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The Reformation of the Common Man

The people will go free and God alone will be their Lord.

Thomas Müntzer

“Brother Andy”

Luther's return to Wittenberg from the Wartburg halted Karlstadt's rapid implementation of reform and displaced his leadership. Karlstadt expressed his anger over this turn of events by displacing it toward Catholic refusal of communion in both kinds to the laity, the use of Latin in the liturgy, and all the other aspects of Catholic ritual he had overturned during Luther's absence. The fact that this attack also covered the recent events following Luther's "Invocavit Sermons" was not lost on Luther and the university, which seized Karlstadt's writing and forbade its publication. Although Melancthon feared Karlstadt would jeopardize the evangelical cause out of personal pique, Karlstadt initially contained his resentment.

Whether or not Karlstadt had an inferiority complex that motivated his aspiration for success and status, he interpreted the rejection of his reform efforts as divine chastisement of his desire for honor and status. In a dramatic move that would warm the heart of any radical student, Karlstadt renounced his academic achievements and announced he would no longer participate in the granting of academic degrees. That was no small feat for a man who had acquired doctoral degrees in theology, civil law, and canon law, and become a full professor and archdeacon. The occasion was the promotion of two of his students on 3 February 1523, after which he made his announcement with an appeal to Matthew 23: 10, "Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ." This was one time when Luther, rarely at a loss for words, was too stunned to comment.

Shortly after this Karlstadt wrote that formerly he had studied and written for acclaim, but now he realized how egocentric he had been

and indeed how arrogant and self-serving the whole academic enterprise was with its degrees, intellectual elitism, and quests for glory. Henceforth, he said, he would be a simple layman. He signed his works "Andreas Karlstadt, a new layman" and replaced his academic garb with that of a peasant. As if clothes made the man – did Christ deck himself in finery? – he asked to be addressed as "brother Andy" and, it seems, he tried farming. He later explained his preference for the honest labor that brings dirty hands over the professional privilege that lives off the labor of others, of which he too was once guilty: a peasant or craftsman lives according to God's law by the sweat of his brow, while the academics and other big shots exploit them. But Luther has forgotten this true mortification of the flesh. "What think you Luther, are not blisters on the hands more honorable than golden rings?" (Hertzsch 1957: II, 95–6).

Faithful to his convictions, Karlstadt left Wittenberg in the early summer of 1523 for the life of a parish pastor in Orlamünde, a small town not far away on the river Saale. The story of this move and its consequences is complicated and historically controversial because it involved financial and legal matters as well as Karlstadt's conscience. Unlike Luther and Melancthon, who received salaries, Karlstadt was still financially dependent on the benefices and mass endowments all the Reformers had condemned. Included in his income was the benefice from the Orlamünde parish which Karlstadt received as archdeacon of All Saints. By becoming pastor at Orlamünde, Karlstadt would free himself from the strongly criticized ecclesiastical abuses which provided his income in Wittenberg. Also, the present pastor, Glitzsch, had failed to pay the stipend due All Saints that provided Karlstadt's income, and had also let the local parish go to rack and ruin. When Glitzsch was legally told to leave for failure to maintain his responsibilities, Karlstadt requested permission to take his place. Prince Frederick granted his request. However, there were potential complications because as archdeacon Karlstadt was obligated to teach at the university for part of his income, and the university had the right to nominate the vicar of Orlamünde.

These potential problems were actualized when Karlstadt proceeded to institute the changes in Orlamünde which had been quenched in Wittenberg. Images were removed from the church, infant baptism was discontinued, the Lord's Supper was interpreted as a memorial of Christ's death, and Karlstadt began publishing his ideas for reform of the church. The divisive ramifications of the sacramental changes will be treated in the next chapters, but it should be clear that Luther and his

Wittenberg colleagues did not approve. They now started legal moves to evict Karlstadt from his parish on the basis that he was not legally called there and was not fulfilling his university assignments. The effort to silence Karlstadt was also motivated both by the diet of Nuremberg's injunction against innovation and by peasant unrest spreading through the Saale valley, stimulated by the revolutionary preaching of Thomas Müntzer, with whom Karlstadt was now – unfairly – associated. The response of the Orlamünde parish, which appreciated Karlstadt, was clever and ironic. They elected him their pastor – a congregational right that Luther had just emphasized in a tract written for the parish in Leisnig (*LW* 39: 303–14).

By July 1524 Luther was convinced that Karlstadt was supporting the violence preached by Müntzer (in March Müntzer's followers had burned a chapel outside the gates of Allstedt). Müntzer had indeed approached Karlstadt for political support; but he and his parish rejected violent reform on the basis of its biblical prohibition: "We cannot help you with armed resistance . . . We have not been commanded to do this, for Christ ordered Peter to sheath his sword" (Baylor 1991: 33–4). "Karlstadt was trapped between the radical Müntzer and the complex Luther whose conservative fear of social disorder was at least equal to his desire for religious change" (Sider 1974: 196). The Electoral Saxon princes now sent Luther on a tour of the Saale valley to assess the situation and to counter what they perceived to be a rising tide of violence.

Luther's reception through the area and its towns of Jena, Kahla, Neustadt, and Orlamünde was warm – too warm: he was often greeted by abuse and at times stones; at Kahla, where the pastor supported Karlstadt, Luther had to step over a smashed crucifix to get to the pulpit to preach his sermon on tolerating images. On 22 August Luther preached at Jena against the destruction of images, the cessation of both infant baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the evil fruits of the spiritualist theology that led to insurrection. At the rear of the church slouched Karlstadt under a felt hat pulled forward to prevent recognition. Though Luther mentioned no one by name, Karlstadt was incensed by the sermon and convinced that Luther was attacking him personally. After the sermon Karlstadt sent Luther a note asking for a meeting. That afternoon the two Reformers met at Luther's place of lodging, the Black Bear Inn in Jena. There was an unpleasant exchange of accusations and charges, both theological and personal, which concluded when Luther challenged Karlstadt to write against him and gave him a gulden in pledge of his willingness to engage in polemical battle. All in all it was a declaration of theological war.

Luther's encounter two days later with the parish in Orlamünde went no better. The congregation wanted Karlstadt as their pastor, and supported their election of him on the basis of Luther's own writings. Luther rejected this with the argument that Karlstadt had broken his commitments to All Saints and the university. In the argument over the removal of images the congregation would not retract their claim that Luther's toleration of images was unbiblical and jeopardized his own membership in the body of Christ. Luther then broke off the conversation, such as it was. Soon thereafter Karlstadt preached against Luther, calling him an unfaithful servant of God and a perverter of the Scriptures.

Karlstadt soon obliged Luther's challenge with a series of tracts on the Lord's Supper as well as a polemic against Luther's concern for the weak in faith. The five tracts on the Lord's Supper illustrate his adaptation of a mystical terminology, spiritualist leanings, and a vigorous concern for a regenerate life of obedience to the Lord. These eucharistic tracts, which were both direct attacks upon Luther and the first expressions of a purely symbolic understanding of the Lord's Supper, were sent to Switzerland via Karlstadt's brother-in-law, Dr Gerhard Westerborg of Cologne, in the fall of 1524. By now Karlstadt was banished from Electoral Saxony. He complained that he had been driven out without benefit of trial or sentence at the instigation of a Luther who now wished to defend the gospel with force.

The bone of contention between Luther and Karlstadt was not the timetable of reform but the understanding of reform itself. In retrospect scholars have contrasted Luther's theology of justification with Karlstadt's theology of regeneration. There were hints of this difference already in Wittenberg, but these hints blossomed into public differences with the publication of Karlstadt's eucharistic tracts. His emphasis upon the inner testimony of the Spirit of God is what led Luther to draw the connection between Müntzer and Karlstadt. This spiritualism was perhaps most clearly articulated in Karlstadt's "Dialogue" on the Lord's Supper. Here Karlstadt provides via his protagonist, Peter the layman, the following testimony to the inward witness of the Spirit: "I do not need the external witness for my own sake, for I desire to have my testimony of the Spirit inwardly as Christ has promised." When asked who taught him his interpretation, Peter responds, "He whose voice I heard yet did not see; I also knew not how he came and went from me . . . Our Father in heaven." When further pressed as to why he had not explained his views earlier, Peter says, "The Spirit did not impel me quickly enough . . . At times one must conceal the Spirit for the sake of his honor, and sometimes fight with externally received

testimony. I knew quite well that you and the whole world, especially the 'Scripture-wise,' would have laughed at me and said, 'He raves,' if I had burst forth earlier" (Lindberg 1979: 50-1).

The inner witness of the Spirit, in contrast to Luther's emphasis on the external word of God's promise, is according to Karlstadt the agency which makes the uneducated laity independent of the learned theologians. Here is Karlstadt's model for the social structure of the congregation and thus communal reform: the laity are to be "Peter the layman." Karlstadt strove to realize this model of renewal in Orlamünde by fostering a democratic-synodal communal polity, an evangelical mass, abolition of images, oral confession, fasting, and the development of an evangelical poor relief. Through the internal witness of the Spirit, power is given to the people. Although Karlstadt refused Müntzer's exhortation to forced reform, he and his congregation at Orlamünde had achieved a passive disobedience. For him churchly reforms belonged in the jurisdiction of the congregational or city authority. Thus he opposed the Lutheran model of the territorial church with the model of a congregational or city church. In terms of ecclesiology he was a proto-congregationalist. That this tendency, even without overt revolutionary political actions, had to lead to conflicts with the territorial lords, who on their part sought to exploit the Reformation upheaval to expand their power, was inevitable.

After Karlstadt's expulsion from Electoral Saxony in September 1524 he traveled through southwest Germany. The following sketch of Karlstadt's travels and contacts will suggest how widespread his influence became. In Strasbourg he gained a certain amount of support from the Reformer Wolfgang Capito, and also was able to publish his defense, *Ursachen derhalben Andreas Karlstadt aus den Landen zu Sachsen vertreiben* ("Reasons Why Andreas Karlstadt Was Expelled from Saxony"). In Zurich and Basle he had contact with Anabaptist circles, and in Basle his brother-in-law Westerbürg, expelled from Jena, and Felix Manz, from Zurich, tried to get his tracts on infant baptism and the (now lost) writing "On the Living Voice of God" published. Johannes Oecolampadius hindered the printing of the dialogue on infant baptism in Basle; however it was published anonymously in 1527. In this tract Karlstadt rejected infant baptism because he both denied Luther's teaching of the representative faith of the sponsors and affirmed the precedence of the baptism of the Spirit over that of water. Karlstadt did not, however, raise the demand for rebaptism.

In Basle seven writings by Karlstadt were published, of which five were directed against Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. In Nuremberg Karlstadt had a following which included among others

Hans Greifenberger, Hans Denck, and the so-called "three godless painters;" also, two of Karlstadt's writings were circulated here in 1524 by the printer Hieronymous Höltzel. In his five eucharistic tracts Karlstadt attacked Luther's doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. The bread and wine are rather signs of the spiritual presence of the Lord. In his "Dialogue" Karlstadt advanced the exegetical argument that with the words "this is my body" Jesus pointed to himself, not the bread. This was an argument that had been advanced since the thirteenth century and apparently mediated by the Bohemian Waldensians. It also had been advanced a half year before Karlstadt's tract by the circle of dissidents in Zwickau. For Karlstadt the center of his understanding of the eucharist is the remembrance of the cross of Jesus.

After traveling through Heidelberg, Schweinfurt, and Kitzingen, Karlstadt arrived in Rothenburg on the Tauber in December 1524 and settled there for a while, striving to influence the reform movement. After the outbreak of the Peasants' War he left the city around the end of May 1525.

Karlstadt was on friendly terms with the Thuringian leader of the Peasants' War, Thomas Müntzer, and they had influenced each other. However, already in his *Ursachen, dass Andreas Karlstadt ein Zeit stillgeschwiegen* (1523: "Reasons Why Andreas Karlstadt Was Temporarily Silent"), Karlstadt had cautiously drawn back from Müntzer's understanding of revelation in which dreams and visions played an important role. Yet in spite of Karlstadt's clear rejection of Müntzer's revolutionary efforts, Karlstadt found himself caught between two fronts during the Peasants' War. On the one hand, Luther unfairly smelled revolution in Karlstadt; and on the other, Karlstadt sought without success to influence the Frankish peasants toward nonaggression. After a week's refuge with his mother during Pentecost of 1525, he fled to Luther's protection. Luther exacted Karlstadt's promise to desist writing. In the preface to Karlstadt's *Entschuldigung des falschen Namens des Aufruhrs* (June 1525: "Apology Regarding the False Charge of Insurrection"), Luther retracted the imputation that Karlstadt was a rebel. However, Karlstadt's retraction of his eucharistic teaching was a forced compromise which held the seeds of further controversies. At first Karlstadt was given asylum in the towns around Wittenberg, where he eked out a living as a farmer and then as a shopkeeper. However, his influence was not broken and, albeit with great difficulty, he maintained contacts through letters and visits. An intercepted letter to Kasper Schwenkfeld revealed his unchanged convictions regarding the eucharist. He refused to write against Ulrich Zwingli. At

the beginning of 1529 he fled his oppressive situation to Kiel at the call of the lay preacher and furrier, Melchior Hoffman. Karlstadt helped Hoffman prepare for the Flensburg (Denmark) disputation on the Lord's Supper (April 1529) but did not himself participate in it, although he did co-author the report on it. Nevertheless Karlstadt was not comfortable with Hoffman's visionary-apocalyptic ideas.

After expulsion from Kiel in April 1529 and a period of existence as a wandering preacher in East Friesland, Karlstadt was in the area around Oldersum south of Emden from around August 1529 to January 1530. After his flight from Oldersum he sought positions from Strasbourg to Basle to Zurich, where with Zwingli's help he became a deacon at the Great Minster and hospital chaplain. In a foreword of 10 December 1530 to Leo Jud's edition of Zwingli's lectures on Philippians, Karlstadt identified himself publicly with the Zurich Reformation. The one-time second man of the Wittenberg Reformation now found eleven creative years among the fathers of Swiss Reformed Protestantism.

During these years his disputes with the Wittenbergers continued. In early 1530 he responded to Melanchthon and in 1532 he answered Luther's charge that the fates of Müntzer, Zwingli, and Karlstadt were the punishments of God. In 1534 he became professor of Old Testament and pastor of St Peter's in Basle. There he strove with his Basle colleagues and with Martin Bucer of Strasbourg to develop harmony among the Reformers. He was a member of the Basle delegation that discussed with Bucer the Wittenberg Concord on the Lord's Supper, which he supported. In Basle he and the lawyer Bonifazius Amerbach worked together on reform of the university, and reintroduced promotions and disputations in the theological faculty. He himself gave in January 1535 an inaugural disputation that provided a systematic presentation of his theology.

Karlstadt's humanistic interests also now came to the fore, including his high valuation of history and nature, which he held to be an important precondition for the understanding of Scripture. In connection with his lectures on the Old Testament he began instruction in Hebrew. For a while he also gave lectures in New Testament and philosophy. He planned a major encyclopedia of theology to integrate into a pansophical understanding of theology the various influences he had experienced during his career; but he died of the plague on 24 December 1541, having before his death intentionally destroyed the unprinted manuscript which he had only just begun.

With some 90 printed writings in about 213 editions, Karlstadt was among the more prolific writers of the Reformation. For the period 1518-25 he was second only to Luther in the number of publications in

German. During his journey from Wittenberg to Basle, Karlstadt influenced the most varied reforming groups at the times of their formations – Lutherans, Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and the Swiss Reformers. On the one hand he had a broad intellectual influence; but on the other hand, precisely because of the changing fronts he addressed, he was denied an abiding influence on ecclesial formation. His effective influence on the whole course of the Reformation came from his battle against images and against Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The elimination of images forthwith became an external sign of the Reformation in the cities, even in the many cities that pursued a more Lutheran type of reform. The Lord's Supper controversy with Luther became through its reception and continuation in Zwingli a church-dividing dimension of the Reformation.

The movement of students and followers characterized for a time as "Karlstadtians" reached its high point between 1523 and 1530. Karlstadt's influence centered on the areas of Thuringia, Franken, and the upper German cities; but his influence was felt from Reval to East Friesland and from Holstein to the Tyrol. In social perspective his followers came from contexts similar to his own among the educated urban burghers. On the other hand, since Orlamünde he spoke of aiming at the circle of craftsmen and peasants, to whom he identified himself as a "new layman" or "brother Andy." Karlstadt's external adjustment to the confessional line of the Swiss cities robbed the radical Karlstadtians of their model, and excluded him as a possible coalition partner of the Anabaptists. Nevertheless, later Lutheran polemical writings indicate his continuing influence. Also, significant Spiritualists of the time such as Hoffmann, Denck, Schwenkfeld, and Sebastian Franck, adopted and mediated in many different ways Karlstadt's opinions, above all his strongly mystically stamped writings of 1523–5.

Karlstadt's path led into crypto-dissidentism. Many of his followers appear, like himself, to have taken the path of external accommodation and internal emigration. The praxis derived from the priesthood of all believers and home Bible study supported a clandestine continuation of the Karlstadtian spirit along with the heritage of other Reformation dissidents. Karlstadt's writings continued to be read in secret.

With his theology of rebirth and sanctification Karlstadt was a forerunner of Pietism. There are not only material agreements between him and Pietism but also historical lines of connection. Most significant for the transmission of Karlstadt's heritage between the Reformation and Pietism was the mystic and crypto-dissident Valentin Weigel (1533–88).

Thomas Müntzer

Far more than Karlstadt, Thomas Müntzer (ca. 1489–1525) developed the political as well as religious consequences of Spiritualism. With Müntzer the inner order of the Spirit led directly to change of the outer order of the world; mysticism became the theological basis for revolution.

Müntzer initially viewed Luther as a comrade-in-arms but then believed he was a lackey of the princes after learning of Luther's role in reversing Karlstadt's innovations in Wittenberg. In his *A Highly Provoked Vindication and a Refutation of the Unspiritual Soft-Living Flesh in Wittenberg whose Robbery and Distortion of Scripture has so Grievously Polluted our Wretched Christian Church* (1524) Müntzer denounced Luther as a carrion crow, Father Pussyfoot, Dr Liar, the Wittenberg Pope, the chaste Babylonian virgin, archdevil, and a rabid fox. The better part of valor was never Müntzer's strong point! But Luther himself was also no slouch at invective. He labeled Müntzer a bloodthirsty rioter possessed by the devil who was hellbent on destroying both church and state, "a man born for heresies and schisms." Thus began the Protestant historiography of Müntzer, and by association all the so-called "radical" Reformers. Luther's theological suspicion of all theologies of inner change and regeneration was sharpened and hardened by his experiences with Karlstadt and Müntzer and thereby became a vehement rejection of any person or group which appeared to hold Spiritualist views. To Luther, Müntzer became *the* symbol of dissent and heresy that logically led to the horrors of the Peasants' War and the later disaster at the city of Münster (1534–5).

The modern stimulus for Müntzer research has come from Marxist historians who took their cue from Friedrich Engels' reinterpretation of Müntzer as a theologian of liberation from social and political oppression. In a pamphlet prepared for the 1989 quincentenary of his birth, a committee in the former East Germany wrote: "The GDR [German Democratic Republic] . . . has understood itself as a state living up to the idea of Thomas Müntzer's that 'power shall be given to the common folk.' As a man who fought with dedicated self-sacrifice for the goal of building a new society in the interests of the common people, Müntzer's example demonstrates ethical and moral values that . . . still bear fruit in creating the foundations of socialism."

Archdevil or socialist hero? Revolutionary or servant of God? Bloodthirsty killer or spiritual pastor? Will the real Thomas Müntzer stand up! Unlike Luther, Müntzer's reforming activity was compressed

into the few years between 1521 and 1525, a period marked by polemical and physical violence and culminating with his execution. The events of this time-frame, which also include the Peasants' War, all associated with the controversial nature of his person and work, make Müntzer a difficult person to assess.

Müntzer's Origins and Theology

Scholarly efforts to find the "real" Müntzer have to deal not only with a centuries-long polemical historiography but also with an almost complete lack of sources and studies of his origins and ideas. There are practically no sources for his childhood and school years. Claims for his birthdate have ranged between 1470 and 1495, though the present consensus is around 1489. It seems clear that his parents were from an urban milieu, and the family name suggests that at some point they were engaged in minting. Müntzer identified his home as Stolberg, and the family name is recorded there and also in the nearby towns of Quedlinburg, Aschersleben, and Halberstadt. Since a direct analysis of his family origins is not possible, Ulrich Bubenheimer has recently explored Müntzer's social relationships for clues to his origins. The sources from his time in Braunschweig (1514-17) and his later contacts there up to 1522 indicate he associated with people from the professional strata of international merchants, goldsmiths, and minters. His connections with these people suggest that he came from a relatively well-to-do social milieu that in the larger cities was an educated and politically influential citizenry. Müntzer's origins and personal relationships were in the circles of the early capitalist mining economy of the Harz and Thuringian area, and thus were similar to Luther's (Bubenheimer 1989: 11-40).

Müntzer studied at Leipzig, Frankfurt an der Oder, Wittenberg (1517-18, 1519), and perhaps at other universities. He received the degrees of Bachelor and Master of Arts, and Bachelor of Scripture. He was probably ordained before his acceptance on 6 May 1514 of a prebend at St Michael's church in Braunschweig. His service as chaplain to a nunnery at Frose is dated by correspondence in July 1515 and August 1516. The foundation church there was dedicated to the martyr St Cyriacus, and thus occasioned his early liturgical work on the office of St Cyriacus. His *Officium Sancti Cyriaci* shows that no later than 1515-16 he possessed the liturgical and musical training expected of his educational and vocational development. The liturgy of the martyr Cyriacus not only indicates Müntzer's early liturgical interest but also reflects his esteem for martyrdom that later became a

characteristic of his piety. Discipleship to Christ leads to martyrdom. One of the favorite citations of Müntzer and his followers was Matthew 10: 24: "A disciple is not above his master." This was interpreted in light of John 15: 20: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Bubenheimer 1989: 94). The conviction that reform of the church will require martyrdom is the leitmotif of Müntzer's career.

Müntzer's religious development at this time is further suggested by a letter to him signed "in the passionate love of purity." There is a mystical element in this formula which seeks identification with Christ and his passion. The letter addresses Müntzer with the title "Persecutor of Injustice." This title seems to have a programmatic character but unfortunately the historical context is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, this formulation suggests that Müntzer critically confronted his environment, and that the establishment of "justice," whatever he may have meant by it, was integral to Müntzer's goals from the beginning. The concern for justice appears two years later in a request for Müntzer's opinion of indulgences in Braunschweig. Bubenheimer (1989: 96, 106) suggests that Müntzer's possible involvement in this pre-"Ninety-Five Theses" indulgence controversy indicates that his development as a critic of the church was not initially stimulated by Luther but rather has pre-Reformation roots.

Müntzer's Braunschweig circle of relatives and friends were not only interested in humanism; some were also involved in a kind of self-renunciation characteristic of early capitalists concerned that their worldly success would dull their hearing for the voice of God. Müntzer's demand for an ascetic structure of life developed in this social-economic context keyed to growth, expansion, and capital accumulation.

Müntzer remained bound not only biographically but also spiritually to those dedicated to his anti-feudal struggle. His close relationship to the circle of merchants is reflected in his *Highly Provoked Vindication*, where he rejects Luther's abuse of merchants expressed in the summer 1524 tract *Trade and Usury*. In this writing Luther sharply criticized early capitalist business practices as well as the international trade he saw developing from the Frankfurt Fair. According to Luther, the merchants, with few honorable exceptions, were equivalent to thieves in their tendency to maximize profit; and he recommended the worldly authorities restrain their usury. But according to Müntzer, the essential authors of usury, thievery, and robbery were the princes who oppressed the merchants. Müntzer held that Luther should rather preach judgment against the princes, who merited condemnation more

than any others. Müntzer's partisanship and implicit courtship of the merchants has concrete biographical background in the fact that at the time he was having the *Highly Provoked Vindication* printed in Nuremberg he was in communication with Christoph Fürer, a participant in the leading Nuremberg mining society. Luther had totally rejected exactly such societies, which he perceived as monopolies.

Müntzer's support of merchant entrepreneurs against Luther conveys an important insight: his struggle since the fall of 1524 was against feudalism, against the "godless rulers." The urban population involved in early capitalist economic forms did not, after all, exclude the desire for an ascetic standard of living. Müntzer was certainly able to recognize forms of exploitation also in early capitalist entrepreneurship, but his Braunschweig relationships led him to seek a coalition rather than a confrontation with the economically leading urban class in the struggle against the feudal lords.

Müntzer's period of study in Wittenberg cannot be definitively attributed to a desire to become acquainted with Luther's theology, for it is not known whether he arrived there before or after the indulgence controversy. Furthermore, at this time in Wittenberg there was a complex mix of humanistic and theological studies from which the early Reformation theology had not yet been distilled. Certainly, however, Müntzer must have had some acquaintance at this time with Luther, Karlstadt, and Melancthon, and he did later attend the Leipzig debate in 1519. While in Wittenberg for part of the winter semester of 1517-18, he attended lectures on St Jerome by the humanist Johannes Rhagius Aesticampanius. Müntzer's notes indicate he attended these lectures with the intention to pursue humanistic studies. It is evident that Rhagius' interest in rhetoric and the ethical education of his students with regard to an ascetic lifestyle, especially in the area of sexuality, intrigued Müntzer. The notes also indicate Müntzer's interest in St Jerome's emphasis upon having a teacher for the living voice as more effective than the written word. Müntzer was also influenced by the humanist emphasis upon travel not only as a way of increasing learning but as a pedagogy of suffering. This humanist form of monastic asceticism included celibacy and the lack of a fixed abode. Its phenomenological closeness to Müntzer's theology of suffering is evident, and may also be the source of his criticism of the Wittenberg advocacy of clerical marriage. For Müntzer, the only justification of sexual intercourse within marriage was the divine instruction for the generation of elect descendants (*CTM* 44-5).

Humanist influences came not just from his contemporaries such as Erasmus and Ficino, in particular the latter's edition of Plato, but also

from the classics of the faith by the church fathers. He studied Jerome, Augustine, Cyprian, Eusebius, Tertullian, Cassiodorus, and Basil, among others. From Cyprian he got the notion of "nothing without the consent of the people" that later developed into the claim that the worldly authorities are dependent upon the decision of the people. From Eusebius, Müntzer imbibed the theme that the virgin church of the apostolic period had fallen. To Müntzer, the once pure church had become a whore and prostitute through the spiritual adultery introduced by self-serving scholars and faithless priests. Thus the laity, the common folk, must become the new priests. The community must be purified until it consists only of the elect separated from the godless (CTM 377-8).

In the spring of 1519 Müntzer visited Orlamünde for about a month, probably at the invitation of Karlstadt with whom Müntzer was now well acquainted. It was here that Müntzer immersed himself in the study of the medieval German mystic, Tauler, whose emphasis upon reception of the Holy Spirit in the abyss of the soul became fundamental to Müntzer's mature theology. It is also of interest that Müntzer's study of Tauler at this time took place with the Orlamünde parish cook, a simple pious woman. He may already have begun studying Tauler with Karlstadt in Wittenberg, but this study in Orlamünde again suggests Müntzer's orientation toward the wisdom of the unlearned over that of the "scribes."

Humanist rhetoric also provided Müntzer with the category of "the order of things" (*ordo rerum*) by which he structured his theology. This rhetorical concept with its emphasis upon the right relationship between "beginning" and "end" functioned in Müntzer's theology as a fundamental hermeneutical category. It comprehends rhetorically a revelation process from the immanent order of creation to the structure of the Creator's speech. The knowledge of God is not teachable, it may be conferred only in connection with a spirit-worked faith saturated with experience. The catastrophic inability of the church to mediate this spiritual renewal is related to its loss of the right "order of things" in God and in all creatures. Thus Müntzer called for reversal from the traditional movement from the external order to the internal order. The living Word of God must be heard from God's own mouth and not from books, even the Bible. The mystical tradition as well as the humanist expressions of neoplatonism served his effort to express the priority of an inner-oriented hearing by humankind that will lead persons to turn from their bondage to creatures to the process of divinization in God.

Theologically, God's living spoken Word of creation is present in every period, and the creation is analogous to a rhetorical construction. Holy Scripture is thus a historically limited precipitate of this revelation process, a "part" of the "whole" revelation. Beyond Scripture there are other realms of divine revelation: the living speech of God, nature, and history. Theologians who limit revelation to Scripture are nothing but scribes.

The particularity of Müntzer's reception of ancient rhetoric can be more sharply seen by a comparison to Luther, who also was influenced by the humanist recovery of classical rhetoric. For Luther, however, the role of rhetoric is to serve the text as a philological tool, as an exegetical aid to understanding the language of the Bible. For Müntzer the import of rhetoric goes beyond its function as an aide to exegesis. Sharply put, Luther is interested in an exegetical-hermeneutical sense mainly for the "order of the words" (*ordo verborum*) of the interpreted texts, whereas Müntzer's concern is the systematic-hermeneutical sense of the "order of things" (*ordo rerum*). This finds in the *ordo verborum* of the written text of the Bible only an expression next to which the actual address of the living God is to be heard in the here and now. Once again, for Müntzer, the Holy Scripture is a prominent but historically limited expression of the process of revelation, one part of the whole of revelation.

Müntzer's Historical Development

In May of 1520 Müntzer was called to stand in for Johannes Egranus, the preacher of St Mary's, the most important church in Zwickau. Zwickau was a thriving town of about 7,500 inhabitants whose work in textiles and mining created wealthy patricians, merchants, and artisans. Elector Frederick called Zwickau the "pearl" of Saxony. The prosperity of the city supported numerous institutions including eight churches, six chapels, a large Franciscan cloister, and Carthusian, Dominican, and Beguine communities as well as numerous religious brotherhoods. This prosperity however brought in its wake new social tensions as the merchants and manufacturers broke the power of the guilds and markedly increased the economic and social gap between themselves and the lower ranks of citizens. The city council gravitated toward the wealthy and distanced itself from traditional communal principles, thus alienating the "common man" of the city. By the time of Müntzer's arrival there were also increasing ecclesiastical conflicts and anticlerical anger, especially among the lower ranks. In 1516 the weavers' guild

challenged the rule of the magistrates and in 1521 was the locus of support for Müntzer.

Müntzer no sooner arrived than he leaped into the social fray with vehement sermons against the Franciscans for their exploitation of the poor. He not only rang the changes on the customary themes of anticlericalism (clerical and monastic avarice, hypocrisy, external ritualism instead of preaching the gospel), but spiced his message with *bon mots* such as that you could cut a pound of flesh from the mouths of the monks and they would still have too much mouth.

The Franciscans were not amused. The monks not only denounced Müntzer to the bishop of Naumberg and the Franciscan Provincial but took to the streets to foment the citizens against him. The town council asked him to seek Luther's advice, for it was Luther who had recommended him to the town. In his letter to Luther, Müntzer reviews the charges against him and appeals for Luther's support and advice: "You are my advocate in the Lord Jesus. I beg you not to lend your ears to those who are defaming me. . . . It is not my work I am doing, but that of the Lord." He refers to Luther as the one who "brought [him] to birth by the gospel" and as a "model and beacon to the friends of God" (*CTM* 18-22). Müntzer's strong identification of himself with the will of God continues throughout his ministry; his deference to Luther soon ceased.

The town council was obviously not too disturbed by events, for upon the return of Egranus, Müntzer was provided the preaching position at St Catherine's. But a bitter controversy soon arose between Egranus and Müntzer. Egranus was more interested in humanistic studies than in theology and pastoral care; Luther described him as "a man most unlearned in theological matters." Müntzer attacked Egranus for his lack of commitment, and advanced in contrast his conviction that it is not the learned but the experienced in faith who are saved. By experience in faith Müntzer meant being led by God through despair and suffering to true experiential faith formed and filled by the Holy Spirit. In terms of the history of theology this debate foreshadows the debate between Luther and Erasmus over freedom of the will, and the later development of the hermeneutic of experience in both Pietism and Protestant liberalism. Müntzer's emphasis on the suffering experience of God found a positive reception among the poor weavers and day laborers of St Catherine's whose piety related to their socio-economic conditions. This piety perceived material and spiritual suffering as the precondition to faith, and spoke of the mystical illumination of unlearned laity. Among these parishioners was Nicholas Storch, one of

the Zwickau prophets who contributed to the unrest in Wittenberg in early 1522.

Müntzer continued to preach against Egranus and, more forcefully, those priests and monks who still adhered to Catholicism. Anticlerical actions similar to those that took place in Wittenberg and elsewhere began to occur. In return Müntzer himself began to receive abuse, and public disorder on a major scale appeared more and more likely. On 16 April 1521, the very day Luther was entering Worms to face the emperor, Müntzer was dismissed by the council from his office. A large group of armed weavers came to his defense, but 50 of them were promptly arrested. Müntzer later claimed he did not engineer this uprising because he was taking a bath at the time. That night he fled the town.