seriously. Rosicrucianism offered an exhilarating promise of reform, and the manifestos promoted the organization of societies modeled after the Rosicrucian fraternity that saw the reformation of Protestantism as their goal.  

At about the time that Andreae published his Rosicrucian pamphlets, Jakob Boehme, a shoemaker from Görlitz, began to set down his interpretation of the story of creation and redemption. Boehme asserted that, in the beginning, God was a primal abyss—an eternal nothingness that contained everything. God was neither good nor evil, for he had “no distinction in himself.” But God had a longing to be conscious of himself, and so he turned inward and made a “mirror” in which to see himself. The mirror of self-knowledge was a female principle—Virgin Wisdom, or the Heavenly Sophia. “Not that she reveals God out of her power and action,” explained Boehme, “but that the Divine Center, as God’s heart or being, reveals itself in her: She is like a mirror of the Godhead, in which the intellect of God sees itself.” She was God’s self-revelation and thus the beginning of all knowledge. To reveal himself further, however, God had to undergo a dialectical process within himself—his principles of goodness and light had to overcome the darker principles, represented by fire. Through this dialectic God became in reality three Persons—the first three forms of Nature were the Father; the principle of light, the Son; and the seventh form of Nature, embodying all the others, was the Holy Spirit.

Within this framework Boehme explicated the fall of man and his redemption. In the beginning Adam had a glory exceeding even that of the angels, for he was a microcosm of God and contained the glory

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27 Peuckert, *Das Rosenkreuz*, 180-92. Andreae, as a church leader, pursued this same goal later in life with more mundane methods. He persuaded the ecclesiastical bureaucracy of Württemberg to institute an array of educational and catechetical reforms, many of which inspired Spener’s proposals in *Pia Desideria*. It is not surprising, then, to find Spener citing the “sainted and thoughtful Andreae” as an especially astute critic of the church.


of God in the form of Virginal Widsom. Being like God, man was also androgynous; "he was a man and also a woman, not to be understood as a woman, but as a virgin, wholly pure in modesty." When Adam fell, this unity shattered, his male and female principles separated into the two genders, and human sexuality came into existence. In time, Christ came as the incarnation of light, crushed the principle of darkness forever, and redeemed man.

Boehme claimed to be an autodidact, but he derived many of the elements of his thought—especially his ideas about God’s masculine and feminine principles—from the cabbala. His earliest work, Aurora, promised a new dawn of reformation like the Rosicrucian manifestos. But it was written, though not published, before the first Rosicrucian manifesto appeared, and so Boehme must have had direct access to the cabbalistic literature circulating at the time. Unlike Knorr von Rosenroth, however, he stopped short of belief in the millennium, the thousand year reign of Christ. His golden age was to be the restitution of all things, a restoration of the original paradise.

During his lifetime, Boehme had been suspected of heterodoxy and had been harassed by the authorities, but many people considered him to be a godly man. He never left the church, and his thought pervaded both church and separatist Pietist circles. Spener thought that, while Boehme erred on many points, he ought not to be condemned. Boehme, in a less intellectually rigorous way, used the cabbala in the same way as Andreae. Both saw nature and the harmony between the microcosm and macrocosm as the key to knowledge. This essential unity of knowledge was, for both Boehmists and Rosicrucians, the foundation of their hope for human harmony and a new age.

When Knorr von Rosenroth published his Kabbala Demudata—a cabbala purged of non-Christian elements—it was this hope he wished
to encourage. The fundamental premise of a *kabbala denudata* was that the core of Judaism bore an essential affinity to Christian prophecy—proof of the truth and universality of Christian revelation. The *cabbala* was a form of wisdom that shed light on the more obscure passages of both the Old and New Testaments. This was important for two reasons. First of all, the *cabbala* could aid in the conversion of the Jews, a necessary precondition for the coming of the millennium. Knorr von Rosenroth argued that, because the sacred wisdom of the Jews supported Christian doctrine, Christians who studied the *cabbala* could draw the Jews “back into the way of truth.” Knorr von Rosenroth also ascribed an ecumenical mission to the *cabbala*. If Christians returned to the *cabbala*—the oldest of all philosophies and a source of universal knowledge—they could overcome their divisions and join in one faith.37

Both Spener and Schütz very much admired Knorr von Rosenroth’s *Kabbala Denudata*. Spener’s interest in cabbalistic studies went back to the early 1660s, when he was part of the cabbalistic circle in the court of Princess Antonia of Wurttemberg. But Spener never became deeply involved in these studies, partly, he claimed, because he simply did not understand them.38 Schütz, however, not only had an intense interest in the *cabbala* but was also a close friend of Knorr von Rosenroth’s. In 1672 Schütz wrote the foreword to Knorr von Rosenroth’s *Harmonia Evangeliorum*, and the following year he travelled to Sulzbach to be a godfather at the christening of Knorr von Rosenroth’s second daughter. In the early years of the Frankfurt collegium, then, Schütz established a close connection with a man learned in the *cabbala*, a connection that was instrumental in the introduction of chiliastic speculation into the Frankfurt circle of Pietists.39

Knorr von Rosenroth’s circle at Christian August’s court also included the enigmatic Francis Mercurius van Helmont (1614-1698). Van Helmont, the son of the famous Belgian chemist Jean-Baptiste van Helmont, was trained as a doctor, but he spent most of his life

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37 Quoted by Coudert, “Quaker-Kabalist,” 173. See also Ernst Benz, *Die christliche Kabbala* (Zurich, 1958), 10-14, 18-25.
as a "wandering eremite" travelling through England and Europe. His spiritual journeys paralleled this peripatetic life—he was above all a seeker. "I woulde be rightly understoode," he explained, "that I am one who cultivates not a sect, or separate company of people & (accordinge to the sectarian manner) doe not thinke that any one sort of people are by the lump to be esteemed for the people of God."  

Van Helmont met Knorr von Rosenroth when he was at the court of Christian August in the early 1660s. Van Helmont shared Knorr von Rosenroth's enthusiasm for the cabbala and helped him compile and publish the *Kabbala Denudata*. He agreed with Knorr von Rosenroth that it was key to the conversion of the Jews and that it offered a solution to the "confusion and contention, which is among those who are called Christians." Van Helmont and Knorr von Rosenroth also borrowed the theory of reincarnation developed by the post-Renaissance Jewish cabbalist, Isaac Luria. They used this doctrine of reincarnation to argue that God's essence was goodness and love and that every human being would eventually be saved through repeated incarnations. Man did not enter heaven by becoming successively purer in each cycle of rebirth, as Luria argued, but by having the opportunity during one of his incarnations to believe in Christ. Van Helmont and Knorr von Rosenroth used this doctrine to support the contention that Christianity was a universal religion revealed to all men. This doctrine, by dispensing with the difficulty of reconciling the attributes of a loving God with those of an angry God who consigned people to eternal damnation, removed an important stumbling block that had hitherto hindered the conversion of the Jews and pagans. Van Helmont and Knorr von Rosenroth thus extended the usefulness of the cabbala as a means to convert the Jews.

Van Helmont had already formulated this doctrine when he went to England in 1670. There, through the Cambridge Platonist Henry

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40 Quoted in William Isaac Hull, *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam* (Swarthmore, Pa., 1941), 121.
41 Coudert, "Quaker-Kabbalist," 172.
42 Ibid., 176.
43 Ibid., 177-78.
More, he met Anne, Viscountess Conway, who retained him as her personal physician from 1670 to 1679. Lady Conway was an intensely religious woman who had befriended many Quakers, and she eventually became one herself. She introduced van Helmont to many prominent Quakers, and for a few years the restless Van Helmont found a spiritual home with Quakers like George Keith and Benjamin Furly, who also studied cabala.  

Keith, a leading Quaker apologist, had read extensively in the writings supposed to have been composed by Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary Egyptian philosopher. These works were thought to be pre-Mosaic, and many believed that they embodied the most ancient, and therefore universal wisdom. Keith met Van Helmont in 1675, and took an immediate interest in van Helmont’s cabbalistic studies. Van Helmont felt he had found a kindred spirit in Keith and, assuming that Keith spoke for Quakers as a whole, he thought he had finally discovered a religion that was consonant with his beliefs. He decided to become a Quaker late in 1676 or early in 1677.

It turned out, however, that van Helmont had influenced Keith at least as much as Keith had him. Keith was especially taken with the cabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation, which helped him resolve a problem that had plagued him for some time: how to reconcile the Quaker emphasis on “saving” faith with “historical” faith, or faith in the historically centered doctrines of Christianity. Van Helmont’s theory of transmigration allowed Keith to argue that a pagan could have saving faith without historical faith, but that he would eventually acquire historical faith through successive reincarnations. Through his friendship with van Helmont, Keith, though still a leading Quaker, also became a cabalist. In the late 1670s he began to correspond with Knorr von Rosenroth, with whom he discussed millennial speculations, among other things.

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44 On Lady Conway see Joseph Green, “Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Quaker Lady”, 1675,” Journal of the Friends Historical Society, VII, no. 1 (January 1910), 7-17; VII, no. 2 (April, 1910), 49-55.
47 I would like to thank Jon Butler for graciously lending me his microfiche copies of this correspondence, which remain in manuscript in Wolfenbuttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod-Guelf, 30.4, Auftrags-Nr. 5519. Coudert, “Quaker-Kabbalist,” 179, cites this correspondence as well.
Van Helmont's peculiar doctrines did not go unnoticed by the Quaker leaders, though they seem not to have paid any attention to Keith's growing interest in these ideas. In January 1684 George Fox sent a memorandum to the Second-day's Morning Meeting of the Quakers asking them to scrutinize van Helmont's doctrines. The opinion of this meeting is not known, but Gerard Croese reports in his *Historia Quakeriana* that some Quakers viewed his doctrines as "Dangerous Innovations; others as foolish Errors and Distracted Notions."48 About this same time van Helmont formulated, with Keith's help, his *Two Hundred Queries moderately propounded concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of humane Souls and its conformity with the truth of the Christian Religion*, published in 1684 in London, in which he explained his theory of the transmigration of souls.49 Van Helmont was "a stiff Defender of his own Opinions," and he refused to abandon these doctrines. The suspicions of the Quakers eventually forced van Helmont out of the Society some time in the late 1680s. For his part, van Helmont persisted in his admiration of the Quakers as the group that came nearest to "professinge the primitive apostolical & true Christianity."50

Keith, in the meantime, continued to act as a spokesman for the Quakers, and he, along with Penn, Barclay, and Fox, made a trip to the Continent in 1677 to try to persuade sympathetic groups and individuals to come into the Quaker fold.51 One of the first stops on this trip was Rotterdam, where they sought the advice and assistance of Benjamin Furly. Furly, an English merchant, was a key figure in the growth of Quakerism in Rotterdam and on the Continent. He translated the works of English Quakers into Dutch and German and wrote many treatises of his own in defense of the Quakers. Furly, "addicted to learning," had boundless and wide-ranging intellectual curiosity.52 His library of over 4,000 books testified to the breadth of his interests, though the books "were mostly on the theological

48 Quoted by Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, 113.
50 Quoted by Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, 113; Ibid., 121.
51 On Penn's two visits to the Continent see William Isaac Hull, *William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration to Pennsylvania*, (Swarthmore, Pa., 1935).
52 Quoted by Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, 31.
subjects of the *suspectae fidei* order"—works relating to early Quakerism and seventeenth-century mystics and theologians like Gottfried Arnold, Boehme, and Labadie. A large number of the books were also on linguistics, lexicography, and grammar, covering twenty-eight languages in all.\(^53\) He was an especially avid scholar of Hebrew, and with his close friend Keith he co-authored the post-script to Keith’s *Universall Free Grace of the Gospel Asserted* (1671), in which Furley translated lines from Hermes Trismegistus.\(^54\) Furley, despite his services on behalf of the Quakers, was not as constant in his faith as they would have liked. Neither of his two marriages was performed according to the Quaker marriage ceremony, though he himself had been instrumental in procuring its legalization. In 1693 Friends in Amsterdam began to complain that Furley was becoming increasingly worldly and had fallen into the “foolish courtoisies of the world.”\(^55\)

Furley’s troubles with the Quakers in 1693 may have had more to do with his translation in the same year of van Helmont’s *The Divine Being and its Attributes*. Van Helmont and Furley had been friends since the middle of the 1670s, and Furley’s library contained many of van Helmont’s books. By 1693 van Helmont had clearly fallen out of favor with the Quakers, and Keith was stirring up a storm within the Society of Friends because of his Helmontian notions. The Friends would not have viewed kindly Furley’s association with van Helmont at this time. Furley never gave explicit reasons—at least any we know of—for his estrangement from the Quakers, but it is clear that at some point he “went off from many things in the Doctrine and Manner of the Quakers.” A visitor to Furley in 1710 described him as “a paradoxial and peculiar man, who soon gave us to understand that he adhered to no special religion.” When Furley died in 1714, he was buried in the Protestant cathedral in Rotterdam.\(^56\)

It is somehow fitting that Furley, with his eclectic interests and religious indifference, should have been the one largely responsible for having contributed to the religious and ethnic pluralism of early Pennsylvania. Despite Furley’s strained relationship with the Quakers

\(^{53}\) On Furley’s library see Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, 137-155.

\(^{54}\) Cadbury, “Early Quakerism,” 195.

\(^{55}\) Quoted by Hull, *Benjamin Furly*, 157.

later in life, as Penn's chief agent on the Continent he labored ceaselessly as both a recruiter and publicist for Penn's new American colony. His location in Rotterdam at the mouth of the Rhine and his language abilities ideally suited him for the task. Furly's position and talents allowed him to reap the harvest of Penn's 1677 trip through Germany by enabling hundreds of Germans, including Kelpius, to settle in Pennsylvania.

One place that Penn visited during that trip was Frankfurt, where the Saalhof Pietists received him warmly. Johanne Eleanor Von Merkel was especially enthusiastic about Penn, as his letter to her indicates: "The sense of your open-heartedness, simplicity, and sincere love to the testimony of Jesus, delivered by us unto you," he wrote, "hath deeply engaged my heart towards you." A result of Penn's visit, not anticipated in 1677, was the formation of the German Company in 1682 by the Saalhof Pietists. Through Furly, they purchased 15,000 acres in Pennsylvania and asked Francis Daniel Pastorius, who had been connected with them since 1680, to be the company's agent in Pennsylvania. Pastorius left for Pennsylvania in 1683 with the understanding that the other members would follow.\(^{57}\)

None did. "It almost seems," Pastorius wrote to Schütz in 1685, "that the majority could not fully carry out their good intention, namely, to serve God and their neighbor here in Pennsylvania in tranquility of spirit, but that some of them, almost against their will, are entangled in various affairs of this world, with neglect of the one thing that is necessary." The reluctance of the Saalhof group to emigrate indicates that their intentions at this time were very imprecise. The group, despite its separatist impulses, continued to have warm personal relations with Spener, and, in their millennial thought, had not yet strayed very far from his vague "hope for a better time."\(^{58}\)


\(^{58}\) "Es scheinet fast, dass di meisten ihre gute Intenion (allhier in Pennsylvania Gott und dem [N]echsten im Stilligkeit ihres Gemuts zu dienen) nicht so volkommlich erreichen Konnen, sondern deren etlich, gleichsam wider Willen, in mancherley Welt-Affairen, (mit Verabsaumung des Einen so nothig ist) geflechten werden." Francis Daniel Pastorius, *Umstandige Geographische Beschreibung der Aller letzet Erfundenen Provintz Pensylvaniae* (Frank-
Though the devastating French Wars and the resulting "vicissitudes and disorders of the Fatherland" contributed to a general sense of the corruption and decline of the Old World and the comparative promise and innocence of the New World, Pastorius and the other Saalhof Pietists saw Pennsylvania more as a nursery for the cultivation of the philadelphian ideal than as part of an explicitly millennial vision.\textsuperscript{59}

This changed in 1685, when a new urgency appeared in the millennial speculation of some of the Saalhof Pietists. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes heightened Protestant millennialism, and it was a critical time for von Merlau and her husband in the elaboration of their eschatology. In that year, reported Petersen in his autobiography, he and his wife were led simultaneously, but without each other's knowledge, to read the Revelation of St. John. Petersen, though a doctor of theology, had up till then been afraid to delve too deeply into the book, because it was commonly held to be a "sealed book." When he read it this time, he completed it in an hour. Von Merlau then told him that she had read the book in the very same hour. Then she recalled a dream she had had when she was sixteen, in which the numbers 1\,6\,8\,5 appeared, and a man said, "Look! At this time great things are seen to happen, and something is opened to you." The Petersens saw this prophecy fulfilled in the "persecutions in France" of that year and in the opening of the Book of Revelation to their understanding.\textsuperscript{60} The reorganization of the German Company as the Frankfurt Company in 1686, and the Petersens' first appearance as members of the company in that year also


\textsuperscript{60} Petersen, \textit{Lebensbeschreibung}, 62.
point to the mid 1680s as a turning point for both them and the Saalhof circle.  

Johann Jakob Zimmerman was also in Frankfurt in 1685-86, where he lodged with Schütz. He had been active in the promotion of millennial speculation in Wurttemberg until the authorities, who referred to him as “doctissimus Astrologus, Magus, and Cabbalista,” decided to dismiss him in 1685. Before this he had already appeared several times before the consistory under suspicion of teaching false doctrine. He maintained that the reformation of the church was his main concern. In 1684, however, under the pseudonym of Ambrosius Sehman von Camnicz, he published a work entitled *Muthmassige Zeit-Bestimmung gewiss gewartiger beedes Gottlicher Gerichten über das Europeische Babel und Anti-Christenthum ietzigen Seculi*, or *Precise Mathematical Determination of the Time of the Two Expected Divine Judgments over the European Babel and the Anti-Christianity of this World*. In this work Zimmerman interpreted several signs—the appearance of the great comet of 1680, the fall of Strassburg to the French in 1681, and the advance of the Turks on Vienna in 1683—as perhaps of the establishment of the millennium in 1694. He also discussed the destruction of the “European Babel,” the thousand-year Sabbath of the pious, the general conversion of the heathen, the existence of true prophets in the present day, and a few doubts concerning the Augsburg Confession.

The contents of this book and the suspicion that Zimmerman esteemed the work of Boehme even above the Apostles caused the consistory to summon him to a hearing. Before the consistory he explained that by “European Babel” he did not mean only the papacy but all those who behaved like the “Babylonian whore,” and that he also believed in the reunion of the churches before the end of the

61 It was not until the mid 1960’s, however, that the first Petersen’s many publications on the millennium appeared. See, for example, *Das ewige Evangelium der Allgemeinen Widerrbringung Aller Creaturen* (1698).


63 Kolb, “Anfänge des Pietismus,” 83.
world. When asked about Boehme, he simply replied that he had read him but neither condemned him nor approved of all that he said. In another treatise published in 1685, he argued that, while there were still many good souls in the Lutheran church—and it ought not to be called Babel—nevertheless the Anti-Christ ruled there too.\(^{64}\)

Many members of the consistory did not like what they heard; nor did the Duke, who commanded the consistory to remove Zimmerman from his post as deacon in Bietigheim and to expel him from the Duchy. Despite the opposition of some in the consistory and Spener's disapproval of the proceedings, the Duke's orders were carried out. After leaving Wurttemberg Zimmerman led a peripatetic life. He lived in Amsterdam (1685), Frankfurt (1686), and Heidelberg (1689), where he was professor of mathematics for a short time. He finally settled in Hamburg in 1689, where he became a member of the learned society, *Kunstrechnung-liebenden Gesellschaft*, and continued his work on mathematics and astronomy. He also began to work on his plans for the Chapter of Perfection and the voyage to the New World.\(^{65}\)

We know little about how Zimmerman recruited members for his Chapter, or how he met Kelpius. Knorr von Rosenroth most likely brought the two together. Sometime during his years as a student at the University of Altdorf, near Nurnberg, Kelpius came to know Knorr von Rosenroth, and later used many of Knorr von Rosenroth's hymns as the inspiration for his own hymns.\(^{66}\) Early in his career Kelpius published three theological works, including his thesis on natural theology, for which he received the title of *Magister* in 1689.

\(^{64}\) Quoted by Fritz, "Konventikel in Wurttemberg," 109 Ibid., 110.


at the age of sixteen. In these treatises he revealed himself as an opponent of orthodox Lutheran scholasticism and an advocate, like most Pietists, of an irenic theology. His later writings indicate that the decisive influence on him was mystical theosophy and that he was well acquainted with the Rosicrucian Confessio. Knorr von Rosenroth probably introduced Kelpius to these studies through the cabbalistic circle in Sulzbach. Zimmerman, who was in Nurnberg in the late 1680s, undoubtedly sought out the esteemed cabbalist and also attended these same cabbalistic meetings, where he would have met Kelpius. 67

After Zimmerman chose him as one of the members of his Chapter, Kelpius, then twenty, joined about twenty companions in Rotterdam to organize their Rosicrucian fraternity and start the journey to America. On the way to Pennsylvania, the group stopped in London for six months. There they established a close connection with the Philadelphian Society, “a Religious Society for the Reformation of Manners, for the Advancement of an Heroical Christian Piety, and Universal Peace and Love towards all.” The purpose of the society was neither to form a new sect nor to “persuade others to dissent from that Communion, which they are Previously obliged to Adhere to” but to overcome divisions among Christians. 68

The Philadelphian Society and Jane Leade, its principal publicist, although unknown in Germany, took much of their philosophy from Boehme, and so they found a sympathetic friend in Kelpius. Kelpius had read extensively in Boehme’s writings and had derived much of his imagery from them. More important, the Philadelphian Society shared Kelpius’s millennialism. Their “single opinion,” they explained, was that the “Coming of Christ was near at Hand; and therefore they think it their Duty to warn and awaken the World.” 69

The Philadelphian Society sought to extend its contacts on the Continent in the interests of this universal mission. Shortly after Kelpius’s

69 Ibid.:ephl, 92.
visit, they contacted Petersen, who became their principal advocate in Germany. In 1703 they started mission work on a large scale in Germany. One of their mission inspectors, Dittmar, sent back a list of German “friends” that included Petersen, Lauterback, a friend of Kelpius’s, Schütz’s widow, and, perhaps somewhat dishonestly, Spener.  

In many ways, however, the real beginning of this mission was their friendship with Kelpius. The Philadelphians saw Kelpius’s mission as part of their own. His six-month stay in London enlarged the nature of his mission to America and added another group to the broad spectrum of reformers who shared his ecumenical and millennial views. Kelpius clearly perceived this commonalty of interests, or to put it more precisely, he regarded the different strands within this web of reformers as many manifestations of the same movement. “This late Revolution in Europe (not to speak of that in other parts),” he wrote, “in the Roman Church goes under the Name of Quietism, in the Protestant Church under the Name of Pietism, Chiliasm, and Philadelphianism.” Of all the signs that the millennium was near at hand—“Phoenomena, Meteors, Stars, and various Colours of the Skei”—the clearest and most important harbinger was this “Revolution”:

And like as the Miracles wrought by God through the Hand of Moyses was for the main part in the outward Creation of Macrocosm, the Miracles of Jesus the Messia on the Bodys of Man or Microcosm, so these in our days was wrought (much like unto them in the days of the Apostles) on the Soul and more inerior parts by Ecstases, Revelations, Apparitions, Changings of Minds, Transfigurations, Translations of their Bodys, wonderful Fastings for 11, 14, 27, 37 days, Paradysical Representations by Voices, Melodies, and Sensations to the very perceptibility of Spectators who was about such persons . . .  

These spiritual stirrings, begun in Europe, were to find their fullest expression in America, Kelpius believed, and the Chapter saw in America the arena for the unfolding of the final stages of history. Johann Selig, Kelpius’s closest friend in the group, sent a letter back

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70 Ibid., 126.
72 Ibid., 49.
to Germany in which he contrasted the millennial role of the New World to the decay and sin of the Old. "Ye European church women, consider," he warned, "unless you put off your soiled garments of religion, you cannot enter into the Philadelphia which the Lord awakens anew out of a little pebble and a paltry mustard seed, rather outside of your European Babylon than within it, as the future will show." It was not new for America to be cast in this sort of role, but the Society of the Woman in the Wilderness worked the American wilderness in a unique way into a specific and detailed cosmology and eschatology that drew on elements and imagery from Boehmism and Rosicrucianism. The wilderness was for Kelpius a symbol that knit together several facets of this theology, eschatology and devotional discipline.

Kelpius's eschatology was, for the most part, an explication of the twelfth chapter of Revelation:

Next appeared a great portent in heaven, a woman robed with the sun, beneath her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant, and in the anguish of her labour she cried out to be delivered. Then a second portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns; on his heads were seven diadems, and with his tail he swept down a third of the stars in the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that when her child was born he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, who is destined to rule all nations with an iron rod. But her child was snatched up to God and his throne; and the woman herself fled into the wilds, where she had a place prepared for her by God, there to be sustained for twelve hundred and sixty days.

Kelpius understood this passage to mean that the fall of the Apostolic Church was caused by the dragon, who wanted to devour the male child, Jesus. When the woman, the Virgin Sophia, fled into the wilderness, the dragon turned on her other offspring, the remnant

73 [Johann Selig], "Copy of a Report from the New World . . . 7 August 1694," trans. Oswald Seidensticker in Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 12 (1888), 440. Seidensticker incorrectly identified the author as Daniel Falkner. It was Schmauck who identified Selig as the author.

74 Rev. 12: 1-6 (The New English Bible).
of the true church. This remnant has remained hidden in the world since the woman fled, and has attempted to flee into the wilderness to rejoin its mother—but has failed. As the time of the millennium was approaching, however, the true Christians would soon be reunited with their spiritual mother.\(^75\)

This rich allegory enabled the American wilderness to take on several layers of meaning. First, it was the wilderness into which the woman fled. Moreover, it was important that this wilderness be a real physical place, as Christian history had clearly shown. "God hath prepared always his most eminent Instruments in the Wilderness," noted Kelpius. He "could produce a whole Cloud of such chosen Vessels out of the antient Records of the first Christians, who being prepared in the Wilds . . . after their coming forth converted whole Cities, wrought signs and Miracles, was to their disciples living Oracles."\(^76\) Kelpius here was not speaking of an imaginary wilderness, but, harking back to the desert fathers of Christianity, he was explaining the importance of the physical wilderness to the success of the great prophets' religious calling.\(^77\) The discipline of celibacy was one part of the ascetic tradition that, in Kelpius's case, was an attempt to emulate Adam's prelapsarian androgyne. Kelpius and his brothers also hoped that, like the prophets of old, their own journey into the wilderness would act as the catalyst for dramatic historical events in their own time.

The sojourn in the wilderness, however, was not only physical but also spiritual. Like Spener, who linked the collegium—a devotional group—to a reform movement, Kelpius believed that salvation depended upon the church's flight into the wilderness along with the journey of the soul toward its inward wilderness. "Just as the entire body of Christ is in the desert or hidden," explained Kelpius, "so also is every member or soul in particular."\(^78\) According to Kelpius, there were three "wilderness states" that corresponded to three different levels of mystical perfection.

The first wilderness state represented only the most superficial

\(^75\) Lashlee, "Johannes Kelpius," 333.
\(^77\) Benz discusses the revival of interest in the desert fathers in Die protestantische Thebais.
removal of the soul from the world. The third state was the "wilderness of the elect of God"—those who actually entered into union with God and the Virgin Sophia. The second wilderness state was attainable by all, but not without effort. Kelpius dwelled on the second wilderness state, as that was the place where he himself had arrived. "O! ye Inhabitants of this happy desolation," he exclaimed, "To die in this pleasant Wilderness is to grow lively. Poverty maketh rich. Hunger is the most desirable Meat, and Thirst the most refreshing Nectar... To be nothing is Deified... To have nothing is to enjoy all... To become weak is the greatest strength."79

At the extreme limit of this self-resignation, one gained freedom from all forms and ideas, for these too were informed by life in this world. In his small devotional book *A Method of Prayer*, Kelpius explained that "for our parts, we should and can do so much as to refrain from all Thoughts and Words, and to avoid all rational Cogitations, all Forms and Figures, not only during the Time of our Prayer, but all Day long..."80

When he rhapsodized on this state of permanent mystical ecstasy, Kelpius was elaborating on a familiar devotional theme of spiritual withdrawal from the world, a theme was in some ways contradictory to the prophetic mission of the Chapter of Perfection. The members of the Chapter realized, however, that in addition to a life of contemplative solitude, they also had to expedite the arrival of the millennium by strengthening the international philadelphian community, which was the foundation on which the New Jerusalem would be built. In addition to maintaining a correspondence with the Philadelphian Society and Pietists in Germany, Kelpius also wrote to Americans from a wide variety of religious backgrounds—Stephen Momfort, the leader of the Seventh-day Baptist community in Rhode Island; Hester Palmer, a Quaker from Long Island; and Mary Elizabeth Lerber, a Swiss Anabaptist who lived in Virginia.

The disintegration of the small brotherhood, however, clouded this vision of a philadelphian society. The failure of the millennium to begin at the predicted time undoubtedly contributed to some dissatisfaction. Yet there is much to indicate that this was not a critical

80 Kelpius, *A Short Easy and Comprehensive Method of Prayer* (Germantown, 1761), 20.
factor. Kelpius remained optimistic, so much so that he sent Daniel Falkner back to Germany in 1698 to recruit more members for the Chapter. Falkner returned with several men, including his brother Justus, and Johann Jauert, the son of one of the members of the Frankfurt Company. The small group was still committed to its mission, despite the postponement of the millennium.

The departures from the group seems to have grown instead out of something much deeper than a vague sense of dissatisfaction with plans gone awry; they hinted at a tension that lay at the very heart of the group's philosophy. The active evangelism in the millennialism of these Christian cabbalists encouraged the dispersal of their own group. This same chiliasm also worked against the philadelphian ideal of ecumenicism, for it was grounded in a historically specific understanding of Christianity that was inherently opposed to a non-doctrinal and spiritualized understanding of faith and salvation. The rapid disintegration of Kelpius's group, the Keithian controversy within the Quaker community, and the quarrel over the Frankfurt Company property were all symptoms of the difficulty in reconciling these two strands of the Chapter's ideology.

The Keithian controversy, and Koster's involvement in it, was the most dramatic and vivid example of this conflict. Keith's problems in the Quaker community began in 1682 when he published a summary of Christian doctrine to which, he claimed, all Quakers subscribed. Keith wrote the treatise in response to one written by Christian Lodowick, an ex-Quaker and former tutor of Knorr von Rosenroth's children. Keith visited Lodowick in Rhode Island in 1688, and, as a result of their conversation, Lodowick published an open letter in which he made a distinction between two sorts of Quakers—"Cabbalistical Semi-foxians" or "Semi-Quakers" who distinguished the Inner Light from Christ, and the "Foxians," the majority of Quakers, who equated the Inner Light with Christ. These Foxians, he charged, repudiated the doctrine that "Christ as Man shall come down From Heaven to Raise and Judge the dead." Keith, in his reply, denied that there were two such groups of Quakers and asserted that all

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Quakers believed in the bodily resurrection of Christ and that “God hath appointed a Day where in he will judge the World in Righteousness by that Man Christ Jesus.”

Keith did not speak for all Quakers when he made these claims, and the ensuing controversy led to permanent schism. Keith continued to insist on both the universal experience of the Inward Light and the necessity of belief in the bodily resurrection. The orthodox friends held that the inner Light of Christ was sufficient for salvation. They also accused Keith of believing in the transmigration of souls as an article of faith and suspected him of writing van Helmont’s *Two Hundred Queries*. In 1694 the London Yearly Meeting finally disowned him. Keith tried to organize a separate body of Friends in London, an effort that did not succeed. He joined the Church of England in 1700 and returned to America in 1702 as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Some of his followers in America joined the Anglican Church, while others, with Koster’s help, formed the first Baptist congregations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Koster was a natural ally of the Keithians. Like the other members of the Chapter, he was a millennialist and learned in the cabbala—in 1697 he wrote a treatise on his eschatology titled *De Resurrectione Imperii Aeternitatis*. He was also somewhat contentious. On the voyage to America he took upon himself the task of keeping the others in line on points of faith and doctrine. Kelpius’s journal of the trip notes “the memorable excommunication of Falkner by Koster & that of Anna Maria Schuckart, the Prophetess of Erfurt.” Daniel Falkner had evidently encouraged Schuckart’s esctatic religious visions, which the austere Koster censured.

After the group arrived in Germantown, it is unclear whether Koster ever spent much time with them in their hermitage on the Wissahickon. He began almost immediately to hold services, attended by the rest of the fraternity, at the house of Isaac van Bebber, one

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of the first settlers of Germantown and a Mennonite, soon to become a Keithian. When the Keithians found out that Koster was preaching "Orthodox Lutheran doctrine," they came to hear him. The number of English listeners finally grew so large that they moved the congregation to Philadelphia. At about this time Koster attempted to start a community called "The Brethren in America" of "The true church of Philadelphia or Brotherly Love." He called the community building "Irenia"—peace. This was the group that became the core of the Keithian Baptist Congregation in Philadelphia.87

Koster's activities, however, hardly contributed to brotherly love. He irritated the orthodox Friends and also angered Pastorius, who had become a Quaker and was still agent for the Frankfurt Company. In his pamphlet "Four Boasting Disputers of this World Briefly Rebuked," Pastorius wrote that "H.B. Koster, arriving here in Pennsylvania, his heart and head filled with Whimsical and boisterous Imaginations," had "settled a Plantation near German-town, upon a tract of Land given unto them calling the same IRENIA; that is to say, the home of Peace, which not long after became ERINNIA, the House of raging Contention." Koster's community, which appears to have been a communitarian experiment, was ephemeral, and the members "disagreed, and broke to pieces."88

Koster further widened the schism between the orthodox Friends and the Keithians when he acted as a spokesman for the Keithians at the Yearly Meeting in Burlington in 1696. In a speech lasting half an hour, Koster castigated the Quakers in his typically blunt fashion, telling them that he had come "to refute from the Holy Scriptures your blasphemous doctrine, which is worse than that of the heathen of America, namely, that of your spiritual Jesus."89 Koster was not alone in his mistrust of Quaker doctrine. Kelpius, though he refrained from participating publicly in the Keithian controversy, had views similar to Koster's on the Quakers' "spiritual Jesus." 87 Jon Butler, "Into Pennsylvania's Spiritual Abyss: The Rise and Fall of the Later Keithians, 1693-1703," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 101, no. 2 (April 1777), 151-70.
89 Quoted by Sachse, German Pietists, 271.
can the bride be prepared without the bridegroom,” he asked. “Or is the perfection to be wrought in the spirit only? But then, what of the resurrection from death & the redemption of this body, for which all members of Christ do, with Paul, so anxiously cry?”

The orthodox Friends naturally resented this interference from outside, and wrote to the London Yearly Meeting that “divers Germans and Others, who Indeed were very Fierce & Violent Opposers” had “given Friends here much Exercise & Trouble.” When the Quakers challenged the Keithians to practice what they preached, Koster baptized some of them in the Delaware River. Koster’s exacerbation of the Keithian schism caused a number of German Quakers to petition Pastorius, asking him to disperse the mystics and Pietists within the township. Pastorius wisely refused, but Koster had nevertheless helped to create a permanent breach between Pastorius and the Chapter of Perfection.

Though Koster returned to Germany in 1699, this breach later widened when the Frankfurt Company dismissed Pastorius as their agent, and appointed Kelpius, Daniel Falkner, and Johann Jauert in his place. Furly also gave Falkner the power of attorney to act for him in Pennsylvania. Pastorius had for some time wanted the Company to “put an other in his place.” What finally prompted the Company and Furly to put their affairs in the hands of members of the Chapter is not clear, but the increasing chiliasm of the Frankfurt Pietists and Furly’s estrangement from the Quakers had moved them much closer ideologically to the Chapter than to the Quaker Pastorius. Unfortunately for all concerned, the transfer of control over the property was not smooth. Kelpius declared “he would not act as Attorney for the sd Company, calling himself, Civiliter Mortuus.”

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91 Quoted by Sachse, German Pietists, 272.
92 See Morgan Edwards, Baptists in Pennsylvania Both British and German (Philadelphia, 1770), 58, in Materials Towards a History of the American Baptists in XII Volumes, (1770-92), vol. 1. Sachse gets his information on this from Edwards, but slyly ellipses the curious remark by Edwards that “two public persons were baptized in 1697 by Rev. Thomas Killingworth of Cohanse. Their names were William Davis and Thomas Rutter. The first joined Pennepek, the other kept preaching in Philadelphia where he baptized one Henry Bernard Koster . . . .” I have found no corroboration of this statement. But if Koster had been rebaptized, it would certainly call into question his image as an upright churchman.
93 Sachse, German Pietists, 283.
Pastorius doubted the legality of the transfer without Kelpius's participation, though Furly sent letters insisting on the validity of Falkner's and Jauert's power of attorney. Bitter wrangling ensued over this issue; in the meantime Falkner entangled himself, perhaps unwittingly, in a scheme to defraud the Company of its lands. When this came to light, Jauert sided with Pastorius in the controversy. The matter was not finally settled until 1709.94

Falkner's involvement in these secular affairs distanced him from the brotherhood on the Wissahickon, and within a year or two after his return to America, he married. At the invitation of his brother, Justus, who had been ordained in 1703 by one of the Swedish ministers in Pennsylvania, Daniel Falkner began to minister to the Lutheran congregations on the Raritan, while his brother served the New York congregations. Both were energetic pastors, but Justus championed Lutheranism most zealously. The relations between the Lutherans and the dominant Reformed Church in New York were very strained and Justus, in a move highly uncharacteristic of the irrationally inclined Pietists, published a book in 1708 called *Grondlycke Onderricht*, or *Fundamental Instruction* against "Calvinistic Errors." The ultra-orthodox German theologian Valentin Löscher admiringly called this book a "Compendium Doctrinae Anti-Calvinianum."95

Kelpius did not mention either Koster's or the Falkner brothers' activities in his letters, though he definitely disapproved of religious squabbles. "Nor are they content with reviling," he wrote about the churches and sects, "those that are in power use the sword, those lacking the [se] make swords of their tongues, & with such blind rage, that it moves to pity." While he no doubt was distressed by the fractious spirit of Koster and the Falkners, Kelpius did not seem to disapprove of their leaving the Chapter. He blessed Justus Falkner's ordination by his presence, and Johann Selig reported approvingly that "in the house of this man [van Bebber] there are every week three meetings, at which Koster generally speaks publicly to the great edification of those present."96

94 Learned, Franks Daniel Pastorius, 148-50; Sachse, German Pietists, 307-19.
95 Quoted by Sachse, German Pietists, 283.
Kelpius instead reserved his disapproval for quite a different sort of person—those within the “philadelphian” community who had gotten carried away with a kind of religious enthusiasm that Kelpius viewed as inward-looking and self-indulgent. His correspondence with Johann Deichman, the secretary of the London Philadelphian Society, traces the increasing problems Kelpius had in dealing with members of the Society and reflects a growing caution and skepticism concerning the validity and integrity of some of those who were claiming to be inspired by God. “Inasmuch, however, as we see so many and various pseudo-saviours in the theatre of these our revolutions, it were not strange if our countenances were somewhat turned away from the only true one.” Some men and women had embraced “some folly because of too great ardour and heat of desire.” Kelpius was uncertain even about the activities of Jane Leade, the leader of the Philadelphian Society. “This excessive boasting here in the streets of Babylon is somewhat suspicious to me,” he declared. “In a word, the affair will come to pass quite differently than one or several men, yea even [J.L. herself] imagine.”

Selig, too, condemned this spiritual self-centeredness. The result of such pride, he wrote was

1. a restless running about from place to place without use and fruit of edification, either of one’s self or of another; 2. a life according to one’s own advice, caring little for that which one’s neighbor giveth concerning one’s self and one’s deeds to which we were called in the world and the church, as one imagines . . . .

This lack of discipline, argued Selig, often severed the Christian from Christ and the Christian community and led to situations where “such an one often thinketh himself in the middle of hell, and almost immediately thereafter he declares he is in heaven, by which decla-

97 Kelpius, “Letter to Heinrich John Deichman, May 12, 1699,” in “Diarium,” 36; Ibid., 34. Sachse transcribed “J.L.” as “J.C.,” and wrote it out as “Jesus Christ,” which doesn’t make much sense, even for Kelpius. Kelpius is clearly referring to someone in the Philadelphian Society, and J.L. most likely stands for Jane Leade. If the initials are read as F.L., which they could be, then Kelpius might have been referring to Francis Lee, another leader of the Philadelphian Society.
ration the ignorant are dazzled, as being beyond the true bounds of the process of Christ.”

Kelpius pointed to the career of Peter Schaefer as a particularly notable example of the kind of religious self-delusion of which he was speaking, the kind of religiosity that had little to do with the chapter of Perfection’s enterprise in America. Schaefer was a Finn, a Master of Arts from the University of Ebo, who according to Israel Acrelius in his History of New Sweden, had “fallen into fanatical notions,” namely, that the official acts of an unregenerate minister were invalid. He recanted but began to wander through Germany and England and then to Pennsylvania. In England he must have spent some time with the Philadelphia Society, for Kelpius referred to him in a letter to Deichman, writing that “we cordially received Schaefer and gave him the choice among 7 or 5 different places, among our acquaintances and friends, where he might have enjoyed his bread in quietude.” But Schaefer, “after so many wanderings and ups and downs,” was unable to stay still and “permit God to prepare his soul and fix his purpose.” Instead he went to Pennsneck, where there was a Swedish congregation, to teach school.

Soon after this, related the unsympathetic Acrelius, “he entered upon what he called a ‘Deathfast,’ and received a revelation that he should arise and wander about at random.” The congregation at Pennsneck, however, desired to have him for their minister, for “the simple people took him for a saint.” Schaefer never answered the call, but instead “came to an agreement with Jonas Auren [a Swedish minister] that they should go out into the wild forests to convert the heathen, but neither did anything come out of that.” Kelpius, bewildered by Schaefer, wrote that “when at last his soul should be brought to rest, the Lord alone knows, for he himself is without method to attain this end.” Despite his own weaknesses, “he is desirous of converting and strengthening others, though he himself confesses he has no grounds.” Schaefer eventually returned to England, where, during a fifty-day fast, “he received a revelation that he should proceed to Ebo, and there give his judges a new answer, which in fact he did,

and his days were ended in the castle of Gefle in imprisonment and insanity."\(^9\)

Schaefer’s activities disturbed Kelpius, not because he questioned Schaefer’s integrity, but because Schaefer pursued his religious calling without discipline or direction. Kelpius, though a hermit, conceived of his mission in America as resting on a collective foundation, a *collegium* that would in time embrace all Christians. His criticism of Schaefer and the members of the Philadelphian Society centered explicitly on their lack of discipline, and their indulgence in ecstatic visions for their own sake. Kelpius was hardly one to dismiss intense mystical experiences, and for him ecstatic visions were a sign of the movement of the Holy Spirit. But outside a collective context they ceased to be prophetic and thus became useless.

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Kelpius did not register disapproval of Koster and the Falkners precisely because they did not lose sight of this prophetic mission. The Chapter of Perfection did not dissolve because the members became confused about what to believe but because the fundamental premise of the group almost demanded that members leave. Koster and the Falkners were doing what they had come to America to do—prepare the world for the millennium. When Justus Falkner came to Pennsylvania, he, like the other members of the Chapter, lived as a hermit for a time. “But now, after having schooled myself a little in solitude, I begin as if from a mirror to take cognizance of one fact and the other,” he explained. “I have gone more among the people, and subsequently have resolved to give up the solitude I have thus far maintained, and, according to my humble powers, to strive at least with good intention publicly to assist in doing and affecting good in this spiritual and corporeal wilderness.”\(^10\) Falkner followed the example of the prophets in the desert that Kelpius had invoked; he perceived his time in the wilderness as preparation for a larger

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task, not as a state of permanent withdrawal. Falkner did not altogether abandon the ideals of the Chapter. Rather, he acted on one of the impulses that had created it.

This active evangelism meant, however, that Falkner had to shed the other goals of the group—mystical perfection and an ecumenical Christendom. While the juxtaposition of evangelical zeal and the eremitic tradition had not been uncommon in Christian history, in Pennsylvania it became difficult to reconcile the devotional and ecumenical ethos of the group with its chiliastic and evangelical concerns. As a symbolic device, the wilderness elegantly pulled these strands together. But for many in the Chapter, the challenge of the real wilderness finally superseded the desire to explore the inner wilderness.

In the end, the hope for the reign of Christ on earth inspired by the cabbala was too dynamic to stay anchored to the contemplative life and too rooted in a specific understanding of history to mesh with the philadelphian (and Quaker) retreat from doctrine. The religious diversity of early Pennsylvania, which had seemed such fertile ground for these millennialists to plant the Kingdom of God, instead starkly illuminated the contradictions in their model of reform. Keith, Furly, van Helmont and Lodowick parted from the Society of Friends because of the "Notions" they got out of "the Writings of some Rabbies among the Eastern Jews." Their friends, the German cabbalists in Pennsylvania, left the Chapter of Perfection to chase the dream of the new age promised by Christian scholars of the cabbala.

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