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THE SOURCE AND APPLICATION OF THOMAS MÜNTZER'S THEOLOGY OF
DIVINATION IN HIS MARGINAL NOTES ON TERTULLIAN

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

By
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May, 2021

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To my father, Roger for giving me the love of learning.

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Soli Deo Gloria,

Roger A. Drinnon, 2021

ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
FC	Fathers of the Church
ThMA	Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe Kritische Gesamtausgabe

ABSTRACT

Drinnon, Roger A. "The Source and Application of Thomas Müntzer's Theology of Divinization in His Marginal Notes on Tertullian." Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2021. 101 pp.

Traditional Lutheran and Marxist interpretations of Thomas Müntzer inadequately account for Müntzer's theology and practice. The doctrine of the order of creation tied Müntzer's theology and practice together. According to the order of creation, the goal of the material world was to return to God at the end of time. Müntzer's writings on the order of creation stated the doctrine was the central tenet of Christianity. By returning to God, Müntzer believed the creation would become divinized. Müntzer found this doctrine in the works of the North African Church Father Tertullian and used Tertullian's writings to justify to his own attempt to divinize society and bring about the apocalypse.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FASCIANTION WITH THOMAS MÜNTZER

People are more often interested in other people than things. While topics such as apocalypticism may excite the imagination, the people behind apocalyptic visions are far more interesting to some people than academic discussions. The film *Apocalypse Now* depicts the fascinating yet insane Colonel Kurtz, as the cultist leader of American soldiers and Montagnard guerrilla fighters.¹ In the jungles of Vietnam, Colonel Kurtz became a demigod captivating everyone around him with his charisma. While at the end of the film Willard kills Kurtz, he preserves Kurtz's writings.

Apocalypticism should not be captivating. To rational people, the realization of apocalypticism should be met by fear and horror. For example, the atrocities of Jim Jones at Jonestown, Guyana, proclaimed the dangers of apocalypticism. Although he started his ministry with an emphasis on social and racial justice, nearly a thousand members of Jones' cult committed suicide by drinking cyanide laced Flavor Aid.² Many more stories of mass suicides, killings, and other phenomena are linked to apocalyptic cults. Some Christians disown apocalypticism in order to separate the Christian tradition from radical outliers; however, apocalypticism also falls within the Christian tradition. The books of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John are full of violent images and terrible visitations of God's judgment upon a sinful world. In the early church Tertullian's New

¹ "Apocalypse Now," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified December 17, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse_Now.

² "The Jonestown Death Tape (FBI No. Q 042): The Rev. Jim Jones, Et Al. (The Peoples Temple Cult): Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming," Internet Archive, last modified November 18, 1978, accessed December 27, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/ptc1978-11-18.flac16>. While Kool Aid was commonly thought to be the vehicle for the poison in the mass suicide, the evidence according to the taped recordings in Jonestown indicated that Flavor Aid was the brand used for the mass suicide.

Prophecy sought an authentic Christianity through signs and visions lost after the apostolic age.³ The question I and many others have wrestled with is: From where did those who favor apocalypticism, such as Tertullian and Müntzer draw their theology? Where do they draw from philosophically to justify their apocalypticism? While exploring the Radical Reformation, the person of Thomas Müntzer attracted my interest during my studies. The allure of Müntzer bypassed academics and theologians and penetrated to the broader public's imagination in his day.⁴ In *Apocalypse Now*, the figure of Colonel Kurtz embodied the mindset to win the Vietnam War just as Müntzer exemplified the resolve to bring heaven to earth. Additionally, as with Jim Jones, Müntzer represented a conflux of charisma, apocalypticism, and social change that, at one time, was interpreted by Marxist historians as the natural evolution of history. However, recent scholarship in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has changed the direction of Müntzer studies.

The result is a more comprehensive view of the person and work of Müntzer. Instead of isolating certain aspects of his work for analysis, recent scholarship takes up studying Müntzer holistically, integrating his theology and praxis. A new image has emerged—capable of reconciling various aspects of Müntzer's works that were apparently contradictory under the dominant Lutheran and Marxist interpretations of Müntzer. The new picture has considered Neoplatonism's influence on his theology. The argument of this paper is that Müntzer's

³ Rudolph Arbesmann describes the extent of Tertullian's involvement in the New Prophecy. "The 'new prophecy as the Montanists themselves termed their movement, attempted not only to reinstate prophecy in the prominent place it had held in the life of the early Christian communities, but also to surpass the two previous stages of divine revelation: the first stage, or 'infancy,' being represented by the Law and the Prophets; the second, or 'youth,' by the Gospel. . . . The Montanists (or Tertullianist) group at Carthage was never very numerous; St. Augustine led the last adherents of the sect back to the Church." Rudolph Arbesmann, "Introduction," in *Tertullian Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius*, vol. 10 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), xi.

⁴ Peter Matheson gave an excellent breakdown in post-Cold War developments in Müntzer research. Peter Matheson, "Review Essay: Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86, no. 1 (January 2012): 98.

Neoplatonic theology drove every aspect of his life and work. Through both German mysticism and Tertullian, Müntzer attempted to reform the church. The primary doctrine that Müntzer was concerned with was the order of creation—the right ordering of the cosmos under God’s reign and rule. Müntzer saw himself as a tool for the restoration of the whole world as God’s righteous prophet. The restoration of the cosmos brought about the divinizing potential of humanity to enjoy a perfect union with the Word. The state of the field of Müntzer studies is open to further exploration of divinization in Müntzer’s praxis and connecting his theology to the early North African Fathers.⁵

State of the Field

Throughout the twentieth century, Müntzer received attention in Germany from Marxist philosophers and historians such as Ernst Bloch. Now in the twenty-first century, Müntzer continues to be a source of inspiration for radical revolutionaries. Müntzer’s *Sermon to the Princes* was included in the rainbow flag-covered Verso paperback series on revolutions.⁶ The imagery of the rainbow flag on the book’s cover connected Müntzer with Marxist revolutionary activity. Müntzer’s involvement in the Peasants’ Revolt attracted the imaginations of film makers and social activists. Advocates for liberation theology such as Dorothee Sölle drew inspiration from Müntzer’s struggle to dismantle unjust hierarchies.⁷ Historian Karl Holl was the first to engage Müntzer as a subject of twentieth century research in religious movements, and Methodist scholar Gordon Rupp was the first to present Müntzer to the English speaking world

⁵ Throughout this paper, I will be citing all scriptural quotations from the *English Standard Version*.

⁶ Thomas Müntzer and Wu Ming, *Sermon to the Princes*, trans. Michael G. Baylor (London: Verso, 2010).

⁷ Matheson, “Recent German Research on Müntzer,” 99.

as a substantive theologian.⁸ Throughout the twentieth century, Müntzer studies continued to expand under the expertise of Siegfried Bräuer, Günter Vogler, Gottfried Seebaß, Tom Scott, Hans-Jürgen Goertz, and James Stayer.

After significant dialog between Christians and Marxists, Siegfried Bräuer, Günter Vogler in *Thomas Müntzer: Neu Ordnung Machen in Der Welt: Eine Biographie*⁹ succeeded in dismantling false assumptions about Müntzer's early life and career. In *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben Und Theologie Des Hans Hut*,¹⁰ Gottfried Seebaß wrote about Müntzer's enduring theological legacy beyond Müntzer's lifetime through his disciple Hans Hut. Tom Scott argued in *Thomas Müntzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation*¹¹ that at the foundation of Müntzer's Reformation was the order of creation. Hans-Jürgen Goertz in "Thomas Müntzer: Revolutionary between the Middle Ages and Modernity"¹² traced back modern spirituality to Müntzer. James Stayer in "Thomas Müntzer Theology and Revolution in Recent Non-Marxist Interpretation"¹³ contended that Müntzer's reform program was not about democratic socialism but about the salvation of souls.

The 500th anniversary of Müntzer's birth in 1989 represented a significant pivotal year for

⁸ Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932) 1:420–67; Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, (London: Epworth, 1969).

⁹ Siegfried Bräuer, and Günter Vogler. *Thomas Müntzer: Neu Ordnung Machen in Der Welt: Eine Biographie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2016).

¹⁰ Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben Und Theologie Des Hans Hut* (Göttingen: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002).

¹¹ Tom Scott, *Thomas Müntzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation* (New York: St. Martin, 1989).

¹² Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Thomas Müntzer: Revolutionary between the Middle Ages and Modernity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 64, no. 1 (January 1990): 23–31

¹³ James M. Stayer, "Thomas Müntzer Theology and Revolution in Recent Non-Marxist Interpretation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 43, no. 2 (April 1969): 142–52.

Müntzer.¹⁴ According to Matheson:

For more than a decade, Marxist and church historians in the then German Democratic Republic, had been quietly listening and learning from one another. At the Halle conference in the autumn of 1989, just before the Wall came tumbling down, the fruits of this encounter—and also of contacts with West German and other historians such as Goertz and Eike Wolgast—became evident. Yet 1989 was important for another reason: the flood of biographies and other publications in that year, including a momentous volume on Müntzer’s theology.¹⁵

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, subsequent German research on Thomas Müntzer shifted away from the Cold War Marxist paradigm to a new trend. The field of American research into Müntzer anticipated this shift in Müntzer studies. In Joyce Louise Irwin’s 1972 dissertation *The Theological and Social Dimensions of Thomas Müntzer’s Liturgical Reform*, Irwin sought to reconcile Müntzer’s social reform with his liturgical reforms through the doctrine of divinization.¹⁶ This theological emphasis on divinization in Müntzer’s liturgy brought the elect into participation with God’s work in the world. Practical apocalypticism brought “heaven on earth” first by forming the elect in liturgy and then sending the elect to restore the order of creation. Jared Ortiz in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* noted that divinization in the Western tradition is given little attention in modern scholarship.¹⁷ Irwin’s contribution bridged the gap in the understanding of divinization in the West, opening up new possibilities for researching Müntzer as a person, pastor, theologian, and reformer.

By an examination of practical applications by Müntzer in his reform movement, American

¹⁴ Scott, *Müntzer: Theology and Revolution*, 1. “Reckoning back from his first appointment at a chantry priest in Brunswick in 1514, we can estimate that he must have been born no later than 1491, since the lowest age for ordination was customarily twenty-four. 1498 has been most frequently suggested as his year of birth.”

¹⁵ Matheson, “Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer,” 99.

¹⁶ Joyce Louise Irwin, “The Theological and Social Dimensions of Thomas Müntzer’s Liturgical Reforms,” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972), 2, ProQuest.

¹⁷ Jared Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*, ed. Jared Ortiz (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 1.

late twentieth century Müntzer research sought to draw out his philosophical and theological presuppositions. Glenn Earl Myers's work, *Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview: The Impact of Rhenish Mysticism Upon His Evangelical Theology, Charismatic Experience, and Revolutionary Activity*, traced Müntzer's theological and philosophical influences through German mysticism.¹⁸ The revival of Neoplatonism during the Renaissance meant Müntzer was able to study the Platonism found in the Church Fathers and realized the consequence of his Neoplatonic teaching. Myers connected Müntzer's mysticism with what Müntzer perceived to be Tertullian's order of creation.¹⁹ Müntzer imported his Neoplatonic mysticism into Tertullian's theology, seeing Tertullian as an exemplary theologian. Müntzer did not accept at face value Tertullian's theology—rather Müntzer critically engaged with the North African Father in instances where he felt Tertullian failed to make arguments from the order of creation. In Müntzer's narrative of church history, Tertullian lived during the time of the virginal church before the medieval scholastics turned Christians away from the true teachings of Jesus Christ. In a manner similar to German mysticism's Platonic thought, Tertullian provided Müntzer a template for his own reforming activities in the sixteenth century.

Not to be outdone by American researchers, German research into Müntzer in the twenty-first century has also advanced. Within the last two decades, three volumes of *Thomas Müntzer*:

¹⁸ Glenn Earl Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview: The Impact of Rhenish Mysticism upon His Evangelical Theology, Charismatic Experience, and Revolutionary Activity," (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1992), ProQuest.

¹⁹ Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview," 29. I agree with Myers that Müntzer saw his own Neoplatonic theology of the order of creation in Tertullian even though Tertullian could not be a Neoplatonist. "To this Müntzer responded, 'All things are to be taken back to their origin.' This is the principle that he saw Tertullian illustrating. For all things to show characteristics of the material from which they were formed would logically fit into a scheme of emanation and return. Each new level of emanation reflects the stage from which it has come, and to that source it will again return. That Müntzer gave no explanation of this phrase is not surprising, for his remarks were marginal notes for his own use. Moreover, this is a standard phrase in Neoplatonic thought which is found throughout the writings of the German mystics, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter."

Ausgabe Kritische Gesamtausgabe were released. In 2004, Siegfried Hoyer led the work on volume three providing numerous background sources such as letters, poems, biographies, and histories.²⁰ Released in 2010, volume two edited by Siegfried Bräuer, contains Müntzer's letters and in-depth notes and biographies of Müntzer and his contemporaries.²¹ Finally, in 2017, volume one, edited by Eike Wolgast, was released consisting of Müntzer's works including his letters, sermons, and liturgy.²² Half of volume one consists of Müntzer's daily offices and his Evangelical German Mass with chant tones, all preserved in his original spelling. The significance of reading Müntzer in his own language cannot be overstated. His theology was deeply embedded in praxis found in his Psalm translations, hymns, and liturgical style. The words Müntzer chose to use in his native language are programmatic of his revolutionary theology.

Modern German research continues to look at Müntzer within the Reformation as a whole particularly Thomas Müntzer's and Martin Luther's ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. In the Festschrift for Bräuer, Hans-Jürgen Goertz's argued that the entire Reformation was radical. According to Goertz, the Reformation's attempts to reform the church by confronting power hierarchies caused "spontaneous socialization" to occur throughout all Reformation communities.²³ The doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" was a radical egalitarian doctrine also espoused both Luther and Karlstadt. Furthering research into Müntzer praxis, Helmar

²⁰ Thomas Müntzer, *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Quellen zu Thomas Müntzer*, ed. Siegfried Hoyer, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004).

²¹ Thomas Müntzer, *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Thomas Müntzer Briefwechsel*, ed. Siegfried Bräuer, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010).

²² Thomas Müntzer, *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Thomas Müntzer Schriften, Manuskripte, und Notizen*, ed. Eike Wolgast, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017).

²³ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 104.

Junghans focused on Müntzer time in Zwickau. Junghans dismissed Storch's influence on Müntzer's praxis and made the case that Müntzer advocated for "Josephite," or asexual, marriages—reflecting Müntzer's view of a realized eschaton.²⁴ In his 1967 dissertation Goertz argued that mysticism, not apocalypticism, was the primary emphasis of Müntzer's worldview.²⁵ However, in 2002, Goertz revised his thesis. Mattheson repeated Goertz's view of the apocalypse when he wrote, "The apocalypticism of the Reformation put an abrupt end to the relativization of all time by eternity, typical of Augustine and the Middle Ages. Thus, it was the Reformation, not the Renaissance or Enlightenment, that ushered in modernity."²⁶ Goertz argued that Müntzer's spirituality became the paradigm for modern spirituality—focusing exclusively on the individual. As argued in his *Sermon to the Princes*, early modern spirituality involved divinization through the transformation of the ground of the soul. Mattheson's comments from the translation of volume three of *Thomas-Müntzer Ausgabe-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* presented the key difference between Luther's and Müntzer's eschatologies, "Luther expected the Kingdom of God on the far side of history, Müntzer within history."²⁷ Furthermore in 2008, Goertz developed Müntzer's eschatology into a proleptic anticipation of the coming kingdom, and unlike other radical reformers, the apocalypse did not adhere to a millenarian timeframe—the apocalypse was now.²⁸

Divinization, not social work, was the focus of Müntzer's reforming work. In Günter

²⁴ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 104.

²⁵Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Innere Und Aussere Ordnung in Der Theologie Thomas Müntzers* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

²⁶ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 105.

²⁷ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 105.

²⁸ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 105.

Vogler's monograph titled "Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit", Vogler argued that Müntzer sought the transformation of this world through his apocalyptic faith, as well as through Müntzer's commitment to social justice.²⁹ While his task as a pastor was to change people, Müntzer could not bring about change under the oppressive power structures of medieval Germany. As a result, God had taken power away from the princes and placed it with the people. Yet, social justice was not Müntzer's concern but God's reign and liberation from the material world.³⁰ Scholarly consensus has largely established that Müntzer worked closely with the urban bourgeoisie and princes to enact his reforms rather than the peasants. Only when he had no other options left did Müntzer seek the aid and take up the cause of the peasants. Questions remain regarding his exact relationship with Renaissance humanism. Another topic worth exploring was his relationship with fellow Italian apocalyptic visionary Savonarola, particularly regarding his liturgical practice.

Throughout the twentieth century, research into Müntzer progressed beyond the Lutheran and Marxist paradigms. New contributions from American historians emphasized Müntzer's support of divinization through the influence of German mysticism and his reading of the Church Fathers. German research provided a new critical edition of Thomas Müntzer's works. German scholars, including Goertz and Junghans, explored how Müntzer's apocalyptic vision influenced his ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. Goertz and Junghans concluded that modern spirituality's emphasis on the individual came from Müntzer theology. This theology drove Müntzer to divinize society as God works in individuals through the ground of the soul. Each contribution helped to shape the narrative of Müntzer's life and work.

²⁹ Günter Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit*, in *Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft*, vol. 4 (Mühlhausen:2003).

³⁰ Matheson, "Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer," 106.

The Life and Work of Thomas Müntzer

“History is written by the victors.” This quote is attributed to Winston Churchill, but perhaps not original to him. The victors of the Peasants’ Revolt wrote the initial histories of Thomas Müntzer casting him as the villain of Christendom. Martin Luther wrote to the Christians at Halle a grand narrative of Müntzer:

The dissenting sects are exerting themselves with might and main to bring about such a catastrophe by dividing us in mind and purpose. This in turn is to be followed by physical separation and warfare, so that we shall then behold the fulfilment of that which was begun in Müntzer, which was merely Satan’s prelude and introduction.³¹

But the spirit of Müntzer continued to endure through the centuries. Luther’s initial condemnation of Müntzer would not stand unopposed. Müntzer continued to be reevaluated and reinterpreted according to the spirit of the age. With Müntzer’s emphasis on social justice, Marxists saw Müntzer as their Church Father.³² In the German Democratic Republic, Müntzer represented a hero of the proletariat and a visionary leader who sensed the coming class struggle against the bourgeoisie. Marxists selectively considered and ignored Müntzer’s theological views: his apocalyptic, or his belief in God, for example, but relished his communitarianism. As discussed in the previous section, these divergent views were mostly reconciled in the late twentieth century by considering Müntzer’s actual theological views.³³

³¹ Martin Luther, “To the Christians at Halle,” in *Luther's Works: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 162–63.

³² Abraham Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless: The Making of a Sixteenth-Century Religious Revolutionary* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 1. “Thus Muentzer of Stolberg ... came gradually to be rehabilitated in the wake of the French Revolution. Culminating in the 1841–1843 history of the Peasants’ War by Wilhelm Zimmermann, this reinterpretation from a pro-revolutionary perspective found its way, quite naturally into that of Friedrich Engels, and through him into all subsequent Marxist interpretations.”

³³ Irwin, “Theological and Social Dimensions,” 2. “Only with recent, more balanced studies of Müntzer has the possible theological or social significance of his liturgical reform been recognized. Hans-Jurgen Goertz, who perhaps over-compensates previous Lutheran orientations by relating Müntzer almost exclusively to medieval mysticism, has pointed to the close link between his liturgy and his understanding of Scripture. On the Marxist side Karl Honemeyer has provided an introductory essay on the social significance of the reform.”

Since historical figures arise within contexts, it would be appropriate at this point to take up Müntzer's personal history. Born either in the year 1488 or 1489 in the town of Stolberg, Müntzer entered a world that differed greatly from the modern world. At this time in Pre-Modern thinking, many believed an enchanted world full of spiritual powers exerting their influence on the world existed beyond the physical world. Little is known of Müntzer's early life.³⁴ We do know Müntzer acquired a Master of Arts and Bachelor of Holy Scripture degrees between 1506 and 1512.³⁵ A 'Thomas Müntzer de Quedlinburgk' was found in the Leipzig register in winter 1506. If this was Thomas Müntzer (which is most likely), his stay in Leipzig was short. At some point, he transferred to Frankfurt an der Oder where he completed his studies. While the records at Frankfurt were not complete, Müntzer's possession of these degrees was not called into question by neither friend nor foe.³⁶ While at university, Müntzer was educated in the *via antiqua* and imparted a conservative scholastic training. During his time at Frankfurt University, Müntzer was exposed to Renaissance humanism.³⁷ Later in life, Müntzer rejected his academic training and embraced mysticism. This Renaissance humanism became the fertile ground from which

³⁴ Andrew Bradstock notes, "... the most commonly accepted dates [of his birth] are 1488 or 1489, on the assumption that Müntzer began his studies at Leipzig University in 1506 (a date which we can be a little more certain) at the conventional age of seventeen." Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution: The Political Theologies of Müntzer and Winstanley* (London: SPCK, 1997), 4. Müntzer's own testimony states, "I, Thomas Müntzer, born in Stolberg and living in Prague, the city of the dear and saintly warrior John Hus." Peter Matheson, ed., *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 362.

³⁵ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 406.

Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 4. "Between 1506 and 1512 Müntzer appears to have studied at Leipzig (if the 'Thomas Müntzer de Quedlinburgk' in the university register 1506 is in fact our man), and then at Frankfurt an der Oder, gaining, so it would seem, degrees in the arts and divinity."

³⁶ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic, Mystic, and Revolutionary*, ed. Peter Matheson, trans. Jocelyn Jaquiere (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 35. "Müntzer's own pronouncement of 1521, that he was 'artium magister et sancta scripture baccalaureus,' 'master of arts and bachelor of holy scripture,' is beyond doubt, since in an extensive correspondence both friend and foe address him, independently of one another in all confidence as 'Magister,' and they nowhere take exception to the title of 'baccalaureus.'"

³⁷ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 35. "This [Müntzer's time at university] does not preclude hearing lectures from a few humanists."

Müntzer developed his theological program of reform through his synthesis of German mysticism and medieval apocalypticism.

In 1514, Müntzer was ordained and appointed as a chantry priest at St. Michael's, Brunswick.³⁸ Müntzer's benefice could not support him financially, so Müntzer became a teacher at Aschersleben.³⁹ Through his teaching in Brunswick, Müntzer encountered the *Devotio Moderna*.⁴⁰ According to Hans-Jürgen Goertz, the *Devotio Moderna* was a lay movement "drawing on the spirit of mysticism and bound by high moral demands, which spread to German territories on the eve of the Reformation and strengthened the self-assurance of lay people disposed to be anti-clerical."⁴¹ As stated in Müntzer letters during his time in Brunswick, Müntzer grew a close circle of friends and allies and became the spiritual center of the city.⁴² Eventually, Müntzer arrived in Wittenberg, at the earliest in autumn 1517, where he studied under Johannes Rhagius Aesticcampianus.⁴³ Müntzer's eighteen month stay in Wittenberg had a long lasting influence on the rest of his career:

This [period] would have been a formative time for Müntzer, for we know that he spent some of his time there studying Plato—particularly the writings on asceticism which echoed Müntzer's own developing concern with the mystical path of suffering; Quintilian, who deals in his *Institutio oratoria* with the concept of a natural order of creation (*ordo rerum*); and, most likely, the *Theologia Deutsch*, an edition which was prepared and published by Luther in 1518.⁴⁴

While Müntzer was in Wittenberg, Müntzer's fateful encounter with Luther occurred,

³⁸ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 5.

³⁹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 39.

⁴⁰ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 39.

⁴¹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 39.

⁴² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 7–9. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 39. "In this town [Brunswick], there had gathered around the trader and influential citizen, Hans Pelt, a circle of profoundly religious people who were dissatisfied with the church and sought their salvation quite consciously in the imitation of Christ."

⁴³ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 5.

⁴⁴ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 5.

October 31, 1517 when Luther produced the Ninety-Five Theses. Müntzer was initially attracted to the anticlerical message of Luther during this period. During his stay at Wittenberg, Müntzer came to know two substantial influences on his career: Luther's colleagues Phillip Melanchthon and Andreas Karlstadt. Goertz explains this influence on Müntzer stating that Melanchthon, "... represented an impressive union of Renaissance humanism and Reformation, of education and new piety, still in its infancy and tentative as yet, but nonetheless in a clear form such as Müntzer had not met before."⁴⁵ Through Karlstadt's influence, Müntzer picked up an interest in the teachings of Augustine of Hippo and Johannes Tauler.⁴⁶

After his stay in Wittenberg, Müntzer attended the Leipzig Disputation where he acquired the works of Eusebius, Hegesippus, and Jerome. These early Church Fathers became foundational to Müntzer's interpretation of the church's history from Late Antiquity through the medieval period.⁴⁷ As Müntzer's interest in early Christianity increased, so did his interest in the North African Fathers: Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine. After reading their writings, Müntzer was convinced that the church had fallen from her 'virginal purity' following the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. While Luther identified the church's breaking point as the abandonment of the teaching of justification by grace, through faith alone, Müntzer believed the church fell into apostasy when it deemphasized the teaching of the order of creation.

Although Müntzer ran in the same circles as the Lutherans, he never hitched his theology with the Wittenbergers. His concerns about the purity of the church differed from Luther's concerns. During the height of the indulgence controversy, Müntzer never spoke about the abuse

⁴⁵ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 46.

⁴⁶ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 6.

⁴⁷ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 6.

of indulgences—that was a major concern for Luther and the other Wittenberg reformers.⁴⁸ Instead of positioning himself with specific theological positions, Müntzer aligned himself with Luther through their common criticism of the Pope, bishops, and corruption in the priesthood. As evident during his time in Brunswick, Müntzer already held anti-clerical views. Luther and the Reformation gave Müntzer a platform to promote his own vision of the church, and Müntzer would ally himself with Luther until profound disagreement and personal attacks caused a rift between the two. Müntzer would eventually break away from Luther and declare himself to be the true leader of the Reformation.

The break with Luther's reform began when Müntzer was appointed preacher at St. Mary's Church in Zwickau. From there, Müntzer continued his program of reform by continuing to denounce the monks and priests for their corruption.⁴⁹ Even as he unknowingly distanced himself from Luther, he continued to have good relations with the reformer. Letters to Luther written in this time give a snapshot of Müntzer's rhetoric toward the institutional church. Müntzer called the mendicant orders taking advantage of the church, "hypocrites, who for a piece of bread, bring to life the souls of those who are not alive and devour the homes of the widows with their long prayers, not promoting faith in those who are dying, but their own insatiable avarice ... men, whether monks or priests, had seduced the church of God."⁵⁰

The laity fared no better in Müntzer critique of the church because they failed to pray for good shepherds to guide God's flock.⁵¹ Even before Müntzer entered Zwickau, the city was rife

⁴⁸ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 6.

⁴⁹ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 6.

⁵⁰ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 18

⁵¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 18.

with religious tension. Müntzer's bombastic presence could have only contributed to further strife in the city.⁵² Under the guidance of the Zwickau prophets, Müntzer learned about the oppression of the working class. Income disparities created by the mining operations near Zwickau rippled through the economic life of the city. Inflation did not keep up with wages, causing income stagnation and poverty in the lower strata of society.⁵³ Müntzer's exposure to the increasing wealth disparities between the rich and the poor only confirmed his view that both church and society needed reform.

As the leader of the Zwickau prophets, Nicholas Storck's mysticism demonstrated to Müntzer the need for a faith arose only through experience (*experientia fidei*) in order that society might change.⁵⁴ The intellectualism of the scholastics produced a counterfeit faith and social conditions that threatened to tear Germany apart. Genuine faith did not require reading the scriptures or the use of any other intermediary. God worked through the elect in the ground of the soul through the Holy Spirit alone. After Müntzer was dismissed by the Zwickau city council for his radical preaching in 1521, Müntzer traveled to the Bohemian capital of Prague.⁵⁵ As a result of his experiences in Zwickau and Prague, Müntzer penned the *Prague Manifesto*. Four versions of this document exist. Here, Müntzer called for a complete overthrow of the bookish scholastics "who gulp down the dead words of scripture then pour out the mere letter and the

⁵² Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 6.

⁵³ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 57.

⁵⁴ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 7. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic, Mystic, and Revolutionary*, 61.

⁵⁵Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 7. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 66–67. "... there is no doubt but that he [Müntzer] struck a chord which made poorer circles sit up and pay attention, and that his impetuous anti-clericalism, allied with a distinctive anti-intellectualism, seeded unrest in the town. The Town Council was bound to fear demagogues from the lower classes could use this situation to fan the latent conflicts between authority and the 'common man' into a blaze. For this reason the Council admonished the belligerent preachers 'to tolerate your differences and defects amicably, in order to prevent scandal and uproar. However, as the dispute worsened, Müntzer was dismissed on the sixteenth of April 1521.'"

untried faith (which is not worth a louse) upon the poor, really poor people.”⁵⁶ True pastors must teach the experience of faith to the elect.⁵⁷ During his career, Müntzer developed his mystical theology into a radical apocalyptic program to restore the order of creation. Müntzer’s trajectory led him into the currents of the Radical Reformation. This radical program to restore the order of creation involved returning the church to her primitive roots through liturgical reform, pastoral practice, and social justice.

The Radix of Thomas Müntzer

The word radical invokes sentiments of extremist, often violent, change or action. In this light, the Radical Reformation is often perceived as a departure and break from the status quo of medieval Christian tradition. However, the word radical comes from the Latin root *radix* which means “root.”⁵⁸ The purpose of the Anabaptist tradition was not to break decisively with Christian tradition but to return to the primitive roots of Christianity, purifying the church of corruption experienced during the late medieval period.⁵⁹ Thomas Müntzer sought such a return to the virginal purity of the apostolic church by advocating radical and violent measures against what he termed the tares in the church. According to Myers, “It is likely that some of his formal university education introduced him to [Neoplatonism]; Platonic thought in some form is found in the Church Fathers as well as the classical authors which we know [Müntzer] encountered in

⁵⁶ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 367.

⁵⁷ “That is why the people live without real pastors, for the experience of faith is never preached to it.” Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 368–69.

⁵⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Radical,” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/radical>.

⁵⁹ Paul Walker, “Radical Roots: Connecting Anabaptism to the Early Church Fathers,” (2015), 1–2, https://www.academia.edu/13729308/Radical_Roots_Connecting_Anabaptism_to_the_Early_Church_Fathers.

his humanist studies.”⁶⁰ Even though his approach and theology were extreme even by sixteenth century standards, the theology behind his movement was present even in the ante-Nicene period.⁶¹ Through viewing Müntzer as fostered by the North African Fathers, his violent and apocalyptic vision of Christianity, rather than being a complete aberration, was brought into conversation with the larger Christian tradition. While Müntzer was influenced by Cyprian and Augustine, he had a special affinity for the North African Father, Tertullian.⁶² By comparing Müntzer to Tertullian, his concerns can be reevaluated considering his apocalyptic and spirit driven ministry.

The Thesis

While Thomas Müntzer’s actions appeared to be extreme even in his own time, his theology, a development within the trajectories laid out in patristic and medieval theology, was rooted particularly in the North African Church Fathers. Through indirect and direct exposure to Neoplatonism by way of the Rhenish mysticism and the North African Fathers, Müntzer constructed his campaign for social reform by attempting to restore the “order of things.”⁶³ By restoring the cosmic order of things, Müntzer hoped to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. Looking into the early church, Müntzer relied on a blueprint provided by North African Fathers

⁶⁰ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview,” 14.

⁶¹ The ante-Nicene period: ca. 100 AD–325 AD

⁶² Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview," 14. “Nevertheless, the contours of a basically Neoplatonic worldview can be traced throughout his writings, including his [Müntzer’s] correspondence. To what degree Müntzer himself was aware of his own ontological presuppositions can only be guessed; however, given his extensive study in the Church Fathers as well as his reading in the mystics, it is likely that he had a reasonable awareness of the intellectual framework in which they and he operated.”

⁶³ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview,” 83. “Müntzer’s concept of the proper relational order comes directly out the mystical tradition which had such an extensive influence upon him. The Rhenish mystics, in turn, had adopted terminology of being ‘ordered’ toward God or toward self directly from the thought of Augustine. Thus Müntzer’s use of the term ‘order’ in this fashion was not unique in the least.” Myers, "

such as Tertullian to develop his approach to restoring the order of creation and restoring the church to her primitive fidelity. By evaluating Müntzer through Tertullian, Müntzer's apocalyptic theology can be seen not as a radical break from Platonic thought, but rather his theology represented a development of doctrine and practice in reaction to the exigencies of his time. In this study, the theology of Thomas Müntzer will be evaluated in the light of the North African Father, Tertullian. Through his exercise of liturgy, pastoral care, and social justice, Müntzer implemented a program with the goal of restoring the order of creation that was in turn inspired by the work of Tertullian.

CHAPTER TWO

MÜNTZER, GERMAN MYSTICISM, AND ITS PATRISTIC FOREGROUNDINGS

“Therefore this whole revolving order of things is a witness to the resurrection of the dead.”

—Thomas Müntzer, *Marginal Comments on The Resurrection of the Flesh*¹

Müntzer’s Anthropology

On the eve of the Reformation, the church was in a severe spiritual crisis. From the High Middle Ages to the Reformation, scholastic theology became increasingly disconnected from the everyday experiences of Western Christians.² During the Late Middle Ages, scholastic theology and the institutional church failed to meet the spiritual needs the faithful, especially with regard to the certainty of salvation. Instead, Christians turned toward mysticism for relatable spiritual experiences.³ Through the German mystics, Meister Eckhart (Eckhart von Hochheim), Johannes Tauler, Henry Suso and the anonymous author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, the Reformation drew upon a rich legacy of experiential theology found in their writings to address the spiritual needs of the people.⁴ Within the pages of the mystics, the practical topics of suffering and preparation for dying were discussed in ways readily relatable to the average listener. These authors pointed to the imitation of Christ through suffering as the means of achieving unity with God and securing eternity with Him.

¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 422. Throughout his works, Thomas Müntzer recalls the image of the virginal church by Eusebius as the goal of his reforming efforts. Reading his own context into Eusebius, Müntzer attempted to reform the church to her virginal purity by synthesizing Neoplatonic mysticism and medieval apocalypticism to create a paradise on earth.

² High Middle Ages: ca. 1000 AD–ca. 1250 AD

³ Late Middle Ages: ca. 1250 AD–ca. 1500 AD

⁴ Luther gave the name to the anonymous work. “Theologia Deutsch,” *Wikipedia* (Wikimedia Foundation, December 16, 2020), last modified December 16, 2020, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theologia_deutsch.

From the writings of these mystics and the reform efforts of Cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus, a new theological movement began in the north-eastern Low Countries, Westphalia, and the Lower Rhine that came to be known as the *Devotio Moderna*.⁵ United by the writings of the German mystics, devotees of the *Devotio Moderna* sought to achieve the *unio mystica* as the highest achievement of the “inner life.”⁶ In their writings, the German mystics taught an experiential theology that did not need the mediation of the institutional church to bring the soul to Christ. Relying on a common inherited Platonic framework, the mystics taught that the soul was united with the One. Through their contingency within the order of creation, creatures had no substantial existence except through their unity with the One.⁷ In his study of the Church Fathers, Müntzer imported his mystical theology especially that of Tauler, as in line with the doctrine taught in the ante-Nicene church. Here Tertullian represented the prime example.⁸

Through his humanist education, Müntzer became acquainted with Tauler’s sermons, *Eine Deutsche Theologie* (a work then thought to be by Tauler), Augustine’s sermons, and Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*.⁹ Reading through these works, Müntzer concluded that the theology taught by the German mystics represented the pure theology of the ante-Nicene

⁵ Anna Bollmann, “The *Devotio Moderna* in Northern Germany,” in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, vol. 44 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 232–33.

⁶ Bollmann, “The *Devotio Moderna* in Northern Germany,” 323–34.

⁷ Existence as a concept was not at stake. The argument was between the nominalists and realists over the issue of particulars and universals. For adherents to the *Devotio Moderna*, the issue of the existence of particulars at stake.

⁸ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 36.

⁹ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer a Destroyer of the Godless*, 6. See also: Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview, 3 and Irwin, “The Theological and Social Dimensions,” 73. “The concept of the ground of the soul as the dwelling-place of God in man is evidence of Müntzer's affinity to the tradition of German mysticism. Direct evidence of his acquaintance with mystical writings is meager. A letter from a nun of the cloister he had served makes mention of his knowledge of Tauler and Suso. According to a seventeenth-century book entry, he owned a copy of Tauler's sermons bound together with other mystical writings such as those of Hildegard of Bingen and Elizabeth of Schönau. Mystical influence might also have come through Karlstadt, with whose writings Müntzer was definitely familiar. The mystical tract *Deutsch Theologia* also is included in his book list.”

church—the theology needed to return the church to her virginal purity. While relying on the German mystical tradition for his reform efforts, Müntzer also critically engaged with the tradition as Goertz notes:

Müntzer was not a faithful pupil of mediaeval mysticism. Rather, he absorbed only what illuminated his situation and was useful to him. He altered and exchanged much for biblical texts and metaphors, if he could strengthen his persuasive power in this way. But his most important basic concepts he shared with the mystic tradition.¹⁰

Müntzer drew from German mystics to validate his theology of divinization—man becoming God through participation in the divine. By the unmediated act of God’s grace, Müntzer believed one could achieve the original unity enjoyed in paradise by our first parents. Through unity with the One in the ground of the soul, the goal of the Christian life became the return to the source, God the creator of all things. However, this return to the source was achieved by self-denial, self-emptying, and suffering to achieve divinization.¹¹ Through divinization, God’s people would return to a purity before Him that would in turn usher in the End Times, especially by God’s purging of the tares from the wheat.¹² By approaching Müntzer through his theme of divinization, the aspects of Müntzer’s radical theology, pastoral concerns, and his revolutionary actions, are seen to be in harmony, over against attempts by Lutheran and Marxist historians to separate them.

¹⁰ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 197.

¹¹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 197–98.

¹² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 370. End Times readings such as Augustine’s were typical and were one of the four exegetical readings advocated in the medieval four-fold method: literal, allegorical, tropological (moral), anagogical (End Times). In this respect, Müntzer kept to a conservative interpretation of scripture while Luther deviated by following Erasmus, Lyra, Valla and others in his nearly exclusively literal interpretation of scripture.

The Ground of the Soul in Müntzer's Theology of Divinization

In the Vespers office hymn for Christmas, *Let Us Sing from the Heart*, Müntzer wrote, “Proclaim in the ground of our hearts that the Savior may be known to us so that we are born with you anew, Your work is found, not lost.” (stanza 3)¹³ In German mysticism, the term “ground of the soul” took on a technical meaning. According to Udo Kern, “The soul becomes the place where God works by giving birth, because God himself, through the birth of the Son in the soul, creates in it perfection, light, grace, and blessedness.”¹⁴ Through the ground of the soul, God worked in the elect through subjective religious experience—raptures, ecstasies, prophetic utterances, and contemplation—in immediate ways to produce the unity the soul has with the Word.¹⁵ The goal of the Christian within Müntzer's mystical theology was to rid the self of all creatureliness to attain unity with the One.¹⁶ According to Müntzer, the fall of man reduced humanity to the level of the creatures, and with no ability to return, barred mankind from returning to the source. This created an “ontological barrier” separating God from His creatures. Only through God's action was this barrier broken down to rescue His lost.¹⁷ Tauler similarly spoke of the ground of the soul when he wrote, “They are born anew, for created things have no claim on them, and they sink ever deeper into the divine ground, stripped of creatureliness, truly

¹³ ThMA 1; 1.10, 64. Translation mine.

¹⁴ Udo Kern, “Eckhart's Anthropology,” in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, vol. 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 241.

¹⁵ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview,” 18.

¹⁶ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 270. “Thirdly, one has to understand how the heart of the elect is always moved by the power of the Most High to return to its origin.”

¹⁷ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 197. “Behind Müntzer's understanding of the action of the divine spirit in humanity lay the assumption that humanity had fallen from God to the creatures and thenceforth had no possibility of returning to its origin by its own powers. This return was barred to it by the ‘ontological barrier’ separating the divine from the creaturely. This barrier could only be penetrated by God himself.”

detached and forgetful of self.”¹⁸ According to the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, to attain unity with God, one must strip oneself of all creatureliness that is all selfishness, “I-hood,” or “self-hood.”¹⁹ Traditionally, the scriptural origin of divinization was rooted in two verses: 2 Pet. 1:4 and Gen. 1:26–27.²⁰ The first verse was used by second century Hellenistic philosophy to justify its point of view.²¹ According to Stephan Finland, “Imitation of God is a major theme of Middle-Platonism, which seeks to systematize Plato’s metaphysics and theology, and which heightens the notion of deification. ... The goal of life is to come to resemble God. In order to do this, it is necessary to repudiate sensuality and selfishness.”²² The second verse, Genesis 1:26–27, appeared to contradict this position as man and woman were created in the image of God as material creatures. However, the nature of this image was not defined in the text, allowing for a spiritual interpretation of the image of God to refer exclusively to the soul. For the German mystics then, the soul was so close with God it became identified with Him.²³ The material world with its sensations and passions caused the soul to look away from God and into the abyss of nothingness. Because the creation pulled the soul downward, relics, ceremonies of institutional organizations such as the church, and the written scripture had to be removed from the life of a Christian. Creatureliness detracted from the living Word whose source was now directly found in

¹⁸ Johannes Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, trans. Maria Shradly (New York: Paulist, 1985), 127.

¹⁹ Joseph Bernhart, ed., *Theologia Germanica*, trans. Susanna Winkworth and Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1949), 115.

²⁰ Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 16–20, 72. Daniel A. Keating gives a list of biblical passages about divinization in *Deification and Grace*. Other examples include: 2 Cor. 8:9, Gal. 4:4–6, and 1 John 3:1–2. Keating notes that Gen. 1:26–27 is foundational to the idea of likeness or image in the doctrine of divinization.

²¹ Stephen Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene: Pickwick, 2006), 32.

²² Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 34.

²³ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer’s Neoplatonic Worldview,” 133.

the newly reclaimed ground of the soul.²⁴ The written text of scripture for Müntzer was the dead word of God, as Müntzer wrote in his sermon on the Second Chapter of Daniel:

Hence Paul quotes Moses and Isaiah in Romans 10, speaking there of the inward word which is to be heard in the abyss of the soul through the revelation of God. Now anyone who has not become conscious and receptive to this through the living witness of God, Romans 8, may have devoured a hundred thousand Bibles, but he can say nothing about God which has any validity.²⁵

For Müntzer, only the manifest living Word that arose from the ground of the heart brought God's grace to the elect. The purpose of the creaturely written Word was to point to the need of the inward Word for salvation and divinization. Müntzer put himself squarely at odds with Luther and his doctrine of the objective Word. For Luther, the promise of the Gospel was received through the external means of grace.²⁶ The very words on the pages of the Bible contained the promise of grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit which converted the individual's heart through the actions of Word and Sacrament. Müntzer's theology could never accept the premise that God worked through the material creation as the means to deliver grace to His people.

In Müntzer's Good Friday Vespers hymn, "The King's Banner Goes Forth," the physical instrument of salvation, the cross, is "cheap to praise."²⁷ In his Neoplatonic theology, Müntzer replaced sacramental presence with the ground of the soul—a reinterpretation of the means of

²⁴ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 424. Müntzer in his marginal notes on Tertullian: "For even without Scripture the Christian truth endures."

²⁵ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 240.

²⁶ Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," in *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 45–73, 60. "So it is a clear from all this that this holy sacrament is nothing else than a divine sign, in which are pledged, granted, and imparted Christ and all saints together with all their works, sufferings, merits, mercies, and possessions, for the comfort and strengthening of all who are in anxiety and sorrow persecuted by the devil, sins, the world, the flesh, and every evil." Müntzer would never agree with Luther. Nothing in creation can mediate God's grace except for the ground of the soul.

²⁷ ThMA 1; 1.5, 106. Translation mine.

grace that his rival Luther could never agree to as Müntzer's theology would eliminate the certainty found in the external Word (*extra nos*).²⁸ In this impasse between Luther and Müntzer, the trajectories of their respective Reformations were crystalized through the externalism of the *extra nos* of Luther and internalism of the spiritualist Müntzer. As Joyce Louise Irwin has noted regarding Müntzer's view of the scriptures, "scripture itself is not thereby degraded, but its content must not be objectified. Only in connection with the one objective vehicle of grace—the ground of the human soul as God's dwelling-place—can scripture receive its authority." The consequence of this was that the Reformation was not one monolithic movement with Luther at the helm. Rather the Reformation consisted of various streams of thought attempting to interpret and apply the tradition of German mysticism to address the theological, pastoral, and social problems evident. Müntzer took the medieval mystical tradition far more seriously than Luther did, attempting to preserve the "rough edges" of Neoplatonism rounded off first by Augustine and then by the Council of Orange.²⁹

²⁸ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 71–72. Irwin notes, "For Müntzer Scripture in itself is no more holy or divine than relics or ceremonies. It is a human testimony of divine workings, not to be revered as an inviolable promise of grace to all but to be used as evidence of the manner in which God continues to work in man. Müntzer could make this claim only because his theology contained a vehicle of grace which Luther's theology could not accept—the ground of the human soul."

Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 84. "Müntzer's rejection of all external things as holy or as a vehicle of grace is expressed through another translating tendency with regard to the references to the ground of the soul. We noted above his interpretation of the terms 'Sion,' 'stul,' 'wonung' as metaphors for the 'Seelengrund.' He also understood such terms as 'altar,' 'templum' and 'tabernaculum' in this sense."

²⁹ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Theology of Man and Grace: Commentary—Readings in the Theology of Grace* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 157–58. "Unquestionably, St. Augustine on the whole came out victorious [at the Council of Orange]. He is the doctor of grace, and the substance of his teaching has become the Church's. However, the efforts of his opponents [the Pelagians] have not been useless. By upholding the claims of nature, they forestalled the official adoption of his too rigorous conclusions and thereby aided in preserving the humane character of the Church's teaching."

By too rigorous conclusions Fortman means, the intrinsic malice of concupiscence; on its agency in the transmission of original sin; on the *massa damnata*; on the lot of unbaptized children; on the nature of grace and its irresistibility; on the twofold declaration and the way in which we are carried away by the one or the other; on the small number of the elect and God's will to save all men.

Through the medieval mystical tradition, Müntzer located the working of God immediately within the ground of the soul—bypassing the institutional church and her scholars—opening the spiritual life to all believers. In line with what Müntzer believed the ante-Nicene church had once practiced, the common man now had as much spiritual authority as the most learned priest by his union with God through the ground of the soul. Looking beyond Augustine to Tertullian, Müntzer saw a theology akin to his own with its parallel concerns being incarnational and eschatological, that were the means by which divinization came through the restoration of the order of creation.³⁰ The Platonic hierarchy found in Tertullian proved to Müntzer that creatureliness prevented God from coming into the ground of the soul to purify one of sin. The result of the soul’s liberation was that it might attain unity with the One. The certainty of the *unio mystica* rested on God’s union with the elect through the ground of the soul, and through that union, the soul returned to the source. This return was modeled after the life and work of Jesus Christ who came to restore the order of creation and ensure humanity’s return to the One.

Emanation and Return: The Order of Creation

In his Christmas Vespers hymn, Müntzer wrote, “We thank you God the Father, Son and Spirit for your eternal goodness, and we are made godlike through His Word, now made man

³⁰ Mark A. Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 54–74. On page 74 Frisius wrote, “Tertullian’s understanding of deification is rooted in his incarnational and eschatological thought. Deification is only possible as a result of the incarnation as Christ joins man to God and God to man by taking up and perfecting human nature.”

Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” 5. Ortiz summarizes Frisius’ argument for Tertullian and divinization, “Mark Frisius’s *Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian* shows us one of the more unique approaches to deification in the Latin tradition. Frisius examines the way which Tertullian’s incarnational and eschatological thought are connected with an understanding of deification. In particular, Tertullian applies the legal concept of sequester to establish the unity between divinity and human flesh. Through this incarnational activity, the perfection of the flesh becomes an eschatological possibility and the believer, whose soul has been purified by the Holy Spirit, is able to receive the divine attributes. In this way, Tertullian uniquely approaches the concept of deification while remaining faithful to his rigoristic approach to Christian life.”

through his birth.” (stanza 8)³¹ For Müntzer and the German mystics, the return to the One was the telos or goal of the Christian. In his *Little Book of Truth*, Henry Suso stated:

The ancient philosophers pursued the study of natural things exclusively in connection with their natural causes. This is how they talked about them and this is how they received them, and not otherwise. The holy Christian thinkers, and all theologians and saintly people as well, consider things as they have flowed out of God and how they bring man back within after his natural death if he is living here on earth according to his will. Now these people who are within, because of their boundless immanent oneness (with God), see themselves and all things as always and eternally existing.³²

The emanation of creation from the One as conceived by the Neoplatonic hierarchy was not a onetime event but a continual action by the One maintaining, sustaining and continually creating within the material world. Suso called this the “eternal birth” from which, “all things and causes of all things have it that they exist and are causes.”³³ Suso continued his argument for the Neoplatonic hierarchy in his *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*. Reflecting the hierarchy of society, the material world flowed from the One, with each emanation representing a level within the celestial hierarchy.³⁴ Humanity stood at the juncture between the spiritual and creaturely realms as it possessed both a rational soul and a physical body. The human creature alone was created in the image of God and with the rest of creation existed in *similitudo* (similarity) seeking to return to the Divine Being. This similarity sufficed for the return of the creation to the One but not for humans.³⁵ Because of original sin, man’s spiritual ascent to the One was blocked and was threatened with returning to the nothingness of the source of the creatures. Through divine

³¹ ThMA 1; 1.10, 64. Translation mine.

³² Heinrich Seuse, *Henry Suso: The Exemplar with Two German Sermons*, ed. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 320.

³³ Seuse, *The Exemplar with Two German Sermons*, 323.

³⁴ Seuse, *The Exemplar with Two German Sermons*, 213. “According to the order of nature, the loftiest flowing forth of all beings from their primal origin proceeds from the highest beings to the lowest, but the return to the origin proceeds from the lowest beings to the highest.”

³⁵ Kern, “Eckhart’s Anthropology,” 240.

action, Jesus Christ, the Son, broke into the world, establishing the pattern from which the elect could drive out the nothingness of creatureliness by establishing the means to return to the source of all things. While the ground of the soul provided the means of God's immediate grace to enter the life of an individual believer, this means of grace operated within the Neoplatonic framework of the order of creation. The importance of the order of creation for Müntzer was so great he bewailed the lack of the teaching in the *Prague Manifesto*.³⁶ While Müntzer found the teachings on the order of creation in the German mystics, particularly Suso, he also sourced it from antiquity through the Church Father Tertullian.

Throughout his notes on Tertullian's works, *On the Flesh of Christ* and *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, Müntzer made frequent notes regarding the order of creation.³⁷

Tertullian explicitly referenced it in *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, when he wrote:

To put it in one word, the whole creation is recurrent. Whatsoever you are to meet with has been: whatsoever you are to lose will be. Nothing exists for the first time. All things return to their estate after having departed: all things begin when they have ceased. They come to an end simply that they may come to be: nothing perishes except with a view to salvation. Therefore this whole revolving scheme of things is an attestation of the resurrection of the dead.³⁸

Through the incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus set the pattern by which the order of creation was established. The cyclical patterns established in the creation provided images of the eternal emanation and return of all creatures. Just as day became night only for the sun to rise again, so life died for the resurrection to occur. Life must return to the nothingness of Genesis 1:1 so that life might be born again. As Myers notes, "Tertullian uses [the order of creation] to

³⁶ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 370.

³⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 413, 415, 418–19. See Müntzer's marginal notes on 413, 415, 418, and 419. Another place where Müntzer speaks of the importance of teaching from the order of creation, 46. There is another instance of this teaching on 332.

³⁸ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, ed. Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), 35.

defend the belief in a literal resurrection from the dead. Assumed, however, is the Platonic schema that all things flow forth from their origin, and it is to that origin/end that they will return.”³⁹ Through his mystical view of the order of creation, Müntzer affirmed its goodness. The problem set before humanity was that people sought refuge in creaturely things rather than the Creator.⁴⁰ Everything had its place in the divine hierarchy: the angels, Jesus, humanity, and the rest of creation. By worshiping the creatures instead of the Creator, man looked back from pure being into the abyss of nothingness, for the creation itself was created from nothing. The restoration of the order of creation was accomplished in the incarnation as Müntzer declared in *A Manifest Expose of False Faith*, “we must believe that we fleshly, earthly men are to become gods, through Christ’s becoming man, and thus become God’s pupils with him—to be taught by Christ himself, and become divine, yes, and far more—to be totally transfigured into him, so that this earthly life swings up into heaven, [Phil.]. 3.”⁴¹

The radical political action of Müntzer derived from the certainty of God dwelling in the ground of the soul, thereby granting the elect their awareness of their place within the divine hierarchy. Those with God’s indwelling could not be ruled by those who worshipped creatures. In *The King’s Banner Goes Forth*, Müntzer wrote regarding earthly pleasures, “God destroys all foreign joy.”⁴² Creaturely pleasures and experiences were foreign to the elect who enjoyed union with God. Just as the parable of the Wheat and the Tares applied to the individual believer as they rooted out the creaturely tares to preserve the divine wheat, society too had to be purged of

³⁹ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer’s Neoplatonic Worldview,” 144.

⁴⁰ Rom. 1:25.

⁴¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 278.

⁴² ThMA 1; 1.5, 106. Translation Mine.

godlessness. Irwin noted the parallel between the individual and society in Müntzer's thought when she wrote, "Society as a whole must be cleansed—in the same way the individual soul is purified—if it is to become the people of God."⁴³ The personal indwelling and univocal identification with the Word granted the elect discernment over who were the wheat and the tares. Ignoring Luther's distinction between the two realms, Müntzer saw the harvest as an ever-present reality as the creation sought continually to be in unity with the One.⁴⁴ For Müntzer, the ontological identification with the Logos meant the elect were logoi—words of God within an emanation. As Irwin noted in her translation of Psalm 27:

In order to avoid the possible implication that God's word is to be found solely in scripture, Müntzer translates 'in scripturis' as 'auss den schrifften' and makes 'the People' the object of God's speaking rather than the mere owners of the scriptures.⁴⁵

As God's Word was now found within the people, the elect purged all that opposed the reign and rule of God not just from within them but throughout society. The Neoplatonic framework of the order of creation gave Müntzer the justification for his revolutionary activity. It was not the doctrine of justification by Christ, but rather the teaching of the order of creation and its corollary of divinization that had been neglected by the medieval scholastics. Through Tauler and the German mystics, Müntzer inherited a vivid world that contained a set hierarchy reflected in the created order, but there was a difference here in that the medieval mystics typically turned pacifistic and inward. The social activism of Müntzer had to be understood both through mysticism and his connection with the grievances and sufferings of his flock. The social ills and problems experienced by the people resulted from the godless who ruled over the rightful rulers of the world—the godly. Authority now rested with those who experienced God in the ground of

⁴³ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 105.

⁴⁴ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 105.

⁴⁵ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 82.

their souls rather than with the princes or the institutional church—be it Catholic or Lutheran. The apocalyptic emphasis in Müntzer’s mystical theology granted him permission to act in a revolutionary manner against all who would oppose the reign and rule of God. While the medieval mystics ebbed and flowed in retreat from the world to the cultivation of inner virtue, Müntzer sought the exact opposite—the reign of God established on earth through the final destruction of the godless.⁴⁶ In his *Sermon to the Princes*, Müntzer was ready to lead an army and invited the princes to his side in order to restore God’s order in creation and wage war against the godless.⁴⁷ However, the German princes and Luther perceived the real revolutionary character of Müntzer’s true intentions—the complete transformation of society. Müntzer saw himself as the restorer of order, ushering in the kingdom of God that was at hand. If the princes opposed him, so be it, for God’s order could not be opposed for long. For this, Müntzer was ready to suffer and become divinized to bring about the divinization of the world.⁴⁸

Divinization through Suffering

According to Müntzer’s Neoplatonic worldview, divinization was required for the believer to achieve the *unio mystica*—God being united with the elect through the immediate means of grace in the ground of the soul. Feeding into Müntzer’s radical theology of divinization was the German mystical contribution to *theosis*—namely imitation of Christ through suffering. While the imitation of Christ dated to the earliest of Church Fathers, the early Latin and Greek Fathers emphasized different aspects of the imitation of Christ to achieve union with God. Especially in

⁴⁶ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 198.

⁴⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 246.

⁴⁸ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 208. Thomas Müntzer in Protestation or Proposition states, “For this I pledge myself, life and limb, scorning any devious defense by human hand, through Jesus CHRIST, the true son of God; may he have you in his keeping for ever. Amen.”

the early church, Christians were sensitive to the reality of suffering for the faith—a reality that needed to be conquered and embraced. Within the early church, the dominant metaphor for the atonement was *Christus Victor*—Christ the victor.⁴⁹ The cross was not a point of shame or humiliation but a point of triumph over God’s enemies: the world, sin, death, and the devil.

As a minority faith in the Roman Empire, the earliest Christians sought refuge in stories of martyrdom where the martyr experienced no real pain or suffering in their death due to their union with Christ the Word. For instance, in the *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, the authors went to great lengths to demonstrate that Polycarp was always at peace. Polycarp invited the Roman soldiers charged with executing him to dinner. After getting thrown out of his carriage by the authorities, he dislocated his leg but did not suffer, and Polycarp’s body would not burn so he was stabbed in the side which produced a dove and so much blood that the fire was extinguished.⁵⁰ The focus of the martyrdom literature was on the *agōn* (test) and *hupomonē* (endurance) of the martyr in the face of unavoidable conflict with civil authorities where death was virtually guaranteed.⁵¹ The early Christian view of divinization reflected the cultural ideas of what it meant to imitate God within second century Middle-Platonism.⁵² According to Finlan,

⁴⁹ Aulén Gustaf, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 82–3. “The Latin idea of penance provides the sufficient explanation of the Latin doctrine of the atonement. Its root idea is that man must make an offering or payment to satisfy God’s justice; this is the idea that is used to explain the work of Christ. Two points immediately emerge: First, that the whole idea is essentially legalistic; and second, that in speaking of Christ’s work, the emphasis is all laid on that which is done by Christ *as man* in relation to God.” Aulén argued the beginnings of this theory of atonement lie in the work of Tertullian. The objective atonement of Tertullian would be contrasted to the subjective theory of Abelard and the *imitatio Christi* of the Late Middle Ages which influenced Müntzer’s theology of divinization.

⁵⁰ Michael W. Holmes, ed., “Martyrdom of Polycarp 15–6,” in *Apostolic Fathers Greek Texts and English Translations*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 323–25. “When the lawless men eventually realized that his [Polycarp’s] body could not be consumed by the fire, they ordered an executioner to go up to him and stab him with a dagger. And when he did this, there came out a dove and a large quantity of blood, so that it extinguished the fire, and the whole crowd was amazed that there could be so great a difference between unbelievers and the elect.”

⁵¹ Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 32.

⁵² Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plato to Platonism* (London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 7, Kindle. Lloyd P. Gerson provided an excellent timeline for Middle Platonism. Middle Platonism began around 87 BC with the

divinization in the second century Christian communities meant, “to repudiate sensuality and selfishness. Spiritual progress means imitating God, taking on God’s righteous, rational, controlled nature. This results in an actual transformation, even taking on God’s incorruption.⁵³ Even in the Constantinian era, *The Life of St. Anthony*, preserved these priorities as Athanasius used St. Anthony as a model for the divinized life. Even after fasting and while secluded within a mountain, St. Anthony did not show any signs of physical degradation from malnutrition but instead his face and body remained immaculate showing signs of life and vitality enjoyed through his union with the Word.⁵⁴

While German mysticism shared many of the same concerns as early Christians, the process through which one identified and imitated Christ reflected the cultural concerns of Germans in the late medieval period. With the end of the systematic persecution of Christians and the decline of the Roman Empire, the emphasis on the atonement of Christ shifted from *Christus Victor* toward the satisfaction view of the atonement found in Anselm and Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁵ This shift marked a change in what the imitation of Christ looked like—from the

philosopher Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 130–c. 68 b.c.). Middle Platonism ended with Plotinus (204/5–270 AD) with the onset of Neoplatonism. Tertullian lived before Plotinus and Neoplatonism.

⁵³ Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 34.

⁵⁴ Athanasius, “Life of Anthony” in *Athanasius: Selected Works and Letters*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series vol. 14, (Hendrickson, 1994), 4:200. “Then for the first time he [Anthony] was seen outside the fort by those who came to see him. And they, when they saw him, wondered at the sight, for he had the same habit of body as before, and was neither fat, like a man without exercise, nor lean from fasting and striving with demons, but he was just the same as they had known him before his retirement. And again his soul was free from blemish, for it was neither contracted by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor possessed by laughter or dejection, for he was not troubled when he beheld the crowd, nor overjoyed at being saluted by so many.”

⁵⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 89. “The clearest sign of the thoroughness with which he discards the dualistic outlook is his interpretation of the meaning of Christ’s death. His whole emphasis is on the death as an isolated fact, and as in itself constituting the satisfaction; but, according to the classic type of view, the death had been the climax of a long conflict, and had constituted Christ’s victory. Hence, also, the note of triumph which had always been typical of the classic idea, from the Apostolic Age onwards, is damped down. The reason is that the dualistic outlook is gone, or, what comes to the same thing, that the work of the atonement is no longer seen as directly the work of God.” See also, Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 95. “In Thomas, also, certain of the characteristic points of the classic point of the view appear, such as the deliverance of men from the power of the devil, which he seeks to reconcile with the

triumphant life exposed by the early Church Fathers to the righteous suffering of the German mystics. Through self-denial, abandonment of self-will, detachment, and “striving for perfect-self surrender,” the Christian was immersed in the divine abyss that accompanied the ground of the soul achieving unity with the One. The purpose of Tauler and the German mystics’ application of Neoplatonic philosophy to their medieval context expressly addressed concrete pastoral concerns and imparted catechetical advice to Christians living in a different world than Late Antiquity.⁵⁶ The Late Medieval world was a brutal place to live in, and the mystics sought to address the contemporary problems Christians faced.⁵⁷ The author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie* attempted to address the issues of suffering by reconciling suffering through movement toward God:

For when God will draw us up to something higher, that is, to an utter loss and forsaking of our own things, spiritual and natural, and withdraws His comfort and all sweetness from us, we faint and are troubled, and can in no way bring our minds to it. ... For a true lover loves God, or the Eternal good, alike in having and in not having, in sweetness and in bitterness, in joy and sorrow; for he seeks alone the Glory of God and of that which is God’s.⁵⁸

Connecting Late Antiquity to the present situation that Müntzer found himself in was the

idea of the satisfaction. But these are only lingering traces of the classic idea of the Atonement; the Latin view was decisively the dominant type of theory. The situation is then, thoroughly clear and intelligible. The Latin doctrine of the Atonement was completely in accord with the general nature of mediæval theology, with its typical emphasis on penance and on the Sacrifice of the Mass. The doctrine of penance emphasized the necessity of satisfaction, and the Mass was interpreted primarily as a sacrifice for sins.”

⁵⁶ Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, 31.

⁵⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 97. “The Devotion to the Passion [Passion-mysticism] stands to mediæval theology in a double relation, of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. On the one hand, it is clear that neither the scholastic arguments based on the Divine Justice, nor the key-idea of satisfaction itself, could make any special appeal to the devout soul; on the other, theology and piety agreed in the concentrating their attention on the passion and death of Christ. Here, however, there is again a difference; for while the emphasis of theology was laid on the death as such, piety directed its gaze to the passion of the Christ as a whole, contemplating it as a martyrdom. ... The attitude of the Christian is to be *meditation et imitatio*; to enter with loving compassion into the unspeakable sufferings of Christ, to follow in His steps, and so be cleansed and united with the eternal Divine Love.”

⁵⁸ Bernhart, ed., *Theologia Germanica*, 130–31.

common Platonic framework that gave the German mystics and Church Fathers, such as Tertullian and Augustine, a common language that could attempt to bridge the gap between Christians in antiquity and their medieval counterparts. Müntzer was within the Christian Neoplatonic tradition—a tradition he sought to conform with through his reading of the Church Fathers.⁵⁹ Christ’s sufferings formed a totality and are such that Müntzer wrote that the death of Christ, “[extinguished] the bright flame,” reducing Christ to nothingness.⁶⁰ The problem with Luther was that he preached a “honey-sweet CHRIST” that did not require suffering as a prerequisite for faith, while Müntzer’s “bitter Christ” required suffering as a part of the conversion experience.⁶¹ As the leader of the revolution, Müntzer threatened insurrection to divinize society with the purpose of purging the godless and the bookish theologians, all the while speaking of himself in heroic terms, “By his exemplary trials he must open others’ eyes to the cross which he comes to know from his youth and must cry out into the wretched, desolate, erring hearts of the God fearing, who are now beginning to watch out for the Truth.”⁶² Through his own suffering, Müntzer’s connection with the Word was complete, so that opposing him was opposing the Spirit.⁶³ Within German mysticism, the birth of the Word in the soul was not by

⁵⁹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 191.

⁶⁰ ThMA 1; 1.5, 106. My Good Friday hymn translation.

⁶¹ Irwin, “The Theological and Social Dimensions,” 108–09. “Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that for Müntzer suffering becomes a necessary prerequisite to true faith, whereas for Luther the only absolutely indispensable cross is that of Christ.”

“This ‘objective’ side of Luther was the only one which Müntzer recognized though he undoubtedly had read works in which Luther stressed the importance of the ‘subjective.’”

⁶² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 310, 334.

⁶³ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 328. “As if he [Luther] had access (through you, the very portal of truth) to your judgments, he is insolent to your very face, utterly despising your true spirit for, driven by his raging envy and his bitter hate, he has betrayed his true colours by denouncing me.” Müntzer’s own cause was the same as the Spirit’s.

analogy but was a univocal birth of God in the ground of the soul.⁶⁴ While Müntzer on one hand internalized the means of grace through the ground of the soul, Müntzer externalized the inward struggle of the mystic. The mystic sought contemplation with God through the ground of the soul with mystical experiences with the One through self-denial, withdrawal, complete detachment from the world, suffering, etc. identifying with Christ's own sufferings as the individual believer sought to imitate God. One must go through the abyss of darkness to reach God. The externalization of German mysticism for Müntzer meant that the outward purgation of society of the godless necessitated suffering. Furthermore, the inner struggles to defeat sin were now externalized in flesh and blood enemies. Goertz indicated the need to find this connection between the inward mystical battle and Müntzer's apocalyptic expectations when he wrote:

... some have found it difficult to continue to place him in the mystic tradition's sphere of influence. However if we observe that mysticism in the late Middle Ages by no means represented an homogeneous type, but was able to combine with other reforming and apocalyptic trends, that 'a suffusion of mystics even [moved] from their quiet retreats into the final apocalyptic struggle,' it may not be misleading to keep to the basic mystical premise and to look for connections between mystical piety and apocalyptic expectation in Müntzer.⁶⁵

Müntzer linked his theology of divinization, mystical piety, and apocalyptic expectation.

Through the lens of divinization, Müntzer's theology, mystical piety, social reforms, and apocalyptic expectations were unified, creating a complete picture of the man's work often made incoherent through the work of various historians and narratives. As Myers noted:

Müntzer did not see himself as a revolutionary, overturning tyrants; rather, he saw himself and the elect as God's vessels. It was God who was to overthrow the godless

⁶⁴ Kern, "Eckhart's Anthropology," 241. "The birth of God in the soul must be understood univocally. For it is 'one birth, and this birth takes place in the *Being* and in the *ground* of the soul.'" It "takes place in the soul entirely the same way' as 'in eternity ...; for it is *one* birth' of the one God. In the ground of the soul, 'the ground of God and the ground of the soul are one ground.' Through the birth of God in the soul, the human person who is affected by this becomes one who dwells in the one ground of God and is thus a human person by being the Son. As one who stands in the ground, he is the one whose Being is one with the One in the ground."

⁶⁵ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 198.

rulers, just as in the Old Testament. Müntzer and the elect were simply the means or agency of God's judgment, as can be seen in various passages in Müntzer's writings.⁶⁶

Müntzer's war was not against the German nobility *per se* as he would have welcomed their support in the war against the godless, but the very radical nature of Müntzer's theology meant the upheaval of the entire social order of the Holy Roman Empire should the nobility not adhere to Müntzer's expectations of the role of a Christian prince as laid out in his sermon on Chapter 2 of Daniel. And if the princes would not support his war against the godless, God by his imminent presence in the creation would supply him with the power and the ability to divinize the world by purging the godless, even the princes and theologians, from the world, thereby establishing heaven on earth. Müntzer would be Gideon's sword, the instrument of God's will, to implement God's plan to divinize the world. The immediacy of the task meant that the elect must be prepared for the purging of sin from the world. By imitating Christ's sufferings, this global divinization would be accomplished through the personal self-emptying of the elect in their real war against all godlessness both in their internal being and outwardly on the battlefield.

The Radical Need for Societal Divinization

As seen through the order of creation, the Neoplatonic hierarchy reflected the class structure of medieval society. For Müntzer, the time was now for the elect to take their rightful place in the order of creation, establishing themselves as rulers united in the ground of the soul in God. Müntzer was not advocating anarchy or the overthrow of hierarchical structures, but sought to institute a new social order based on his Neoplatonic worldview. Mystical experience through suffering had to confirm God's presence in the life of the elect, and through this suffering, the

⁶⁶ Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview," 162.

elect were turned away from the nothingness of creaturely existence and toward eternal existence with God. In the abyss of darkness, God was found. Through the *devotio moderna*, the German mystics provided comfort, pastoral instruction, and catechesis in real and relevant ways that medieval scholastic theology did not effectively address—a weakness Müntzer capitalized on in his campaign against the godless. Through his reading of the Church Fathers such as Tertullian and Eusebius, Müntzer saw in the ante-Nicene church the pure doctrine needed for apostolic reform. In Müntzer's historical reconstruction, the church apostatized from the teachings of Christ soon after the last of the direct pupils of the disciples died.⁶⁷ Within the German mystical tradition, Müntzer found pure teaching of the apostles preserved in the works of Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, the author of *Eine Deutsche Theologie*, among others. This represented the theology taught by ante-Nicene Fathers such as Tertullian regarding the order of creation, the goal of the soul to return to the source, as well as immediate grace granted through the means of the ground of the soul. Through their common Platonic framework, Müntzer read into their writings his late medieval context that sought the same goals as the early Latin and Greek Christians—namely divinization by grace, to become one with God. Seeing himself in continuity with the rest of church tradition, Müntzer saw what he perceived to be the innovations of the medieval church in continuity with the errors reported in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* by Hegesippus.⁶⁸ As Friesen noted:

From passages such as these taken out of Eusebius' larger context and placed into his own, Müntzer concluded that the early church had been filled with true prophets while the post-apostolic church had been subverted from within by false prophets. ...

⁶⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, Thomas Müntzer, 370. Throughout his works, Thomas Müntzer recalled the image of the pre-Constantinian church as the goal of his reforming efforts. Reading his own context into Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Müntzer would attempt to reform the church to her virginal purity by synthesizing Neoplatonic mysticism with medieval apocalypticism. To reach this purity, Müntzer would proclaim the order of creation (*ordo rerum*) restoring pure doctrine in the church.

⁶⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.22; Fathers of the Church 19: 254–55.

When such people infiltrated the church, the wheat came to be mixed with the tares, and the Holy Spirit was forced to withdraw from it.⁶⁹

In Eusebius, Müntzer saw Tauler's mysticism with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit and personal transformation, however, while Tauler spoke as a mystic in individualistic terms, Eusebius was speaking of the entire catholic church.

How could Tauler and German mysticism's individualism be reconciled with Eusebius' corporate vision of the church? Goertz distinguished between Müntzer's inner transformation and outer transformation. As he noted, "the inner transformation included the outer transformation, and the renewal of the individual extended the inner logic to the renewal of the church, government and society."⁷⁰ Through his mystical anthropology, Müntzer broke with the inner retreat and contemplation of the mystic life and saw the translation of inner divinization to the outer order of church government, and society. He drew support from Eusebius' account of the ante-Nicene church because Christians communally held all things in common presenting the perfect example of self-emptying required in German mysticism. The problem was as Goertz has noted, "The institutions engender creaturely fear and survive by maintaining this fear. This fear obstructs God's rule in the inward realm just as it does in the outer."⁷¹

Through revolution, the godless powers and authorities were cast aside so true spiritual renewal might occur through the active presence of the Holy Spirit. Without an appreciation of Müntzer's understanding of divinization, the pastoral, mystical, and revolutionary aspects of Müntzer become divorced from each other creating an incomplete image of his activity as a reformer. Through the Holy Spirit acting in the ground of the soul, the order of creation was

⁶⁹ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer a Destroyer of the Godless*, 50.

⁷⁰ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 202.

⁷¹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 202.

restored in God's activity in his immediate means of grace in the individual. Through suffering, Christians were conformed to the image of Christ, casting off their creaturely fear and embracing unity with the One. By this inner transformation, the complete divinization of society could take place. Müntzer stood as the leader of the vanguard of Christians that sought to return to their apostolic roots—roots he thought he had found in Eusebius and Tertullian. Müntzer grew as a wild branch from the radical root of Tertullian. Müntzer thought that Tertullian was an early witness to his own theological vision—the divinization of society through the restoration of the order of creation. Yet, Müntzer did not see himself as breaking away from the Christian tradition as he embraced the radical conclusions of his theology. Müntzer would press on as the heroic leader who ushered in the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER THREE

THOMAS MÜNTZER AND TERTULLIAN

“Christ took upon himself flesh and blood to free us by his divine understanding from our rationalistic, sensual, brutish understanding. The word of God must deify us by taking captive our understanding for the service of faith.”

—Thomas Müntzer, “*Sermon on the Incarnation of Christ*”¹

Often, in the study of the Church Fathers, academics have assumed that primarily the Greek Fathers were concerned with *theosis* or deification—the teaching that one gradually becomes one with God.² Traditional scholarship generally assumed that the Latin Fathers were not concerned with *theosis*.³ However, as demonstrated through German mysticism, Christians during the medieval and Reformation periods were also concerned with the doctrine of divinization. From where did this impulse originate in the West? Jared Ortiz argues divinization is native to the Latin tradition. Modern scholars wrestled with narrowing the search for the doctrine of divinization because they often look only for what Ortiz has called *deif-* derived language in Latin.⁴

¹ ThMA 1; 26.10, 463. My translation is an excerpt from “Aufzeichnung über das Abendmahl (Von der Menschwerdung Christi).” “Christus hat darumb bluth vnd fleysch an sich genommen, auff das wyr durch seynen dotlichen vorsatandt solten entsatzt warden von vnßerm vornunfftigem sinlichem vichischen vorstande, joannis am 10, das wort gottis muß vnß vorgoten, wan es vnßern vorstandt in dye dinsparkeit des glaubens gefangen nympt.”

² Other Church Fathers such as Augustine, Cyprian, and Eusebius could be considered here. For the purposes of narrowing the scope of research, only Tertullian and his formative influence on Müntzer’s theology of *theosis* will be evaluated.

³ Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” 1–2. Ortiz lamented the lack of academic engagement with deification in the Latin Fathers.

⁴ Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” 3. “Whatever the reason, it is clear that the Latin Fathers do not extensively employ the technical terminology for deification. This has led many scholars to conclude that the Latin tradition is largely bereft of a theology of deification, but as, Eriugena reminds us, this is not a necessary conclusion. The *intellectus* can be present, even if the terms are not. Even many of the Greek Fathers whom we associate with the doctrine of deification—Irenaeus, for example—do not use a technical vocabulary to discuss it.” Jared Ortiz borrowed the phrase “the pattern of theology” to draw out the doctrine of deification from the Latin Fathers. The same patterns of theology were present in the Reformation humanists as they drew from the currents of thought present in the early church. I will use Ortiz’s *Deif-* terminology to describe the lack of lexical cognates to deification in Latin patristic literature.

According to the traditional argument, the lack of *deif-* derived language in the Latin patristic tradition meant Latin Christians were neither interested nor cared much about divinization. While the technical terminology for deification was largely absent from the Latin Fathers, the *intellectus* or the pattern of teaching divinization was readily found within their works.⁵ As the Latin tradition progressed, using *deif-* derived language increased, with an explosion in the 13th century.⁶ Jared Ortiz noted that, “many of our common assumptions about deification in the *whole* Latin tradition need to be rethought.”⁷ The Latin Father’s teaching on divinization rippled into the era of the Reformation—setting the stage for Müntzer’s own theology of deification.

With a broader understanding of divinization within Latin patristic sources, Müntzer’s theology of divinization was not an aberration within the Latin tradition but was well within the priorities of the Latin Fathers. In Tertullian, Müntzer saw the pure theology of the early church. While Luther’s more institutionally approved Reformation saw the church’s fall into apostasy coinciding with the rise of papal power some 400 years before the Reformation, Müntzer placed the fall much earlier in history. According to Müntzer’s church timeline, which was drawn from Eusebius, the church fell into apostasy almost immediately after the death of the apostles. From Müntzer’s reading of Tertullian, he saw his own theology of the *ordo rerum* affirmed in one of the earliest Church Fathers.

Reading his marginal notes on Tertullian, Müntzer perceived to him as teaching the *ordo rerum*, the order of creation—a teaching central to German mysticism’s and Müntzer’s view of

⁵ 2 Tim. 1:13, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

⁶ Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” 3.

⁷ Ortiz, “Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition,” 3.

deification. Is Müntzer right in his interpretation of Tertullian's viewpoint? Tertullian taught a comprehensive theology of divinization, and since Müntzer drew from Tertullian's theology, to what extent did their positions converge? Aligning with the humanists, Müntzer's interest in classical works drew upon the writings of the early church, with an emphasis on Tertullian, as evinced by his theology of divinization concentrated in the teaching of the *ordo rerum*. However, the *ordo rerum* as an illustration was not exclusively used by Tertullian to develop divinization. The Church Father also employed other illustrations such as Christ as *sequester* thereby illustrating how God brings divinization to sinful humanity. While Müntzer relied on Tertullian's work for evidence of his doctrine of *theosis*, he received Tertullian's work critically within the framework of the *ordo rerum*.

Tertullian and the Doctrine of Deification

At his heart, Tertullian was a translator. Tertullian's works themselves provided evidence that make it likely that he received a classical Roman education which would have included learning Greek—a language of commerce and culture in the world of antiquity.⁸ Although many have argued the sharp distinction between Eastern and Western theological priorities, each branch of early Christianity developed alongside and influenced the other.⁹ While Tertullian

⁸ A. Cleveland Coxe, "Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 3, 7. "Tertullian was born a heathen, and seems to have been educated at Rome, where he probably practiced as a jurisconsult. . . . It is not ignorance of Greek which is imputed to Tertullian, as being current and best known among their readers. Independent feeling, also, would have weight with such a temper as Tertullian's, to say nothing of the suspicion with largely prevailed in the African branch of the Latin church, that the Greek copies of the Scriptures were much corrupted by heretics, who were chiefly, if not wholly, Greek or Greek-speaking persons." Tertullian's education as a jurist included knowing the Greek language. See also Benjamin D. Haupt, "Tertullian's Citations of the New Testament Outside the Gospels," (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham), 2019, Ubria Database. Benjamin Haupt thoroughly demonstrated in his monograph Tertullian's familiarity with Greek.

⁹ Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 581. "Let us refer to Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* I, 6, 2, where we will find underscored the same opposition, as to the final fate, between Pneumatics and Psychics. There is the same observation that the Valentinians do not forget themselves in this division that they do indeed intend to be these

emerged as the fountainhead of Western Christianity, he was still working within his inherited framework shared by Christians throughout the Roman Empire. Tertullian had an interest in the doctrine of *theosis*. One must not read too much into Tertullian's rhetoric against philosophy when he exclaimed, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?"¹⁰ Tertullian did not divorce himself from his Greco-Roman context.¹¹ Instead, Tertullian sought to translate the superior philosophy of Christianity into the language of Middle-Platonism—the common language of philosophy in the second century. Operating within this framework, Tertullian assumed that the goal of any philosopher was unity with the divine through the imitation of God. If we correctly consider his theological milieu, Tertullian was not arguing that the goal of Middle-Platonism was wrong; rather Tertullian argued that all pagan sources of *gnosis* were unable to provide the way to unity with the divine. In his arguments against pagans in his *Apology*, Tertullian leveraged Middle-Platonism's doctrine of deification to illustrate the capriciousness of the pagan gods—how could heroes become gods if virtue were required?¹² Tertullian ridiculed the idea of the deification of these "non-existent gods" who were but "mere men."¹³

Pneumatics sure of salvation, and that they reject the Christians of the Church as the intermediate nature, without certainty of being saved, but capable of being a formed ... The parallelism with Tertullian's text could not be clearer. It is there that he found the indication—on which he is going to stitch together—for the Valentinians, the Psychics, it is the Christians faithful to the Church, 'who are of the Church.' Under these conditions, it does not appear doubtful that the means of resolving our difficulty must be sought in the second part of the definition of Psychics. This detail should have escaped Tertullian's attention, all the less, since at the end of the previous paragraph, Irenaeus defines the Psychics as those who have perfect knowledge of God." Tertullian to some extent depended on Irenaeus for his knowledge of Valentinianism and Gnosticism.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics* 7; ANF 3: 246.

¹¹ Adhémar D'Alès, *La Théologie De Tertullien* (Gabriel Beauchesne, 1905), 429. "We will only take up the final mountain, where Christianity is defined: a better philosophy. This word does not invalidate the assertions of Apologetics. Tertullian agrees to call Christianity a philosophy, but he implies that this philosophy surpasses all others, as much as the revealed truth of God surpasses all combinations of human reason."

¹² Tertullian, *Apology* 11.6; FC 10: 39.

¹³ Tertullian, *Apology* 10.2; FC 10: 35.

For Tertullian, the means to unity with God was found, not through fickle pagan gods or their immoral heroes, but in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Mark A. Frisius argued in his essay, “Deification in Tertullian,” that Tertullian’s understanding of Christ’s incarnation as well as eschatology provided a framework to discuss deification’s role in Tertullian’s soteriology—coincidentally the very works that Thomas Müntzer commented on.¹⁴ While Tertullian did not explicitly employ *deif-* derived language, the major concerns he addressed in his apologetical works presumed the ultimate destiny of man was his participation in the divine nature. Deification in Middle-Platonism rested on the goal of the imitation of God—particularly His virtue. Tertullian’s critique of the pagan gods would not be possible without a thorough understanding of Middle-Platonism’s doctrine of deification.¹⁵ Tertullian’s concern for the participation in the divine nature also extended to heretical groups of Christians, foremost among these the followers of Marcion.

In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian argues that participation in the divine nature was threatened by distinguishing between a “higher” savior god and a “lower” creator god. According to Tertullian, Marcion’s doctrine of two gods threatened to destroy the Creator/creature relationship as the singular Creator God of the Old Testament did not share His essential attributes with other beings—as Marcion argued was the case with the lesser creator god.¹⁶ Tertullian’s doctrine of

¹⁴ Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” 59.

¹⁵ Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 34. “Plutarch teaches that humans can take on the first three characteristics, ‘incorruption, power, and virtue; and the most revered, the divinest of these, is virtue.’ The goal of life is to come to resemble God. In order to do this, it is necessary to repudiate sensuality and selfishness. Spiritual progress means imitating God, taking on God’s righteous, rational, and controlled nature. This results in an actual transformation, even taking on God’s incorruption. God is the perfect model. Deification involves progress, and is available for a few.”

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Tertullian Against Marcion* 1.7; ANF 3: 276. *Carnem induere* translates to, “clothed in flesh.” See also where the glorious exchange articulated by Irenaeus was paradigmatic for Tertullian’s own soteriology. Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies* 3.19.1; ANF 1: 448 “To whom the Word says, mentioning His own gift of grace: ‘I said, Ye are all the sons of the Highest, and gods; but ye shall die like men.’ He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of

divinization did not allow creatures to be gods by nature—thereby upholding his commitment to monotheism. Instead, the Creator God allowed himself *carnem induere* in the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ In Middle-Platonic thought, participation in the divine nature required a perfect model.¹⁸ Through the union of His divine and human natures, Jesus Christ provided this model of deification for Tertullian. In the *imitatio Christi*, one is conformed to the characteristics of God: incorruption, power, and most important for Tertullian and the Middle-Platonists, virtue.¹⁹ Marcion’s god destroyed any hope of participation in the divine because his Christ never became flesh and therefore could not provide the path to deification. Through the imitation of Christ in the flesh, one was transformed and therefore participated in the divine nature. Citing Psalm 82, God made us “gods” through His grace alone and by nothing inherent in humanity.²⁰ In his later works, Tertullian’s emphasis on the Paraclete might make it seem as though Tertullian moved away from the paradigm of the *imitatio Christi* into the new, more rigorous and spiritualist teachings of Montanism. However, as Frisius notes:

Although Tertullian’s view of rigoristic obedience was strengthened by his

the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.” The doctrine of *theosis* was used to fight back against the spiritualizing soteriology of the Gnostics. See also, Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” 58.

¹⁷ René Braun, *Deus Christianorum: Recherches Sur Le Vocabulaire Doctrinal De Tertullien* (Universitaires de France, 1962), 311. “In this flexible and varied phraseology, it is this phrase *carnem induere* that dominates. Tertullian was attached to it: if it is absent from the *Apologeticum*, it is found in all the other treatises where our author has touched on the Christological problem, and *Adversus Praxean* recognizes it as the locution capable of formulating with the most accuracy the mystery of the reunion of the two elements human and divine in the person of Christ. ... Tertullian’s predilection for this periphrasis, a predilection at first glance a little surprising if we realize that the expression had already been used in paganism to designate the metamorphoses of the gods, can be explained however, we believe by several reasons.”

¹⁸ Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 33.

¹⁹ Finlan, “Second Peter’s Notion of Divine Participation,” 34.

²⁰ Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 5; ANF 3: 480. “For we shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom he declared, ‘I have said, Ye are gods,’ and, ‘God standeth in the congregation of the gods.’ But this comes from His own grace, not from any property in us, because it is He alone who can make gods.”

embrace of Montanism, this movement does not erase the idea of conformity to Christ. During Tertullian's Montanist phase, the Paraclete was clearly understood as bringing stricter discipline to a church that has matured or come of age. Although this may appear to be a movement away from *imitatio Christi*, it is best understood as the fulfillment of the concept. The Paraclete's teachings were the logical extension of the teachings of Christ and made clear their ethical implications. ... Thus, following the discipline of the Paraclete brings the Christian into conformity with the will of Christ and the Christian takes on the likeness of Christ.²¹

This, the critical role of the Paraclete in Tertullian's vision of the Christian life, flowed from the *imitatio Christi*. The moral and ethical transformation required by the *imitatio Christi* was revealed in the teachings of the Paraclete.²² Virtue, which was so important to Tertullian and Middle-Platonism, was attainable through the participation in the divine nature. In this way, the Paraclete did not eliminate the need for Christ's grace, but provided a path of progressive teaching to achieve conformity with Christ. As the soteriological maxim of the early church went: "God became man so that men could become gods."²³ For Tertullian and the Montanists, the Paraclete revealed the way to deification, which was in turn accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christ as *Sequester*

Besides the Pauline corpus and the Letter to the Hebrews, the earliest uses of μεσίτης are recorded in Christian works by Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus of Lyons.²⁴ While the

²¹ Frisius, "Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian," 60–61.

²² D'Alès, *La Théologie De Tertullien*, 450. "But he has already made his own the mother idea of Montanism, that of an evolution of Christian revelation, intended to perfect the discipline by a new outpouring of the Paraclete after the apostolic age. This is why this treatise seems to us, better than any other, to mark a turning point in his life. Formerly, when he explained the divine plan unfolded through the ages, he did not suspect this last phase, the phase of the Paraclete."

²³ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," 448.

²⁴ Frederick William Danker, ed., "μεσίτης," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 634. "One who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement or reach a common goal, *mediator, arbitrator*." See also, Braun, *Deus*

language of mediator appeared in Galatians and in Hebrews, 1 Timothy 2:5 explicitly linked Jesus as the mediator between God and man.²⁵ In Irenaeus' work *Against Heresies*, the purpose of a mediator per Roman law was to reconcile two hostile parties, specifically in his view: God and man.²⁶ In *De carne Christi*, Tertullian did not stray from this definition and in his Latin translation renders μεσίτης as "mediator."²⁷ The common use of the word mediator in antiquity derived from the Roman legal practice in which a judge could summon an outside "mediator" to handle disputes typically involving property or inheritance. Frisius says that the role of a mediator was an, "expert in the area of dispute and was often empowered to insure an equitable distribution of the common property in question. To accomplish this, it was necessary that the mediator be independent from all involved parties, thus [ensuring] neutrality and trust."²⁸

Tertullian's use of 1 Timothy 2:5 upheld the full humanity of Christ against Valentinus' assertion that Christ only possessed spiritual flesh.²⁹ However, the language of mediator also presented challenges for Tertullian as he dealt with his fight against the Gnostics. A mediator by

Christianorum, 512–13. "It did not develop in the oldest Christian literature; it did not become a central motif of dogmatics: neither the Apostolic Fathers nor the Apologists have the word. Clement of Alexandria has an example of μεσίτης and an example of μεσιτεύειν, concerning the divine Logos. Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* presents only 4 attestations of the substantive: the first two appearing in explicit scriptural quotations; the other two are the resumption of the Pauline formula of I Tm 2:5 which is found associated with the image of the reconciliation between God and man brought about by Christ."

²⁵ 1 Tim 2:5, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

²⁶ Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 513.

²⁷ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 53. "... also Paul the Apostle, *A mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*"

Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 513. "The μεσίτης -mediator equivalence is probably ancient: it is the only one known to the Vulgate and the ancient versions of the Pauline corpus."

²⁸ Frisius, "Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian," 63.

²⁹ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, 53. "Valentinus, by heretical privilege, allowed himself to invent a spiritual flesh of Christ. One who has refused to believe it human can fashion it into anything he likes, since (and let this remark be addressed to them all) if it was not human and not derived from man, I cannot see what substance Christ himself was referring to when he declared himself both man and the Son of Man."

necessity was an uninterested party that reconciled two disputing parties. This metaphor was hardly useful for Tertullian's rhetoric in demonstrating the two natures in Christ as the office of mediator lacked a relationship between the two parties. Using the metaphor of mediator meant that Christ's human nature was not united to his divinity in a personal way. Tertullian needed to provide a relational connection that would unite Christ, God, and man. After he had penned *De carne Christi*, Tertullian would render μεσίτης as *sequester*—an intentional and unprecedented translation.³⁰

While a mediator was an independent arbitrator, a *sequester* was purposefully connected with the parties in conflict. In the Roman legal system, a statute of limitations was set over disputed property. Therefore, the litigants had a fixed amount of time to resolve their dispute. After the statute of limitations ended, the property would default to the party that currently held it. Abuses within the arbitration agreement occurred when the party that possessed the disputed property simply waited out the clock through legal proceedings. With the default judgment of the property reverting to its current "owner," often, the real owner of the property would not receive what he was owed, the property in dispute, weakening trust in Rome's arbitration process. Rome's solution to arbitration was the *sequester*. The *sequester's* purpose was to hold on to the property in dispute until reconciliation was achieved.³¹ Unlike the disinvested mediator, the *sequester* possessed a relationship with both disputing parties to establish trust that the property

³⁰ Frisius, "Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian," 63.

Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 514–15. "This is indeed a personal transduction, as evidenced by its isolation from the mainstream of Christian literature."

³¹ Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 514 "If this equivalence, already attested in Tertullian's time, was that of the future, our writer preferred to use another correspondent of μεσίτης in the other two passages of his work where he alleged the expression of I Tm 2:5: he resorted to seizure, an old word of the language of law and of the courts which, designating the depositary of an object in dispute, had taken on the meaning of 'intermediary.'" The modern analog of the *sequester* is an escrow or trust.

would be returned to the rightful owner. With the *sequester*, the Roman statute of limitations could not run out forestalling the strategy of running out the clock on arbitration. Until an agreement was signed, the property would remain in the *sequester's* possession.

Tertullian's rendering of μεσίτης as *sequester* occurs twice in *De resurrectione carnis* appearing in both chapters 51 and 63.³² The Valentinians cited 1 Cor. 15:50–56 as proof that flesh and blood was excluded from the kingdom of God. In chapter 51 of *De resurrectione carnis*, Tertullian disputed the Valentinian claim that flesh and blood was excluded in the resurrection of the dead. He stated that excluding flesh and blood in 1 Cor. 15:50–60 must be read while taking into consideration the Apostle Paul's words in Gal. 5:21.³³ While sinful flesh was excluded from the kingdom of God, flesh as substance was not excluded. Rather, human flesh could be transformed, as proven by Christ's ascension into heaven.³⁴ As the last Adam, Christ's flesh then became paradigmatic of all human flesh.³⁵

In Tertullian's analogy of Christ as *sequester*, Christ held on to the deposit of divine flesh giving man the deposit of His Spirit as a guarantee of His return.³⁶ Later on in chapter 63,

³² Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, 149, 183.

³³ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, 145. "Also, when he [Paul] had made these matters clear to the Galatians, he affirmed that he forewarned them that those who do such things will not obtain by inheritance the kingdom of God, that is, while they were not wearing the image of heavenly, as they worn the image of the choice, and thus their old life and manners, could be reckoned as none other than flesh and blood."

³⁴ "Else, if they deny that you are in Christ, let them, as they have denied heaven to you, deny also that Christ is in heaven." Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, 149.

³⁵ Frisius, "Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian," 65. "In *De resurrectione carnis* 51.2, Tertullian describes how Christ preserves the flesh in heaven; however, the identity of the flesh of Christ is expanded to become paradigmatic of all human flesh."

³⁶ Braun, *Deus Christianorum*, 515. Braun wrote concerning Christ as the deposit of divine flesh, "Jesus is called mediator of God and of men because of the deposit entrusted to him by each part, he also keeps the deposit of the flesh within himself, as a deposit of the totality (of the flesh). For, just as he left us the down payment of the Spirit, so he received from us the arks of the flesh and he carried into heaven the pledge (received on) the totality (of the flesh) which 'he must bring it back one day.' On the last day, Christ will give the deposit of divine flesh back to its owner, humanity."

Tertullian returned to the metaphor of Christ as *sequester*. There, he asserted that all flesh would be restored through the faithful guarantor of the *sequester*, Jesus.³⁷ As Frisius states, “In a clear parallel with Irenaeus, Tertullian described the role of the *sequester* as restoring (*reddet*) God to man and man to God.”³⁸ Beyond *De resurrectione carne*, Tertullian expanded on Christ as *sequester* in *Adversus Praxean* and *Adversus Marcionem*.³⁹ As an expert translator, Tertullian bridged the gap between God and man in Platonic thought through the metaphor of Christ as *sequester*.

Tertullian and Müntzer on Deification: Compare and Contrast

With Tertullian’s teaching of deification established in both *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione carne*, Thomas Müntzer was correct in asserting that Tertullian taught deification, however, Müntzer did not correctly grasp Tertullian’s argument. Before twenty-first century scholars sought to break down the theologically constructed division of Western and Eastern Christianity, but Thomas Müntzer believed that Tertullian taught deification.⁴⁰ Throughout

³⁷ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection*, 183–85, “So then the flesh will rise again, all of it indeed, itself, entire. Wherever it is, it is on deposit with God through the faithful trustee (*fidellissimum sequestrem*) of God and men, Jesus Christ, who will pay back both God to man and man to God, spirit to flesh and flesh to spirit.”

³⁸ Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” 67.

³⁹ Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” 69–72. Mark Frisius continued to expound on Tertullian’s metaphor of Christ as *sequester* in his essay Deification in Tertullian. In both *Adversus Praxean* and *Adversus Marcionem*, Tertullian expanded upon the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* and developed his doctrine of deification even further. The *communicatio idiomatum* both allowed for Tertullian to speak about the need to live in holiness in the present anticipating the life of the resurrection of the dead, and the happy exchange between Christ and man, Christ taking on man’s sin so that man could possess the qualities of the divine nature.

⁴⁰ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview,” 124. “Emanation and return are referred to by Müntzer as the “order of things” in his marginal notes to Tertullian's two works. *On the Flesh of Christ* and *On the Resurrection of the Dead*. When alluding to the chronological sequence of creation, the order or arrangement of things is that of emanation and return. Müntzer found this use of the term “order” in Suso's writings, but more pertinent to his marginal notes, he found it in Tertullian's own work. It is likely for this reason that Müntzer used the term *ordo rerum* to refer to emanation and return particularly during his reading of Tertullian.”

Müntzer's writings, he regularly drew upon the Neoplatonism of the German Mystical tradition. Müntzer believed that he shared with Tertullian a common vocabulary centered in images of the *imitatio Christi*. Although traditional scholarship dated the inception of the doctrine of deification in the West to the translation of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite by Scotus Erigena, recent scholarship seeks to date the origination of the relationship between the Western tradition and the doctrine of deification within the fluid years of the second century, as Christians drew upon the common core *kerygma* of apostolic teaching suffused in the philosophical language of its time.⁴¹ But, the language of emanation and return was also a theological pattern shared by

⁴¹ Ivan V. Popov, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov, vol. 2 (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 46–47. Popov commented on Tertullian's use of stoicism, "The concepts and terms of the Stoics were widely used in the patristic literature. It was on the basis of such concepts that the church writes conceived the union of spirit and matter, of grace and the material of the sacraments, and of God and the flesh, calling this union mixing (μῖξις) or dissolving (κρᾶσις). ... Tertullian fully adopted the Stoics' concepts, but in this respect, he was an exception. The Stoics' materialism in conceiving the mode of the union of God and the human being was foreign to other church writers, but without accepting the Stoics' terms in their strict sense, these writers nonetheless conceived this union according to the Stoics' schema. On the one hand, aspiring to realize in their consciousness the idea of the physical union of God and the human being, and on the other hand, preserving the concept of Divinity, these writers employed the images of mixing and dissolving, but they accompanied these images with either an explicit or implicit qualification, which expunged from them their crudely sensuous, material meaning." Tertullian took the doctrine of deification and translated it to his Roman audience using Stoic (and Middle-Platonic) philosophy which was popular in the West during the 2nd century. When comparing the "pattern of theology," Tertullian was in agreement with Irenaeus and other "Eastern" Christians.

Ortiz, "Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition," 3. "Whatever the reason, it is clear that the Latin Fathers do not extensively employ the technical terminology for deification. This has led many scholars to conclude that the Latin tradition is largely bereft of a theology of deification, but, as Eriugena reminds us, this is not a necessary conclusion." The traditional view was medieval mysticism derived its theology from John Scotus Eriugena's translation Pseudo-Dionysius. However, Jared Ortiz saw Eriugena putting to words what the Latin Fathers always taught. By systematizing the doctrine of deification, the medieval mystics were given freedom to form their speculative theology according to the context of their day.

Vladimir Kharlamov, "Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov, vol. 2 (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 11. "In my opinion, the universal presence of deification in the early Christian writers was often overstated. Historical analysis of the development of the deification theme, and the formation of a specific terminology associated with it, shows it was a gradual process, far from being homogeneous. The notion of deification in the first five centuries had a very marginal character and was often addressed on the periphery of other theological issues. This marginal application of the deification theme indicates that it was predominately used as a rhetorical tool and a notion of popular theology, as it still lacked coherent systematic treatment." Vladimir Kharlamov dissented from Jared Ortiz's thesis that *theosis* was the central doctrine in the first five centuries of the church. While certainly no systematic doctrine of deification was laid out by the Church Fathers, the pattern of theology which existed in their works. Tertullian's theology of deification was more than mere rhetorical flourish but was meant to defend orthodox Christianity against the Valentinians and the

both Tertullian and Müntzer.⁴² As Tertullian noted regarding the seasons in *De resurrectione carne*:

For there is also a rekindling of the beams of the stars, which the lighting up of morning had put out; there is a returning home of constellations which have been abroad, which the dividing of seasons had removed; a refurbishing of the mirrors of the moon, which date of the month had worn away; a revolution of winters and summers, of springs and autumns, with their own functions, fashions, and fruits.⁴³

Tertullian referred to the cycle of the seasons as life going forth in bloom in the spring and returning to the earth in the fall. The pattern of the seasons testified to the ultimate end of humanity to return to its source. Nature for Tertullian represented a “*Si parum universitas resurrectionem figurat*” —If only in miniature, the universe provides a figure of the resurrection....⁴⁴ Within Müntzer’s notes on chapter 12 of *De resurrectione carne*, he wrote, “Everything returns.”⁴⁵ For Müntzer and Tertullian, Christ was the archetype for emanation and return, going forth into the world in the incarnation and returning to the Father by His ascension into heaven. Müntzer’s interpretation of Tertullian was colored by *Eine Deutsche Theologie*’s teaching of the order of creation. Jesus’ life, ministry, and death paved the way to unity with God

Marcionites. In Tertullian as with the rest of the Fathers, soteriology drove the doctrine of deification—and certainly was a central concern of Müntzer.

⁴² Myers, “Thomas Müntzer’s Neoplatonic Worldview,” 142, “This hierarchical arrangement of things is the result of their logical order of creation— emanation and return. Both are aspects of the Neoplatonic view of the world, and both are part of the ‘order of nature.’ It is possible that such a distinction between hierarchical order or arrangement and a sequential order was never made by Suso and others. All of this is the ‘order of things,’ according to their Neoplatonic understanding of the universe; it is simply the way things work.”

⁴³ Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*, 32–33. “Redaccenduntur enim et stellarum radii quos matutina succesio extinxerat, reducuntur et siderum absentiae quas temporalis distinction exemerat, redornantur et specula lunae quae menstruus numerus adriverat. Revolvuntur hiemes et aestates, verna et autumnna, cum suis viribus moribus fructibus.” The very language of redaccenduntur, reducuntur, revolvuntur were all interpreted by Müntzer as technical terms referring to the order of creation.

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*, 34–35.

⁴⁵ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 422. See also 418, “He proves the Resurrection from the order of things,” 423, “Nature assists prophesies,” and his comments on chapter 17 of Tertullian’s *On the Flesh of Christ*, “Here again he touches on the other of things as it relates to the conception of diverse beings.”

allowing the creation to return to the source of all things. "Wherefore God took human nature, or manhood, upon himself and was made man, and man was made God."⁴⁶ Müntzer's thought was a modification of Neoplatonism, a Neoplatonic Christianity, where salvation history became personalized through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In stark contrast to the Middle-Platonism of Tertullian that sought to systematize Plato's theology and had no concept of *pleroma* (degrees of divinity), pure Neoplatonism taught salvation as abstract, impersonal, and mediated by a *pleroma* of lesser, intermediary deities.⁴⁷ Christianity resolved this tension by providing the direct path to the One who created all things, with Christ setting the example, the order of creation in his life, death, and resurrection.

While both Tertullian and Müntzer articulated the order of creation, Müntzer was not blindly bound to Tertullian's works in *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione carne*. Müntzer often criticized Tertullian for not dealing with heretics by applying the order of things.⁴⁸ When Tertullian was using arguments that derived from the order of things, Müntzer generally heaped lavish praise on him. He saw arguing from the order of creation as a superior argument to scriptural arguments. Müntzer thought Tertullian knew better than to argue from the dead letter of scripture and was frustrated when Tertullian used scriptural arguments. While Müntzer relied solely on the order of creation for his doctrine of deification, Tertullian did not. Instead, Tertullian used multiple metaphors for deification—the order of creation and Christ as *sequester*.

⁴⁶ Bernhart, ed., *Theologia Germanica*, 117.

⁴⁷ Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview," 20. "This formula is a condensation and personalization of Christian Neoplatonism's interpretation of salvation history."

⁴⁸ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 413, 427. In response to chapter five, verse three of *On the Flesh of Christ*, "Why do you not argue from the order of things?" See also 427 for his comments on *The Resurrection of the flesh*, "He refutes the Heretics with a broken battering-ram." In Müntzer view, Tertullian was using inferior scriptural arguments rather than arguing from the order of creation.

Müntzer's single-minded focus on the order of creation prevented him from seeing Tertullian's argument later presented by Frisius for Christ as *sequester*. As Matheson noted regarding Müntzer's treatment of Tertullian's works, "Müntzer wrestles with the text more as a theologian than a humanist."⁴⁹ While many have not perceived Tertullian's revolutionary translation of μεσίτης as *sequester*, Müntzer could have capitalized on yet another ante-Nicene source for his theology of deification. But instead, Müntzer did not. Especially in connection with Tertullian's theology of the Spirit, Christ as *sequester* articulated the great exchange. According to Frisius:

In his description of Christ as *sequester*, Tertullian clearly articulates significant elements of deification. He describes a mutual exchange whereby Christ fully owns and perfects human flesh and gives the Spirit for the perfection of the soul. This restorative process is a present reality which is completed in the eschaton when Christ the *sequester* restores the flesh to the soul and the human takes possession of god and is taken into the divine nature.⁵⁰

For Müntzer as for Tauler, this exchange of the Spirit took place in the ground of the soul through suffering and alienation from God. Deification based German mysticism differed from second century deification in its assertion of exactly how one participated in the divine. In second century deification, through transformation of humans from mortal to immortal on the last day, one participated in the divine—whereas in German mysticism, suffering through the ground of the soul was the means of deification. For Müntzer, this participation in the Spirit did

⁴⁹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 409.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 6.3; ANF 3: 705. "For when at any time they had been discoursing among themselves about their wish in respect of their martyrdom, Saturninus indeed had professed that he wished that he might be thrown to all the beasts; doubtless that he might wear a more glorious crown . . . Saturus was drawn out when he had been bound on the floor near to a bear, the bear would not come forth from his den. And so Saturus for a second time is recalled unhurt. . . . So being recalled, they were unbound. Perpetua is first led in. She was tossed, and fell on her loins; and when she saw her tunic torn from her side, she drew it over her as a veil for her middle, rather mindful of her modesty than her suffering. Then she was called for again, and bound up her dishevelled hair; for it was not becoming for a martyr to suffer with dishevelled hair, lest she should appear to be mourning in her glory." The common theme in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* was victory over suffering. Even as they were martyred, their bodies were not subject to the disfiguring effects of violence. Frisius, "Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian," 71.

not preclude perfection. Rather different theological priorities coincided with their disparate contexts, namely pagan Rome and Reformation Germany.⁵¹ With Carthage in the second century as an epicenter of Christian persecution, participation in the divine nature became a victory over suffering with its implication that one became impervious to harm.⁵² This contrasted with Germany where the coming of the Black Death along with its attendant suffering became something all walks of Christian society experienced either directly or indirectly. Under these circumstances of sickness and death, mystics interpreted these travails in the light of Christ's own suffering as the path to participation in Christ's divine nature.⁵³ Tertullian's image of Christ as *sequester* could have fit into the paradigm of German mysticism, with its attendant comfort in the perfected flesh that Jesus would impart in the End Times.

⁵¹ ThMA 1; 1.5, 106. "God kills all foreign joys through suffering." Suffering becomes the means of instruction for the elect to enjoy participation with the divine nature. Translation mine. Perfectionism was the goal of deification in German mysticism as well.

⁵² Holmes, ed., *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15; AF, 323. "When he had offered up the "Amen" and finished his prayer, the men in charge of the fire lit it. And as a mighty flame blazed up, we saw a miracle (we, that is, to whom it was given to see), and we have been preserved in order that we may tell the rest what happened. For the fire, taking the shape of an arch, like the sail of a ship filled by the wind, completely surrounded the body of the martyr; and it was there in the middle, not like flesh burning but like bread baking or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. For we also perceived a very fragrant aroma, as if it were the scent of incense or some other precious spice."

Thomas Heffernan, "Dying to Become Gods: Deification in the Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*, ed. Jared Ortiz (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 30–53, 46. "Perpetua's final dream presents her figuratively as a Christ figure, an *alter Christus* who is able to conquer the power of Satan, the prince of the world, who appears in the guise of an Egyptian wrestler. The text states that she is not able to kill Satan because he is a demon. Only God or someone privileged to participate in God's power can overcome him."

⁵³ Myers, "Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview," 21. "To this Neoplatonic scheme of things, the medieval mystics added a third point: the role of the individual. The participation of the individual soul in the process of salvation is a logical addition in light of mysticism's essential inner, personal focus. The individual must follow Christ's example of detachment— a separation from the created things. In order to be focused upon God, one must first turn away from the world. . . . The process of turning from creaturely things to the creator involves the experience of suffering. It is through the process of suffering that one is able truly to become detached from creaturely things. Also, in suffering, the individual becomes identified with Christ's suffering. If he or she is willing to join Christ in suffering, then he or she will also be able to join him in his resurrection— the return to God."

Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 107. "Suffering is perhaps the most important part of the Christian life for Müntzer; it has the same purpose as the cleansing of the soul. Both are a trial of man's faith by God, a part of the whole process of salvation rather than a preliminary preparation by man's effort."

The gifting of Christ's divine flesh at the End Times fits well within Müntzer's apocalyptic theology—with the new flesh poured out on those who possessed the Spirit. In addition, since Christ as Lord ruled over all human flesh, Christ's judgment could interrupt the here-and-now, purifying society of sin. Müntzer and those who possessed the Spirit could bring Christ's righteous judgment upon the reprobate and the theologians. But to his detriment, Müntzer did not pick up on this pattern of theology in Tertullian's work. Müntzer's case was bolstered by Tertullian's teaching of deification—just in ways that Müntzer did not or could not perceive in the 16th century. A third possibility is that Müntzer was aware of Tertullian's position but that he did not want to accept his soteriology.

Müntzer's Place in the Latin Tradition

Müntzer is a radical reformer—radical in both senses of the word—representing social change and attempting to go back to the earliest roots of the Christian experience. Müntzer was emulating one of the most radical early Christian writers in the person of Tertullian— and took his thought even further than Tertullian would have. Only when one also considers the doctrine of deification can Müntzer's social work, pastoral care, liturgical reform, exegesis of scripture, and revolutionary activity be brought together. As Irwin notes, "Society as a whole must be cleansed— in the same way the individual soul is purified— if it is to become the people of God."⁵⁴ For Müntzer, deification cannot remain an individual pursuit. Rather, deification must affect broader society by transforming the inner city (individual) and resulting in the transformation of the outer city (society). Through his own take on deification, Müntzer interpreted Tertullian.

⁵⁴ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 105.

However, contra Müntzer, Tertullian never saw the goal of Christianity as to deify society, rather Tertullian saw that the Christian church provided an alternative community of saints to the Greco-Roman one—hence his, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?”⁵⁵ The doctrine of deification and its implications were wider reaching for this life in Müntzer than in Tertullian because the consequences of Müntzer’s doctrine reached into the secular sphere. While both Tertullian and Müntzer saw the role of the Spirit as bringing continual revelation to the church, the Spirit for Tertullian brought progressive revelation for ethical instruction to conform with the *imitatio Christi*. Frisius has written, “Thus, the *imitatio Christi* is fully revealed through the Paraclete, and yet this modern progressive ethical revelation is consistent with Christ’s teachings. Thus, following the discipline of the Paraclete brings the Christian into conformity with the will of Christ and the Christian takes on the likeness of Christ.”⁵⁶

Myers compared this with Müntzer’s vision of the *imitatio Christi* as one attaining participation in the divine through suffering:

For one to endure suffering and to detach himself or herself from created things is to follow Christ's example. Christ did these things to atone for the damage caused by Adam and to restore the proper order of relationships. Christians, as his followers, must do likewise. The responsibility of the individual believer, then, is to take the same path as Christ. This is the concept of the imitation of Christ, *Imitatio Christi*, pervasive in the piety of the latter Middle Ages. According to Müntzer, in order to return to God— i.e., experience salvation— believers are to follow Christ by imitating his example of suffering and of detachment from any and every earthly thing.⁵⁷

In Tertullian’s doctrine of deification, Müntzer saw own teaching. Although he did not blindly follow Tertullian, Tertullian was a formative influence upon Müntzer—his rhetoric, and his incarnational theology. Matheson has expressed the influence that Tertullian had in

⁵⁵ Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics* 7; ANF 3: 246.

⁵⁶ Frisius, “Sequestered in Christ: Deification in Tertullian,” 61.

⁵⁷ Myers, “Thomas Müntzer's Neoplatonic Worldview,” 100–01.

Müntzer's later works:

The ambivalent attitude to the flesh, the mention of dreams, the emphasis on Mary as an antitype of Eve, the critique of allegorical exegesis and speculative theology, even the belligerent, confident manner in which Tertullian mounts his offensive are all of interest for the later Müntzer, and even the most superficial glance shows parallels or similarities to the Prague Manifesto, the Propositions of Egranus, the *Exposé*.⁵⁸

Tertullian provided a paradigm within which Müntzer operated, but he was not bound to the Latin Father's writings. Müntzer's notes on Tertullian show Müntzer doing theology—both analyzing, critiquing, and agreeing with Tertullian. Understanding that Tertullian did possess a robust theology of deification, Müntzer's energies were drawn by an ante-Nicene Father who he believed had the same priorities as his own. However, as all people are victims of their own time and context, Müntzer's margin notes in his copy of Tertullian's writings indicated that Müntzer read too much into Tertullian's commitment to the *ordo rerum*.

Through careful examination, Müntzer did expect the likely return of a theology familiar to him, the restoration of creation. This is especially true in his study of *De resurrectione carne*. Müntzer's single-minded focus on the order of creation prevented him from seeing beyond his own theological priorities to sense that Tertullian was doing something new with his translation of μεσίτης. If Müntzer in the role of Renaissance humanist had analyzed Tertullian, he could have seen how Tertullian translated μεσίτης not as mediator but as *sequester* and what that metaphor meant for Tertullian's doctrine of deification.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Müntzer was content with drawing from Tertullian a source for his theology of the *ordo rerum*. Clear connections

⁵⁸ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 409. Matheson warns, "Until careful analysis has taken place, however, caution is indicated in assessing their importance." Throughout Müntzer's works, the topic of deification was consistently discussed. The importance of Tertullian to Müntzer laid in his teaching on deification—a topic thought to a concern primarily to the Eastern Fathers. Current scholarship is breaking down the barriers between East and West and seeing the first four centuries of Christianity in a holistic manner.

⁵⁹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 35. Müntzer's exposure to a humanist education would have given him proficiency in Greek and Latin.

between Müntzer and Tertullian that were derived through deification—progressive revelation and moral rigorism did not harmonize their teachings. Rather, progressive revelation by the Spirit and moral rigorism represented consequences of being united with Christ.

Both Tertullian and Thomas Müntzer exhibited deification as a pattern of theology in their works. For Müntzer the *deif*-derived language in Latin was translated into *got*- language in German. Peter Matheson’s translation of Müntzer’s sermon “On the Incarnation of Christ” obscured this *got*- language: “Christ took upon himself flesh and blood to release us by his heavenly understanding from our rationalistic, sensual, bovine understanding John 10. The word of God must make us divine by taking captive our understanding for the service of faith.”⁶⁰ Of note are the words *gotlichen* and *vorgoten* which Matheson translates as “heavenly” and “make us divine” respectively.⁶¹ A better word for heavenly in German would derive from *himmlisch* rather than *gotlichen*. A better translation of *gotlichen* would consider Müntzer’s theology of *theosis*— “divine understanding” rather than “heavenly understanding.” While an apparently small semantic change, translating *gotlichen* as divine takes into account Müntzer’s following statement in his sermon. Rather than translate *vorgoten* as “make us divine,” Irwin’s translation of *vergottet* as “deified” keeps with Müntzer’s pattern of theology and preserving the forcefulness of his argument. The pattern of *got*- derived language in Müntzer continues in his work *Ausgedrückte Entblößung*:

Wie es uns den allen in der ankunfft des glaubens müß widerfaren, vnd gehalten warden, das wir fleyschlichen yrdischen menschen sollen götter werden, durch die menschwerdung Christi, vnd also mit jm gots schüler seyn, von jm selber gelert

⁶⁰ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 389.

⁶¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 389. ThMA 1; 26.10, 463.

warden vnd vergotttet seyn, Ja wol vil mher, in jn gantz vnd gar verwandelt, auff das sich das yrdische leben schwencke in den hymel, Philip .3.⁶²

Earlier in Matheson's translation, *wir fleyschlichen yrdischen menschen sollen götter warden*, is translated as "we must believe that we fleshly, earthly men are to become gods," signifying Müntzer's move toward deification language in his preaching of Luke chapter 1. Consistently translating *got*-language into *deif*-language reveals the centrality of deification and the *imitatio Christi* in Müntzer's theology. While Müntzer did not have to use *got*-language to speak of deification, he let his hearers know that the aim of the Christian life was deification. Divorced from the Western Latin tradition, Müntzer and the Anabaptists developed a particular strain of Latin patristic thought—one that took seriously the unity one enjoyed with Christ by one's participation in His death and resurrection.

Müntzer's Reception and Adaptation of Tertullian

Although Tertullian and Müntzer wrote in different contexts, they were united in the centrality of the *imitatio Christi* in their theology. Their Spirit-led theology did not diminish the centrality of the person of Christ; rather, the Spirit affirmed and revealed the true content of the Gospel. Even though *deif*-language was not present in Tertullian's writings, at least two patterns of deification were found there—the *ordo rerum* and Christ as *sequester*. Müntzer perceived the former but could not find the latter in Tertullian's works *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione carne*. However, Müntzer was critical of Tertullian in key arguments where he did not employ the *ordo rerum* to refute heretics—something that Müntzer believed would have been helpful in the fight against the Valentinians and the Marcionites.

⁶² ThMA 1; 7.20, 339. My translation: "Just as happens to all of us when we come to faith: we must believe that we fleshly, earthly men are to become gods through Christ's becoming man, and thus become God's pupils with him—to be taught by Christ himself, and become divinized, yes, and far more—to be totally transfigured into him, so that this earthly life swings up into heaven."

But Tertullian did unmistakably teach the *ordo rerum* in *De resurrectione carne*—converging the second century world of Middle-Platonism with the 16th century Neoplatonism of German mysticism. This in turn created the opportunity for these two perspectives to become confused. Tertullian was much more flexible in his conception of deification than Müntzer—using many patterns and metaphors, such as Christ as *sequester*, to combat the Valentinians and Marcionites. And while the lack emphasis on the *ordo rerum* drew Müntzer ire, he sought in making suffering itself a sacrament, a process that guaranteed a restored *ordo rerum*. Man no longer served creatures, but directly served God through the unmediated grace bestowed on man through the ground of the soul. Tertullian could never see suffering as solely something to be overcome through the victory present in Jesus Christ. Deification for Tertullian meant participating in God’s immortality and virtue. Deification remained the goal of both theologians but the telos of the *imitatio Christi* was fundamentally different between them—victory in the case of Tertullian and suffering for Müntzer. While superficially, the two may seem to have much in common--direct revelation by the Paraclete, moral rigorism, conformity to Christ, etc.--the difference between the two rested in how each regarded what that image looked like. The goal of deification determined how one became a god.

CHAPTER FOUR

THOMAS MÜNTZER'S APOCALYPTIC DIVINIZATION IN HIS PASTORAL THEOLOGY, LITURGY AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

“May God have mercy on you, emptying yourself from day to day, to observe all His will and purpose us to do and allow good,”

—Thomas Müntzer, *German Evangelical Mass*.¹

Following the lines of German mysticism and the Church Father Tertullian, the Platonic heritage of Thomas Müntzer pressed his theology out of the realms of theory and into concrete practice as he began his revolutionary activity. Scholars have traditionally viewed Müntzer as either the wayward student of Luther or the prototypical Marxist revolutionary. Neither perspective encapsulates Müntzer's actual theological views. First, Müntzer's spiritualist theology predates his encounter with Luther and Lutheran theology. In Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes* little attention is paid to the central doctrine of Luther's reform, the doctrine of justification.² To understand Müntzer, he must also be viewed as a separate independent force of Reformation that latched on to Luther's early reform program as a potentially kindred spirit.³

¹ ThMA 1; 3.30, 202.

² Matthias Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” in *A Companion to the Premodern Apocalypse*, vol. 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 269–70. “Certainly, in his early years Müntzer admired the Wittenberg reformer and regarded himself as a product of Luther's evangelical preaching. It is also true, and a little surprising, that in his first public appearances as a reform preacher Müntzer was perceived as a Lutheran. Yet at no point did Müntzer care much about the central piece of Luther's theology, the doctrine of justification. The popular image of Müntzer as a Lutheran who went astray is therefore flawed. The theological program of the *Sermon to the Princes* is so unique that it cannot be explained as a mere deviation from Luther. When he gave his sermon in the castle of Allstedt, Thomas Müntzer was aware that he competed with Luther for the favor of the Saxon princes. Yet he proudly presented his own program for a revolutionary reformation that contains surprisingly few references to Luther. Central concepts of Lutheran theology, such as ‘grace’ and ‘justification,’ are missing in the text.”

³ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 40. “Ulrich Budenheimer has expressed a similar opinion; he too sees among the Brunswick people hints of a mysticism centered on the imitation of Christ's Passion in which even socially critical components of a renewed religiosity were included. He thus draws the important conclusion that Müntzer's religious and political ambition, ‘did not emerge as a product of the Wittenberg movement, but rather was strengthened and sharpened by it and theologically developed as he accepted some points and distanced himself from others.’”

After a time, he became disillusioned with Luther's reform. His Platonized gospel sought to bring the Word of God directly to man reducing or eliminating the need for the written scriptures. Müntzer sought to transform society by the realization of the eschaton. Müntzer later leveraged the support he gained by allying with Luther, to further his own goals by restoring the order of creation.⁴

Müntzer as the great antagonist or wayward disciple of the Lutheran Reformation does not fit the historical data regarding Müntzer's own agenda of reforming activities. Already enmeshed in the teaching of Tauler, German mysticism, *via moderna*, and Renaissance humanism, Müntzer's development parallels Luther's own reforming efforts at Wittenberg. But in Müntzer, a drastically different theological and political aim emerged—the apocalyptic destruction of sin through temporal force to bring God's reign and rule fully into the present reality. His initial support of Luther and the Wittenbergers did not necessarily mean that he later shifted his theological and political stances. What Luther began, Müntzer would seek to finish through his own revolutionary and apocalyptic practice.⁵

But this apparently Marxist interpretation of Müntzer does not fit with the historical data recorded in Müntzer's own radical program. Müntzer's insistence upon the doctrine of the order of creation initially prevented Müntzer from allying with the peasant class. According to

⁴ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 51–52. "Because of the frequency of his scriptural citations, he appeared to espouse the principle of Scripture as the sole authority and source of religious teaching. Since Müntzer was able to give credence to his theological and political ideas through supporting scriptural passages, he could claim that Luther, where he disagreed with Müntzer, ignored his own Scripture principle for the sake of scholastic subtleties. In this way Müntzer could establish his authority with the people above Luther's and thereby cause them to depart from the political direction Luther had advocated."

⁵ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic, Mystic, and Revolutionary*, 111. "Müntzer never tired of declaring that the Wittenbergers' message of justification misled individuals into religious superficiality and moral inefficacy; and he allowed no doubt that unless an 'improvement' could be brought about in it, the Wittenberg Reformation was only another milestone on Christianity's road to ruin."

Matthias Riedl:

[T]he *Sermon to the Princes* clearly shows that while Müntzer's program of the sermon is definitely revolutionary it is not revolutionary in a Marxist sense. It aims at a destruction of the existing order and the establishment of a new order; yet Müntzer would have been more than happy if he could have counted on the leadership experiences of the princes. In other words, up to this point of his life Müntzer had no general problem with lordship as such, as long as it was put into the service of religious renewal and the approaching Kingdom of God. The fact that Müntzer became an anti-feudal revolutionary later on partly results from the reaction of the princes to the sermon and not from a preconceived social program.⁶

Müntzer's alliance with the peasants attempted to bring about the restoration of the *ordo rerum*.

His concern for the peasants was not solely predicated on their economic wellbeing. Rather,

Müntzer's concerns originated from the fact that poverty prevented the peasants from learning the Word of God:⁷

Because Müntzer is more hopeful regarding the poor than other groups, he sometimes expresses his outrage at the economic oppression of the peasants. Yet even the poor must be spiritually alive in order to be among the elect; their poverty does not achieve this for them. Even in Müntzer's demand for the correction of economic injustice the driving force is religious concern. ... Not a concern for the peasants' poor living conditions, but a concern for the time needed for learning to read the Bible caused Müntzer to make one of his most direct statements on the oppression of the poor.⁸

The Lutheran and Marxist interpretations dominated Müntzer scholarship for the first half of the twentieth century until scholars such as Joyce Louise Irwin took a different approach. Instead of Müntzer being portrayed as the adversary of the Lutheran reformers, or the

⁶ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 269.

⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 272. "For all their words and deeds ensure that the poor man is too worried about getting his food to have time to learn to read; moreover they have the nerve to preach that the poor man should let himself be flayed and fleeced by the tyrants. How on earth is he to learn to read the Scripture?"

James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, vol. 6 (Montreal: McGill-Queen, 1991), 109. "Müntzer looked upon the commoner as the victim of a system created by clerics and aristocrats for their own purposes."

⁸ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 44.

prototypical Marxist revolutionary, Irwin and other scholars sought to place Müntzer's Neoplatonic theology as a progression of the doctrine of *theosis*. As shown earlier, the lack of interest in *theosis* in the Latin church is attested to by Jared Ortiz when he confirms the lack of any secondary literature available on this position in the Latin church.⁹ Even though the secondary literature was lacking, this does not mean that Western theology lacked the concept of *theosis* in their theology. As demonstrated by Tertullian, the Latin Fathers employed colorful language and metaphor to express this doctrine even if it was not expressly enunciated. Through the practical application of theology, *theosis* was evident in the works of the Latin Fathers. This tradition that German mysticism preserved in medieval thought was recapitulated in Müntzer's theology. This is especially true in the Reformation during which primary sources and texts of the Church Fathers became readily available outside of monastic libraries in part due to the work of Renaissance humanists and the relatively recently invented movable type printing press.

Receiving these traditions, Müntzer reclaimed what he believed to be the authentic and apostolic Christian experience through his radical theology of *theosis*. More than just the indwelling of Christ in one's inner being, by means of the ground of the soul, one could achieve an ontological identification with the Word of God. This congruence brought certainty to his hearers that God was on their side and that history would go their way as they sought to destroy all godlessness and sin in their quest to usher in the eschaton. No longer was certainty found in the externals of the church and her hierarchy. Certainty was now found through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the ground of the soul which united a believer with the Word Himself.

At the forefront of Müntzer's mind was the need to practically proclaim the gospel to

⁹ Ortiz, "Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition," 1.

people, who in his mind, never heard the gospel before. Seeing the moral decay and spiritual malaise of his time, Müntzer sought to return to the source of all things in his radical preaching and pastoral care. Christendom needed to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so that Christ might transform the ground of the soul in individuals. The basic program of his pastoral care can be found in his treatises *Protestation or Proposition* and *On Counterfeit Faith* where Müntzer outlined the systemic problems in Christendom and how his teaching would bring about the revival of Christianity. As he wrote his program of pastoral care, Müntzer creatively translated the liturgy from Latin into German. Müntzer's *Deutsche Evangelische Masse* reflected his theological and social goals by using the vernacular to transform his congregants into a new community. Finally, in his *Sermon to the Princes*, he presented his vision of a divinized world through the restoration of the order of creation.

Thomas Müntzer: Pastoral Theology and Praxis

After breaking ranks with Luther, Müntzer began a two-prong attack on the spiritualities of both Rome and Wittenberg. On one hand, Müntzer rejected the hypocritical moralizing of the Roman Church's hierarchy. But Müntzer also rejected the doctrine of justification by faith alone as a counterfeit faith.¹⁰ Both Rome and Wittenberg lacked the inward distinction of true discipleship. As Müntzer stated regarding the errors of the Romans and Lutherans, "The Romans distributed indulgences, and remitted penalty and guilt, and are we, straight away, to build on a similar foundation?"¹¹ Luther continued the error of the Romanists by emphasizing the "honey-sweet Christ" over and against the "bitter Christ."¹² While both Luther and Müntzer used the

¹⁰ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 185.

¹¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 200.

¹² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 200, 220.

language of law and gospel, Müntzer would apply the law as both the beginning and the end goal of the Christian life. This law, however, is, “not the law either of the Old Testament or of the Roman church. It is not a humanly devised law which leads to external ethical activity, but rather God's law which He alone can carry out.”¹³ While Luther and Müntzer agreed with the definition that the gospel meant “promise,” Müntzer continued to emphasize a soteriological role of the law as individuals were purified by its power and transformed through bitter suffering and death to self. As Müntzer declared:

There is no other basis of faith than the whole Christ; half will not do; for one does not sneak into a house by the window. Anyone who rejects the bitter [Christ] will gorge himself to death on honey. Christ is a [cornerstone]. Just as he had to be shaped, so we have to be knocked into shape by the master-mason if we are to grow into a true living building.¹⁴

The bitter Christ became the teacher of the law. Suffering found meaning as sinful habits and desires were cleansed from the soul. This was not a human work but the inner most working of God penetrating to the ground of the soul. The bitter Christ alone performed this salvific work through the working of the law. As the bitter Christ taught the inward man, the carnal realities of this world were left behind. For Müntzer, who needed the scriptures when one could learn from Christ in the ground of the soul? Divinization brought comfort and through the participation in suffering, God directly taught the elect. No longer could those with faith remain as children. Through suffering, one endured and matured as Christ's genuine disciples. Goertz summarized Müntzer's pastoral practice stating:

Müntzer concludes this treatise [*On Counterfeit Faith*] by saying that the individual cannot grasp the meaning of the Holy Scripture by human means: ‘he has to wait until the key of David has revealed it to him, until he has been trodden underfoot with all his habitual ways in the wine press. There he will attain such poverty of spirit as to acknowledge that there is no faith in him at all; only the desire to learn the true faith.

¹³ Irwin, “The Theological and Social Dimensions,” 66.

¹⁴ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 220.

This, then, is the faith which becomes as small as a mustard seed. Then man must see how he is to endure the work of God, in order that he may grow from day to day in the knowledge of God. Then man will be taught by God alone, person to person, and not by any created being. Everything known to created being will become bitter gall to him, since its ways are perverse. God will preserve all his elect from them, and save them when they have fallen away.¹⁵

Any faith based upon the institutional church, such as the practice of infant baptism, represented a counterfeit faith. Likewise, any faith grounded solely in the written scriptures also expressed a counterfeit faith, relying on the knowledge of God through creation rather than through the inward light which pierced the soul. These two means of coming to Christ would not bear the fruits of repentance and sacrificed the significance of the bitter Christ for a Christ that permitted licentiousness. Both Roman and Lutheran practices and beliefs were indistinguishable from the Jew and the Turk as all relied on outwardly written testimony rather than the teachings of the bitter Christ in the ground of the soul.¹⁶ Reliance on creation drew man away from God and His will and toward the pleasures and comforts of creaturely existence. The written scriptures along with the biblical scholars drew people away from the true Jesus toward their own godless delusions. Müntzer stated:

The faith of the damned and of the elect is arrived at very differently. The godless man is only too happy to accept Scripture. He builds up a strong faith on the fact that someone has suffered before him. But when it comes to facing the little lamb who opens up the book, he has no intention at all of losing his life, or of conforming

¹⁵ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 110–1.

¹⁶ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 197–8. “If I then go on to look at the Turks, I find that in the Koran, which Mohammed has written, [Jesus] of Nazareth was the son of a pure virgin but (he goes on to say) it cannot be true that he was nailed to a cross. The reason: God, one and might, is far too gentle to allow evil men to perpetrate this. Hence (he says) God kept faith with his son by putting an evil-doer in his place to be crucified, thus deceiving the stupid men, who did not perceive the almighty power of God. Judge for yourself, you miserable, false brother: isn’t our whole world today party to a similar fantastic, sensual, deceptively attractive way of looking at things, although it still likes to dress up neatly in Holy Scripture. It makes a great song and dance about the faith of the apostles and the prophets, but apparently the only price we need to pay for the faith so bitterly gained by them is to stagger round mad-drunk.”

himself to the lamb, but hopes in his worldly way to save his skin with proof-texts. That is all wrong.¹⁷

While Müntzer denounced reliance on scripture as the means to know God's law, he did not dismiss scripture as useless and unnecessary. Müntzer saw scripture as demanding the exposure of this false spirituality:

And what a fine opinion we have of ourselves, who have not yet been put to the test, having recourse to counterfeit faith and a fictitious picture of God's mercy; we imagine we can storm the heavens helped by a natural promise or assurance. O no, most beloved Christians, let us use the holy Scriptures as they were meant to be used; to do us for death (as we have argued above)! For the living word which brings to life is heard only by the soul which has been purged. So let us be led by the teaching of the spirit and not of the flesh and recognise the consistent message of every part of Scripture...¹⁸

Through his spirit-led exegetical method, Müntzer frequently quoted scripture for its intended purpose—to kill human creatureliness. The creaturely nature of scripture meant that it could produce only death—by destroying the carnal person who heard the written word. Within the scriptures, there was no salvation as salvation could only be produced by the indwelling of the Word in the ground of the soul by the Holy Spirit. Genuine faith came with great suffering.¹⁹ Müntzer underscored this when he wrote, “There [the elect] will discover that none of the Fathers—the patriarchs, prophets, the apostles, least of all—came to faith without great difficulty.”²⁰ The promise of God came not through the written texts of scripture that testified to

¹⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 224.

¹⁸ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 218.

¹⁹ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 277. “In contrast to Martin Luther, Müntzer did not place the Bible in the center of his teachings on faith and revelation. Instead he emphasized the inner, unmediated experience of God. This experience, however, was only available for humans who killed their own self, their selfish desires and interests. Becoming a true Christian meant experiencing deep tribulations and actual suffering in order to undergo passion and crucifixion with Christ. Müntzer clearly refers to the Apostle Paul's concept of co-crucifixion (συσταυρωθῆναι) and the idea of the Christian church as a community of suffering (κοινωνία τῶν παθημάτων). Suffering brings about an inner purification, which removes all obstacles obstructing the influx of the Holy Spirit. In this way, a human becomes a vessel of the Divine, filled with the will of God. In the eyes of Müntzer, the Scripture merely serves to verify the authenticity of revelatory spiritual experience.”

²⁰ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 217.

genuine acts of faith and reliance on God—but only through the inner light that purged the soul of sin by aligning the elect with God’s will. Müntzer wrote, “Their speech has not the might of God, for they say quite unabashedly that they have no other belief or spirit than the one they have stolen from scripture. Only they don’t say that it is stolen, but believed. The light of nature has such a high conceit of itself that it fancies that [faith] is so easily come by.”

Through the ages, Christians have aspired toward the genuine experiences found in the scriptures by the examples presented by the patriarchs, prophets, and the apostles. Tertullian in his denunciations of Marcion, sought to preserve the spirit of prophesy in the Old Testament against the attempts to squelch the Spirit’s power in the church. Likewise, during the Reformation, the earnest desire to experience God within the core of one’s being propelled Müntzer to reevaluate the pastoral practices of his day. On both sides, the Roman Church and the Lutherans, Müntzer believed that he was assailed by licentiousness and false faith. Each faction was just another steppingstone to the ruination of the church through their preaching of the honey-sweet Christ. Through the language of German mysticism and his own humanist education, Müntzer sought to pastorally address the abuses and the deteriorating state of spirituality in Christendom using his bitter Christ. Only through a genuine encounter with the inner Word could a man come to a genuine and complete faith. A faith built from the experiences of others, even from holy scripture, did not pass the test of genuineness. In his correspondence, Müntzer wrote to a man named George who was most likely a low-level member of the clergy.²¹ He consoled George by pointing out the authenticity of his faith over and against those with an incomplete or counterfeit faith:

²¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 104.

How are we to escape, so God can put [our spirit] to work? It will take on a quite different profile, than the one it has for the people who take offence so easily. What causes offence is an incomplete or counterfeit faith, which has to be ruthlessly wiped out, as Christ did for his disciples, since they all had to take offence at his suffering.²²

Müntzer's pastoral care was marked by his identification with the Word of God through suffering. This identification with suffering gave Müntzer the ability to interpret personal difficulty in the light of Christ's suffering. The elect in their identification with Christ should expect to suffer as their creaturely desires were purged through the working of the Spirit in the ground of the soul. The written scriptures could not bring about this change as their purpose was simply to kill the creaturely man. Müntzer pointed the elect to the promise not made through natural means but through heavenly means. The inner promise ontologically identified the elect with Christ; and, as the result of the power of the inner Word, the elect became the means through which Christ then purged all worldly sin. Müntzer's theology of divinization meant the elect were little christs with all the authority the Word brought. This was mediated not by the dead letter of scripture but by the living and active Spirit that sought the restoration of the order of creation. As a pastoral theologian, Müntzer moved this theology out of the realm of the theoretical and into concrete application through his public and private practice.

Thomas Müntzer: Teaching through the Liturgy

To practice his theology in a communal setting, the liturgy became a vehicle for the formation and inculcation of faith. Müntzer's reforms sought to bring his Reformation theology to the masses. Müntzer began his theological program in Allstedt by fostering divinization

²² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 106

through the liturgy.²³ Müntzer was the first to translate the Latin mass into German.²⁴ At first glance, Müntzer's liturgy seemed unimpressive and even conservative. Plainsong that was exclusively sung by the priest before Müntzer's reforms was now sung by the entire congregation.²⁵ Further signaling his conservatism, the order of the liturgy remained unchanged. The Lutherans charged that Müntzer had merely translated the Latin mass with little creativity or innovation.²⁶ However, Müntzer's liturgy was hardly conservative at all—beneath the plainsong and retention of the order of the mass was a radical agenda that changed the relationship between priest and laity. Riedl dismissed the Lutheran criticisms of Müntzer when he stated:

The criticism [of the Lutherans] is hardly justified since Müntzer's mass was a sensation. For the first time, the believers could follow the words of the priest. For the first time, the believers could sing along, even if it was the old Gregorian chorales. Furthermore, the real sensation was the performance of the priest: He did not face the altar but spoke directly to the community.

The sensationalism of Müntzer's liturgical reforms helped to underscore the aims of his theology. No longer was the liturgy performed by spiritually dead priests (Roman Catholics) and

²³ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 278. "Three major goals can be extracted from Müntzer's writings on the German mass: First, every believer must be enabled to personally hear the word of God, the inner word just as much as the outer spoken word of the liturgy. As Müntzer repeatedly emphasizes, all mysteries are laid open to the whole world through the use of the vernacular. Second, the main services on Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost are to remind the community of the sacrificial acts of Christ and to allow them to identify with his suffering. Third, the attendees of the service were to become a true community of singing and praying, the nucleus of a reformed church, first in Allstedt and then everywhere."

²⁴ Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service," in *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 51–90, 53. Although Wolfgang Wissenburger in Basel and Johann Schwebel in Pforzheim conducted services in the vernacular and Kaspar Kantz published a German mass before Müntzer wrote his German Evangelical Mass, Müntzer was the first to publish a comprehensive order of service which included Matins, Vespers, and his own proposed German Evangelical Mass in 1523–1524. At the time, this was an unprecedented accomplishment achieved by Müntzer's own reforming activities.

²⁵ ThMA 1; 10, 203. The introit was in plainsong.

Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 168. "This attribution to the Latin words of a power like the incantations of the magicians cannot be tolerated any longer, for the poor people leave the churches more ignorant than they entered them, contrary to what God has declared in Isaiah 54, Jeremiah 31, and John 6, that all the elect should be instructed by God. And Paul says: 'Let the people be edified by songs of praise.'"

²⁶ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 278.

biblical scholars (Lutherans). Rather, the liturgy was now in the hands of whom it belonged—the elect. In addition to the rubrics performed by the priest, the content of the liturgy changed. Müntzer contextualized his translations of the Psalms and liturgical texts both for modern day reading but also to emphasize divinization within the congregation.²⁷ While the content and rubrics of Müntzer’s liturgy are radical, Müntzer retained plainsong and the form of the Roman mass, because Müntzer was realistic in his expectations of the community. Müntzer’s first and primary goal with his reformation agenda was catechesis. The poor and ignorant had been robbed of their rightful inheritance—a right understanding of the scriptures and the inward dwelling of the Word. Müntzer’s understanding of the historical development of Latin in the liturgy highlighted his sympathies with early Christian missionaries evangelizing German barbarians:

From these unambiguous histories, and from others like them, the condition that the Christian people was in six hundred years ago, when our ancestors came to faith, is not only visible but plain as a pike-staff. In the circumstances of the people at the time the pious, well-meaning fathers (who converted our country) did the best they could. They were Italian and French monks, and as a first step their coming was acceptable. Since the German language at that time was completely unformed, it is quite understandable that they used Latin for services, and insisted on keeping people united...²⁸

²⁷ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 168.” So in order to improve matters, I have translated the Psalms in accordance with German style and form but under the intimate and direct leading of the holy spirit, following the sense rather than the letter, for to trace one little figure from another is nauseating nonsense at a time like ours, when we still need much formation in the things of the spirit if we are to be purged of our traditional ways.”

²⁸ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 167. Of note, Müntzer did not cast aspersions upon the work of early missionaries in Germany even though by that time the “virgin church” had become corrupted by false teachers. Müntzer did not operate with an absolutist view of history.

Irwin, “The Theological and Social Dimensions,” 14–15. “The ‘poor folk’ were the inspiration not only for the fact but also for the manner of Müntzer’s translations. He was concerned to use words which would speak to his congregation at their own level. Thus he delighted in the use of colloquial and vivid expressions such as ‘mit fusen treten,’ ‘warumb rympfestu dich, ip greynen,’ ‘zencken’ among others. The use of ‘geschuss’ rather than ‘bogen’ is evidence of his attempt to modernize language for his own day: the invention of gunpowder had, by the sixteenth century, made arrows an outmoded weapon, so that the general term for projectile was more meaningful to Müntzer’s audience. Other free usages of language were determined by his theology, for he felt himself led by the

Müntzer saw himself in the same role as the early missionaries to Germany. Using Latin for a time was necessary as a pedagogical tool for Germans, but now, they had grown up with their own language and manner of speaking. Müntzer employed the patience which the early missionaries had as they evangelized the German people as he further brought the gospel to the poor and uneducated German masses.²⁹ Divinization did not occur overnight, but through the slow, painful, and powerful work of the Spirit in the elect. Instead of changing the order of service and chant-tones in the mass as Luther later did with his reforms, the translation of the liturgy expressed Müntzer's revolutionary nature. The creaturely nature of scripture gave Müntzer permission to be flexible with translation. A wooden word-to-word translation would be of no help to the elect, denying them the edification of God's Word. Müntzer saw the need to contextualize the scriptures to his present time and place to accurately convey, in his mind, the teachings of the scriptures. Examining Müntzer's translation of Psalm 93 for his German church offices, the entire Christian life was encapsulated:³⁰

Spirit, not bound to the letter."

²⁹ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 10–11, "Because of the composition of his congregation, then, Müntzer's main goal was to make the Scriptures available to the masses of poor people in their own language; he was not primarily seeking a purified liturgy for its own sake. He attempted to fill the same structure of worship to which the people were accustomed with as much Scripture as seemed appropriate. As a good pedagogue he knew he must meet the uneducated at their level without contriving unfamiliar practices which might alienate them. The poor folk had put their faith in the ceremonies of the church, and the way to wean them away from them was not to throw out the ceremonies immediately, but to make them understand what they were all about."

³⁰ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 131–32. "Although the baptismal ceremony is performed only once in the lifetime of each person, that which it symbolizes is an ever-present reality for the true believer. For this reason the psalm which best expresses this reality for Müntzer, Psalm 93, is used in four of the five seasonal offices, thereby keeping the faithful mindful of the centrality of this experience in the Christian life. In fact, spiritual baptism cannot be separated from such other aspects of Müntzer's theology as the ground of the soul, fear of God, and the testimony of spiritual experience. Even though this psalm has already been mentioned with regard to these topics, its significance warrants treatment as a whole at this point."

Psalm 93

God demonstrates His reign clothed with ornaments, clothed with His strength, and girded up Himself. He who does not move has confirmed the ends of the earth.

Because you are an unchangeable God, you have made the elect your stool.³¹

Oh God, the floodwaters have surged over him, the floodwaters with their swelling waves.

The streams of water have surged their waves through the swelling of many waters. The Lord is a strange and mysterious man in the mighty flood, where the wild wave of the sea rages.

There, Your testimony will not be misappropriated in imaginary truth. There, a man sees that he is in the dwelling place of God who gives length to his days.³²

Müntzer's translation of Psalm 93 evoked humanist images of man's destiny in the analogy of the sailboat. Here, the boat represented the goddess Fortune while the man represented the sailor. As Ernst Cassirer states, "The old image of Fortune with a wheel, seizing men and dragging them along, sometimes raising them, sometimes throwing them down into the abyss, now gives way to the depiction of Fortune with a sailboat. And this boat is not controlled by Fortune alone--man himself is steering it."³³ This image of boat and sailor was also found in Thomas Müntzer's first publication, *An Open Letter to his Brothers in Stolberg*: "Therefore everyone should watch out for the great waves which pour their torrents of water down on our spirit. He must know his business. A wise helmsman shows his skill by negotiating the great

³¹ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 273. "A parallel [to Pico and Ficino's positions on election] we find in Müntzer's concept of 'the elect' (die außerwelten) which has little to do with predestination in the Augustinian or Lutheran sense. Election means an offer, a divinizing potential given to man, which must be actualized in a long and painful process of suffering and self-alienation. The 'inert elect' will fail in this respect and ultimately join the reprobate."

³² ThMA 1; 5–15, 133. This is an example of Müntzer's radical translation.

Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 132–33. My translation with the help of Irwin's original translation.

³³ Ernst Cassirer, "Freedom and Necessity in the Philosophy of the Renaissance," in *Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Harper: New York, 1963), 73–122, 77.

waves; he should not and cannot try to avoid them.”³⁴

By using humanist images of the boat and the sailor, Müntzer saw man as playing a role in his own destiny. As Riedl commented, “Of course, in Müntzer it is not Fortuna but God who shakes human existence. Nevertheless, the reception of Renaissance humanism introduces an element of choice and self-determination into the fatalist apocalyptic narrative.”³⁵ Drawing from sources from antiquity, a certain optimism regarding man’s nature began to develop in some but not all humanist thinkers.³⁶ When reading St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, the Florentine humanist Petrarch’s concerns with valuing the creation over the soul, presaged Müntzer’s own concerns about the believer seeking earthly things over heavenly things, “Men go to admire the heights of the mountains, the great floods of the sea, the sources of rivers, the shores of the ocean, and the orbits of the stars, and neglect themselves.”³⁷

For Neoplatonist thinkers such as Petrarch and Müntzer, the beauty of the creation detracted from the chief concern of man to know one’s nature: the destiny for which we will go, where we will come, and where we will finally arrive.³⁸ Behind Müntzer’s image in Psalm 93 lay

³⁴ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 63.

³⁵ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 273.

³⁶ Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Dignity of Man,” in *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 169–81, 169. “To the doctrines which we are going to discuss we may not only oppose those of Luther or Calvin, who insist on the depravity of man after Adam’s fall, but perhaps in conscious reaction against the humanist emphasis on dignity, but also Montaigne who stresses man’s weakness and the modest place he occupies in the universe, and who is yet, in many other respects, a typical representative of Renaissance humanism. In other words, the glorification of man, which we are going to discuss, was not approved by all Renaissance thinkers, but only by some of them.”

³⁷ Francesco Petrarca, *Le Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, vol. 1 (Florence: Firenze, 1933), 159.

Ernst Cassirer, John Herman Randall, and Paul Oskar Kristeller, eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Petrarca, Valla, Ficino, Pico, Pomponazzi, Vives* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1956), 44.

³⁸ Kristeller, “The Dignity of Man,” 170–71. “Petrarch stresses the point that our knowledge of nature and of the animals, even if true, is useless unless we know the nature of man, the end for which we are born, whence we come and where we go.”

a certain strain of Renaissance humanist thought first explored in the Platonic Academy in Florence: the dignity of man. While the doctrine existed in antiquity, the doctrine of the dignity of man was further developed by two Florentine humanists: Marsilio Ficino, and his younger friend and colleague, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.³⁹ Ficino and Pico both developed the doctrine of man within the Neoplatonic framework in two ways. Ficino continued to see man as a part of the great chain of being described by Plato and the Church Fathers. He therefore reconstructed the Neoplatonic hierarchy where the rational soul—which is man—occupied a place below God and the angels and above qualities and bodies.⁴⁰ Man’s soul could become all things, either higher or lower, giving man the potential to be divinized. He also saw that man’s destiny was to dominate all creatures and things. As Paul Oskar Kristeller stated regarding Ficino’s doctrine of the dignity of man:

Two other ideas that occur in Ficino are worth mentioning because they were developed by later thinkers more fully than by him: man’s end is to dominate all elements and all animals, and thus he is the natural lord and ruler of nature; and man the astronomer, who can understand the motions of the celestial spheres and construct a model of them on a smaller scale, is virtually endowed with a mind similar to that of God who constructed the spheres themselves.⁴¹

Müntzer’s language in Psalm 93 echoed Ficino’s doctrine of the dignity of man. The elect must master the crashing waves. Man’s destiny was to be the master of the creation, and the goal of the elect was to restore the order of creation—to be the masters not the servants of the created world. Pico would take this a step further. Man was neither celestial nor material, neither mortal nor immortal, but he might become all things through his free will.⁴² He was the first philosopher

³⁹ Kristeller, “Dignity of Man,” 172.

⁴⁰ Kristeller, “Dignity of Man”, 173.

⁴¹ Kristeller, “Dignity of Man”, 173.

⁴² Kristeller, “Dignity of Man,” 174.

to break out of the great chain of being, placing man outside of the Neoplatonic hierarchy.⁴³ With man having no determined nature, he might choose from all destinies, however, not all those destinies were either good or desirable.⁴⁴ Riedl stated the relationship of Müntzer with Ficino and Pico:

Whether Müntzer knew Pico's writing is not known, and certainly he would not go as far as Pico. But he would agree that man's destiny is not fully determined. Marsilio Ficino's more moderate position is that the stars under which a man is born determine his potential, his Genius. But it is up to man if he activates the genius or not.⁴⁵

Using Psalm 93 in the liturgy helped to direct the elect to grasp their destiny. Müntzer's use of the word "elect" (die außerwelten) was not employed in the Augustinian or Lutheran sense where it meant predestination. Rather, election was the means through which one was imparted divinizing potential, that would then be achieved through turmoil and hardship in life.⁴⁶ Through baptism by the Holy Spirit, one was brought into the life of Christ's sufferings in the ground of the soul. While baptism for Müntzer was an inner spiritual transformation in the ground of the soul through the fire of the Holy Spirit, his catechetical sensitivities prevented him from removing infant baptism all together.⁴⁷ Baptism and the practice of the elect proceeding from

⁴³ Kristeller, "Dignity of Man," 175.

⁴⁴ Kristeller, "Dignity of Man," 175.

⁴⁵ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 273.

⁴⁶ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 273.

Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 134. On Psalm 93:5, "God is to be found in man's own soul and not in any earthly testimony; He is present even in the moments of greatest hopelessness. This inner communion is more certain proof of election than any institutions or written words can provide. But only in the renunciation of all trust in the world and the self during the experience of utter despair is this discovered."

⁴⁷ Irwin, "The Theological and Social Dimensions," 130–31. "While Müntzer wanted each member of the congregation to be a truly reborn believer, he never indicated any interest in the rigid church discipline of the Anabaptists. The strict regulation of baptism among the latter would most likely have been considered by Müntzer another form of adherence to the outward letter. While Grebel considered it blasphemy to use baptism improperly, thus offending against the institutions of Scripture, Müntzer could either perform infant baptism or omit all baptism in its outward form, as long as the spirit of baptism—the overwhelming tribulations of the soul—remained. This, after all, bore no integral relationship to the outward ceremony but was only symbolized therein."

baptism brought the Christian into Müntzer's social imaginary—his understanding of the world and the resulting consequences of his apocalyptic worldview.⁴⁸ The liturgy became the means through which the community became divinized. By suffering, the community became one with Christ.⁴⁹ Purified from creaturely brokenness, the community was sent into the world to cleanse the world from sin, thereby returning order to the creation. Rather than leaving the individual subject to a fatalistic outcome in the apocalypse, divinization granted the ability for man to make his own path through the uncertainties of this world. This purification placed man in a special position as the means by which God divinized the world.⁵⁰

Divinization through Apocalyptic Social Activism

Müntzer already had a moderately successful predecessor who used apocalyptic social activism to bring real change: Savonarola, Müntzer's Italian counterpart in terms of social revolution in Florence.⁵¹ The reformist goals and methods of Savonarola largely lined up with Müntzer's—that is until Müntzer decided to throw his support behind the peasants. Amos

⁴⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 69–70. “Rather, there is an understanding of the world that is carried in and implicit in the practices of religious worship and devotion. These rituals form the imagination of a people who thus construe their world as a particular kind of environment based on the formation implicit in such practices. In just this sense Christianity is a unique social imaginary that ‘inhabits’ and emerges from the matrix of preaching and prayer. The rhythms and rituals of Christian worship are not the ‘expression of’ a Christian worldview, but are themselves an ‘understanding’ implicit in practice—an understanding that cannot be had *apart from* the practices. It’s not that we start with beliefs and doctrine and then come up with worship practices that properly ‘express’ these cognitive beliefs; rather, we begin with worship, and articulated beliefs bubble up from there. ‘Doctrines’ are the cognitive, theoretical articulation of what we ‘understand’ when we pray.”

⁴⁹ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 292. “The revolution is initiated by God and first becomes manifest in the subjective experience of the believers, resulting in a painful process of self-alienation. At the end of this transformation the will of the human person has become one with the will of God.”

⁵⁰ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 289. “*The Sermon to the Princes* develops the scenario of a synergistic action between God and man. Certainly, the revolution is initiated by God; yet it will not be accomplished if the humans are not ready to become the tools of God’s agency and actively contribute to the transformation.”

⁵¹ Savonarola was successful in that he accomplished societal change. He also met the same fate as Müntzer.

Edelheit argued that the Savonarola affair in Florence represented Renaissance humanist values put into action.⁵² While this intersection between Müntzer and Savonarola has not been thoroughly explored, both Müntzer and Savonarola utilized the apocalyptic tradition to appropriate Renaissance humanism through practical means. Both figures were trained in scholastic thinking and later encountered Renaissance humanism during their careers. As Müntzer and Savonarola demonstrated, the line between scholastic and humanist was often not neat and tidy for those who promoted apocalyptic. The practical aims of Savonarola caused him to reject the use of Plato in the context of explaining Christian theology on one hand.⁵³ On the other hand, Savonarola preached sermons with obvious humanist influence.⁵⁴ Müntzer also demonstrated a pragmatic approach to apocalyptic praxis. During his career, Savonarola sought to reform Florence by restoring democratic rule to the city and making Christ the king of Florence.⁵⁵ Savonarola was largely successful with his prophecies, as they were considered by the populace to be true. His preaching was credited with establishing a democratic government in Florence.⁵⁶ While Müntzer's knowledge of Savonarola remains an unknown, Savonarola's goal of divinizing Florence aligned with Müntzer's goal of divinizing Germany and beyond. God's grace was now defined in practical terms as political change.⁵⁷ As Edelheit has indicated, "The religious meaning reinforces the political change and the political meaning makes the religious

⁵² Amos Edelheit, *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies, Cultures, 400–1500*, vol. 78, "The Savonarola Affair," in *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2–1498*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 369.

⁵³ Edelheit, "Savonarola Affair," 389.

⁵⁴ Edelheit, "Savonarola Affair," 390.

⁵⁵ Edelheit, "Savonarola Affair," 390.

⁵⁶ Edelheit, "Savonarola Affair," 373. "Savonarola gained this reputation due to his prophetic and apocalyptic sermons on Noah's ark, were now regarded as true prophecies." Could Müntzer's prophesy of the rainbow be linked to Savonarola's own prophetic emphasis on Noah?

⁵⁷ Edelheit, "Savonarola Affair," 411.

concept relevant and full of concrete meaning at the present; the grace becomes very practical, an essential part of life.”⁵⁸

For both Savonarola and Müntzer, political success translated into an act of God’s grace. Müntzer’s initial attempts in reforming the church were met with resounding success which signified that God was with him. With the reformed German Evangelical Mass in place, Allstedt attracted hearers from surrounding towns and villages. This sudden rise in Müntzer’s popularity attracted the attention of the Saxon princes.⁵⁹ As Müntzer’s social program exploded in popularity, Müntzer attracted Catholics in neighboring territories to his services. Müntzer first experienced resistance to his Reformation program by the nearby Catholic prince, Ernest, Count of Mansfeld. Ernest, according to Müntzer, almost immediately attempted to suppress Müntzer’s German Mass in late April 1523.⁶⁰ The movement was forming by the Spirit-led Müntzer and his *Bund* (Alliance), against the godless German princes of the Holy Roman Empire. When his initial success met with resistance, Müntzer confirmed his theological vision that swelled his ego.⁶¹ The princes had to decide which side they were on—Christ’s or the Antichrist’s. The

⁵⁸ Edelheit, “Savonarola Affair,” 411.

⁵⁹ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 278. “Without a single known exception the people of Allstedt supported Müntzer’s reform of the mass which soon became a huge success in the whole region. People from the surrounding towns and villages came to Allstedt to attend Müntzer’s service, and this is when the trouble began.”

⁶⁰ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 179, 82. “... while Luther appears to have had a copy of the edict in hand by 8 March, Frederick did not promulgate it until 25 May. If Luther was in possession of a copy by early March, it is quite possible that the Count of Mansfeld also had a copy early. If so, he may well have acted upon it as soon as he became aware of Muentzer’s activities in Allstedt. Muentzer, however, living within the borders of Electoral Saxony, must have operated on the promulgation date 25 May. Indeed, like others, he may well have read the edict from his pulpit at the behest of the elector himself. If, therefore, the Count did indeed forbid the attendance of his subjects at Muentzer’s services shortly after the latter had introduced his German Mass in late April 1523, then, from Muentzer’s perspective, the Count indeed attempted to use the edict retroactively to justify his actions. If, however, the Count of Mansfeld was in possession of a copy of the Imperial edict shortly after it was issued and decided to act upon it with respect to Muentzer’s innovations, then he was fully honest in his letter on 24 September to the elector.”

⁶¹ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 181. “No sooner, he asserted, had he introduced the Psalms and songs of praise into his church service, along with his German Mass, then the Count of Mansfeld had

initial conflict with the Count of Mansfeld eventually boiled over and Müntzer's radical preaching reached its logical conclusion—the burning of the chapel at Mallerbach. This chapel just outside of Allstedt was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The nearby Cistercian Convent of Naundorf maintained a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary said to produce miracle cures for those who sought her intervention.⁶² According to Friesen, “Those claiming to have been healed hung wax replicas of the appropriate body members on the chapel wall.”⁶³ The “devil at Mallerbach” along with the idolatrous wax figures brought by pilgrims could not stand. Müntzer's *Bund*, already established by this time, was responsible for the destruction of the chapel with the likely possibility that Müntzer oversaw the arson personally.⁶⁴ While constituting a small incident in the grand scheme of the Reformation, the burning of the Mallerbach Chapel would serve as the example of Müntzer's radical praxis when he finally gained a hearing among the Evangelical princes.

Attempting to quell the violence coming from Allstedt, the princes of Electoral Saxony

begun—and had continued throughout the summer—to forbid, and attempt to hinder, his subjects from attending these services.”

Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 280–1. “The formation of the reformer's megalomaniac personality is essential for understanding the beginnings of apocalyptic violence. The success of Allstedt had removed all doubts. Müntzer had identified with the will of God: ‘I breathe nothing but the eternal will of God,’ he writes from Allstedt to an unknown recipient. He felt driven by the Holy Spirit and therefore fully justified in destroying his opponents. This is not to say that Müntzer's personality was solely apt to initiate such a development; yet wherever violence results from apocalyptic motives we will encounter a charismatic personality.”

⁶² Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 281.

⁶³ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 190.

Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 90. “The Devil at Mallerbach” was Müntzer's name for the idolatrous statue of the Virgin Mary.

⁶⁴ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 190. “In his biography of Muentzer, Eric Gritsch argues that the burning of the chapel at Mallerbach on 24 March 1524 was the work of Muentzer's *Bund*. There is reason to believe, however, that Muentzer's *Bund* was already in place in Zwickau. ... swearing an oath to defend the Gospel was one of the cardinal tenets of Muentzer's *Bund*. ... as Muentzer observed in his confession, he had warned the ‘old man to leave the place.’ If that is true, Muentzer must, at best, have anticipated what was to come, at worst, have known what was coming because he was actively involved with it.”

took punitive measures against those who committed the arson at Mallerbach. However, only one man was arrested in connection to the burning of the chapel at Allstedt. The arrest sparked an uproar in the citizens of Allstedt lasting for several months.⁶⁵ During this discord, Jacob Strauss, an ally of Müntzer, influenced Duke John the Steadfast to gain a hearing for him through his friend and go-between, the Weimar court chaplain Wolfgang Stein. Through Stein's influence, Duke John had been persuaded that he should implement Mosaic Laws in the electoral lands. Ignoring Luther's and his own son's recommendations against implementing this course of action, Duke John appeared before Müntzer in the electoral castle near Allstedt to hear the preaching of this radical reformer.⁶⁶

Müntzer's bombastic sermon on Daniel chapter 2 served as a defense of his revolutionary actions until that point.⁶⁷ This sermon, more than the *Prague Manifesto*, served as the most developed articulation of his views. Müntzer hoped to get the princes on board with his program of revolutionary change, and only later would Müntzer reject the princes and the urban bourgeoisie as the means to divinize society.⁶⁸ Müntzer's sermon also used this occasion to differentiate himself from Luther's theological program. While scholarship has traditionally interpreted this sermon as a polemic against the Wittenberger, Luther shows up rarely, and none of the hallmarks of the Lutheran reformation, such as "faith" or "grace," show up in the text.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 281.

⁶⁶ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 201–02.

⁶⁷ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 282. "Müntzer notes that he began his sermon with a translation of the Vulgate text of Daniel 2; however, the translation is not included in the published version. The printed text begins with an analysis of the present situation of the people of God. The basic claim is that the corrupt and selfish clergy hinders the believers from recognizing the word of God themselves and from experiencing the Holy Spirit."

⁶⁸ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 269. "The fact Müntzer became an anti-feudal revolutionary later on partly results from the reaction of the princes to the sermon and not from a preconceived social program."

⁶⁹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 227. Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and

By deemphasizing Luther, Müntzer sought to highlight his particular theological vision for social change.

In his sermon, the princes were treated to Müntzer's theological vision—the divinization of society. Incendiary language peppered the sermon. Müntzer proclaimed:

Hence the suffering of Christ is nothing but a fairground spectacle in the eyes of these abandoned scoundrels of whom Psalm 68 speaks. No mercenary would be so depraved. And so, my dear brothers, if we are to rise up out of this mire and become true pupils of God, taught by God himself, John 6, Mt. 23, we will need the vast resources of his strength, sent down to us from above, in order to punish such unspeakable wickedness and nullify it. We will need that is, the very clearest wisdom of God, Wisdom 9, which can only spring from the pure unfeigned fear of God. This alone can equip us with its mighty arm to exercise vengeance on the enemies of God with burning zeal to God as is written in Wisdom 5, John 2, Psalm 68. No rational or human considerations should serve to excuse them, for like the pretty cornflower among the golden ears of wheat, the shape taken by the godless can be incredibly attractive and deceptive, Ecclesiastes 8. It takes the wisdom of God to recognize this.⁷⁰

In Müntzer's view, the Evangelical princes' role was to eradicate all godlessness in their territories and uphold God's vision for a divinized world. Should they fail in their task, they would be placed under the same judgment as the reprobate. The stakes were high for Müntzer to convince the princes to side with him. Two days after Müntzer preached his *Sermon to the Princes*, he reported to the prisoners of Sangerhausen the result of the princes not following his Evangelical program, "For I tell you in truth that the time has come when a bloodbath will befall this obstinate world because of its unbelief."⁷¹ In two letters to his ardent supporter and administrator in Allstedt, John Zeiss, just days after his *Sermon to the Princes*, Müntzer spoke about the divine transformation of the world (*voränderung der welt*), "Think of the

Revolutionary Action," 270.

⁷⁰ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 234–35.

⁷¹ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 90.

transformation of the world which is now at hand, Daniel 2,” and, “It is incredible impertinence to fall back on traditional ways of administering one’s office when the whole world has been so mightily and profoundly altered.”⁷² On the one hand, the princes could either play the role of King Nebuchadnezzar or King Jehu. If the princes wished to play the role of King Nebuchadnezzar, they like Nebuchadnezzar before them would submit to Müntzer as the new Daniel who ultimately brought their judgment.⁷³ On the other hand, they could perform the role of King Jehu by eliminating unbelief through the sword.⁷⁴ Either way, Müntzer stood at the center of the transformation of the world, and he would be the catalyst of its divinization.

He will release [the Christian people] from its shame and pour out his spirit over all flesh; and our sons and daughters will prophesy and have dreams and vision etc. For if the Christian people is not to become apostolic ... what is the point of preaching at all? ... It is true—I know it for a fact—that the spirit of God is revealing to many elect and pious men at this time the great need or a full and final reformation in the near future. This must be carried out.⁷⁵

Through Müntzer’s sermon, the Evangelical princes saw Müntzer’s latent theocratic vision; they knew that they would not be a part of his future world. Müntzer’s proposed *Bund*, as the princes realized, was provisional.⁷⁶ If the princes ever went against Müntzer even on the grounds

⁷² Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 100–01.

⁷³ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 251, “Hence every nook and cranny is full of vain hypocrites, none of whom is courageous enough to speak the real truth. In order, then, that the truth may really begin to dawn on you rulers must (God willing—whether you do it gladly or not) be guided by the conclusion of this chapter, where Nebuchadnezzar installed the holy Daniel in office to judge fairly and well, as the holy spirit says, Psalm 57.”

⁷⁴ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 246. “I know this for a fact, that if the plight of the Christian people really came home to you and you put your mind to it properly then you would develop the same zeal as King Jehu showed, 2 Kings 9,10, and as we find throughout the whole book of Revelation. And I know this for a fact that you would have the very greatest difficulty not to resort to the power of the sword....Therefore a new Daniel must arise and expound your dreams to you and, as Moses teaches in Deuteronomy 20, he must be in the vanguard, leading the way. He must bring about a reconciliation between the wrath of the prince and the rage of the peoples.”

⁷⁵ Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 244.

⁷⁶ Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, a Destroyer of the Godless*, 197. “... the *Bund* could not be considered as consisting only of the elect, its purpose, Muentzer stated explicitly, was to keep the godless at bay while the wheat, the elect, with the potential to receive the Holy Spirit, had, ‘the opportunity to plumb the depths of God’s wisdom

of conscience, they would be identified as tares fit for judgment. Since Müntzer was God's designated prophet, going against him was going against God. Through the bloodshed of the godless, Müntzer would realize his apocalyptic ideals of violence with or without the help of the princes. And if the princes would not help, they too would be ruthlessly cut down. The bloodlust in Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes* was palpable.⁷⁷ He was certain that his vision of divinization would in the end restore the order of creation and bring about heaven on earth. Through the apocalyptic use of the sword, the pure indwelling of the inner Word was now secure for the elect. Müntzer believed paradise was close at hand.

The Sword of Gideon

Events did not proceed as Müntzer foretold. Alienating both the princes and the urban bourgeoisie, Müntzer found refuge in the peasantry who were readily receptive to his message of overthrowing the existing social order. The peasants always had grievances with their landlords. The *Gravamina*, often presented to periodic diets, invariably sought to restore ancient rights and customs afforded to the peasantry.⁷⁸ For instance, the rights to enjoy the common distribution of produce, fowl, and game among members of the peasant community under Native Common Law were abolished under Imperial Law.⁷⁹ The peasant could only see the enforcement of Imperial

and learning with all the witnesses at their disposal.”

Matheson, ed., *Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, 102.

⁷⁷ Riedl, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action,” 287. Riedl identified the last parts of Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes* as a rhetorical slaughter, a thinly veiled call to violence. “Whatever is said here about killing is to be taken literally. The unrestrained brutality of this section, which almost breathes bloodlust, has never adequately been presented. It is important to fully lay open the rhetoric of apocalyptic violence and its underlying logic.”

⁷⁸ Steven D. Martinson, *Between Luther and Münzer: The Peasant Revolt in German Drama and Thought* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1988), 32.

⁷⁹ Michael G. Baylor, *The German Reformation and the Peasants' War: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012), 79–80. Article Four of the *Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants*: “Fourth, until now it has been the custom that no poor man has had the authority to hunt game or fowl or to catch

Law as an infringement upon the liberties and privileges once enjoyed between the old tenant and landlord agreement. As Steven Martinson has written about the economic and legal conditions of the peasants during the early Reformation, “When nobles started appropriating holdings previously held in common by the peasants, many of them were dispossessed. One result of this was that many flocked to the city forming a new social estate of unskilled workers.”⁸⁰

While the demands to restore rights and privileges were typical of peasant grievances, spiritual demands were also added to the list. The first three of the *Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia* demonstrated the Protestant spirituality of the peasants: they demanded the ability to appoint their own pastors, asked to administer their own tithes, and requested that they no longer be considered the local, “Lord’s property.”⁸¹ These demands linked the Peasants’ Rebellion directly to the Reformation and to Luther. Although Luther at first sympathized with the peasants, by denouncing both sides in the conflict—he ultimately sided with the princes in the war against the peasants.⁸² While the princes and cities were allied in purpose, Müntzer and

fish in flowing water. We think that this is completely improper and unbrotherly; rather, it is selfish and not compatible with the Word of God. The authorities in some places also maintain game [for their own hunting], to our distress and great detriment. And we must tolerate it that unreasoning animals uselessly consume our crops (which God has let grow for the benefit of people). And we have kept silent about this, which is contrary to God’s will and the needs of one’s neighbors. When the Lord God created man, he gave him dominion over all animals, birds of the air, and fish in the water. Thus it is our wish that, if someone owns a body of water, and he can adequately prove it in writing that the water was knowingly sold to him, it is not to be taken from him with force. Rather, for the sake of brotherly love, we must have a Christian investigation of the matter. But if someone cannot produce adequate proof of his ownership, he should inform the community of this in proper manner.” See also, Martinson, *Between Luther and Münzer*, 32.

⁸⁰ Martinson, *Between Luther and Münzer*, 32.

⁸¹ Baylor, *Reformation and the Peasants’ War*, 77–78.

⁸² Martin Luther, “Admonition to Peace a Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia,” in *The Christian in Society III*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 3–44. Luther condemned both sides of the conflict between the princes and the peasants and hoped that both sides would negotiate mutual concessions to ensure peace.

Martin Luther, “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants,” in *The Christian in Society III*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 45–57, 54. As the Peasants’ War sought to engulf Germany, Luther exhorts the princes to do whatever it takes to restore order. Because, Luther warns, the peasants will coerce good people into

the peasants were not—although the peasants’ political and economic goals caused them to appear to be aligned with Müntzer’s spiritual aims. This was one of the contributing factors to the failure of the Peasants’ Revolt. The regressive demands of the Peasants’ to restore ancient rights and privileges did not sit well with Müntzer’s program of revolutionary reform, and its attendant emphasis on the rejection of worldly comfort.

And so, marching under a white flag with a rainbow, the “Sword of Gideon” mustered around 7,000 men for what would become their certain destruction. Visions of victory and invincibility were confirmed by the appearance of a sun halo—the prismatic symbolism confirming Müntzer’s vision of invincibility for the peasant army. God was on their side. While Müntzer’s troops were poorly equipped, God would bring about the victory. Over 6000 were slaughtered; the princely armies lost only six men. Müntzer was captured shortly after the battle, tortured, and executed for his role in fomenting the Peasants’ Revolt.⁸³

While Müntzer failed to divinize the world, the legacy of divinization continued through some branches of the Anabaptist tradition. As Paul Walker notes, “For both the early Church Fathers and the Anabaptists, salvation is more than legal fiction; rather salvation necessitates an infusion of grace into the Divine nature.”⁸⁴ The difference between Müntzer and his fellow Anabaptists was that Müntzer took the tradition seriously. Beneath the conservative facade of his liturgy lay a radical reformer. An infused grace could not bring the world under the rule of Christ—this transformation continued to be preached by those who proclaimed the honey-sweet Christ. Only an ontological transformation by grace through the bitter experiences of the ground

joining their ranks, swelling their numbers, and increasing the damage they will do.

⁸³ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 173–91. The events of Müntzer’s rebellion are outlined in Goertz’s chapter, “Battle Under the Rainbow.”

⁸⁴ Walker, *Radical Roots: Connecting Anabaptism to the Early Church Fathers*, 11.

of the soul could bring about the just society God desired. A genuine mystic visionary, Müntzer took on the sufferings of this world head-on with a full guarantee of his righteous cause—the restoration of the order of creation. Müntzer externalized the conflict of medieval mysticism by applying its tenets to a broken world in need of God’s divinizing grace. Whoever sided with Müntzer, whether peasant, noble, or the urban middle class, was provided the guarantee of election through God’s working in the individuals’ ground of the soul. He would bring the genuine fear of God through his charismatic preaching with the belief that the end was near. Through his program of pastoral care, his dynamic utilization of his German Evangelical Mass, and his social program for the spread of the Gospel proclaimed in his *Sermon to the Princes*, Müntzer’s apocalyptic vision for a divinized world continues to speak to a broken and sinful world needing social justice.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: MÜNTZER—AN ATTEMPT TO RESTORE THE COSMIC ORDER

Behind every apocalypse, the threat of violence looms. As John J. Collins writes in *What Are Biblical Values?* “... in the case of nearly all ancient Jewish and Christian apocalypses, the message is quietistic rather than violent. The quietistic ethic is framed and supported by predictions of great eschatological violence, to be unleashed from heaven.”¹ Müntzer transformed this quietistic ethic within German mysticism into a violent apocalyptic revolution. His training as a Renaissance humanist gave Müntzer the theological acumen to transform the mystical piety of Tauler from an inward to an outward purge of sin. The elect were not subject to the fickle winds of fate but had to take hold of their destiny in the present to create heaven on earth. The quietistic piety of Tauler, Meister Eckhart, and the rest of the German mystics might seem divorced from Müntzer’s revolutionary theology until apocalyptic becomes understood. An apocalyptic visionary channeled the hopes and dreams of his following for a better future. Müntzer embodied the German mystical ideal of *theosis* in his teaching, preaching, and pastoral care. He sought to be that conduit for a better tomorrow by enjoining the elect to participate in the divine. While the eschaton guaranteed violence, intolerable conditions produced within people’s imaginations the hope that God would make all things right even in this world. The brutal conditions of Germany proved to Müntzer that the apocalypse was now. He and the elect would seize the opportunity to bring heaven on earth through violence.

Reformers generally, including Luther, thought they were living in the last days. The Reformation caused a crisis in Europe and that crisis fed into the apocalyptic expectations of the

¹ John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values?: What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 162.

time. But even if the conditions of the peasants were horrible, was Müntzer's apocalyptic vision sustainable? As Collins has commented concerning the problems with these visions, "Apocalyptic fantasies can serve to create a sense of crisis where crisis is not generally perceived."² The swift and bloody defeat of Müntzer in the Peasants' Revolt, along with the defeat of the Kingdom of Müntzer after his death, demonstrated that the strength generated by the crisis Müntzer tapped into was insufficient to overthrow the existing socio-economic order.³ The fact Müntzer failed in his attempt to overthrow the religious and secular authorities was one of the major reasons many Anabaptists abandoned and eventually disclaimed him.⁴

While divorced from the Tradition of the church, Thomas Müntzer stood in a long line of radical theologians not only in the Anabaptist tradition but also the more general history of the church. From the Exodus to the Maccabean Revolt, to the Arian heresy, the Christian tradition is replete with examples of the violent overthrow of rulers as well as civil disobedience. Thomas Müntzer was an heir of this apocalyptic tradition that stretched over thousands of years. What made Müntzer's movement distinctive was how he combined this tradition with German mysticism. As Goertz notes:

² Collins, *What Are Biblical Values?*, 163.

³ Bradstock, *Faith in the Revolution*, 59. "Yet Müntzer's investment of his faith in the disorganized and inchoate peasants' movement, his equation of that movement with the elect and his confidence that God was shortening the time of suffering, led him to the sadly naïve conclusion about their prospects; specifically, his identification of their struggle with the last (apocalyptic) battle spared him from the necessary task of relating his (and their) political ambitions to the concrete process of history, and thus to seriously misplaced confidence in the outcome of their struggle. All of which leads to a conclusion that an apocalyptic identification of the *karios*, when freed from demands that it be given eschatological significance *now*, can, Müntzer on one level powerfully demonstrates, profoundly sharpen one's focus on contemporary events; yet when, as ultimately happens in Müntzer's case, such reductionistic demands *are* imposed, the result is a failure to take seriously the realistic possibilities of the given historical moment, and the still-birth of what, in principle, might be revolutionary ideas."

⁴ Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action," 277. "Müntzer's theology had a determining impact on several founding members of the Anabaptist movement and lives on in various forms of charismatic Christianity to this day. ... Up to this day, Anabaptists, such as the Mennonites, struggle with Thomas Müntzer as an unwanted ancestor."

Mystical piety is usually suspected of being an introverted type of faith, turned away from everyday life. ... Of Müntzer, however, exactly the opposite is true. Not only did he throw himself vehemently into the anti-clerical reforming conflict of the day, he also contributed with apocalyptic ardour and revolutionary energy to the overthrow of the clerical and secular authorities. ... if we observe that mysticism in the late Middle Ages by no means represented an homogeneous type, but was able to combine with other reforming and apocalyptic trends, ... it may not be misleading to keep to the basic mystical premises and to look for the connections between mystical piety and apocalyptic expectation in Müntzer.⁵

In Müntzer, inward justice met outward justice. Outward justice flowed from inward justice. Christ came to restore the *ordo rerum* thereby bringing about the right ordering of the world. Through infused grace, the elect were purged of inward sin. Infused grace brought about an ontological identification with the Logos. As a result, the elect were agents of this right ordering through the Holy Spirit acting in the ground of the soul. The synthesis of mysticism and apocalypticism aligned this inner transformation with the goal of the outward reform of society. While the teaching of the *ordo rerum* was lost shortly after the time of the apostles, Müntzer as God's prophet would restore the teaching and restore it to the people.

Müntzer saw himself as in continuity with the tradition of the early church. In his marginal notes on Tertullian's works *On the Incarnation* and *On the Resurrection*, Müntzer attempted to link his teaching on the *ordo rerum* to the ante-Nicene church. By returning to the teaching of the *ordo rerum*, Müntzer sought a faithful return to the teachings of the early Church Fathers with the radical Father Tertullian as his guide. In Müntzer's schema of history, Tertullian represented the Church Father *par excellence*, living in the age of the virginal church. By endeavoring to ground his position *ad fontes*, Müntzer confirmed his soteriology in Tertullian's works. Müntzer saw these similarities because he shared the language of Neoplatonism with Tertullian. However, what Müntzer meant by *ordo rerum* and the ground of the soul was not what Tertullian meant.

⁵ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 198.

The two theologians worked in very different contexts. Tertullian believed the participation in the divine was freeing oneself from suffering and defeat through immortal life in Christ. For Müntzer, *theosis* could be achieved only through suffering. These competing visions of the *imitatio Christi* sought to address the place of suffering in the life of a Christian, but in two distinct ways. The Roman culture sought to overcome humiliation and defeat through triumph, while the medieval German culture grimly embraced suffering—both positions were defended by citing the example of Jesus Christ. What divinization looked like to these two societies was contextual. Müntzer’s use of the bitter Christ drew upon his own context and experience living in German during the 1500s.

Müntzer’s lived experience was reflected in his pastoral care. He sought to deal practically with the spiritual illnesses of the people he attended to their German situation. His own experiences as a priest taught him the foolishness of relying on outward signs. For true Christian renewal, the Spirit must make one born again. As a practical theologian, Müntzer sought to bring lively liturgy and spectacle to the laity. With initial success, Müntzer thought he had rediscovered apostolic Christianity. The fruits of success were the indicators that the Spirit was with the community. Through Müntzer, as the prophet of this new community, the world would be transformed anew. External social justice was the means to restore the order of creation before the coming of Jesus Christ. Different strands of Christianity came together in Müntzer’s vision of a divinized world. Müntzer’s error was the timing of his “eschaton.” The eventual divinization of creation was to occur on the Last Day. As St. Paul had written, “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”⁶ Breaking out of the quietistic ethic of much of traditional

⁶ 1 Cor. 15:28.

apocalypticism, Müntzer continued to demonstrate the potential for violence that lay beneath the surface of those who sought militantly to bring about the fulfillment of their apocalyptic vision.

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