

# THOMAS MÜNTZER, HANS HUTH AND THE "GOSPEL OF ALL CREATURES"

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## 1. *The "Natural Theology" of Thomas Müntzer*

**T**HEOLOGICAL labels have a limited utility value, but they become dangerous when rigidly applied, when the evidence is blurred or over-simplified, or when their nominalist significance is forgotten. The warnings should be remembered when discussing the Reformation radicals, a historical field where typology has been carried to extravagant lengths. Thus, if we had to choose, in terms of the typology of Troeltsch, whether to label Thomas Müntzer a "Spiritualist" or a "Biblicist" we must no doubt opt for the former designation. It calls attention to what differentiates him from Martin Luther: to his stress on the immediate, unmediated work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart, to his insistence on visions and dreams as vehicles of revelation, and to his conviction of his own prophetic calling.

The distinction is mischievous if it leads us to underrate the importance of the Bible for Thomas Müntzer or the extent of his Biblical knowledge. It was remarkable. His writings, and not only his sermons but his correspondence, were as heavily peppered with Scriptural citations as a modern reference Bible. He appeals frequently to the "whole Bible", and his quotations are drawn from all levels of the scriptural testimony. Apart from his general use of the New Testament, the first books of the Old give him his important doctrines about creation, and about the Law, while he draws more heavily than many of his contemporaries on the great prophets, on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The Psalms were part of the intimate texture of his mind.

His use of the word "Schriftgelehrter" (Scribe) is in polarity to the use by his opponents of the word "Schwärmer" (fanatic), but his all-out opposition to the Scribes of Wittenberg (and the

word covers not only Luther and Melanchthon but such opponents as Egranus and Urbanus Rhegius) for their obsession with the letter, and with a "false faith", must not obscure the importance for him of the appeal to the "whole Scripture". And the typological label becomes pernicious if it leads us to overlook other important features of his thought and not least that third dimension which with some hesitation we may designate his "natural theology".

We know Thomas Müntzer to have been a voracious reader, a scholar in whose life books really counted,<sup>1</sup> and that he contrived to keep abreast of the latest tools: the new printed editions of the Fathers, and of medieval writers, of the humanist programmes, and of the intricate polemic in which Erasmus, Luther and Karlstadt were involved. Some of this new printed material was exotic and explosive, and scholarship has not yet properly appraised the dangerous potentialities of much of the literature which was printed and re-printed in the first years of the sixteenth century. Our information about Müntzer's reading is haphazard. A casual sentence in a letter, for example, tells us that the pseudo-Joachitic commentary on Jeremiah counted for much with him.<sup>2</sup> A line in a rather skittish letter from the nun, Ursula,<sup>3</sup> tells us (though this we might have guessed) of his familiarity with Suso and Tauler.

Among this explosive material must surely be reckoned the volume of mystical and prophetic writings edited by Le Fèvre, and published in 1513 as "Liber Trium Virorum et spiritualium virginum".<sup>4</sup> This included the Shepherd of Hermas, the writings of Robert Euzès and Huguetinus, but the really important part of the work consisted of the visions of the German mystics Hildegard of Bingen (her famous "Scivias"), Elizabeth of Schönau, and Mechtild of Hackeborn. Here was stress on prophetic vocation, and on revelation through dreams and visions, and an

<sup>1</sup> *Thomas Müntzers Briefwechsel*, ed. Heinrich Böhmer and Paul Kirm (Leipzig, 1931), App. 2 and 3. (Hereafter B-K.)

<sup>2</sup> *Thomas Müntzer, Sein Leben und seine Schriften*, Otto H. Brandt (Jena, 1933), 132. (Hereafter B.)

<sup>3</sup> B-K. Doc. 11.

<sup>4</sup> H. Etienne, Paris, 1513. See A. Renaudet, *Préréforme et Humanisme* (Paris, 1954), 621-2, 635-6.

often vehement and apocalyptic criticism of the contemporary church. A reasonable tradition has it that Müntzer had his copy bound together with Tauler's sermons and that the bulky double volume was for him a "vade mecum".<sup>1</sup>

There are many elements, perhaps never co-ordinated, in his thought, medieval apocalyptic, radical Hussitism, the teaching of Luther and Melanchthon and Karlstadt, 1517-22. But even more important was the influence of German mysticism as in the fifteenth century it became conflated with the "devotio moderna". That the little "Theologia Germanica" which Luther edited and republished, has left less trace on him than on Karlstadt and Hans Denck is perhaps because in his case the mystical influence had been earlier formed. In Müntzer's case, the influence of Tauler was paramount. Here he found his insistence on conformity with Christ and in following, in suffering, his footsteps: on the need for renunciation, resignation and waiting on God ("Gelassenheit", "Langweil"): on the need for the soul to be purged from lusts and creaturely desires and seek the one will of God. Much of this was fairly widespread fifteenth century piety, and left its mark on such diverse thinkers as Gerson, Staupitz and Oecolampadius.

Within this mystical tradition was a good deal of speculation about the relation of man to the creatures, and of man to the universe, and of both to God (in Eckhart, but remarkable also in S. Hildegard of Bingen) but in the fifteenth century it found a new development in the thought of Italian humanists and in Nicholas of Cusa. A focus for this was the Parisian humanist Le Fèvre. We cannot know if Müntzer was acquainted with two writers who much intrigued the Le Fèvre circle, Raymond Lull and Raymond of Sabunde. If he did know, and make use of, the bold speculations of Raymond's "Theologia Naturalis" he transmuted them into his own theological idiom. Raymond's doctrine of the creatures is set in the major, Müntzer's in minor key. In Raymond there is a remarkable paean on the joy (gaudium) of the creatures which recalls the first fine Franciscan raptures, whereas in Müntzer it is the soured apocalyptic of the Pseudo-Joachitic writings of the Spiritual Franciscans of a later day, and

<sup>1</sup> G. T. Strobel, *Leben, Schriften und Lehren T. Müntzers* (Nürnberg, 1795).

the thought, so striking in Raymond, of the analogy between the service of the creatures to man and that of man in relation to God is something which Müntzer can only think of in terms of suffering.<sup>1</sup> For Raymond, as for most Catholic patterns of salvation, "Love of God" is the key: we might say that for Luther it is "Faith in God": but with Müntzer it is perhaps "The Fear of the Lord" and with even more propriety than in the case of Luther, his might be called a "Theology of the Cross". If we speak of Thomas Müntzer's "Natural Theology" we must not modernize it, as though he were a potential Gifford Lecturer, or as though he were interested in theistic proofs, or in the relation of philosophy to theology. What concerns him is preaching, and polemic, and what he has to say about the evidence in the universe and in the heart of man, about the power and glory of God, never gets far from the Bible and from Christology. What is written in the universe and in the mind of man is "the suffering Christ—in Head and Members".

Of this natural theology there are many hints and allusions in Müntzer's writings, and nowhere a direct and full exposition. His writings were occasional, and few, as compared with the scores of pamphlets from Karlstadt, and the hundreds from Luther. But there are two strands which we may distinguish. First, there is a stress on the existence of faith outside Christendom, among Jews, Turks and unbelievers. His references to them are surprisingly frequent. He had read the Koran (from Cusa onwards a theme of the age) and disputed with Jews. Acts x, the story of the vision of Cornelius, with its emphasis on works was too good a polemic weapon against Wittenberg to miss (as John Wesley used it against the Calvinists later). There is also the well-known preaching technique of playing up the godliness of the outsider in order to rebuke those within the household of faith. But there is more here than apologetic or polemic.

I preach such a Christian faith as does not agree with that of Luther, but which is in conformity with the hearts of the elect in all the world. And even though he were born a Turk, a man might yet have the Beginning of this same faith, that is, the moving (*Bewegung*) of the Holy Ghost, as it is written of Cornelius, Acts x.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 509, and Renaudet, *Préréforme*, 485, 520, 521. Both Le Fèvre and Beatus Rhenanus possessed copies of Raymond's "Theologia Naturalis" which was often reprinted; e.g. Deventer, 1484, Strasbourg, 1496, Paris, 1509.

Thus he defends his refusal to meet Luther and Melanchthon in open disputation :

If I am to be given a hearing before Christendom, then those ought to be informed, bidden, invited from all nations of men who have suffered invincible temptation (Anfechtung) found despair in their hearts and through the same been all the time brought to remembrance (durch dieselbe allenthalben errinert werden). Those are the people I will admit to be my judges.

In an apocalyptic passage, he prophesies :

The Gospel will come into a much higher reality (viel höher ins Wesen) than in the time of the Apostles. Out of many lands and from many strange nations there will come the Elect who will be far superior to us slothful and neglectful Christians . . . see how aforetime from among the heathen were chosen fellows with the Jews . . . and so many of these strange, wild heathen will put the false scribes to shame.<sup>1</sup>

The second characteristic of Müntzer's "Natural Theology" is his thought of the relation of the creatures to the Creator, of the parts of the Universe to the whole, of the One and the many. We may begin with the enigmatic sentence which may well be a quotation, which he scribbled on the back of a letter in 1521.

All knowledge of the creatures is to be referred to the Whole, and this is best, for it is knowledge of the works of his hands, which is as praiseworthy as the knowledge of God, when it is understood in terms of the Whole.<sup>2</sup>

There is a similar reference in the Prague Manifesto (1521) :

I have learned from no scholar . . . how the Whole is the only way in which to understand the parts.<sup>3</sup>

In the longer German version, which Müntzer worked over at end of November 1521, this is expanded with interesting Scriptural references to 1 Cor. xiii, Luke vi, Eph. iv, and Acts ii, xv, xvii.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To the Elector Frederick, 3 August 1524 (B-K. 64 ; B. 71).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Müntzer seems constantly aware of this wider audience. In a letter to Count Ernest of Mansfeld he threatens to have his letter translated, "and hold you up to ridicule before Turks, heathens and Jews" (22 September 1523, B-K. 44 ; B. 63). The citizens of Prague are told that if they reject his ultimatum they will be "beaten by the Turks in the next years" (B. 61).

<sup>3</sup> B.183.

<sup>4</sup> "in toto exordienda est omnis scientia creaturarum, que est optima, nam est de operibus manuum suarum, que aequè laudabilis est sicut scientia dei, cum in toto intelligatur" (B-K. 24, 24 June 1521). The attempt of Smirin (*Volksreformation T. Müntzer's*, p. 110) to read into this a sociological statement is obtuse. The distinction between the works of God and the works of the hands of God is Augustinian and much used by Luther in his first lectures on the Psalms, 1513-15.

The same thought is expressed in a letter <sup>1</sup> to Hans Zeiss,<sup>2</sup> in 1524, "The will of God is the whole over all the parts".<sup>3</sup> This thought is allied with the theme of a divine Order (Ordnung) implanted in the creatures, recognized by men as the law is written in their hearts. Thus he declares in the Prague Manifesto : <sup>4</sup>

I have learned from no scholar of that Order (Ordnung) which is implanted in every creature down to the very smallest word.

He had not understood the Order which is to be found in God and the creature.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Müntzer had been derided when he had put this doctrine before the Scribes (Urbanus Rhegius)?

I would sooner talk with the Heathen, Turks and Jews about the very smallest of all the words of God and about His Order (Ordnung) and reflect on possessions, ours and towards God . . . they would not receive it when I gave them a brotherly admonition about the ownership of God and of ourselves over the creatures. It is all fanaticism to them. So I say, if you will not learn the truth about the beginning of the Bible, you will understand neither God nor the creatures.<sup>6</sup>

In his last vehement polemic against Luther, Müntzer defends the view that Christ—with all His members, is the fulfiller of the law.

Christ began at the beginning, as did Moses, and He declared the Law from the beginning until the end. That is why He says "I am the light of the World". His preaching is true and moreover so fashioned as a Whole that He took account of human reason also among the godless . . . now I too, through the beginning of the Bible and the Order (Ordnung) of the first distinction, strive after the purity of the divine law, and declare the fulfilment of the spirit of the fear of God . . . thus the Elect have all known from the beginning in their unbelief through the use of the Law (Rom. ii and iv). I set Christ with all His members as a fulfiller of the Law (Ps. 19) for the will and work of God must be perfected through contemplation of the Law.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. 59.

<sup>2</sup> "was do sey das ganze adder unvolkomene, welches ist ein gleicheilende mass alle teyle uberlegen" (B-K. App. 6, 143).

<sup>3</sup> B. 131. Some such doctrine seems to be part of Karlstadt's Thomism, whose "De intentionibus" (1507) includes "Totum perfecte et distincte non scimus, nisi partes scientes. Et tamen partes non sunt per se in consideratione scientiae de toto, sed per totum."

<sup>4</sup> B. 59. It would be attractive to amend "wörtlein" to "würmlein" but there seems no evidence to support it.

<sup>5</sup> B. 61. See also the important letter to Jeori B-K. 61, p. 79, "das sich got anzeygt auffenbart durch dye ordenung yn sich und yn alle creaturen gesetzt".

<sup>6</sup> B. 184.

<sup>7</sup> B. 190, 191 ; B-K. 49, 56.

This "natural theology" is Biblical and Christological, and a key sentence is Müntzer's,

Holy Scripture shows nothing else—as all the creatures bear witness—than the crucified Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

There is then a revelation of God, in the created universe, and among the heathen. From this man can derive what Müntzer calls "The Beginnings" (Ankunft) of Faith, which will lead them through the "Movement" (Bewegung) of the Spirit, through "Temptation" (Anfechtung) to the real and genuine Faith. There is finally an important testimony to the fact that this was no mere speculative doctrine for him, but part of the plan of salvation which he expounded to his peasant hearers. In 1525 Urbanus Rhegius in a tract against Karlstadt declared :

It is now two years since your comrade Thomas Müntzer wanted to put away the Bible, imagining he could teach the peasants faith out of natural things.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. *The Authorship of the Homily "Of the Mystery of Baptism"*

Lydia Müller published in 1938 a collection of early Anabaptist writings.<sup>3</sup> It included a tract entitled "Of the Mystery of Baptism, Of the Sign and of the Essence, a beginning of a right and truly Christian life."<sup>4</sup> It exists only in manuscript versions, one of which, in a shortened form, is contained in the recently re-discovered "Kunstbuch" in Bern.<sup>5</sup>

The authorship is attributed to Hans Huth, though this is not directly claimed in the text. But there is evidence in the Anabaptist trials that this tract, or something like it, was in use among Huth's disciples, and that he used it as a basis for his preaching and teaching.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Widder den newen irsall T. Müntzers und D. Andreas Karlstadt (B. iii. 1525).

<sup>3</sup> L. Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*, Q.G.T. III (1938).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 13 ff. "Von dem geheimnis der tauf, baide des zeichens und des wesens, ein anfang eines rechten warhaftigen christlichen lebens."

<sup>5</sup> Codex 464. *Anabaptistarum opuscula germanice*. For a description of this manuscript see H. Fast, *ARG.* (1956), pp. 212 ff. The title of the tract in the "Kunstbuch" is "The beginning of a right and truly Christian life". There are many minor variants between the KB text and that published by Lydia Müller.

<sup>6</sup> Testimonies of Peutelhans (1527), given in L. Müller, *Kommunismus der mährischen Wiedertäufer* (Leipzig, 1927, ref. Becks Sammlung, 74); Ambrosius Spittelmayer (Q.G.T. *Bayern*, II, Schornbaum, 56); Martin Weischenfelder

Huth<sup>1</sup> himself is a striking figure, the leader of the south German Anabaptists, able to hold his own against such eminent and learned radicals as Denck and Hubmaier. He was a layman, literate, but not academically learned.<sup>2</sup> He was a Thuringian, from Haina, and lived for many years in the town of Bibra. There he had been a sexton and a wine seller, before turning to the roving occupations of bookbinder and bookseller. The travelling workman, and especially bookseller, has a special importance in England and on the Continent as a carrier of Reformation germs, and Huth's wide itinerancy gave him an interested clientèle in dozens of towns and villages in south Germany and Austria among whom he was to found cells of Anabaptist disciples. Like other radicals in 1524 he was an opponent of infant baptism, though he was not baptized until 1526, at the hands of Denck, after which he became an outstanding leader and the central figure, perhaps the chief organizer of the Augsburg Anabaptists and of the missionary apostolate which went out from that city. He also figured in the famous debates which took place in Nicolsburg in Moravia, where his apocalyptic prophecies were a point of opposition between himself and Hubmaier. He was arrested in Augsburg in the autumn of 1527 and underwent repeated interrogations in prison, sometimes under torture. He

(P. Wappler, *Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen* (Jena, 1933), p. 237). See also U. Rhegius, *Zwen wunderseltsamen Sendbrieff an die Boten gen Augsburg gesandt* (1528), k. ii. The second "Sendbrief" may be a letter of Hans Huth and deserves attention. It is not the same as the letter of Huth to which Rhegius devoted a separate tract and which is printed in L. Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 13.

<sup>1</sup> *Mennonite Encyclopaedia*, ii. 846 (not always accurate); W. Neuser, *Hans Huth* (Berlin, 1913). I am indebted to Dr. W. Neuser for the loan of the manuscript of his Dissertation which was never fully published and never completed. The important documents concerning Huth's trial are in the Stadtarchiv in Augsburg where I inspected them. They were printed by C. Meyer in his important article "Zur geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberschwaben," *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Schwaben und Neuburg* (1874), pp. 207-53. The documents belonging to Huth are described in a further article in the same journal by F. Roth, *Z des HV f. S und N.* (1900), pp. 38 ff. See also articles by H. Klassen in *MQR.*, July, October 1959.

<sup>2</sup> He is described by the authorities of Nuremberg as "ain vast gelerter, geschickert gesell" (26 March 1527, Wappler, 245). Urbanus Rhegius says that he had been a student ("Ein sendbrieff Hanns Huth", 1528). He himself said that he had heard Luther and Melanchthon at Wittenberg. It is unlikely that he knew Latin.



died as a result of burns, perhaps incurred during an attempt to escape, in December of that year. There is no doubt of the magnetic effect of this Anabaptist Pied Piper, at whose words men left goods, honour, fortune, wife, like the Anabaptists of Erlangen, whose story is a real life anticipation of the opening scene of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress".<sup>1</sup> He became a legendary figure, said to possess a mysterious book of prophecies and a drinking potion one draught from which bound men to him and his doctrines.

That he was a deep and original thinker is less certain. The contents of his notebook are evidence of Biblical study, with an insistence on apocalyptic and on numerology (the number seven seems to have more than a mnemonic value for him). He taught a doctrine of the "seven seals" or "judgments",<sup>2</sup> and among other preaching heads are the sentences "the destruction of the godless", and "the believers desire vengeance over the godless". For the rest his only printed work is "A Christian Instruction, how the Holy Scriptures should be judged and compared".<sup>3</sup> After a short introduction the work consists in the main of sentences from Scripture which appear to contradict one another. This was a theme in the air at this time, having been sharply raised by Erasmus and it seems likely that Huth is dependent on a similar compilation of Denck,<sup>4</sup> or perhaps (since there are a few citations different in both) from a third document used by both.

Thus, apart from the short "Sendbrief"<sup>5</sup> in which Huth pleads those acquainted with the eschatological mysteries not to

<sup>1</sup> This very remarkable story deserves to be told at length. The documents were printed by Berbig, "Die Wiedertaüfer in . . . Königsberg i. Fr., 1527-8", *D.Z. f. Kirchenrecht*, xiii (1908), 291 ff.; Wappler, 231, 234; *Q.G.T.*, V. 1951; Bayern II; Schornbaum, *Dok.*, 6.115.16.19; etc.

<sup>2</sup> The statement by L. Müller that the homily "Of the Mystery of Baptism" is the "Book with the seven seals" which Huth used, rests on a misunderstanding by W. Neuser of a document in Roth's article (p. 40), where Huth has simply a series of texts about the seven seals of the Apocalypse. There is no trace of this kind of a thing in the homily "Of the Mystery of Baptism". From other references to the Book of the seven seals it seems to have consisted of a description of the doctrine of Faith, the two sacraments and the four last things.

<sup>3</sup> "Ein christlicher unterricht, wie gottliche geschrift vergleicht und geurteilt solle werden" (Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, pp. 28 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> *Wer die warheit warlich lieb hat* (1526). H. Denck, *Schriften*, ed. W. Fellmann (1956), pp. 67 ff. <sup>5</sup> Printed in L. Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 13.

offend the brethren who have not heard or understood about them, the main source of our knowledge of Huth's thought, and certainly the main evidence for its depth and originality comes from the Homily, "Of the Mystery of Baptism". Of the originality of this tract there can be no doubt at all. It is a remarkable exposition of Mark xvi. 15 which stands out among the radical literature of this early period, and to which I can parallel only that other tour de force, the "Fürstenpredigt" which Thomas Müntzer delivered before the rulers of Saxony.<sup>1</sup> It contains the only full length exposition of the radical "Gospel of every creature", and also a doctrine of faith and of justification, and an interpretation of baptism in terms of suffering which clearly sets out the difference between radical and Wittenberg theology. One is bound to ask whether it fits what we know of Huth's background, and his other writings.

It is at this point that we run foul of an old controversy, recently revived, of the relation of Hans Huth to Thomas Müntzer. For there have been those who would play down altogether the debt of the Anabaptists to the peasant leader.<sup>2</sup>

It was understandable and proper for Mennonite scholars to expose an ancient calumny which from the time of Melancthon and Bullinger sought to discredit the Anabaptists by fathering the movement on Thomas Müntzer. None the less, the evidence continues to suggest a real link between him and the south German Anabaptists, first in the influence of his writings, and second in that apocalyptic ferment which begins with Müntzer, persists in Huth, Römer, Bader, and others and continues until the disaster at Münster in 1536. The battle of Frankenhausen discredited Müntzer and ended his "realized eschatology". But what of the thousands of followers of him and other radical peasant leaders? A few of the more doughty among them, like Hans

<sup>1</sup> There is translation of the "Fürstenpredigt" by G. H. Williams in *Spiritual and Anabaptist writers* (*Library of Christian Classics*, xxv (1957), 47 ff. and a valuable edition in C. Hinrichs, *Thomas Müntzers politische Schriften* (Halle, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> See articles by H. S. Bender, *Th. Ztschft.* (1952); R. Friedmann, "Thomas Müntzer's relation to Anabaptism," *MQR.* (April 1957). The latter is an unhappy example of the lengths to which prejudice can go. Essays by Mecenseffy, Bäring and Zschäbitz have shown how very one-sided this attempt has been.

Römer, were bold enough to confess ten years later, that Müntzer was their "spiritual father".<sup>1</sup> The recently published Strasbourg documents show that as early as 1527 the Strasbourg leaders, Bucer and Capito, recognized that Müntzer had disciples who became Anabaptists.<sup>2</sup>

The battle of Frankenhausen did not immediately end the apocalyptic hopes among Müntzer's followers. The ferment which was at its height at Easter 1525 lasted at least until Whitsun (Pentecost remained a focus for Huth's hopes for some time), and Huth seems to have preached the overthrow of the godless in a sermon at Bibra on 31 May,<sup>3</sup> though the collapse of peasant resistance led him to substitute a vaguer apocalyptic in the following months, stressing the supernatural inauguration of the new age.

This oratorical vehemence does not tally with Huth's statement under interrogation that he did not understand Müntzer's teaching.<sup>4</sup> But by then he had the most pressing reasons for not emphasizing any association. He had to admit that Müntzer, on the run, had stayed in his house at Bibra "for a night and a day" and had entrusted to him a manuscript, "given him a book to print, on the first chapter of Luke", as he was a bookseller by trade.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hans Römer's charges against Erfurt that they had slain his "Father"—"seinen Vater Thomassen Muntzers erwürget" (P. Wappler, *Tauferbewegung*, p. 363).

<sup>2</sup> "Etlich teuffer des Muntzers junger" (*Q.G.T.*, vii; Elsass, 1. Teil, ed. Rott (1960), Doc. 80, p. 105 (*Warnungsschrift der Strassburger Prädikanten*), 2 July 1527).

<sup>3</sup> Meyer, pp. 249, 251; G. Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung* (1958), pp. 49-76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* It is not clear whether this was on TM's flight from Allstedt to Mühlhausen in August 1524, or from Mühlhausen to Nuremberg later in the year. (In any case, not as the *M.E.*, ii. 847, seems to suggest, after Frankenhausen.) The book seems to have been the "Ausgedruckte Entblösung" which bears the imprint Mühlhausen. This would tally with Huth's statement. But Brandt says it was really printed in Nuremberg where most of the edition was confiscated. If so, why should TM give it to Huth when he himself was on the way to that city, where as he tells us, he spent his time in getting his writings printed? (Brandt, pp. 243 ff.; B-K. 71). H. Baring (*ARG.* (1959), 2, "Hans Denck und Thomas Müntzer") assumes that it was en route to Nuremberg, and that Pfeiffer was with Müntzer. There is no word of this in the document.

Moreover, he had turned up at the rebel camp on the eve of the battle where, according to his own account, he was arrested by the peasants and released at the orders of Müntzer. There he remained, and heard Müntzer preach several times. His excuse that he hoped to sell books among them sounds a little disingenuous and prompts the thought that perhaps, like David of old, in the naughtiness of his heart he was come that he might see the battle. He has left some vivid details of proceedings in the rebel camp.<sup>1</sup>

And here a dilemma emerges for those who would discount the association between Hans Huth and Thomas Müntzer. If the relationship were as casual as Huth stated, then we must give up the attribution of the homily "Of the Mystery of Baptism" to him, and its use as a major source for Huth's thought. For its relation to the vocabulary and teaching of Müntzer is so close that it cannot be explained in terms of a common background of radical jargon and mystical doctrine. Either this tract was written by Huth, who in that case emerges as one who was thoroughly soaked in Müntzer's doctrines, or this writing is by Thomas Müntzer himself, trimmed, edited and even interpolated perhaps, but bearing the imprint of Müntzer's originality upon it. For, as we shall see, it is not that Müntzer's doctrines, which are fully expounded elsewhere, are echoed in summary hints in this tract—though this is true to a certain extent, but that allusions and half-developed doctrines in Müntzer's writings are here worked out in a logical and extended form.

The possibility that we might have here a lost treatise of Müntzer himself was first suggested by Lydia Müller.<sup>2</sup> She rejected the idea on the ground that the author was apparently ignorant of Greek and Latin. She obviously grounded this judgment on the exegesis of the text of the Homily (Mark xvi. 15)

<sup>1</sup> There is an enigmatic sentence in a letter of TM to the Allstedt citizens written from Mühlhausen at the end of April. "My publisher (Drucker-printer) will arrive in a few days time" (B. 75). The reference is vague, might refer to Hans Römer, and cannot be pressed. But on his own showing, it could fit Huth. The Anabaptist depositions in Franconia show that he was by no means reluctant to talk to them about his experience at Frankenhausen, and of what he had seen and heard.

<sup>2</sup> L. Müller, *Kommunismus*, p. 74, n. 1. "His name is unknown. He knew neither Greek nor Latin—otherwise one would almost imagine an unknown writing of Thomas Müntzer before one."

which is interpreted "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel of every creature". Here the Dative "Aller kreatur" is treated as if it were the Genitive singular with which it is identical, an interpretation impossible in the Greek or Latin. None the less it is a possible interpretation, though equally forced of the Latin of Colossians i. 23: "Quod praedicatum est in universa creatura", the text to which the Homily immediately appeals, and on which, together with Romans i. 20, the "gospel of all creatures" really relies. This exegesis is accepted by Hans Schlaffer, a disciple of Huth who also expounds this gospel and who was a former Catholic priest and who presumably knew enough Latin to know that such an exegesis would not be permissible from the Latin of Mark xvi. 15. Might not the author of the Homily have found Mark xvi. 15 an irresistibly apt opportunity to expound in one text his natural theology, his teaching about faith and his conception of Baptism?

Moreover, if "aller kreatur" is only possible in the German, there are other quotations where the Latin may be preferred to the German. Thus if we do not press his use of "Gleichnis" where the Vulgate has "Parabolis" and Luther "Sprüche" on the ground that "Gleichnis" is a common usage in early German Bibles, the use of "Urteil" for judgements (Vg "Judicia") is rarer (ML "Rechte", Zw "Ordnungen").<sup>1</sup>

That there are expressions in the tract which come from Müntzer has been pointed out by Mecenseffy and Baring, as well as by Lydia Müller.<sup>2</sup> They are more numerous, however, than anybody has yet indicated, and extend from technical vocabulary into the wider field of theological doctrine. Thus if we do not press the word "Scribe" (Schriftgelehrter) as a radical commonplace, there is the expression "Brother Soft Living" (Bruder Sanftleben) which Müntzer applies specifically to Luther. There is the constant denunciation of the parsons as carnal, covetous and precious (wöllüstigen, geizigen, zarte); they behave with Scriptures like Apes (wie die Affen); use Scripture as a cloak (Deckel, Schanddeckel) and lead astray and pervert the

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dr. F. W. Ratcliffe of Manchester University Library for expert judgement at this point. Vg = Vulgate; ML = Luther's Bible; Zw = The Zurich, Zwinglian Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Mecenseffy, *ARG*, 47, 2, pp. 257-8; Baring, *ARG*, 50, 2, pp. 155 ff.

poor common man ; they teach a false (ertichten, erdichten, gedichteten) Faith ; they tell simple folk " Only believe ", and pretend that there are mysteries too high for them ; they deride those who disagree with them as fanatics, treating them in fact as the Scribes once treated Christ ; they erect a new and worse kind of knavery than Popery ; they suggest that Christ has made sufficient atonement for sin and they apply to Christ alone, what is true of Christ, Head and Members. The whole polemical preamble of the tract abounds in such exact Müntzerian phraseology, and there is no single idea in this opening part of the homily which cannot be paralleled in his writings.

There is a common Taulerian and mystical vocabulary : " Gelassenheit ", " Langenweil " : the " friends of God " (Tauler, Suso, but here as in T.M. " Elect friends of God ") : there is reference to the Beginning (Ankunft), the Movement (Bewegung) and to " Anfechtung ". Common to both is the imagery in this connection of water, storms and waves, and a reference to the sign of Jonah. Then there are turns of expression which are characteristic of Müntzer's exuberant and hyperbolic style. He is wont to appeal, as does the homily, to the " whole world " and to " the whole Scripture " and to say that this or that existed " from the beginning ". Both say " the world is full, full (voll, voll <sup>1</sup>) " and both use the cry " Oho ! " and like the word " allerhöchst ". Important for both are Biblical citations such as " The clean fear of the Lord " (Ps. 19), the " Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of wisdom " (Ecclus. i. 14) and " these last dangerous times " (2 Tim. iii, 1). The subtitle of the tract, " Of the Beginning of a right and truly Christian life " is thoroughly Müntzer.<sup>2</sup> There is a long list of technical words : they include, as theological phrases common to the tract and to Müntzer : " Geheimnis " (mystery) : " Urteil " (Judgement—scores of times in Müntzer and a key word in the tract, as also for Huth) : " Ordnung " (order, ordinance) : Bund, (Covenant) : " Bewegung "

<sup>1</sup> So T.M. " Furstenpredigt ", " Er will die Welt . . . voll, voll machen ". Also Ordnung und Berechnung. " Himmel und erde voll, voll." The Bern KB of the homily has only one " voll " but the other manuscripts having the harder reading, are to be preferred.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the sub title to his " Protestation oder Entbietung " (1524)—" zum anfang von dem rechten Christenglauben und der Taufe ".

(Movement, esp. of the Holy Spirit) : the Work of God (Werk Gottes) : the Method of God (Kunst, from Lat. Scientia?) : the witness (Zeugnis) as distinct from the essence (Wesen) of baptism: anxiety about bodily welfare (" Sorge um Nahrung ") : the poor common man : real or genuine (recht, rechtgeschaffen) faith, as against false and feigned (ertichten, gedichteten) : faith proved by fire : the earnest (ernst) righteousness : conscience (gewissen): both speak of the Church in terms of " Christenheit " and " people of God ". There is one major word in the tract which I have only found in Müntzer once, the word " Verwilligung " which occurs in passages relating to the rite of baptism. But the analogy of the Pauline epistles, a literature comparable in size with the Müntzer corpus, suggests that it would be possible for one expression to appear in only one writing.<sup>1</sup>

As we have already hinted, this common vocabulary comes from identical doctrine. Both stress the antithesis between the real faith which comes through temptation, and the false, glib faith of the Scribes who can only point to their preaching and to the letter of the Bible. Both insist that there is a revelation through the creatures, which precedes the coming of faith. Both use the parable of the Sower, and use more than once the analogy of a field, which must be ploughed, then cleared of thorns, thistles and stones, which are creaturely lusts, before the seed of the Word can be implanted by God. Both stress the " Movement " of the Holy Ghost through the waves and billows of temptation, and the theme that baptism is in essence this purging by tribulation is described in terms which are used by Müntzer to describe temptation and the coming of faith. Both the tract and Müntzer treat the essence of baptism (as distinct from the sign) as being suffering and tribulation. Both insist that there has to be a complete purging of the heart from bodily and creaturely lusts, and that for this the soul must passively wait on God. Both stress the importance of the solidarity of Christians with Christ, their Head, and that atonement is made by Christ as Head and

<sup>1</sup> It occurs in Huth's short " Sendbrief " (L. Müller, p. 12) but it is not in question that Huth knew the Homily. On the other hand " Verwilligung " appears at least six times in the Tract and appears to be a technical or at least jargon expression about the rite of Baptism. I regard this as the strongest point in favour of Huth's authorship.

Members and not alone as Head. Of critical importance to the argument of the tract, as the bond between its natural theology of the creatures and its Christology, is the expression “the whole of Scripture—and all creatures show nothing else save the suffering Christ in all His members”—to which there is the striking counterpart in Müntzer’s “Hoch Verursachte Schutzrede”—“the holy scriptures say nothing else—as also all the creatures show—than the crucified Son of God . . . the suffering Son of God”.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, there is one scriptural allusion in the tract which is only intelligible in the light of Müntzer’s own version. It occurs in the last section, about baptism (this section is missing from the Bern “Kunstbuch” but style and vocabulary establish it as part of the original manuscript). It describes how God uses the waters of tribulation to flush the soul from creaturely lusts and proceeds :

da wirt der mensch in der Langeweil seiner Zeit in der erduldung Gottes hand ein fertig und bereiter stuel und wonung Gottes

There a man becomes, in the length and waiting time (there is a play on both senses of the word) of his days a ready and prepared seat and dwelling place of God.

The use of the mystical jargon “Langeweil” at this point seems obscure until we turn to the version of Psalm 93 which Müntzer introduced into his “Deutsch Kirchen ampt” at Allstedt (a version he also commended in a letter to the Stolberg brethren in 1523). A central section of the Psalm, which describes how the floods lift up their voice, is characteristically described by Müntzer in terms of the “flood of sin”, but the remarkable verses are 2 and 5.

In verse 2 the Latin has

parata sedes tua ex tunc : a saeculo tu es

<sup>1</sup> Tract : “die ganz schrift und all creatur nichts anders anzeigen denn den leidenden Christum in allen seinen gliedmassen” T.M. (Brandt), 189. “Die ganze heilige schrift saget nit anders—wie auch all Kreaturen ausweisen, denn vom gekreuzigten Sohne Gottes . . . den leidenden Sohn Gottes.” That TM means also Christ in Head and Members here can be easily demonstrated from his other writings and correspondence (B-K. 47, 49, p. 58; 38, p. 40).



Müntzer has

Darumb das du ein unwandelbar got bist  
Hast du den auserwelten gemacht zu deinem stule

In verse 5 :

Domum tuam decet sanctitudo  
Domine in longitudinem dierum

Müntzer has

do siht der mensch das er ein wonung gottis  
Sei in der lankweil seinen tage

[Luther follows the Latin, but his rendering of verse 5 “ “Heiligkeit ist die Zierde deines Hauses, O Herr, ewiglich ”, is completely different from Müntzer.] Dr. Ratcliffe has found no reading similar to T.M. in any pre-Reformation Bible.

Dr. W. Elliger,<sup>1</sup> in an interesting examination of Müntzer's version of this Psalm, has shown how perfectly it illustrates his free use of Scripture. It is, of course, possible that Hans Huth knew this version of Müntzer, for it had been published in the Allstedt liturgy, but I am bound to say that this allusive, almost casual, use of it in the Homily suggests the greater likelihood that this is Müntzer quoting his own version of a favourite Psalm.

The wealth of scriptural allusion in the Homily is itself very like Müntzer. But we know that Anabaptist leaders, like Pilgrim Marbeck, attained a remarkable depth of Biblical learning, and Hans Huth may have been similarly skilled. But we have to ask a further important question. Is there evidence in the Homily of theological and academic learning such as we know that Müntzer possessed but which we cannot predicate of Huth? I suggest there are at least three places where such learning is apparent. There are references to the creatures as reaching their “ end ”, and to man as attaining the “ end ” of his perfection.<sup>2</sup> This sounds very much like Aristotelian doctrine, as filtered through fifteenth-century mystical and philosophical speculation.

More important is the following very striking passage :

*For the whole world with all creatures is a Book, in which a man sees in work, all the things which are read in the written book.* For all the elect from the beginning of

<sup>1</sup> In “ So lange es heute ist ” (Festschrift R. Herrmann, Berlin, 1957), p. 56 ff.

<sup>2</sup> It should be said that Hans Huth in his printed “ Christlich Unterricht ” has a reference to the “ highest good ”.

the world to Moses have studied in the *Book of all creatures*, and have understood it by their reason, as it is written by nature through the Spirit of God written in the heart, because the whole Law is expressed in terms of the *works of the creatures*.

The second half of this paragraph is closely paralleled in Thomas Müntzer, as we have quoted him above, from this "Hoch Verursachte Schutzrede". But the first paragraph is surely a reminiscence of the "Theologia Naturalis, or Liber Creaturarum" of Raymond of Sabunde? <sup>1</sup>

This remarkable book, which was often reprinted and much read in humanist circles in the early sixteenth century, had a still more remarkable preface. Indeed, the preface so exalted natural theology and the evidence to be found in the study of the creatures that it was put on the index in 1595 and omitted from later editions. In this preface, and also in the body of the work,<sup>2</sup> Raymond teaches that God has given two Books to men, the Book of Nature (or the Book of the creatures), and the written book of Holy Scripture.

The Book of the Creatures is written in terms of the Works of God (*facta*), that of the Scripture of His words (*verba*).<sup>3</sup> In the preface Raymond extols the Book of the Creatures because unlike Scripture it is not subject to mistakes and glosses. Moreover, and this is an important link with the Reformation radical disparagement of clerical learning, "The Book of the Creatures is necessary and fit for everyman"—for, whereas the Scriptures need learning, the science of the creatures is "accessible alike to

<sup>1</sup> Raymond of Sabunde (Sebonde, Sabiunde), d. 1436, was a Spanish Franciscan who became Professor at Toulouse. His "Theologia naturalis" is a highly original work which hardly ever quotes directly from Scripture, Fathers or Schoolmen. He has been described as an Ockhamist, but there is a good deal of Thomist Aristotelianism and some affinities with Raymond Lull. See C. C. J. Webb, *Studies in Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 292 ff.; A. Renaudet, *Préréforme et humanisme*, pp. 485, 520, 521; I. S. Reval, *La Théologie Naturelle de Raymond Sébon* (Lisbon, 1955). Part of the work (as turned into a dialogue form) circulated as the "Viola Animae" of Petrus Dorlandus. Montaigne translated Raymond's work and gave it a new lease of fame in France.

<sup>2</sup> We have used the 1502 edition (Strasbourg) and the 1852 edition. See Tit. CCXI, "Liber creaturarum debet primo sciri, antequam homo veniat ad librum sacrae scripturae . . . et ideo liber creaturarum est porta, via, janua, introductorium et lumen quoddam ad librum sacrae scripturae". Tit. CCXII, "omnia quae probantur per librum creaturarum, sint scripta in libro scripturae".

<sup>3</sup> Tit. CCX.

laymen and to clerks and can be had in less than a month and without trouble ”.

The imagery of two books, one of the creatures and the other of Holy Scripture, is common to the Homily and to Raymond. John Keble would have found Raymond of Sabunde and Thomas Müntzer rather exuberant travelling companions, but he would one day express the same thought :

There is a book who runs may read  
Which heavenly truth imparts,  
And all the lore its scholars need  
Pure eyes and Christian hearts

The works of God above, below  
Within us and around  
Are pages in that book to show  
How God himself is found

Two worlds are ours : 'tis only sin  
Forbids us to descry  
The mystic heaven and earth within  
Plain as the sea and sky

If John Keble could light on the same imagery, why not Hans Huth? But there are other indications in the Homily, of Raymond's arguments. Of major importance in Raymond is the analogy between the obedience of the creatures to man, and of man's obedience to God. This is an important part too of the argument of the Homily, in the section concerning the " Gospel of every creature ", though transmuted into the theme of suffering and sacrifice (even though the argument here of both Raymond and the Homily derives ultimately from the Book of Genesis). Thus the Homily says " that it will always hold true for man, that he is to be in relation to God as such (animal) sacrifice is in relation to man "—" all animals are subordinate to man : if a man needs one, he must first dress, cook and roast it . . . if God would use and enjoy us we have first to be justified by him and cleansed within and without ". " So men can perceive the invisible being and eternal power of God in the creatures and see how God deals with men, and prepares them for the " end " of their perfection . . . that is why all creatures are subject to man, that men may rule over them ". " So men

recognize in their own works which they exercise over and in all creatures, the will of God towards them.”<sup>1</sup>

I do not contend that the Homily quotes Raymond, but that it seems to be the work of one who had read him, mastered and adapted his arguments. If this is so, then we must conclude I think that we have here a work of Thomas Müntzer.

I do not say that this is a demonstrative case, but that it is a strong one.<sup>2</sup> I think that the doctrine of Baptism in terms of suffering, linked with a doctrine of faith and justification which is thoroughly Müntzerian, is entirely compatible with what we know of Müntzer's teaching,<sup>3</sup> down to and including the denunciation of infant baptism.

At the risk of prolonging what may seem to some a subjective argument, we may suggest two points when Müntzer might have passed on the manuscript. The first would be in 1524 when he gave Huth another manuscript to print. The second, more likely, would be on the eve of Frankenhausen.

There is one other consideration which may be mentioned. Conrad Grebel and his friends (signing themselves “seven young Müntzers against Luther”) wrote to Müntzer a letter and postscript in the summer of 1524. In it Grebel requested Müntzer and Karlstadt to write some further treatise on the doctrine of Baptism. Grebel said “In the matter of Baptism thy book pleases me well, and we desire to be further instructed by thee . . . if thou and Karlstadt will not write against infant baptism

<sup>1</sup> So also in Raymond, Tit. XCIX. “Sic ergo creaturae ligantur cum homine, quia sunt propter hominem, et exinde homo ligatur cum Deo per talem obligationem”. CXVII. “Vero duo sunt servitia: primum est servitium creaturarum ad hominem: secundum est servitium hominis ad Deum.” Tit. CXVII: “Creaturae enim serviunt homini, ut sit et duret et permaneat in esse: et ipso homo debet servire Deo, ut ei sit bene et optime”.

CCX: “Scientia creaturarum est scientia de factis et operibus Dei et illa jam dicta est. Sed nunc restat tractare de verbis Dei . . . et si est dignus liber in quo sunt verba Dei scripta.”

<sup>2</sup> Points in favour of Huth would be the use of “Verwilligung”, and the rather banal reiteration of “Darum”, “Derhalben”, “Alhie” which suggests an untutored style (or one who thought in Latin?—Etiam, Quaeamodum, etc.). I am not excluding an element of editing of such a manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> As against H. Klassen, *MQR*. (1959). He does not appear to me to do justice to T.M.'s theology and leans too heavily on Karl Holl. He also tones down Huth's apocalyptic.

sufficiently . . . I will try my hand." From the fact that this document turned up in the St. Gall archives, where it presumably came to Vadianus on Grebel's death, Dr. Bender concludes that Müntzer never received it. And though he shies away too eagerly from the possibility of contact between Grebel and Müntzer, and misreads what Grebel says about there being no copy of the letter,<sup>1</sup> he is probably right. But we do know that at the same time Grebel and his friends wrote in similar terms to Karlstadt, and that Karlstadt seems in fact to have done as they requested, for in October 1524 his son-in-law Gerard Westerborg was in Basel arranging with Felix Mantz (one of the signatories of the letter) for the publication of Karlstadt's tract on Baptism, a writing which was confiscated. In these weeks Müntzer came himself to Basel and thereafter spent weeks, perhaps months, in the area of the Klettgau in south Germany. There were thus many possibilities of his having news of the Swiss Brethren and hearing that they wanted literature about Baptism. May he not have done so, and have turned one of his powerful sermons,<sup>2</sup> into an exposition of his major doctrines, his natural theology, his view of faith in relation to temptation and to justification, and his doctrine of Baptism as related to his theology of the Cross?

One thing is sure, such a Homily by Müntzer would be dangerous property after Frankenhausen. But I can imagine that a radical like Huth would regard it as too valuable to lose, that he might circulate the manuscript, use it as the basis of preaching, perhaps trimming it here and there, but not attempting to print it, not directly acknowledging it as a writing of his own. Much of this may be hypothetical, but it is surely not unreasonable. In any case, all that is contended for here is that either this writing is by Thomas Müntzer or else it is the writing of one so closely connected with him that we must label it "School of Müntzer," as we might name a picture "School of Breughel".

<sup>1</sup> Grebel appears to be referring to his letter to Luther, not the letter to T.M. at this point in his manuscript. I am grateful to the St. Gall archives for a photostat of the originals.

<sup>2</sup> It is a pity that his writings are in the main polemically occasioned. There is testimony that he was a fine and powerful preacher on the less eccentric themes of the Gospel.

### 3. *The "Gospel of Every Creature"*

After a greeting and long preamble, the main part of the Homily follows, an exposition of Mark xvi. 15, with its three parts, "the gospel of every creature", faith and baptism.

Insisting that a right understanding of God's mysteries and judgements depends on keeping his "Order", the writer stresses the importance of the "Order" of the three parts of the text: first must come the "Gospel of every creature", then faith, and then baptism, in its outward sign and in its essence, which is "to follow in the footsteps of Christ in the school of all tribulation". The section begins with the insistence that:

By the gospel of Every Creature nothing less is displayed than Christ and He alone crucified, but not simply Christ as Head, but the whole Christ with all His members . . . the whole Christ must suffer in all His members and not as our scribes teach . . . that Christ the head has borne everything and accomplished all.<sup>1</sup>

But by this "Gospel of every creature" you are not to understand<sup>2</sup>

that the Gospel is to be preached to all creatures, to dogs and cats, cows and calves, leaves and grass, but as Paul says, the gospel which is preached to you, "in all creatures".<sup>3</sup>

But this gospel is hidden from the carnal preachers and is now almost unknown. But this is how Christ Himself preached.

He always showed the common man the Kingdom of heaven and the power of the Father by means of a parable, by means of the works of the hands of man, in all those daily works with which men are occupied.

Unlike the senseless scribes, He did not direct men to books, but He showed them the gospel in their work, the peasant through his field, seed, thistle, thorns, and rocks. "As the countryman treats

<sup>1</sup> This is a recurring theme in Thomas Müntzer. See references in his writings, in Brandt, pp. 130, 131. "Wenn man sagt, Christus hats alleine alles ausgerichtet, ist viel, viel zu kurz. Wenn du das Haupt mit den Gliedern nicht fassdest, wie konntest du dann seinen Fussstapfen nachfolgen"? (ibid. pp. 139. 186): "Ich setze Christum mit allen seinen Gliedern zum Erfuller des Gesetzes" (191). See also the important letter to C. Meinhard, Böhmer-Kirn, no. 47, p. 52 (11 December 1523).

<sup>2</sup> The statement that the "Order" (Ordnung) must be put together with all its parts, recalls T.M.'s doctrine of the Whole in relation to the parts.

<sup>3</sup> The immediate appeal to Col. i. 23 is to be noted. A citation of Rom. i follows.

his field before he sows seed in it, so does God with us before He gives us His word, that it may grow and bear fruit.”

So it is in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> “He teaches the gardener from his trees, the fisherman from his catch, the carpenter by means of his house, the goldsmith by the testing of gold, the wives from their dough, the vinedresser from the vineyard, vine and shoots, the tailor from the patch on an old cloth, the merchant from his pearls, the reaper and the harvest, the woodcutter and the axe laid to the tree, the shepherd and his sheep, the potter and his pottery, the stewards and bailiffs with their accounts, the woman with her child-bearing, the thresher with his chaff, the butcher with his slaughtering. Paul, too, illustrates the Kingdom of God in terms of the human body. So Christ always preached the Kingdom of God by the creatures and in parables.”

This is an astonishing and surely highly original appeal to the teaching of Jesus, something even more radical than the Erasmian “philosophy of Christ”. It seems almost startlingly nineteenth century in its appeal to the Jesus of History, though its realism is more that of Breughel and Bosch than of Rossetti and Holman Hunt, and the argument turns at once in a medieval way from parable to allegory. These parables and analogies are to teach men that :

all creatures have to suffer at the hand of men, and so come through pain to that end for which they were created, and . . . no man can come to be saved other than by suffering and through tribulation . . . so the whole of Scripture and the creatures teach nothing else but—the suffering Christ in all His members.

The next section shows how the ceremonial and sacrificial law of Moses agrees with the natural law of the heathen. Thus the laws of Moses are not to be understood literally (Rede) but in terms of spiritual meaning (Kraft). Thus God commands the Jews to avoid eating unclean animals, that Christian men may learn to avoid the company of the ungodly. Again the analogy between the creatures, and God, is used :

All animals are subordinate to man : if a man needs one for himself he must first prepare, cook and roast it and the animal has to suffer according to his will. If God would use us, we have first to be justified by Him and cleansed within and without, inwardly from desire and lust and outwardly from all improper behaviour and misuse of the creatures.

<sup>1</sup> Numerous citations are given.

Again the author turns to allegory. "The carpenter does not build houses from whole trees, but first cuts them down and then fashions them according to his will, and makes a house out of them. We should learn from this how God treats us, as a man builds his house, before he dwells in it, which house (Paul says) we are." Again, as "on a tree a branch sticks out, now in one direction, now in another, so it is with the desires of men, one branch stretches out towards possessions, another towards wife and children, a third towards money, a fourth towards fields and meadows, to temporal pomp, to luxury and honour".

So every work which we accomplish with the creatures should be as the Scriptures to us, which we diligently mark. For the whole world with all the creatures is a book in which a man may see in the work, all those things which are read in the written book. For all the elect from the beginning of the world to Moses have studied in this book of all creatures, and have understood it by their reason, as it is written by nature through the spirit of God written in the heart, for the whole law is described in terms of creaturely works.

Similarly the heathen also are concerned with the creatures. The law commands that animals be killed before being eaten : thus do the heathen also : the law commands that lamp trimmers be put with the lamps : this is the heathen practice !

And so the law is described and shown forth in all the creatures and we read it daily in our work. In this book we are occupied daily, and the whole world is full, yes, full of the will of God so illustrated, of which our own hearts bear witness if we keep them from the coarsening of worldly lusts, and so men can understand the invisible being and eternal power of God in the works of the creatures, and see how God deals with men and prepares them for the end of their perfection, and this can only take place under the cross of suffering, according to his will.

Not only is this direct appeal to the preaching of Jesus and to the manner in which His parables spoke to the condition of the common man highly original and perceptive, but it had obvious immediate polemical value for the radicals. The appeal to books, and chief among them the Bible, by the Scribes was utterly different from the methods of the Lord, who, it is plausibly argued, only used the appeal to Scripture itself when confuting the Scribes on their own ground. This "Gospel of all creatures" could by-pass the Church machine, not only of Rome, but of Wittenberg, for here was a simple gospel which was not bound to the preaching and scholarship of the Lutheran preachers.



Thus this "Gospel of All Creatures" as expounded in the Homily corresponds exactly to the complaint of Urbanus Rhegius in 1525 that two years previously Thomas Müntzer had sought to discredit the Bible by saying that he would teach the common man directly from the study of natural things.

The later sections of the Homily are not our main concern, but there is one section which was also part of the radical polemic, the retort (first made by Karlstadt?) to the Lutheran insistence on abiding in one's vocation, a doctrine which hit hard at the itinerancy of the Anabaptists.

And so nowadays . . . everybody says "Each man must abide in his calling". If that is so, why did not Peter remain a fisherman, Matthew a publican, why did Christ tell the rich young ruler to sell all and give to the poor? If it is right for our preachers to possess so much, then the rich young ruler was right, too, to keep his possessions. O Zachaeus, why did you give up your property so easily—according to your preachers you would have done better to stick to it, and still have been a good Christian. Oho, comrades, how do you like that?—can't you smell arrant knavery here?

That the "Gospel of All Creatures" was taught by Huth himself is to be admitted. There are, we have already suggested, clear traces of such teaching among the examinations of his disciples.<sup>1</sup> It is explicitly set forth in his "Ein christlicher Unterricht, wie gottliche geschrift vergleicht und geurteilt solle werden".<sup>2</sup> But this document seems far less reminiscent of Müntzer, and what Huth has to say about it here seems not more original than what is said by other members of this circle. Leonard Schiemer's<sup>3</sup> exposition of the Creed uses the analogy of the suffering creatures, "the means whereby all creatures come to the use of man, that is suffering, and the creature holds itself passive before man and suffers for faiths sake". The ex-priest Hans Schlaffer<sup>4</sup> recurs to this theme as of major importance. In his "Kurzer Unterricht zum Anfang eines recht christlichen Lebens" he speaks of three witnesses, of the creature, the

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 498. Also *QGT. Bayern II*, Schornbaum, Doc. 16, also p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> L. Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, pp. 28 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Schiemer was an ex-Franciscan who was converted by Huth's teaching. He was beheaded and burned at Rottenburg on the Inn. January 1528.

<sup>4</sup> L. Müller, *ibid.* pp. 84 ff. Schlaffer had been a priest in Austria and joined Huth's party at Nicosburg in 1527. He was executed by the sword at Schwaz, in 1528.

Scriptures, and Christ. His first witness, the creature is described in language which shows knowledge of the text of our Homily, and he cites the text "aller creatur". Schlaffer sometimes quotes the examples from the Homily, sometimes extends them "as a hen, a fish, or some other beast" has to be "plucked, washed, cleaned and so to suffer, so it is with men and God when he prepares us for justification". He gives a further exposition of the gospel of all creatures in his "Kurzer bericht und leer eines recht christlichen lebens"<sup>1</sup> and again in his "Bekendniss und verantwortung".<sup>2</sup> But Schlaffer adds no new ideas, and applies the analogy, creatures—man, man—God in a rather wooden way, which contrasts with the liveliness of our Homily. Much more original and striking is the writing of Jörg Haug von Jüchsen, "Ein Christliche Ordnung eines wahrhaftigen Christen zu verantworten die Ankunft seines Glaubens" (1524?).<sup>3</sup> He was elected preacher at Bibra by the peasants and asked Huth to preach to them in the days following the battle of Frankenhausen, 1525. His teaching probably stands in a more direct relation to Müntzer than Schiemer and Schlaffer whose chief debt was to Huth, and he expounds in this tract of doctrine of the seven spirits of wisdom which we know to have been one of Müntzer's doctrines. Jörg Haug sees the timidity of wild beasts and the violence of beasts of prey as examples of the fear of the Lord, and he expounds the original order of creation, Adam's dominion over the creatures, and the results of the fall in a way which must be very like the teaching which Müntzer himself gave. It is to be noted that there is a fairly high theological content to this tract of Haug, who speaks of man's goal of perfection, and of the highest good, and uses the Taulerian vocabular about suffering, and about conformity with Christ. The study of these writings raises interesting questions. Is there behind all this the teaching of one man, Thomas Müntzer? We have real evidence that this might be so, and that during his ministries at Allstedt and Mühlhausen he may well have given some fairly coherent theological teaching not expounded in his polemically occasioned writings but given from the pulpit of which he was a master. Or is it not so simple? Are we to think more in terms of ideas gained through books—of

<sup>1</sup> Müller, p. 94.<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 110.<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 2; *M.E.* 3, p. 679.

little groups of radically minded laymen discussing what had been gleaned from Tauler's sermons and from Müntzer and Karlstadt? Are we to think that in the years, perhaps months preceding the emergence of the Anabaptists that there were groups of radicals, much as in Switzerland the "spiritualists" 'preceded the formation of the Swiss Brethren'. At any rate there is evident in these writings a fairly coherent pattern of theology, with its evident debt to the modern devotion as conflated in Germany with Taulerian mysticism, so that one has to reckon with epigrams of the learned which have become, or are becoming, the evangelical clichés, the jargon of the unlearned. One can only list the intriguing possibilities.

The "Gospel of all creatures" persisted for some time among Anabaptist circles, certainly long enough to intrigue Pilgrim Marbeck. But there were perhaps reasons why it should prove of only transitory importance. Obviously it had an immediate polemical value in its contradiction of the Scribes of Wittenberg, Zürich and Strasbourg, with their appeal through the Bible and the Preaching of the Word, to a learned, teaching Church. But its startling simple gospel, which claimed to speak directly to the simple people, was not really the method of Jesus of Nazareth. We need not blame them because they could not create parables comparable with those of their sublime Master: or that they did not perceive the difference between a parable and an allegory. But they did in fact fall into an allegorizing which was thoroughly medieval, and the superficiality with which one analogy is spiritualized time after time recalls the "Emblems" of the English Puritans. More important, by making the "Gospel of all creatures" a preliminary to real faith, a teaching which men were encouraged to draw for themselves from their own vocation and the natural world, they came very near to re-erecting the very "False faith" against which they were protesting, a mental and theological technique (the Homily seems uneasy at some points about this—when it asks readers not to despise such "written judgements").

One thing might have extended its survival value: the immense stress of our Homily on suffering, only too relevant to the condition of a martyr church. When Felix Mantz's execution

order was read out in Zurich with its sentence of drowning—he cried out “ Ah, that is real Baptism ”, and one ponders the folly of the Swiss Protestant authorities for a form of punishment which must recall the “ red baptism ” of the early Church. But the teaching of the Homily is of a pre-martyrdom vintage, and we may conclude that on the whole the teaching of this Homily stood too near to the world of late medieval mysticism and devotion to have enduring value for a movement which despite many real links with the past was so swift to develop its own authentic ethos, its own disciplinary frame, its own picture of Primitive Christianity.