

Johann Arndt & Paracelsus: *Natural Science in Early Pietism*

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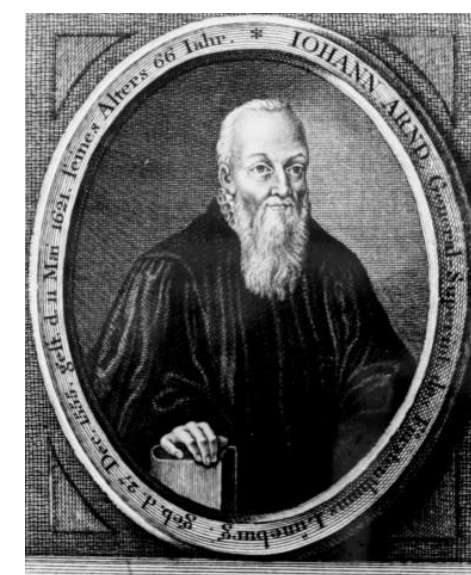
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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Johann Arndt has not been placed at the forefront of Pietism, and his heterodox religious position has been passed over in favor of a more conventional stance.¹ In fact, he has remained relatively anonymous in academic conversations surrounding the evolution of Pietism. Only recently has Arndt's position in orthodox Lutheranism been questioned seriously. His open discussion of mystical, hermetic, and Gnostic philosophy, and his inclusion of Paracelsian theosophy in *Book Four of True Christianity* provide modern historians with new insight into Arndt's true religious beliefs. His inclusion of Paracelsian text as support is particularly revealing; Paracelsian medical and theological principles were exceptionally unorthodox. Paracelsus relied heavily on Neoplatonic, Hermetic and mystic thought in his theosophy. His worldview was deeply entrenched in alchemy and esotericism. Paracelsus conceived of a world influenced by God through Astral and Divine Spirits, which left seeds and signatures throughout Creation; alchemy provided a process through which to purify these Spirits. Moreover, these Spirits created a sympathetic relationship between all things living. Arndt incorporated much of Paracelsus' mystical theosophy into his own theology throughout *Book Four*. In a striking difference from Paracelsus, however, Arndt also based much of his reasoning off of New Testament Scripture, rather than simply experience. This is why he can truly be seen as the forefather of Pietism.



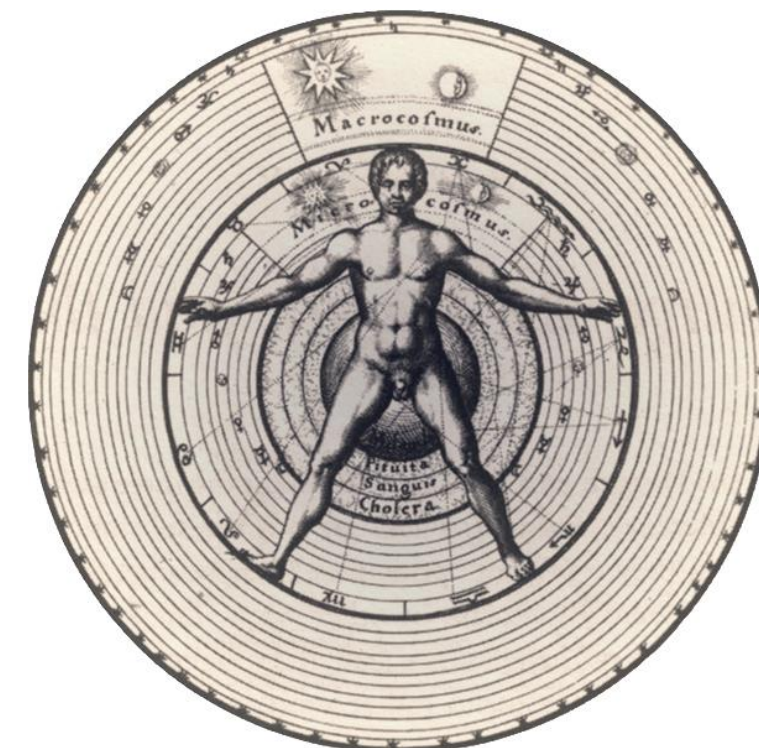
Johann Arndt⁴



Paracelsus⁹

Jole Shackelford has pointed out that, given Arndt's educational background in Basel (where Paracelsus himself once taught) and his own alchemical practice, that we should “regard Arndt's religious views in their chemical-medical context”.² Given Arndt's public relationships with Paracelsian peers and his plausible associations with the Rosicrucian circles coupled with his staunch adherence to Scripture and practical theology, we can reasonably conclude that Arndt created the philosophical and theological foundation for Pietism in Germany. For instance, Arndt anonymously published commentary praising Heinrich Khunrath's alchemical, and theological book, *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1595). Arndt, like Khunrath and Paracelsus, practiced alchemy, and believed in the Hermetic principles of astrology, theurgy and Gnostic dualism as applied to natural theology.² Alchemy was a form of worship so as to better understand the workings of God's Creation and to form a more unified relationship with Christ and God. It was the ultimate process by which to understand the “spiritual might of nature”.³ The basis of these beliefs lay in the idea that all the world was connected through natural Spirit in the Light of Nature, supernatural Spirit through Cabala, and the angelic Spirit of the Holy Ghost.⁴

“For Man is a little World, and the Properties of the great one, or of created Nature, are as it were abbreviated and epitomized in him.”
--Johann Arndt^{6,7}



Nature was the purest form of God's divinity and care for mankind—this included not just the microcosmic earth, but the stars, planets, and heavens, all of which influenced God's Creation through shared Spirit. It was only right, in line with his Pietist beliefs, that Arndt include a book within his publication of *True Christianity* dedicated to nature and all of its elements as understood through a combination of Scripture and experience. This would allow the individual believer to better understand God's work, and to learn to love him all the more through studying his Creation. To lead a truly Christian life, and to find unity in the Spirit of the Lord (a Hermetic and Gnostic dualistic theurgical notion), Arndt understood that one must comprehend nature, in a religious sense, through both Scripture and personal experience in natural science. Such was the foundation of German Pietism, and Arndt's own heterodox movement away from Martin Luther's dogmatism.

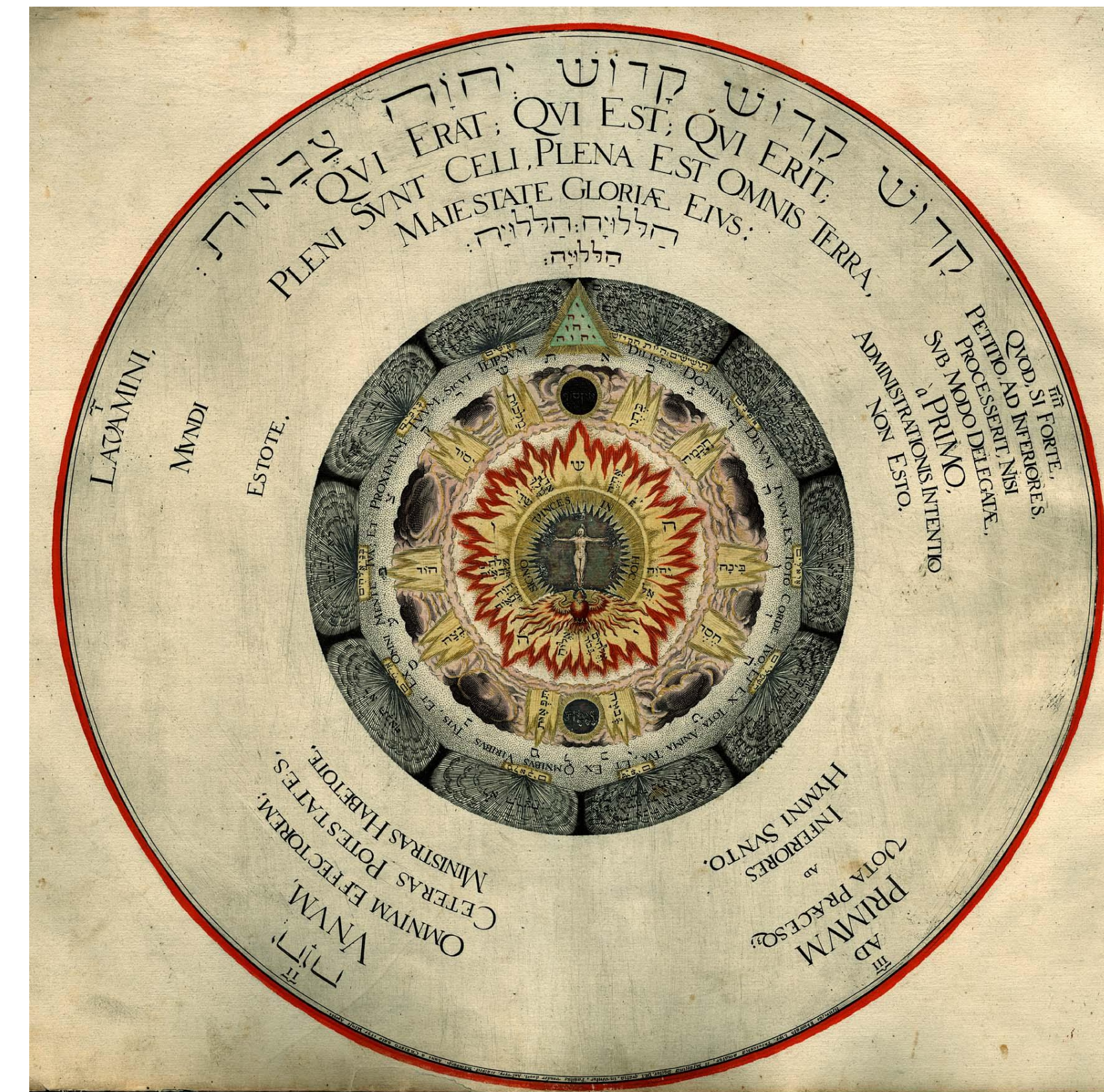
SIMILARITIES

- ❖ Based worldview on Macrocosmic/Microcosmic relationship
- ❖ Believed all man's knowledge, and arts or areas of study came through God's Spirit in man; perfection came through divine unity with God through a transmutation of the soul
- ❖ Alchemy was conceived of as a form of worship—Eucharist, Baptism, etc.
- ❖ Associated with Rosicrucianism, Hermeticism, Gnosticism and Mysticism
- ❖ Interested in practicality and in the common man's access to and participation in religion
- ❖ Showed disregard for institutions that supported excess wealth and greed of mankind
- ❖ Exhibited skepticism or disregard for any doctrinal policies
- ❖ Faced censorship and condemnation for shared views, including loss of positions

DIFFERENCES

- ❖ Arndt adhered to Scripture in the New Testament more than Paracelsus—only true way to know God's Spirit and word—*Important aspect of Pietism*
- ❖ Paracelsus more interested in cosmology than Arndt

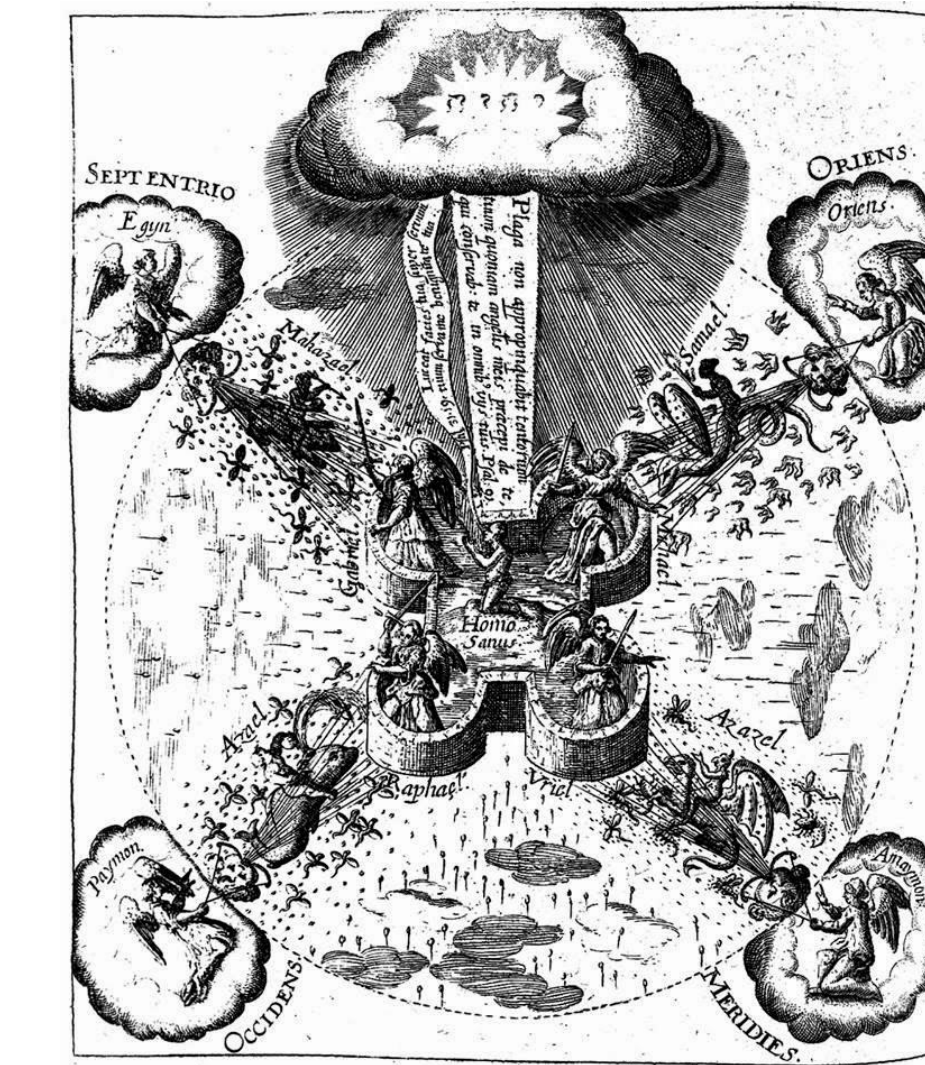
PRIMARY SOURCEWORK



Christ in Glory, Heinrich Khunrath.
From Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (Hamburg, 1595).⁵

In this image, we see the Christ-Anthropos figure descending into the microcosmic world as the “Creator-God”.³ As such, Christ could be “projected onto the base Christian” and man would be divinely reborn.³ This followed the hermetic ideas which Arndt proposed in his *Book of Nature* in *True Christianity*; he confirms this in his own commentary of this image. Arndt conceived of a mystical union with God through a spiritual rebirth of man akin to alchemical material transmutation; this would allow the believer to gain power over both terrestrial and celestial nature through a pure Christian identity. Man's Adamic-self must die so that his own identity as an image of God could instead emerge through an “*in vivo* transmutation of the soul”.² This image is exemplary of Arndt's Gnostic dualism, and hermetic beliefs in both alchemy and theurgy. Moreover, this idea is common as a Paracelsian notion of the powers of those illuminated through God.

“[men] take their first Motion and Byas from that Astral Spirit that presided in their Composition, and from thence they draw continual Supplies of natural Light and Knowledge, and may properly be said to draw nourishment for their Minds for thence...if to this Light of Nature, the Divine Light be added by the Holy Spirit in the regenerate Soul, then are those natural Gifts exalted to a higher degree of Perfection...”
— Johann Arndt quoting Paracelsus⁶



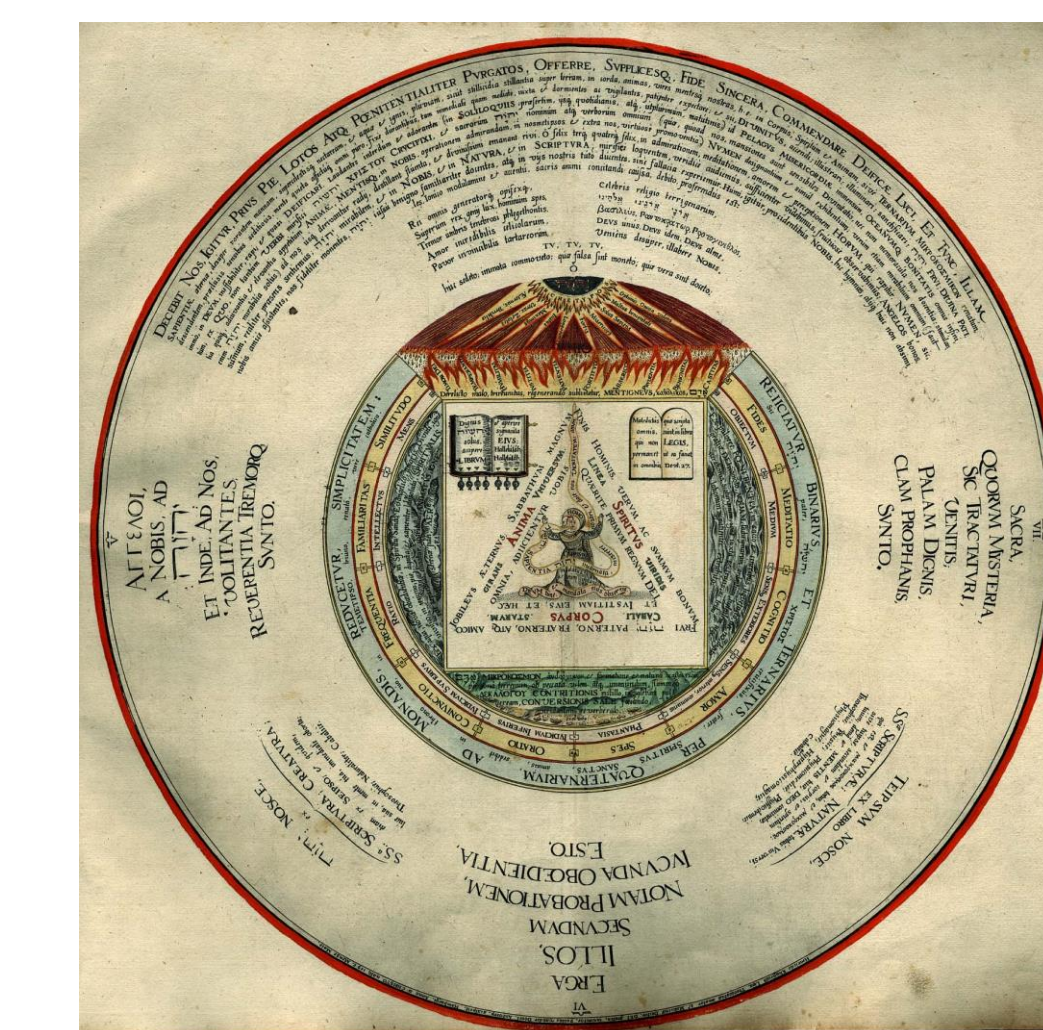
The angels of the four direction and the winds, Robert Fludd. From Fludd's *Medicina Catholica* (Frankfurt, 1629).³

Fludd treated the wind as an “Angelical creature”; it was sent by God, through his “Treasurers” to influence the microcosmic earth.³ Fludd discussed these winds mostly in terms of medicine and illness through influence and, as a Paracelsian, acknowledged that they each had their own signatures.³ Arndt discusses the winds in a similar way, though not in the context of medicine.

In the *Book of Nature*, Arndt lists all of the signatures that are particular to each wind. This includes drought, heat, coldness, and dryness, etc. He continues that these signatures and their hidden spiritual forces are for the benefit of mankind.⁶ The air carried is a vital element and supplies God's creations with life and Spirit. Arndt's discussion of signatures of the wind, and the influence of macrocosmic power on microcosmic beings is represented just as well in Fludd's image as it is in Arndt's writing. Moreover, the whole concept is exceptionally Paracelsian in nature, and ties Arndt to Paracelsus' hermetic philosophical system.

CONCLUSION

Johann Arndt was surrounded in an esoteric, Gnostic, and Hermetically based theology of the world. His views paralleled those of Paracelsus in several notable ways, and showed him to truly be a heterodox Lutheran. His alchemical language and understanding of God's Creation set him apart from his Lutheran peers. Moreover, Arndt believed in a dualistic relationship with God, wrought with aspects of perfectionist and synergist theology which took into account individual choice and freedom.¹ This went against the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of monergism, in which an individual's salvation was irrespective of their own choices and cooperation. Arndt saw the Lutheran doctrine, *sola fide*—salvation through faith alone—as one which left the individual worshipper too much freedom in their respect and love of God. Additionally, Arndt's ideas surrounding the transmutation of the human soul meant that the individual truly united with God—this too contradicted orthodox Lutheranism.^{1,2} However, these ideas were familiar to Paracelsianism. They aligned with Paracelsus' own views on unity with God and perfected Godly knowledge in the individual. In Arndt's *Book of Nature*, Paracelsian and Hermetic alchemy was a way to both understand the natural world, and to worship God. This was highlighted in Khunrath's imagery.



“the *Amphitheatrum* teaches of *Theology in the Oratory* and *Theology* is nothing other than *Alloquium Divinum*, a conversation with God.” –Johann Arndt on Khunrath's figure^{4,5}

Consequently, Arndt was heterodox through his Paracelsianism. He was not, however, a mystic in the Paracelsian sense. Arndt believed that the experience of mysticism needed to be augmented through Scripture. This is why we must call Arndt the founder of Pietism. He encouraged his congregation to engage with Biblical text personally, to make choices in their practice of faith. True Christianity existed in a living faith. Understood in conjunction with his beliefs in Gnostic dualism, Hermeticism, and Paracelsian alchemy and astrology, it is no wonder that his peers commented on his unorthodoxy. Arndt sought to reform the doctrines which had come out of the Reformation. His theosophy, taken in context with his understanding of literal Scripture and his Spagyric medical background, created the foundation for Pietism. Arndt was a heterodox Christian because he was a Paracelsian. Paracelsus' justifications for natural theology paralleled much of Arndt's own, and saturated much of the early Pietist belief system that was created by Arndt. To understand Arndt, we must understand his philosophical relationship with Paracelsus, and the role this played in the formation of his own faith as a reaction to Luther's “doctrinal policing” of the reformed faith.²

CITATIONS

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3. Fludd, R. (1629). Medicina Catholica. Frankfurt: Johann Neumeister.
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