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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Hans Hut and Thomas Muntzer

ONE of the most interesting persons we encounter in the Reformation era is Thomas Müntzer. Born in Stolberg in the Harz mountains in Germany in 1488 or 9 of perhaps fairly well-to-do parents, he was a lover of books from his childhood, matriculated at the University of Leipzig in 1506, and later studied at Frankfurt. He early acquired a large library in which were found works by Augustine, Jerome, Apuleius, Suso, Tauler, Plato and Basil. He gained a working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek in order to be able to study the Bible more effectively, and his writings give evidence of extraordinarily thorough acquaintance with the Bible. From 1506 to 1520 he always seems to have frequented places where he could study. In 1519 he made the acquaintance of Luther. When in that year he came to Zwickau, he already showed traces of his mystic inclinations. He became fond of the writings of the chiliast Joachim of Fiore, and it was here at Zwickau that his fateful acquaintance with Nicholas Storch began, whose views on chiliasm and revelation decisively influenced Müntzer. Although he seems to have been freed from Romanism through Luther's influence, his emerging radical tendencies soon caused considerable friction and eventual separation, each becoming the implacable foe of the other. In their respective polemics against each other they were to give vent to their mutual intense dislike for one another. Müntzer, ousted from his living by Luther, soon became a restless wanderer, gradually becoming more and more radical, and identifying the salvation and judgment of God with the Peasant's Revolt of which he along with many others was the victim in 1525.¹

Among Mennonites this man's very name has been a bad word for a long time and no wonder. From the time of the Reformation until now he has been called the founder of the Anabaptist movement by historians and critics, and Mennonites have rightly repudiated this assertion or charge as it was often meant to be. Only recently have historians become more careful in what they say about the Müntzer-Anabaptist question, although the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, published 1957, still perpetuates the fiction that the Anabaptist movement come directly from Thomas Müntzer.²

Now that historical research has established that although there were contacts between Müntzer and men who later became Anabaptists he has nothing to do with its origins, we can take a good look at the man as a Reformation personality, and also as a man who in some ways significantly influenced Anabaptism. That this is the case is the conviction of this writer. Nor is there any more need to steer clear of the man simply because he is Thomas Müntzer. The thing that has frequently inhibited Mennonites from giving this man serious consideration is of course his radical revolutionary activity from which they anxiously seek to dissociate themselves. Since, however it has been established by Mennonite historians, and others as well, that Anabaptism had no connection with such social revolution as he advocated and practiced, we can calmly and without panic consider another completely different side of this man. For Thomas Müntzer was not only a revolutionary: he was also an intelligent man, a theologian of some ability, and a mystic. In the blurb on the dust cover of Otto Brandt's biography of Müntzer he is referred to as one of the great Protestant mystics, and this is certainly accurate. It was Karl Holl who first pointed this out in his essay "Luther und die Schwärmer." In that work he takes Müntzer the mystic theologian, seriously, regarding him as a creative thinker, and outlining his system of thought in some detail. Otto Brandt does the same thing in his book. This does not mean, of course, that either Holl or Brandt were Müntzer fans, but it does mean that they had the courage and the integrity to give this, in some respects tragic figure, a firm place in the history of Reformation thought. Ought we to be any less courageous, particularly when the work of these men is already nearly thirty years old?

Müntzer was a mystic. No one who has read his brief works can really doubt this. Who his teachers were is not hard to guess. Connections between his thought and that of Medieval mystics and especially Tauler can easily be traced. He took over from Tauler the idea that the way of discipleship is suffering with Christ which leads to union with God and to faith,³ a point of view that was very prevalent in certain Anabaptist circles in the late twenties of the sixteenth century. Although Müntzer's mysticism was mixed with Joachimite chiliasm and also with ideas that were distinctively his own, it is his mysticism that we want to isolate here as the point at which he became important for Anabaptism.

Another very striking personality of that turbulent time is Hans Hut. He was a native of Thuringia. By trade he was a book-binder and also a book salesman, helping to circulate Reformation writings. There is preserved for us a verbal portrait of Hut, originally published by the city Council of Nurneburg, a sixteenth cen-

tury version of "This man is wanted by the F.B.I." In it he is described as

The highest and chief leader of the Anabaptists . . . a well educated, clever fellow, rather tall, a peasant with light brown cropped hair and a blonde moustache. He is dressed in a grey, sometimes black, riding coat, a broad grey hat, and grey pants.⁴

This gives the impression of a man of striking enough appearance as would attract the attention of those who saw him. His writings add to this portrait, showing us a deeply religious man, of unquenchable and energetic zeal for his new found faith; a strong man, willing to take upon himself the sufferings about which he wrote so much; an obedient man, doing the bidding of his Lord under all circumstances. In 1524, due to a conversation with several artisans near Wittenberg, he began to think seriously about baptism. He went to Reformation headquarters in Wittenberg for help, but was not satisfied. His thinking produced positive, or should one say negative, results when he refused to have his newborn child baptized. This refusal led to his expulsion from his home. The rest of his life was to be spent wandering from place to place. In the course of his travels he became acquainted with Müntzer in his capacity as a bookbinder and salesman, but also because he had found in Müntzer some of the answers to his questions that were not forthcoming in Wittenberg. They must have been well acquainted as is indicated by Müntzer's stay at Hut's house during his flight from Frankenhausen. On May 26, 1526, on his way through Augsburg he again met Denk, who, after some considerable debate finally convinced Hut of the necessity for baptism. This marked the beginning of an amazing career of missionary work. The man seems to have taken no time to rest; he was on fire for his Lord and the church, and this took him, in a period of eighteen months, through Germany, Moravia, Austria as far as Vienna, and back again to Augsburg where, in August 1527 he was arrested along with other Anabaptist leaders. Later in December he died as the result of a fire in the prison where he was confined. Hut was certainly one of the most striking, interesting and influential leaders of the early Anabaptist movement in South Germany and Austria. It is for this reason that it is important to examine his thought.

The problem of the influences that shaped the thinking of Hans Hut has caused increasing comment during the last few years. Lydia Müller saw a close connection between the thought of Thomas Müntzer and Hut as she prepared the first volume of *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter* in 1938. Grete Mecenseffy, the Austrian historian, claims a direct connection be-

tween the thought of Müntzer and Hut in her essay "Die Herkunft des oberoesterreichischen Täuferturns" which appeared in *ARG* in 1956.⁵ Dr. Gordon Rupp of Manchester, in his fascinating and thought-provoking article "Word and Spirit in the First Years of the Reformation,"⁶ makes similar suggestions. At one time he even went so far as to suggest that Hut's "Von dem geheimnus der tauff" was actually Müntzer's work, but has since retreated from that position. From the Mennonite side have come a number of outright denials of this.⁷

The resemblance in the writings of Müntzer and Hut are too obvious to be passed over without comment. Even Mennonite historians have recognized this. But it serves no purpose hotly to deny any formative influence of Müntzer on Hut without offering a satisfactory alternative. This appears thus far to be lacking. A comprehensive biography of Hut and a detailed study of his thought and its sources has become an absolute necessity for the proper study of South German Anabaptism. Many of Hut's ideas vary so much from those of the Swiss Brethren, for example, that an explanation for them must be found.

At the centre of the controversy have been concepts common to Müntzer and Hut such as "the creatures," "the cross and suffering," their view of the Scriptures and points of resemblance in their eschatology. Grete Mecenseffy selects especially the theology of "the cross" as the most obvious example to illustrate the dependence of Hut on Müntzer. There is no doubt that this is the most important point of similarity between the two, followed closely by the teaching about 'the creatures,' and by an unusual view regarding the Scriptures. The common source of these three concepts is Medieval Mysticism. From this it appears that the mystic strain in South German Anabaptism of the Hut tradition came in in large measure by way of Thomas Müntzer. He was not himself the originator of these views, but, as in a relay race, received the torch from someone else, in this case the Medieval mystics, and then passed it on to Hans Hut who in turn committed it to others.⁸

It is to be expected, of course, that Müntzer, being an intelligent thinker in his own right, would put his own stamp on these inherited ideas, and this is what happened. Likewise Hans Hut too was a man of some ability, and was in his turn able to sift the wheat from the chaff in what he received from Müntzer. That we get changes from the original formulations of the mystics is therefore not surprising, but this does not prevent us from being able to trace clearly, both in Müntzer and in Hut, these mystic ideas. Nor do they, in the process of modification, lose much of their essentially mystical character.

We will proceed now to a comparison of Müntzer and Hut with reference to the three concepts of "the creatures," "the Scriptures, and "the cross and suffering." This order has been chosen because it lends itself best to a consecutive study. Actually these three concepts although they are here dealt with separately, are of one piece, as will be seen in the frequent necessity to explain one in terms of the other.

The notion of "the creatures" or "the creation" is a fascinating one. Upon a first reading of Müntzer, although the term is used frequently, one does not get the impression that there is an organization of ideas that accounts for the use of these words. The writer suspected this and said so in his dissertation which forms the basis for these articles.⁹ Renewed reading of Müntzer's works has led to the conviction that Hut did not merely borrow the term "creatures" and then proceed to use it in his own way, but that he also took over Müntzer's use of it which is fairly clearly defined. "Creatures" or "the creation" and God were considered by Müntzer to be opposites. It is the ancient mystic dualism of matter and spirit which are mutually exclusive having nothing to do with each other. They are in fact actively opposed to each other.

There are a number of passages in Müntzer's writings which indicate what he thought of as the function of the "creatures" in man's relationship to God. The most important passage here is from his *Exposition of the 19th Psalm*: "Die Werk der Hände Gottes müssen die erste Verwunderung von Gott bewiesen haben, es ist sonst alles Predigen und Schreiben verloren."¹⁰ "The Creatures" are the first witness to man of an omnipotent God who is concerned about men, and only after man has heard this witness is it possible for him to respond to the preaching of the Gospel or reading of the Bible. The witness of the creatures is the witness of God which man can apprehend with his natural reason, and is therefore the natural starting place for all men in their knowledge of God since all men have this natural reason. This is the "order of God in all the creatures."¹¹ God has ordered His purpose in this way, and this, says Müntzer in his earliest definitive theological tract the "Prague Manifesto," is a thing he has not heard even one learned man mention with so much as single word, and consequently no one knows about it. All he has heard from the cursed parsons is the bare Scripture.¹² But Müntzer goes further than this. Not only do the "creatures" constitute the first witness of God to man, but they also preach Christ and His suffering.¹³ This means therefore, that even a man who has never read the Bible or even heard a preacher can be a true believer in Christ. It is here that one finds the explanation to Müntzer's insistence that true faith is possible without the Scriptures. That

Müntzer actually taught such a "gospel of the creatures" appears from one of the writings of Urbanus Rhegius of 1525 entitled *Widder den newen irrsall Thomas Müntzers und D. Andreas Karlstadt*. "It is now two years since your partner Thomas Müntzer thought to belittle the Bible and supposed that he could instruct a farmer in the faith from the created things."¹⁴

This teaching about the creatures is to be found in the mystics whose writings Müntzer had studied. Many years before Bernard of Clairvaux had written, "Believe me, for I have experienced it; you will find vastly more in the woods than in books. Wood and stone will teach you what you can never receive from teachers."¹⁵ Meister Eckhart was even more explicit when he said to his congregation:

How is that I know more of God than you do? This is not the reason that I have studied or read more books. Education is of little value. All creatures are speaking of God. The same thing that my mouth says and reveals can be perceived from the rock, and one gains greater understanding from the works, than from words . . . Every creature is full of God and is a book.¹⁶

The creatures witness to God, and man has only to see them to perceive the message they preach.

But the word "creatures" also had another meaning for Müntzer. The "creaturely" is the opposite of the "spiritual." Faith can come only when the creatures have been overcome, that is to say, when man has, in a tremendous struggle transferred his dependence from the creatures to God. Although the creatures teach man about God, he must never depend on them for they are only creatures and cannot help man to acquire faith. In fact, they *prevent* him from depending on God alone. When a man comes to the point where he wants to believe, says Müntzer he desires only what God can teach him. The creatures with their disobedience and independence of God are to him as bitter gall, for their way is a perverted way.¹⁷ Only as man understands the creatures and God and their proper relationship to man and to each other can he begin to comprehend the Bible.¹⁸ Again we see that knowledge of the creatures in Müntzer's view precedes a proper use of the Scriptures.

Here, too, one can point to the mystics as the source of the idea. "Soll Gott hinein, so muss die Kreatur hinaus" said Tauler in one of his sermons.¹⁹ Another sermon contains the following words "Know that none of the creatures that God ever made can ever deliver you or help you. Only God alone can do this."²⁰

Although the teaching on this subject appears in very scant form in Müntzer's writings, it must have been something like the reconstruction here attempted since other points of his theology depend upon it. There is also the possibility that Hans Hut's treatment of the subject is more dependent on Müntzer than would appear from Müntzer's writings, although it is impossible to demonstrate this.

Hans Hut took over from Müntzer his idea of "the creatures." Clearly this can never be proved beyond dispute, but a comparative study of the writings of these two men leaves no doubt in the writer's mind that this is what happened. Hut, after all, associated with Müntzer during the years when his own views were being shaped. He met with Müntzer on several occasions.²¹ He took care of the publishing of the *Ausgedrückte Entblössung*, a short work on the first chapter of Luke. We can be reasonably certain that an enquiring mind like that of Hut would carefully have studied this writing, and perhaps others as well, since he was clearly interested in Müntzer, but more because he was looking for answers to his questions. Much emphasis has been placed on Hut's later words, "er hab in ettlich malen hoeren predigen, ine aber nit mögen vernemen,"²² and this has been translated, "He could not understand him." It could also be rendered, "He could not hear him," perhaps because of noise or being too far away from the preacher. Hut seems to have understood Müntzer well enough, so well indeed, that he was able to take over from him what he considered to be good and reject that which did not agree with his Anabaptist convictions. Again; why was it that Hans Denck had to spend considerable time in persuading Hut to be baptized?²³ It was precisely because Hut did not at that time consider water baptism to be of any importance as Müntzer also held. Indeed, Hut later continually emphasised in his writing about baptism that water baptism is insufficient of itself, unless accompanied by the baptism of the Spirit and of suffering.

When we go to the writings of Hut, particularly his "Von dem gehaimnus der tauff" we find this idea of "the creatures" worked out in greater detail and given what he considered to be a firm Biblical basis. It has assumed the shape of a doctrine under the title "The Gospel of all the Creatures." This strange expression is a result of a grammatical error in the German. The phrase is taken from Mk. 16 : 15, "darum gehet hin in alle Welt und prediget das Evangelium aller Kreatur." In German the genitive and dative case endings of a feminine noun in the singular are identical, so that the adjective "aller," which modifies the collective noun "Kreatur" which is written as a singular noun, also has the same ending. Thus the dative "to all creatures" could easily be

taken to mean the genitive "of all the creatures" and this is the way in which Hut understood it.

This 'gospel of all the creatures' was, according to Mk. 16:15, the gospel which Christ commanded the apostles to preach. A more significant passage dealing with this idea was found in Rom. 1:20.

Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and diety, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.²⁴

This was to Hut and his followers ample evidence that this 'gospel of all creatures' was Biblical, since here Paul says that men can recognize the existence of the great and almighty God from the created universe. The words of Heb. 11:3, "By faith we understood that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear," were used to prove that God has created the things that are seen, so that through them men might perceive unseen things.²⁵ Moreover, Hut says, and this appears to have been as important an argument as any, Jesus Himself always preached the 'gospel of all creatures' to the people, since they understood it more readily than book knowledge.²⁶

Hans Denck said that even before he was born again God was working in him by His Spirit. This, he said, is the case with all men basing himself on John 1:9. Hut also believed that God speaks to man before man responds, but he held this speaking to be external instead of internal. In "Von dem geheimmus der tauff" he says:

For all the elect from the beginning of the world to Moses have read in the book of all creatures, and from this they have perceived that they have a natural understanding which has been written in their hearts by the Spirit of God. . . . All men thus deal with creatures, even the heathen who do not have the written law, nevertheless do the same as those who have the written law.²⁷

The creatures witness to God, and God has given man the faculties by which he may perceive that the witness of the creatures in this first stage is to the fact of the existence of a righteous and Almighty God, and this, according to Paul, even the heathen can perceive, but there is no thought that through the creatures man may come to a saving knowledge of God. So far then, Hut agrees with Müntzer, namely that the creatures are a witness, the first witness of God to men.

Hut then follows Müntzer a further step to say that the creatures also show as in a type the sufferings of Christ.²⁸ The similarity between Müntzer and Hut is so striking here that it is worth quoting them both. Here is Müntzer in his *Hochverursachte Schutzrede*: "Die ganze heilige Schrift saget nit anders—wie auch alle Kreaturen ausweisen—denn vom gekreuzigten Sohne Gottes." Now follows Hut in his *Von dem geheimnus der tauff*: "Wie auch die ganz scrift und all creatur nichts anders anzaigen den den leidenden Christum." Müntzer's writings do not show any amplification of that bare statement, which, as I said earlier, explains his conviction that man can have true faith without the Scriptures. Hut could not quite follow Müntzer in this, so he expanded the idea, saying that the creatures show the sufferings of Christ. Jesus Himself taught the poor the gospel by means of things with which they were familiar, the created world which surrounded them, for the common man was more readily taught in the creatures than from the Scriptures.²⁹ In fact the Scriptures themselves continually point to the creatures. "Derhalben," says Hut, "ist auch die ganz scrift durch eitel creatur beschrieben."³⁰ Hut therefore believed that a man could actually see the truths of the Gospel of Christ in the creatures. The true significance and force of this conviction is seen when we remember that in the sixteenth century there were still many illiterate folk who could not read the Scriptures, but who *could* read from the created world about them the 'Gospel of all the creatures.' Although, as stated above, Müntzer did not expand that one statement, the words of Rhegius quoted previously³¹ are important here, namely that Müntzer had been attempting to teach a farmer, perhaps an illiterate man, the faith, and for Rhegius this certainly meant faith in Christ, from the natural creation. Thus Hut may have been dependent on Müntzer even for his *expansion* of the idea. This impression is increased when we compare the views of Müntzer and Hut about the Scriptures.

The importance of the Scriptures in Reformation thought is so well known that it is not necessary to say anything about that in a general way here. Everyone who had any interest in the Reformation, be he Lutheran, Zwinglian, Roman Catholic or Radical, had something to say about the Bible. It is therefore not surprising to find Thomas Müntzer mentioning the Bible frequently in his own writings, and because he was a Protestant, to find him using it as the basis of thought and his programme of social revolt. But although the Bible was normative for him as for the rest of the Reformers, his views on the Bible collide head-on with those of Luther. In fact some of his most virulent attacks were focused, not on the Scriptures themselves as has often been thought, but on the use men, and especially Luther, made of the Bible.

The writer's purpose here is to show that Hans Hut adopted in its essential features Thomas Müntzer's view of the Scriptures and their function. To do this requires first of all a statement of Müntzer's position.

As Otto Brandt suggests in his book, faith was for Müntzer the prime essential,³² as also it was for Luther. Müntzer then immediately asks the question as to the source of faith and promptly answers that it does not come from the Scriptures. His evidence for this position is based on two considerations. The first is the nature of faith itself. "Faith" he writes in *Von dem gedichteten Glauben*, "is an assurance that one may depend on the word and promise of Christ." This faith, as the Scriptures themselves testify, is not easy to come by. "Let every pious and staunch chosen one of God search the Bible. . . . He will find that all the Fathers, the Patriarchs, Prophets, and especially the Apostles, achieved their faith only with great difficulty."³³ After all, they had no Scriptures and yet they had faith.³⁴ Consequently it is clear that faith cannot come from the Scriptures, for if it did, it would be easy to get and not difficult, since all one would have to do is read the Bible. But the problem is that the world is full of those who suppose that faith comes from the Scriptures and these *Schriftgelehrte* or scribes not only believe this themselves, but they also deceive the poor people so outrageously that it is hard to express in words.³⁵ This deception is so shocking because the faith that they suppose they gain from the Scriptures is not the true faith that will make a man righteous before God. It is a fabricated and purloined faith. There is no doubt of this since such a faith would be easy to obtain: indeed anyone who could read could have it, but the Scriptures themselves say that true faith is difficult to come by.

Again it is impossible that faith could come from the Scriptures because of the nature of the Scriptures themselves. Müntzer, as also the other mystics, accepted the matter-spirit dualism. The Bible, he taught, is a creature, created by God for a special purpose, and that purpose is to witness to God. Because it is a material creature and therefore opposed to the spiritual, it cannot possibly produce that faith which belongs to the world of the Spirit.³⁶ Because faith does not come from the Scriptures they are not necessary to a true Christian faith. "Even if a man had never heard nor seen the Bible," he wrote in *Ausgedrückte Entblössung*, "he could have a true Christian faith through the teaching of the Spirit, as all those who wrote the Bible had without recourse to any books."³⁷ This does not mean it is useless, for Müntzer is anxious that it be used for the purpose for which it was created. This is not to make alive, but to kill.³⁸ No doubt this a reference to Paul's words about the letter that kills (II Corinthians 3 : 6), words which

were such a favourite for those in the Reformation period who had an inclination to mysticism. It appears also from this that Müntzer regarded the written Scriptures in much the same way as St. Paul regarded the law. But even for the Bible to fulfil its function of killing rather than making alive there is the condition that the reader must have the Key of David without which it remains a closed book. Only with this Key of David can a man understand the Scriptures and this key can be got only after the independent advent of faith. Without the Spirit of Christ which is the Key of David the contradictions in Scripture cannot be reconciled. This inability of men to reconcile opposing Scriptures is the cause for all the trouble in Christendom.³⁹ Whoever therefore does not have the inner witness of the Spirit can never understand the Bible "even though he had swallowed one hundred thousand Bibles."⁴⁰ Once man is able to understand the Scriptures he sees that they teach what he has already experienced, namely that the way to faith is through suffering and dying.

Now it is a terrible calamity, writes Müntzer in *Ausgedrückte Entblössung*, that the Scribes have practically monopolized the Scriptures insofar as their interpretation is concerned. They take from it what they please, each according to his desire, and the deception of the common man is so enormous that no one can express it.⁴¹ Because of this the poor man will have to get his instruction elsewhere, and this can be accomplished only by the Spirit of Christ.⁴² Not only do these Scribes mislead the people by telling them that faith comes from the Scriptures, but they use the Scripture as a cloak of maliciousness, and thus prevent the true nature of the Christian faith from shining out into the world.⁴³

Müntzer is therefore not directing his words against the Bible. His own constant use of it testifies to his belief that it is important. He sincerely believed that his own programme of violence was legitimized by the Bible. This is perfectly clear from his sermon before the Princes. No, he is not directing his attack against the Bible but against the misuse of it. Luther's use of the Scriptures appeared to him as to a good many others a renewed externalization of religion, preventing men from appreciating and experiencing its true inwardness.

Those are broad outlines of Müntzer's view of the Scriptures. Now to take a look at Hans Hut. Hans Hut begins his writing *Ein Christlicher underricht* with words very much like those used by Müntzer :

Since the Holy Scriptures, a witness of God, written by Moses, the prophets and the apostles, is rarely composed of large sections but rather piecemeal, there follows from it nothing but error, unless we are able to reconcile the parts with the whole.⁴⁴

Men who use the Scriptures without being able to reconcile contradictions in Scripture are certainly in error themselves and lead others astray as well.⁴⁵ The reason for this is, says Hut, that they lack proper judgment, a judgment that can be learned only in the school of suffering.⁴⁶ This expresses Hut's conviction that the Scriptures are very important indeed, as they also were for Müntzer, and that the main problem is that they are being misused by those who do not have the proper equipment to use them. Such persons, and here Hut is referring to the clergy who he calls *Schriftgelehrte*, know less about the Scripture than the apes, even though they purport to be masters and teachers of it. As far as they are concerned it remains sealed with seven seals, and they are not willing to have it opened to them through the work of God, *namely suffering*. Consequently everything they teach is false and has the wrong order, and by it the poor man is seduced, deceived and led into all manner of harm. The only thing to do therefore is to avoid these false teachers, for they are not interested in themselves in the first place, and more important, all they can talk about is faith, but no one has any idea about how to arrive at it. They say they have faith, but it is a spurious and fabricated faith that is purloined from the Scriptures. Therefore the poor man must turn to the poor, those despised by the world, who are called enthusiasts and devils, as also were Christ and the Apostles. It is to these that he must listen, and they will hear how good God himself teaches them the faith in the school of suffering.⁴⁷ All this has been outlined above as belonging to the thought of Müntzer, and has been taken almost verbatim from Hut's book on baptism.

Hut further depends on Müntzer when he says that before there were any written Scriptures, that is, before Moses, men nevertheless had a knowledge of God. From the creatures they learned that they must renounce the world and depend on God. The same is true of the heathen even yet. Furthermore Jesus himself did not teach the poor man out of the Scriptures, but from the book of the creatures. "Thus," he writes, "he did not refer them to books, to chapter and verse as our scribes do, for what can be learned from the Scriptures can also be learned from the creatures, and Christ used the Scriptures only to convince the tender Scribes."⁴⁸ Hut himself did not say anything specific about how he regarded the Scriptures, but he had a number of disciples whose writings provide parallels to Müntzer's thought. It is legitimate to use these non-Hut sources, since these men were obviously guided and influenced in their thought by Hut. If it was not by Hut then it must have been by someone else who thought like him. In any case we have here again such striking parallels to Müntzer's thought that to attribute them to his influence seems like the most

obvious way of solving the difficulty. The written word is not the true word of God because it too is a creature, wrote an unknown Anabaptist in his confession.⁴⁹ The best statement of the Hut tradition on the Scriptures comes from the pen of Ulrich Stadler in his tract, *Vom lebendigen Wort und geschriebenen*, written about ten years after the death of Hut. All things, he writes, were ordered and created by God including the written and spoken word. Therefore he who desires to use the Scriptures in the right way, and not to impute to them more than they claim for themselves or is proper, must distinguish them carefully from the inner word of the heart. The written word is only a testimony or sign of the truth. The mere Scriptures are of no use without the inner word; they are no more than stories and an illusion. It is clear that this written word is not the word of God, otherwise the multitudes, who constantly hear it read, would have forsaken their evil ways to do the good.⁵⁰ Again we have the same points that were previously raised by Müntzer; the Scriptures are only a witness; man must not impute to them more than they claim for themselves; it must be recognized that they are not the source of faith, but that this comes to man from God Himself in the depth of the soul.

Again this does not mean that the Scriptures were unimportant for Hut and his disciples. The exact opposite was the case. Their writings abound with references to the Bible, as also do the writings of Müntzer. In the Scriptures, writes Hut, the cross of the suffering of Christ the Mediator are shown, the works, truth and righteousness of the crucified Son of God.⁵¹ Only through Christ can man be saved, out of the pure grace and mercy of God through faith in Him.⁵² This knowledge can be gained only from the Scriptures. Through this seed of the outer Word the true word of God will be born in man.⁵³ The Scriptures are the bridge over which man passes from dependence on the creatures, that is the external witness to God and His working, to dependence on God alone. The Scriptures are the witness to the way; Christ Himself is the way. When man, desiring to know God, reads the Scriptures, writes Leonhard Schiemer, he becomes horrified at his condition which the Scriptures point out to him, and this leads him to listen to sermons, read the Scriptures, pray and ask questions, all with a sincere heart. To such God gives His Grace continually that they will begin to know Him without media, in the depth of the soul.⁵⁴ But as the creatures are a witness from which the elect must be weaned, so the Scriptures also must be left behind and not depended upon as the truth itself.

As with Müntzer therefore, we have here not an attack on the Scriptures as is often claimed, but against their misuse and for the same reasons. These men had come out of Romanism which to

them was a purely externalized form of religion, and to them it seemed that Luther, their chief evangelical opponent was returning to the thing against which he had revolted. This accounts for the strong emphasis on the inner word, while at the same time clearly delineating the function of the outer. Here, as elsewhere, a great deal has had to be left unsaid due to limitations of space, but this is sufficient to show that the connections between Müntzer and Hut are broader than has heretofore been recognized.

There remains now the *theologia crucis*. As was stated above this has been singled out as the most important point of resemblance between Müntzer and Hut. The writer believes this to be correct, since it includes much of what has already been discussed. Beginning again with Müntzer we find that his theology of the cross commences with the answer to the question about the origin of faith. The advent of faith can only come through personal experience of the cross, and can never come merely from believing.⁵⁵ This experience of suffering is the most arduous experience through which man can pass and it is therefore no wonder that we read in the Bible that men of old were beset with difficulty and trouble before they were able to lay hold of this faith.⁵⁶ Before man can receive this faith he must be prepared for it by God Himself by means of the cross of suffering. "As a field cannot bear a plenteous harvest of wheat without the ploughshare, similarly no man can say that he is a Christian, if he has not before been made willing to wait for the work and word of God through His cross."⁵⁷ This preparation means cleansing. All that is contrary to God, and His will, all the weeds and thistles and thorns must be eradicated, before the heart can be filled with that which is good.⁵⁸ Long ago Tauler had said :

The Holy Spirit has two works in man. The one is that He empties, and the other is that He fills again what He has emptied. Emptiness is the first and most important preparation to receive the Spirit. The emptier a man is the more receptive he is. If God is to come in, the creature must leave. Everything that is in you and that you have taken to yourself must of necessity be put away.⁵⁹

The only way to gain divine blessings is to be made empty and receptive by prolonged chastisement through the suffering of the cross.⁶⁰ Once this suffering begins it quickly becomes so severe that man comes to despair of himself and everything on which he has depended so far. In this condition, which is really the suffering of the pain of hell, man believes that there is in him not the slightest vestige of faith. All he has is a desire for it, but even this is so faint and weak that it is hardly perceptible.⁶¹ When man recognizes his condition as hopeless, his heart becomes quite broken and helpless and yielded. In this condition man may re-

ceive the gift of God which is faith, and God will not despise such a broken and contrite spirit.⁶² It is this yielded and broken condition which Muntzer refers to as *Langeweile*,⁶³ and which elsewhere in mystic writings is called *Gelassenheit*. In this condition the man can hear God's word, pay undivided attention to it and accept it. All this is referred to by Muntzer as "being crucified with Christ" and in His suffering man becomes *Christformig*.⁶⁴ This is the bitter Christ from whom everyone turns away, for the sweet Christ is what men want.⁶⁵ Once a man has thus come to the faith through this experience of the suffering of the cross he can understand the Scriptures perfectly, for all through them he sees the mirror of his own experience. This suffering is the key of David.

Hut states his *theologia crucis* in his short work *Von dem geheimnus der tauff*. In fairness it must be said here too that Hut goes beyond Muntzer in his attempt to relate his mystic insights to the Reformation doctrines of justification by faith and *sola scriptura*. He anchors himself in the New Testament when he expands the meaning of Christian baptism as commanded by Jesus to include the theology of suffering. Again we have the same censure of the clergy who preached only the faith but do not go beyond this to tell the people how one may get this faith about which they preach so glibly.⁶⁶ There is a condition which must be fulfilled before man can believe and this is cleansing. Man in his natural state has given his allegiance to the creatures rather than to the Creator. He chooses to depend on what he can see rather than on what is invisible. Before faith, which is trust in God, can enter, man must be weaned from his dependence on the creatures to a sole dependence on God. He must be cleansed of the creatures who rule his life. As a farmer prepares his field before he plants the seed so God cleanses and prepares man before His word is given that it may grow and bear fruit.⁶⁷ God cannot sow the seed of His word into a soul that is full of thistles and thorns, that is to say, whose desire and love is alone for the creatures. All this must be taken away before the word can be sown.⁶⁸

Everyone, says Hut along with Muntzer and Denck, wants a sweet Christ, one who does not demand anything and no will have anything to do with a bitter and challenging Christ. It is possible to experience the sweet Christ, but not before one has tasted of the bitter Christ, and this is precisely the cleansing of the man from his dependence on the creatures.⁶⁹ This suffering, for that is what it is, is a part of the sufferings of Christ, for the whole Christ suffers, that is, He with all His members. It is false when the Scribes say that Christ the Head has done it all.⁷⁰ For as Christ the Lamb of God has suffered from the beginning of the

world, so He must continue in His members to suffer until the Body of Christ is complete. The creatures themselves as in a parable show that man must suffer. Even as the creatures must suffer the will of man, man must suffer the will of God. Before the creature can be of any use to man as food it must be cleansed and prepared and cooked. In the same way God proceeds with man. If he is to be useful to God he must be cleansed inside and out through suffering.⁷¹ No man may come to blessedness except through the way of suffering and tribulation which God works *in* him.⁷² Whoever desires to rule *with* God must be ruled *by* God; whoever would do *God's* will must surrender his *own*. God can dwell in a human life only to the extent to which it is delivered from itself,⁷³ and the only way in which the domain of self can be reduced is through the cross of suffering which God Himself imposes on His own.⁷⁴

According to Hut this suffering is the baptism about which Jesus speaks in the Gospels and without which it is impossible to be saved. Consequently water baptism which follows the preaching of the Word and the response of faith is not the true essence, but a sign, a parable, and a memorial that daily reminds man of the true baptism, the waters of tribulation through which the Lord cleanses, washes and justifies from all fleshly lusts.⁷⁵ The waters that invade the soul are *Anfechtung*, sorrow, anxiety, trembling and grief, all suffering in its most acute form. Thus baptism is suffering.⁷⁶

This experience of suffering is so severe that a man may think that there is left in him no trace of faith or trust and that he is cast off by God. This is the descent into, and the suffering of, the pains of Hell. Here no creature can comfort him, but He alone who has led man into Hell. In the midst of this suffering of the cross man becomes aware of his faith,⁷⁷ and it is at this point that God, who lets no man perish in this baptism, leads him out of it.⁷⁸ No one can apprehend the truth unless he follow in the footsteps of Christ and His elect in the school of suffering.

It will be seen that this corresponds in every respect to the summary of Müntzer's view on this subject with the exception that Hut calls this whole experience the true baptism. However, Hut tries to relate these mystic views to the Reformation view of justification by faith. The sign of baptism or water baptism is given first and then follows the true baptism.⁷⁹ This implies that man had already responded in faith before the suffering, which Hut, like Müntzer, holds can alone produce faith. How is this to be reconciled? Hut has the answer. "The faith which comes from hearing is accounted for righteousness *until man is justified and cleansed under the cross*, at which time such faith becomes like (*gleichförmig*) the faith of God and one with Christ."⁸⁰ In other

words, what he seems to be saying is that the faith which comes from hearing is a sort of "interim" faith. It merely accepts the word as true and then, through suffering, matures into a trust in, and a reliance upon, God alone. What we have here is something like the later Wesleyan distinction between justification and sanctification. That Hut means this becomes clear from a last quotation: "The true baptism is nothing else than a battle with sin throughout the whole life."⁸¹ It is also clear that Hut along with the rest of Anabaptism, considered the hearing of the word to be the necessary starting point for this whole theology of suffering.

Further it seems as though outward sufferings were only incidental to this process for Hut. The suffering about which he speaks here does not come under the theology of martyrdom which is ascribed to Anabaptism, but it is the process of weaning men from dependence on the visible created things to dependence on the invisible God. This is a mystic train of thought and although, as indicated, he tries to reconcile it with Reformation dogma, it remains mystic both in its formulation and in its function.

This comparison between Müntzer and Hut does not, to be sure, tell the whole story, since only several parts have been singled out for discussion. But the longer one reads the writings of these two men side by side the more resemblances emerge. It could be claimed, of course, that Hut got his mystic views elsewhere, but this would be almost like saying that Grebel got his evangelical views from someone other than Zwingli. The fact that Müntzer and Hut were acquainted rather intimately is a strong point in favour of a dependence of the latter on the former.

But this is not the only consideration here. It is clear that South German Anabaptism had a large mystic component in its thought, and that this comes not *from* Thomas Müntzer but *through* him from Roman Catholicism. George Huntston Williams, in a new book on the Radical Reformation that is about to be published, adds further information on this question, saying that in some cases there has been direct borrowing from Roman Catholicism, although this is disguised in mystic and evangelical terminology. It must also be said that this mystic strain in Anabaptism did not survive in any influential form. In the Hutterite movement which was the inheritor of it, it eventually came to a dead end, and among the Swiss Anabaptists it was never an important factor.

There is no need for Mennonites to be embarrassed by the presence of mysticism in their tradition, for mysticism has traditionally concerned itself with the investigation of the depths of the inner experience of the Christian. Out of Anabaptist mysticism have come some of the most deeply moving and beautiful spiritual writings of the Protestant heritage. Whether it came through

Müntzer or in any other way really makes little difference to the genuine faith and trust in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to which it gives expression.

NOTES

¹ Otto Brandt, *Thomas Müntzer. Leben und Schriften*, (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1933), pp. 3-23. Hereafter referred to as *Brandt*.

² *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 933.

³ *Brandt*, p. 24.

⁴ *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertaeufer II. Bd. Markgraftum Brandenburg* (Bayern I. Abteilung), ed. Karl Schornbaum (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1934), p. 19. Hereafter referred to as *TA II*.

⁵ Grete Mecenseffy, "Die Herkunft des oberoesterreichischen Tauerfer-tums," *Archiv fuer Reformationsgeschichte*, XLVII (1956), pp. 252-258. Hereafter referred to as *ARG*.

⁶ *ARG XLIX* (1958), pp. 13-26.

⁷ Herbert C. Klassen, "Ambrosius Spitelmayr; His Life and Teachings," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXXII (1958), pp. 251-270, (hereafter referred to as *MQR*); H. S. Bender's review of Grete Mecenseffy's *Geschichte des Protestantismus in Oesterreich*, in *MQR*, XXXIII (1959), pp. 78-80; Robert Friedmann, "Thomas Muentzer," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, ed. H. S. Bender *et al* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House), III, pp. 785-789.

⁸ Hans Schlaffer, Leonhard Schiemer, Peter Riedemann, Jacob Hutter, Wolfgang Brandhuber, Ulrich Stadler.

⁹ Walter Klaassen, *Word, Spirit and Scripture in Early Anabaptist Thought* (unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, p. 191).

¹⁰ *Brandt*, p. 145.

¹¹ "Prager Anschlag," *Brandt*, p. 59.

¹² *Brandt*, p. 54.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ Urbanus Rhegius, *Widder den neuen irrsall Thomas Muntzers und D. Andreas Karlstadt*.

¹⁵ F. Kropatschek, *Das Schriftprinzip der lutherischen Kirche*, I. Bd. *Das Erbe des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1904), p. 194.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁷ *Brandt*, p. 131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁹ *Ausgewaehlte Predigten Johann Taulers*, ed. Leopold Naumann (Berlin: pp. 239, 241, 243. Hereafter referred to as *Tauler*).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹ Christian Meyer, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertaeufer in Oberschwaben," *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins fuer Schwaben und Neuburg*, I. (1874), pp. 239, 240, 243. Hereafter referred to as *Meyer*.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁴ Revised Standard Version.

²⁵ *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter I*, ed. Lydia Mueller (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1938), p. 49. Hereafter referred to as *GZ I*.

²⁶ *GZ I*, p. 19; cf. pp. 94-95.

²⁷ *GZ I*, p. 19.

²⁸ *Brandt*, p. 189; *GZ I*, p. 17.

- 29 GZ I, p. 17. Cf. A. Nicoladoni, *Johannes Buenderlin von Linz* (Berlin, 1893), p. 251 (hereafter referred to as *Nicoladoni*), and GZ I, p. 95.
- 30 GZ I, p. 17; cf. *Nicoladoni*, p. 251 and GZ I, p. 95.
- 31 See above p. 214.
- 32 *Brandt*, p. 26.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 168.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 44 GZ I, p. 28.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 47 GZ I, pp. 13-14.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 49 Hans J. Hillerbrand, "Ein Täuferbekenntnis aus dem 16. Jahrhundert." *ARG*, L (1959), p. 45.
- 50 GZ I, pp. 212-214.
- 51 GZ I, p. 34; cf. *Brandt*, p. 189.
- 52 GZ I, p. 87.
- 53 GZ I, p. 34; *Brandt*, p. 142.
- 54 GZ I, p. 65; cf. *Brandt*, p. 128.
- 55 *Brandt*, p. 26.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 139.
- 59 *Tauler*, p. 28; cf. p. 51.
- 60 *Brandt*, p. 177.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 142; cf. p. 131.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 64 *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 185.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 66 GZ I, p. 13.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 17; cf. *Brandt*, p. 126.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 18; cf. *Brandt*, pp. 134, 139.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 26; cf. *Brandt*, p. 129.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 74 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 20; cf. p. 24.
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 23; cf. *Brandt*, pp. 131, 142.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 121; cf. *Brandt*, p. 174.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 80 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 81 *Ibid.*, p. 25.