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RIEDL (Matthias), « Thomas Müntzer's Prague Manifesto. A case study in the secularization of the apocalypse »

RÉSUMÉ – Dans le *Manifeste de Prague* (1521), Thomas Müntzer évoque un scénario apocalyptique dans lequel le Christ et l'Antéchrist rassemblent leurs troupes pour l'ultime confrontation, le Christ incarnant le Logos intérieur, l'Antéchrist le prêche erroné du clergé. Les élus n'obtiendront pas la vie éternelle dans l'au-delà, mais la domination sur ce monde. La pensée de Müntzer constitue ainsi un moment important dans la sécularisation de l'apocalyptisme et l'apparition des religions politiques modernes.

ABSTRACT – In the *Prague Manifesto* (1521), Thomas Müntzer evokes an apocalyptic scenario in which Christ and Antichrist are gathering their troops for the final battle. Christ incarnates the inner Logos, while the Antichrist acts through the false preaching of the clergy. The elect will not obtain eternal life in the Hereafter, but rather in dominion over this world. Müntzer's thought represents thus an important moment in the secularization of apocalypticism and the emergence of modern political religions.

# THOMAS MÜNTZER'S PRAGUE MANIFESTO

## A case study in the secularization of the apocalypse

### THE SECULARIZATION THESIS IN ERIC VOEGELIN'S POLITICAL RELIGIONS

In 1938, with immediate impressions of totalitarian rule and persecution, Eric Voegelin made a bold statement about the legacy of Christian apocalypticism. In a chapter of *The Political Religions* entitled "Apocalypse," he writes:

The Christian apocalypse of the empire and the symbolism of the late Middle Ages form the historical basis of the apocalyptic dynamics in modern political religions. [...] the symbolism of the apocalypse of the empires lives on in the symbolism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: in the three empires of Marx and Engels's philosophy of history, in the Third Reich of the National Socialism, and in the fascist third Rome, following the Rome of antiquity and the Christian Rome<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, the English version of Voegelin's statement as quoted above, taken from the *Collected Works*, contains a severe error of translation. The German term *Reichsapokalypse* is rendered as "apocalypse of the empire."<sup>2</sup> However, the German term *Reich* denotes many more things than just empire. The German version of the Lord's Prayer, for instance, says *Dein Reich komme* (Thy kingdom come). And German theologians, such as Martin Luther, distinguish the *Reich der Gnade* (realm of grace) from the *Reich der Welt* (realm of the world). Voegelin's statement refers particularly to the periodization deduced by early

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1 E. Voegelin, "The Political Religions," in *Modernity Without Restraint*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 5 (Columbia and London: The University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 19-73, at p. 51.

2 Cf. E. Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1939), p. 42.

Christian theologians from the letters of the Apostle Paul: The first age, the *ante legem* period, dominated by natural law; the second age, the *sub lege* period, dominated by Mosaic Law; and the third age, the *sub gratia* period, dominated by the grace of God<sup>1</sup>. *Reich der Gnade* here refers to a third age of sacred history, initiated by the incarnation of Christ. In other words, Voegelin's unique term *Reichsapokalypse* refers to the symbolism of periodization and not to empire<sup>2</sup>. Only in this way can it form "the historical basis of the apocalyptic dynamics in modern political religions". This is essential for understanding his claim about the continuous existence of a *Reichsapokalypse*, from Paul's third age to the third *Reich* of the Nazis.

Voegelin's statement is one of the first in a series of claims about the apocalyptic character of modernity. Shortly after World War II, Karl Löwith followed with his thesis about modern philosophy of history as secularized Christian eschatology<sup>3</sup>. Later, Norman Cohn's famous study on apocalyptic violence in the Middle Ages, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, concluded: "Such was the tradition of apocalyptic fanaticism which – secularized and revived – was inherited by Lenin and Hitler."<sup>4</sup> Other scholars could be mentioned, such as Raymond Aron, Jacob Taubes or Jacob Talmon<sup>5</sup>. The terms which were used to describe the modern legacy of Christianity varied: apocalypticism, chiliasm, millenarianism, eschatology, messianism. However, one concept remained the same; in all these text the transformation of Christian theology into modern

1 Cf. Romans 2:12-15 and 3:21-23 and the interpretation by the church fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lyon (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 13, 1 and Augustine (*Enchiridion de fide spe et caritate* 31, 118f).

2 E. Voegelin's remarks are strongly influenced by Alois Dempf, *Sacrum Imperium. Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1954); see especially p. 71-87, which also attribute a paradigmatic role to the periodization in the letters of Paul.

3 "Against this common opinion that proper historical thinking begins only in modern times, with the eighteenth century, the following outline aims to show that philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfillment and that it ends with the secularization of its eschatological pattern." Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 1f.

4 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 1993), p. 286. The book was first published in 1957.

5 Cf. Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Bern: Francke, 1947); Raymond Aron, "Secular Religions," in: *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays from a Witness of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2003), p. 161-176; Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952).

philosophy or ideology was described as “secularization”. In this respect Voegelin is no exception:

There is no distinguished philosopher or thinker in the Western world today who [...] is not aware – and has not also expressed this sentiment – that the world is experiencing a serious crisis, is undergoing a process of withering, which has its origins in the secularization of the soul and in the ensuing severance of a consequently purely secular soul from its roots in religiousness [...].<sup>1</sup>

The quote, once again, contains a highly misleading translation, where *Säkularisation des Geistes* is rendered as “secularization of the soul” and *weltlicher Geist* as “secular soul”. *Geist* here means “spirit,” not “soul”. Only then the idea of the book becomes understandable, since Voegelin distinguishes *Geistreligionen* (spiritual religions), oriented toward the transcendent ground of the world, from the eponymous political or innerworldly religions, “that find the divine in the subcontents of the world (*Teilinhalt der Welt*).” The question of secularization, as raised by Voegelin and others, has not lost its relevance; even though in more recent scholarship secularization is no longer believed to be a strictly unilinear process and more attention is paid to the continuity of non-secular religious traditions in modernity<sup>2</sup>.

But how does the secularization of the spirit actually function? If the claim that modern political religions carry the symbolical lore of medieval apocalypticism is to be verified by historical analysis, the challenge is to find the decisive moments and processes of secularizing transformation. Admittedly, Voegelin’s concept of secularization covers not only the apocalypse but also other symbolic complexes, such as cosmic hierarchies, mystical ascent, and the *corpus mysticum*. Nevertheless, the apocalypse remains crucial as “the interpretation of the [historical; M.R.] development from inside, from the standpoint of the people and powers involved.”<sup>3</sup>

1 E. Voegelin, “The Political Religions,” p. 24.

2 Cf. for instance, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2007), David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, 2005).

3 E. Voegelin, “The Political Religions,” p. 32f. In two earlier studies I have tried to do more justice to the philosophical, historical, and anthropological reflections underlying the secularization thesis of *The Political Religions*. Matthias Riedl, “Der Erfahrungsbegriff in den politischen Philosophien von Michael Oakeshott und Eric Voegelin,” in *Erfahrung als Argument. Zur Relevanz von Erfahrungen für die politische Theorie*, ed. André Brodocz (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007), p. 105-119; and “Gioacchino da Fiore padre della modernità.

Voegelin himself did not carry out such a research program, as from the 1940s onward he conceived the idea of Gnosticism as the primary origin of modern ideologies. Already in his next major work, the posthumously published *History of Political Ideas*, he writes: “This has, in fact, been the course of the movements in Western civilization; the course begins with movements of the Albigensian type; it ends with movements of the Communist and National Socialist type.”<sup>1</sup> From *The New Science of Politics* onwards, the Gnosis-thesis became central for Voegelin’s understanding of modernity<sup>2</sup>. Only in the 1970s did he admit that the Gnosticism thesis had conflated many factors which should have been analyzed separately. Eventually he returned to the more differentiated analysis of symbolic complexes, as originally suggested in *The Political Religions*<sup>3</sup>.

In *The Political Religions*, Voegelin identified a secularizing moment in the history of apocalypticism, namely the teaching of Joachim of Fiore:

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Le tesi di Eric Voegelin,” *Gioacchino da Fiore nella cultura dell’800 e del ’900. Atti del 6° Congresso internazionale di studi gioachimiti*, ed. Gian Luca Potestà (Rome: Viella, 2005), p. 219-236. Cf. also Jürgen Gebhardt, “Zwischen Wissenschaft und Religion. Zur intellektuellen Biographie E. Voegelins in den 30er Jahren,” in: *Politisches Denken, Jahrbuch* (1995/1996), p. 283-304; Hans-Jörg ; Sigwart, *Das Politische und die Wissenschaft. Intellektuell-biographische Studien zum Frühwerk Eric Voegelins* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), p. 247-264; Peter J. Opitz, *Eric Voegelins Politische Religionen. Kontexte und Kontinuitäten*, Occasional Papers 47, revised ed. (München: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, 2006); Thierry Gontier, “From ‘Political Theology’ to ‘Political Religion’: Eric Voegelin and Carl Schmitt,” in *The Review of Politics*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2013), p. 25-43.

- 1 E. Voegelin, “The People of God,” in *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 4: *Renaissance and Reformation*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 22 (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 135.
- 2 *Id.*, “The New Science of Politics. An Introduction,” in *Modernity Without Restraint*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 5 (Columbia and London: The University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 75-241, see especially the statements at p. 190 and 196; cf. Matthias Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton – a critical re-evaluation of Eric Voegelin’s Gnosis-thesis”, in *Revolutions: Finished and Unfinished, From Primal to Final*, ed. Paul Caringella, Wayne Cristaudo and Glenn Hughes (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 80-107.
- 3 In a conversation with Eric O’Connor in 1976, Voegelin says : “I paid perhaps undue attention to gnosticism in the first book I published in English. [...] I happened to run into the problem of gnosticism in my reading of Balthasar. But in the meanwhile we have found that the apocalyptic tradition is of equal importance, and the Neo-Platonic tradition, and hermeticism, and magic, and so on.” Cited from Germino, Dante, *Eric Voegelin on the Gnostic Roots of Violence* (Munich: Eric Voegelin Archive, 1998), p. 23. Cf. also Voegelin’s remarks in his *Autobiographical Reflections*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 34 (Columbia and London: The University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 93.

“Joachim found the formula for a spiritual and intellectual movement that had aspired to gain public attention and acknowledgement for a long time and according to which the age (*Reich*) of Christ, in contrast to the old classification, was not the last worldly age (*Reich*) but would be followed by a third.”<sup>1</sup> As Voegelin admits, Joachim does not yet suggest a revolutionary transformation of the existing order, as the modern political religions do: “The third age (*Reich*) of Joachim is not a new institution that was to take the place of the Church but a process of spiritualization of the ecclesia and transformation of the universal Church toward a new contemplative and spiritual monastic order.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Joachim made an important step in the secularization of the apocalypse, when he described the third age of the Holy Spirit as an age of fulfillment and perfection; even though he expected an even higher fulfillment in the Beyond.

However, after Joachim and the Joachites, there is a big gap in the narrative. The medieval secularization of the apocalypse seems to find its continuation in enlightenment philosophy, the progressivist beliefs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and finally the political religions of communism and National Socialism. Similarly, in Löwith's narrative there is a gap of almost 500 years between Joachim of Fiore and the enlightenment period. This article takes Voegelin's *The Political Religions* as a starting point. It claims to identify another important moment in the secularization of the apocalypse, namely in the radical reform program of Thomas Müntzer, especially in his first major publication, the *Prague Manifesto* of 1521. Unlike the Book of Revelation and the apocalyptic tradition (including Joachim of Fiore), the *Manifesto* does not assert that the elect of God will inhabit Heavenly Jerusalem; rather it promises that they will inherit the “dominion of this world” (*das Reich dieser Welt*). Therefore, it may be justifiably studied as an important moment in the secularization of the *Reichsapokalypse*. This is not to say that Müntzer's thought was absolutely unique and without precedent; but rather that it is the most profound and most reflected expression of an innerworldly apocalypse in this period<sup>3</sup>.

1 E. Voegelin, “The Political Religions,” p. 50f; translation altered.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

3 Currently a new critical edition of Thomas Müntzer's works is being compiled, the *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Helmar Junghans, here cited as “ThMA.” Two of the envisaged three volumes are already available: Volume 2, *Briefwechsel* (Leipzig, 2004),

THE BACKGROUND OF THE *PRAGUE MANIFESTO*

When Thomas Müntzer arrived in Prague in June 1521, he was about a century late<sup>1</sup>. Certainly, most Bohemians still held up the ideas of Jan Hus or, at least, what they considered as their essence as it was laid down in the Four Articles of Prague (1420): Freedom to preach, communion in both (*utraque*) forms, a poor clergy without secular power, and punishment for all sinners in Bohemia, irrespective of their social standing. The practice of the Eucharist in both forms had been conceded to the Hussites in the Compacta of Prague, following the Council of Basil in 1433, whereupon the moderate Hussites, now called the Utraquists, reunited with the Roman Church. The more radical Taborites were defeated soon after. However, the Compacta of Prague were later revoked by Pope Pius II in 1462; and this remained the policy of the Roman Church. In 1521, the Utraquists still did not accept the revocation and certainly, anti-Roman sentiments were widespread. Yet the moment in which Bohemia could have functioned as a seedbed of a major Christian revolution was clearly over. Catholics, Calixtians, various wings and subgroups of the Utraquists, and the Bohemian Brethren were part of a complex religious landscape. Clearly, only a small minority of radical

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containing Müntzer's correspondence; and volume 3, *Quellen zu Thomas Müntzer* (Leipzig, 2010), containing mostly contemporary source material related to Müntzer. However, the publication of volume 1, *Schriften und Fragmente*, has been delayed, because of the death of two editors. Therefore, the *Prague Manifesto* and Müntzer's other main writings must still be quoted from a largely outdated edition: *Thomas Müntzer. Schriften und Briefe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Günther Franz (Gütersloh, 1968), here cited as "MSB." Several translations of the *Prague Manifesto* into modern German and other languages are available. In English language I recommend *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, trans. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 352-379, which provides translations of all three relevant versions of the manifesto. A French translation of the longer German version of the *Manifesto* is available in Joël Lefebvre, "Thomas Muntzer et le Manifeste de Prague," in *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance*, vol. 9 (1979), p. 1-13, at p. 4-8. In this article all translations from German and Latin sources are my own.

- 1 For a biographical and historical background see: Walter Elliger, *Thomas Müntzer. Leben und Werk*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1975), p. 181-213; Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer. Mystiker – Apokalyptiker – Revolutionär* (Munich, 1989), p. 67-78; Günter Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer* (Berlin: Dietz, 1989), p. 93-111; Max Steinmetz, *Thomas Müntzers Weg nach Allstedt. Eine Studie seiner Frühentwicklung* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988), p. 150-168.



Utraquists were ready to start another violent struggle against Rome. Not for the first time, nor the last, Müntzer misjudged the revolutionary potential of his audience.

From his correspondence before the journey and from the content of the *Prague Manifesto* it appears that he had determined Bohemia as the starting point of his reform project<sup>1</sup>. This conviction may have formed in his mind after the encounter with enthusiastic Bohemian followers in Zwickau, where Müntzer had preached before<sup>2</sup>, or during a visit to the old Taborite stronghold Žatec earlier in the year. Certainly, Hus and the Hussites had become positive figures of identification for many reformers, after Martin Luther had defended their “heretical” claims in the Leipzig disputations of 1519<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, already during his first public performance as a reform preacher in Jüterbog, Müntzer’s enemies likened him to the Hussites<sup>4</sup>.

The journey to Prague was also a political statement. While Martin Luther went to the Diet of Worms in April 1521, hoping in vain to win the Emperor over to his reform project<sup>5</sup>, Thomas Müntzer, immediately thereafter, turned to the Bohemians who had once defended their reforms against the Emperor and most forcefully challenged the superiority and legitimacy of the Roman clergy. While Luther sought the support of the territorial lords, Müntzer addressed the burghers, who hoped to combine church reform with larger communal autonomy<sup>6</sup>. The timing of Müntzer’s move was carefully calculated. In a moment where Luther, as a result of the imperial ban, went into hiding in Wartburg Castle and was believed dead by many, Müntzer tried to redefine the direction of the young reformation movement<sup>7</sup>.

Upon his arrival in Prague, Müntzer received a very warm welcome and was guided into the city as a guest of honor. This, however, was

1 ThMA 2.38, p. 88; ThMA 2.39, p. 92f.

2 ThMA 2, 36, p. 86.

3 Already in 1519 Müntzer suggested that the Bohemians are “better Christians”. ThMA 3.5, p. 44.

4 ThMA 3.5, p. 45.

5 Cf. Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther. Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs*, 2nd ed. (München: Beck, 2013), p. 202ff.

6 Already before he first entered Bohemia, Müntzer had sent an open letter to all councilors of the Bohemian cities. He asked them as “the most steadfast defiers of the calamitous tyranny of the Romans” to tear down the Catholic strongholds. ThMA 2, 33, p. 81f.

7 Cf. Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer*, p. 109f.

primarily due to another misjudgment, this time on the side of the Utraquists. They took Müntzer for an authentic representative of Martin Luther, who many of them had come to admire and whose teachings they wanted to study in more detail. Müntzer, at this time, still considered himself a fellow combatant alongside Luther in their common struggle against Rome<sup>1</sup>; but he must have realized how much their theologies differed<sup>2</sup>. As will be shown below, the *Prague Manifesto* is diametrically opposed to the *sola scriptura* principle, in teaching the superiority of inner spiritual revelation. It is equally opposed to the *sola gratia* principle, in emphasizing the salvific value of human effort. Nevertheless, Müntzer may have purposefully traveled in Lutheran disguise in order to provide for smooth entry into the city. He introduced himself as *emulus Martini* and sent ahead a series of theses for disputation, which were actually not his own but “borrowed” from Philipp Melanchthon<sup>3</sup>.

A public disputation of these theses had been planned at Charles University and Müntzer was allowed to preach from the pulpits of the traditional Hussite strongholds, such as the Bethlehem Chapel, once the personal domain of Jan Hus, the Corpus Christi Chapel, and probably the then most important Týn Church. In the Utraquist manner, Müntzer celebrated the Eucharist in both forms. As eyewitness accounts further report, he not only preached in German and Latin but, with the help of two Bohemian interpreters, addressed the audience in the Czech vernacular<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, he did not reach the people. Soon his audience must have realized that Müntzer’s program for church reform was actually a program for rebellion and had little to do with Luther’s theology. Apparently none of the various Utraquist factions found many commonalities between the ideas of the German and their own, not even the more radical Neo-Utraquists who were his primary hosts. Despite occasional anticlerical outbreaks in that period no one wanted to start a new war – which they probably foresaw as an inevitable consequence of Müntzer’s program. The climate cooled down significantly. Müntzer

1 See especially Müntzer’s letter to Luther from 13 July 1520, ThMA 2.21, p. 44-55.

2 I agree with Hans-Jürgen Goertz that Müntzer at no point had internalized the essentials of Luther’s theology, such as the doctrine of justification. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, p. 65.

3 Cf. Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, p. 69f.; Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer*, p. 98ff. Max Steinmetz’ well-meaning re-interpretation of Müntzer’s behavior is unconvincing. Cf. Steinmetz, *Müntzers Weg nach Allstedt*, p. 158f.

4 ThMA 3.60-63, p. 105-108; ThMA 2.39, p. 112.

was forced to abandon his quarters in the college of the university and was no longer allowed to enter the pulpits. However, Müntzer would not give in easily. If the Utraquist establishment would not provide him with a public forum, he had to address the people directly.

Müntzer wrote the Prague Manifesto in no less than three versions ; a short German version (A), dated 1 November 1521, a long German version (B), dated 25 November 1521, and an undated Latin version (C). Additionally he commissioned a Czech translation (D) of the longer German version, though this was left unfinished<sup>1</sup>. Obviously Müntzer intended to address various layers of society with different degrees of education. Some versions may have been meant to be posted around the city, some to be read in informal circles or to be proclaimed in public. Yet the *Prague Manifesto* is also an open letter to the whole Christian world, as the opening sentences of the various versions state<sup>2</sup>. However, the publication of the text was prevented by Müntzer's forced departure from the city.

The A, B, and C versions differ in length and terminology, but not in their essential message and their radicalism<sup>3</sup>. Version B is especially full of fanciful and often barely translatable swear words. Linguistic brutality was fashionable in this period and Martin Luther was a master

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- 1 There is much debate about the many philological problems related to the Prague Manifesto, especially the question of the interdependence and sequence of the versions. However, to this day there is no agreement among scholars, except that A antedates B and that D is dependent on B. The forthcoming critical edition of the manifesto in vol. 1 of the *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe* will hopefully help to clarify these issues. For the purpose of this article, these questions are only of minor significance. My analysis provides a synoptic view on the contents of A, B and C, without always identifying the versions. After all, these three versions were drafted by the same author in a fairly short period of time. D primarily is relevant for philological reasons, especially where the other versions are unclear or contain errors but does not add new thoughts. Cf. Eberhard Wolfgramm, "Der Prager Anschlag des Thomas Müntzer in der Handschrift der Leipziger Universitätsbibliothek," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig*, vol. 6 (1956/57), p. 295-308, at p. 296f.
  - 2 "I, Thomas Müntzer, confess before the entire church and the whole world, wherever this letter may be shown [...]." MSB, p. 491 ; cf. MSB, p. 495 and 505.
  - 3 I do not agree with A. Lohmann's oft-repeated assessment that C is more sober and moderate in style and written with a "humanist pathos". Annemarie Lohmann, *Zur Geistigen Entwicklung Thomas Müntzers* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1931), p. 20. To be sure, since it is written in Latin, it is undoubtedly directed at an educated audience ; but, except for a somewhat curious reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*, I cannot find any humanism in it – certainly less than in some of Müntzer's later writings. On the contrary, when it comes to insulting the clergy, C is equal to B and more brutal than A.

of it ; but Müntzer aimed to outdo everyone else. In order to insult his scholastic, clerical opponents, he invented new adjectives like *bodenseckkyssch* (scrotum-like) and *burnhengestiger* (stallion-like-hot for whores)<sup>1</sup>. In the Latin C version, he compensates for the linguistic losses by an abundant use of (mostly derogatory) superlatives and diminutives. However, the intent of the manifesto is not polemics alone ; rather the harsh and almost violent language is to be seen as the rhetorical means of somebody without office or renown, who desperately wanted to make himself heard. Müntzer strongly felt that time was running out.

Immediately before he left for Prague, Müntzer replied to a letter by Nikolaus Hausmann, an early follower of Martin Luther and pastor in Zwickau<sup>2</sup>. Hausmann had criticized Müntzer for his intransigent and offensive behavior against an opponent in Zwickau, the moderate reformer Johannes Sylvius Egranus. Müntzer's response is a perfect articulation of his state of mind. Since Müntzer could expect that Hausmann would pass on the letter to Luther, it is directed at the whole circle of Wittenberg reformers, and most especially at Johann Agricola, who had warned Müntzer to be considerate and not to attack Egranus<sup>3</sup>.

If Hausmann accuses him of a lack of moderation (*modestia*), Müntzer writes, he must mean *carnal* moderation, while his own activity would be guided by spiritual moderation. This, he explains, is the same temperance which allowed the “most moderate servant, the prophet Elijah,” to slay a thousand soothsayers of Baal, sparing only 150. “Then he was most moderate, as he appeared to the carnal people as being in a rage (*furibundus*).” Hausmann failed to attack Egranus because of his obedience to the priests, the city council, and the magnates, while he should have cared for the crowd (*turba*). However, if he would continue to keep silent in the face of Egranus' lies and make no efforts to convert the people (*populus*), Müntzer would be merciless in his judgment and would not take his side (*partes tuas non firmabo*) – meaning on Judgment Day. “Already now is the time of the Antichrist (*jam est tempus Antichristi*), as is manifest from Matthew 24[:14f.]: ‘When the Lord announces that he

1 MSB, p. 510.

2 Apparently the city council employed Hausmann in March 1521 as a mediator in the Zwickau conflicts. Susan Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition 1500-1547. The Reformation as an Agent of Change* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 100f.

3 ThMA 2.23, p. 57.

wants to have the Gospel of the Kingdom (*evangelium regni*) preached in the whole world, then abominations of desolation will become visible'.<sup>1</sup>

Müntzer's assessment of the situation may be summarized as follows: We are in the time of the final conflict between Christ and Antichrist, who have initiated two universal processes that work against each other; the preaching of Christ's Kingdom and the Antichrist's campaign of conquest. In such times no compromises are possible. The people must know what side they are on and fight their enemies as fiercely as possible. Müntzer seems to allude to the old apocalyptic legend that, in the last days, the Antichrist will take possession of the church and most believers will fall for his lies<sup>2</sup>. This is not the distant future, Müntzer says, this is what happens now. And, therefore, his rage is most appropriate. However, this self-characterization does not mean that the *Prague Manifesto* is merely the linguistic expression of Müntzer pious rage; on the contrary, despite its radical sound it is a carefully composed text, based on biblical studies, mystical meditations, historical research, and apocalyptic readings of recent events.

#### THE TEXT OF THE PRAGUE MANIFESTO

The first word of the *Prague Manifesto* is a keyword: "I" (*ich*); even in Latin, where the personal pronoun needs not to be pronounced, Müntzer emphatically puts his *ego* at the beginning of the text. He presents himself as the new Jan Hus who fills wrought trumpets (*ductiles tubae*) with a new song. The biblical reference to Numbers 10 makes clear that Müntzer also likens himself to Moses, who calls on the people of God to join his campaign<sup>3</sup>. Then Müntzer goes on to explain why he,

1 ThMA 2.39, p. 91-94.

2 The legend is based on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.

3 The edition of Günther Franz wrongly identifies Psalm 97:6 as the underlying biblical passage. The reference in *C ductiles tubae* is clearly to Numbers 10:1ff, where God commands Moses to make two silver trumpets "of hammered work" (Vg: *duae tubas argenteas ductiles*) "for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp." The text continues: "And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting."

as someone without office or renown, should be accepted as the new Christian leader. He confesses “before the whole church of the elect and the whole world” that since his youth he has probably made more effort (*fleysz*) than anyone else towards gaining a superior understanding of the Christian faith. Through these efforts, unguided by the direction of monks and priests, he came to understand the ground (*grundt*) of faith as the spirit of the fear of God (*geyst der forcht Gots*). This spirit will only come over those elect who, through temptations and afflictions, have accomplished an emptying (*lebrmachung*) of their mind; and will then be followed by an affusion (*ubergoss*) of the whole sevenfold spirit, bringing true understanding of the living God<sup>1</sup>.

The opening phrases of the manifesto are full of allusions and references betraying Müntzer’s acquaintance with at least two theological discourses, namely the “German mysticism” of the Dominicans and apocalyptic spiritualism. It is exactly the blending of these discourses, under the experience of a crumbling Roman Catholic order and emerging evangelical reform, which makes Müntzer’s thought original<sup>2</sup>. The sevenfold spirit is a reference to Isaiah 11:2, one of the classical messianic prophecies, announcing the birth of a charismatic king of Davidic descent. However, since the beginning of Christianity the prophecy was seen as fulfilled in Christ; thus the multifold spirit could also refer to the church as the mystical body of Christ<sup>3</sup>. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Joachim of Fiore renewed the prophetic character of Isaiah’s words and described the coming spiritual church of the third age as a messianic collective, endowed with the seven spirits<sup>4</sup>.

Müntzer basically agreed with this<sup>5</sup>. Via Joachite sources and the more vulgar apocalyptic spiritualism of some his followers in Zwickau,

1 MSB, p. 491, 495f., 505.

2 This needs to be emphasized against the many scholars who quarrel over the question whether Müntzer was more an apocalyptic or mystical thinker.

3 The number seven actually results from an imprecise Translation of Isaiah 11:2 in the Vulgate. The Hebrew text has only six spirits. However, in this way it could be brought in line with the seven spirits in the Book of Revelation who are described as the surround God’s heavenly throne and then are “sent out into all the earth”. Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

4 Cf. Matthias Riedl, “A Collective Messiah: Joachim of Fiore’s Constitution of Future Society” in *Mirabilia* 14 (2012), p. 57-80.

5 Cf. his words about the *ecclesia futura* in a letter to Philipp Melanchthon from 29 March 1522; ThMA 2.47, p. 131.

he learned that the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit “on all flesh”, as prophesied in Joel 2:28, was not yet fulfilled in the Pentecostal event after Christ’s ascent<sup>1</sup>. Rather there would be a truly universal Pentecost in the days to come. Then God would speak directly to his elect<sup>2</sup>. As the manifesto implies, the outpouring of the Spirit has already begun in Müntzer himself, who had, more than others, worked towards gaining true faith; and is therefore entitled to remind the Christian world about the things to come and necessary preparations to be made. This strong inner experience of the Spirit as already at work marks an essential transformation in apocalyptic thought since Joachim of Fiore. The transfiguration of the society and the world is no longer seen as a transition from this world to the next, but rather as already happening within the elect, whose faith is being transfigured (*vorclereth*) by the Spirit<sup>3</sup>. Thus the elect gain a completely new understanding of the Divine, far superior to the teaching of the priests and monks<sup>4</sup>. This, however, also means a transfiguration of human nature, from the sinful desire-driven animals into humans, who are truly in the likeness of God, as they were originally created. Consequently, Müntzer can speak in the name of Divine judgment and threaten others with eternal punishment, as he did in the letter to Hausmann.

This is already a magnificent claim, but the really sensational implications of this transformation only become visible when the many hints to Müntzer’s mystical background are followed. As was said above, Isaiah’s symbol of the sevenfold spirit was adapted by early Christianity; but the idea that one of them, the spirit of the fear of God, is a beginning that prepares the believer for a full union with God, goes back to the Dominican friar Johannes Tauler<sup>5</sup>. This

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1 Müntzer later claimed to have read Joachim of Fiore and to agree with him; see ThMA 2.66, p. 216-217. However, the commentary on Jeremiah to which he refers is not an original writing of the Calabrian abbot. In any case, the reference attests to Müntzer’s acquaintance with Joachite literature. For the apocalyptic spiritualists around Nicholas Storch see Elliger, *Thomas Müntzer*, p. 122ff. and Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition*, p. 106-109.

2 Cf. Rudolf Mau, “Gott und Schöpfung bei Thomas Müntzer”, in *Der Theologe Thomas Müntzer. Untersuchungen zu seiner Entwicklung und Lehre*, eds. Siegfried Bräuer and Helmar Junghans (Berlin, 1989), p. 11-38, at p. 17.

3 MSB, p. 491.

4 MSB, p. 495.

5 “The first gift [of the Spirit], the fear of God, is a secure and reliable beginning, and a way to reach the supreme end (*ein sicher und ein gewerlicher anevang und ein weg zû dem*)

is not to say that Müntzer's mysticism is exclusively owed to Tauler, but rather that Müntzer took part in a mystical discourse in which Tauler played a prominent role<sup>1</sup>. In any case, in Tauler there is a lot more which sheds light on Müntzer's words. The Dominican, for instance, describes inner emptiness (*italkeit*) as a requirement for the influx of the Spirit<sup>2</sup>. He also warns that knowing oneself is the precondition of any mystical knowledge and that it requires effort (*fliis*), the daily and nightly practice of introspection and self-observation. Nevertheless, once the goal is achieved and the believer is filled with the Spirit, he has newly received "the noble and dear treasure which, in such a disgraceful manner, was lost through sin in paradise" (*daz der edel túre schatz ist widergegeben der so schedeliche waz verlorn in dem paradise mit den sünden*)<sup>3</sup>. This treasure was the participation in divine eternity and its loss resulted in the mortality of the human creature, Tauler adds. Does this mean that mystical union restores participation in eternity, while we are still dwelling on earth? Yes, it does! And this is the key to understanding Müntzer's attitude. As Tauler writes, with clear reference to Platonic traditions, man is composed of three humans. The first, the outer man, comprises the dimension of the bodily senses and drives; the second, the inner man, refers to man's rational capacity. When the second man has learned to control the first man and, additionally, has learned to accept his own nothingness the following will happen:

Then the third man will be established and remain unimpeded. And he may return into his origin and into his uncreatedness, where he has dwelled eternally. And there he stands devoid of images and forms; there, God endows him with the wealth of his glory. He will be gifted in such a magnificent

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*allerbœhsten ende zû kummende*) [...].” *Die Predigten Taulers*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910), p. 106. Cf. Gnädiger, Louise, *Johannes Tauler: Lebenswelt und mystische Lehre* (München: Beck, 1993), no. 26, p. 302; Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Innere und äußere Ordnung in der Theologie Thomas Müntzers* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 44f.

1 Müntzer's reading of Tauler is testified by one of his acquaintances. See the letter of Sister Ursula to Müntzer in ThMA 2.10, p. 13. Martin Glaser, a follower of Martin Luther, noted in his copy of Tauler's sermons: "Through misunderstood the teaching of Tauler about the Spirit and the abyss of the soul Müntzer and his following were seduced [...]." ThMA 3.7, p. 54f. Glaser gives more details where and with whom Müntzer read Tauler, but the information is questionable.

2 *Die Predigten Taulers*, no. 60e, p. 306.

3 *Ibid.*, n° 60e, p. 304.



way that this wealth will also endow and strengthen all the lowest, middle, and highest forces in a sensible and suitable way<sup>1</sup>.

There would be much to say about the origins of these thoughts. They go back to Neo-Platonist champions of Late Antiquity, such as Plotinus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius, and were transmitted to the West through the writings of the medieval masters from Erigena to Meister Eckhart<sup>2</sup>. The passage is also reminiscent of the Gnostic idea that every person that is enmeshed in earthly temporality has an *alter Ego*, remaining in transcendent eternity. However, for understanding Müntzer it only matters that he believed he had reawakened his true self, a divine spark (*funckeleyen*) that could not be extinguished by the destructive teachings of priests and monks<sup>3</sup>. This true self is a divine self; it is aware that God has engraved into the hearts of the elect His immutable will and eternal wisdom (*unvorrucklichn willn unde ewyge weysbeyt*), which were covered up by sinful directedness toward temporal and creaturely things. Once this awareness is achieved, humans are able to hear the true eternal word of the living God.

This word of the living God is nothing but Christ, the Logos that is incarnate in the human heart<sup>4</sup>; in this respect Müntzer follows the tradition of Dominican mysticism. This living revelation is far superior to the dead and creaturely letters of the Bible that priests throw to believers, as one throws bread to dogs<sup>5</sup>. This is where the clerical church has failed and where the reformation must succeed. The elect must be awakened and become aware of the true word of God; they

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- 1 "Denne wirt der dritte mensche al zemole uf gericht und blibet ungehindert und mag sich keren in sinen ursprung und in sin ungeschaffenheit, do er eweklich gewesen ist, und stet do sunder bilde und forme in rechter lidikeit; do git im Got nach dem richtum sinre ere. Also groeslichen wirt er do begabet das von der richeit alle die nidersten und die mittelste und die obersten krefte werdent begabet und gesterket in bevintlicher wise und gebruchlichen." *Die Predigten Taulers*, no. 67, p. 366. Cf. Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. Vol 3: *Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (München: Beck, 1996), p. 496f. Müntzer refers to the opening of the second (rational) man for the influx of the Spirit as the "opening of reason"; MSB, p. 492, 500.
  - 2 Cf. Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 3, p. 485f., 496f.
  - 3 MSB, p. 502.
  - 4 "There is no securer testimony to verify the Bible than the living speech of God, when the Father addresses the Son in the human heart." MSB, p. 498.
  - 5 MSB, p. 492f., 500, 508; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3, Jeremiah 31:33, Matthew 15:27.

must learn that they are destined to eternity<sup>1</sup>. They must gain “certainty about their infallible predestination” (*infallibilis praedestinationis certitudo*)<sup>2</sup>. True faith, however, is nothing that can be taught, it can only be experienced<sup>3</sup>. True pastors must have their own revelations<sup>4</sup>; but all they can do for their sheep is to guide them to the point where they can have their own experiences<sup>5</sup>.

One of the particularities of Müntzer’s theology is his holistic anthropology, which is diametrically opposed to Luther’s dualist anthropology with its sharp distinction between the inner and the outer man. As the above quote illustrates, Tauler claims that the mystical restitution of man also has an impact on his lower faculties. Müntzer is more explicit when he states that the inner experience of the divine word penetrates “heart, brain, skin, hair, bones, marrow, fluids, power, and force.”<sup>6</sup> He asks the Bohemians to accept the word, which he “lives and breathes”. A few years later, he would find the perfect formula of self-description: “I breathe nothing but the eternal will of God” (*Nihil aliud spiro nisi eternam Dei voluntatem*)<sup>7</sup>. Müntzer believed that the mystical divinization of his person had permeated all dimensions of his existence; his thought, his actions, even his sexual activity<sup>8</sup>.

At this point the question arises of whether all humans are destined to return into God. The answer is clearly no. What emerges from the pages of the *Prague Manifesto* is a peculiar version of the doctrine of predestination<sup>9</sup>. Müntzer thinks, like Augustine before, that there are

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1 “For this is something that all the parsons can’t achieve, even if they’d be assembled in a heap: sufficiently let a single person know that he is destined to eternal life.” (*Denn des vermögens seyn dye pffaffen alle miteinander nicht in einem hauffen versammelt, das sie ein einigen menschen mochten gnügsame wislich machen, das er vorsehen sie zcum ewigen leben*). MSB, p. 500.

2 MSB, p. 508.

3 Müntzer speaks of “experience of faith” (*erfarunge des glaubens / experientia fidei*). This term, which is so essential for the self-interpretation of modern Christians, may be an original creation of Müntzer. MSB, p. 502, 507, 509.

4 MSB, p. 493.

5 MSB, p. 501.

6 MSB, p. 501 ; cf. MSB, p. 508.

7 ThMA 2.62, p. 192.

8 Cf. Dieter Fauth, “Das Menschenbild bei Thomas Müntzer,” in *Der Theologe Thomas Müntzer. Untersuchungen zu seiner Entwicklung und Lehre*, eds. Siegfried Bräuer and Helmar Junghans (Berlin, 1989), p. 39-61, at p. 44-46; Reinhard Schwarz, *Die apokalyptische Theologie Thomas Müntzers und der Taboriten* (Tübingen, 1977), p. 41-43.

9 Cf., Mau, “Gott und Schöpfung bei Thomas Müntzer”, p. 18ff.

two communities in the world, the body of Christ, comprising the elect, and the body of Satan, the community of the reprobate<sup>1</sup>. The split of the communities has its origin in the fall of Satan. Yet as Genesis tells us, Satan was not satisfied with seducing the angels but made proselytes among the humans. In Christian society, the representatives of Satan are none other than the scholastic doctors and the priests<sup>2</sup>. They are masked (*larvati*) and are only external Christians (*externi Christiani*); thieves and robbers who steal the word of God from the Bible and are therefore cursed by Him. In this way they deceive the believers and usurp the words that were never meant for them<sup>3</sup>. The essence of their deception lies in their teaching that the word of God is found only in the letter of the scripture, while in truth God has always spoken directly to humans, as he does now<sup>4</sup>. This is what the *Prague Manifesto* reveals about the priest in the logic of Müntzer's holistic anthropology. They are entirely satanic, just as the awakened elect are entirely spiritual. The formulation in C is as follows:

Those are the ones that who breathe, live, and disgorge this abomination [that God no longer speaks to his elect; M.R.]. Who among the mortals would say that they are the chaste dispensators of the multifold grace of God and that they are undaunted promulgators of the living (and not dead) word? Yet they have been ordained through the workings of the papist counterfeiter (*papistico corruptore agente ordinati*) and anointed with the oil of the sinners, which flows from the head down to the soles. Their insanity (*vesania*) originates from the devil, the apostate (*praevaricator*), proceeds into the inner of their heats, which are void – as Psalm 5 confirms – and don't have the Spirit as their possessor. That is why they are consecrated for the affliction of the people (*in plagam populi*) by the devil, their father, who, just like them, does not hear the word of the living God. They are idols, similar to demons, and, to sum up: they are damned humans (*homines damnati*), no indeed, they are the most damned (*damnatissimi*). They have no hereditary

1 "Wan wer den geyst Christi nyt in ym sporeth, ja der yn nit guyszlich haet, der ist nit eyn glidit Christi, er ist des teufels ad Ro. 8." MSB, p. 492.

2 The satanic character and origin of the clergy is a recurrent theme. The priests are the servants of the Antichrist (MSB, p. 493). They are "founded on hell" (MSB, p. 496). They are "from the devil" (MSB, p. 498). They have "the most evil princes of the devils as their lords" (MSB, p. 501). They are "hellfire-like Asmodeian parsons" and "parsons of the devil" (MSB, p. 503).

3 MSB, p. 505f.

4 This is a prominent theme throughout the text and in practically all of Müntzer's writings. Cf. MSB, p. 492f., 498, 506, *passim*.

right (*ius hereditarium*), neither with God nor with the humans, just as the Apostle tells the Galatians in his exposition of the Genesis<sup>1</sup>.

The B version also presents this frightening image of a satanic ordination and clarifies that the priests do not emerge from the church; rather they are evildoers that have been in the world from the beginning (*bosewichte, dye von anbeginne in der gantzen welt gewest seyn*) and that have been condemned long ago (*lange vorrichtet*)<sup>2</sup>. Their predestination to eternal damnation is just as infallible as the predestination of the elect to eternal bliss.

When the reference to Galatians 4 is also taken into account, the picture is fairly clear: Ever since the creation, there were always two categories of humans in the world, the elect and the reprobate, those possessed by the Spirit and those possessed by the devil. However, God planted his order (*ordnung*) into all creatures, which kept the reprobate separate from the elect.

So far so good; but why, Müntzer asks himself, does he observe in the Christian church nothing but chaos and confusion (*confusus cabos*)<sup>3</sup>? He was so sorry for the state of the church, he writes, that he decided to study history<sup>4</sup>. In the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, in a passage drawing from the second century Christian historian Hegesippus, he read a sentence that was to him like a revelation:

I took this unbearable and malicious damage of Christianity to heart and read with greatest effort (*myt gantzem fleysz*) the history of the old fathers. And I found that, after the death of the disciples of the apostles, the immaculate virgin church was made a whore through spiritual adultery (*dye unbeflecte junffrawliche kirche ist dorch den geystlichen ebruch czur hurn worden*)<sup>5</sup>.

1 MSB, p. 506. The reference is to Galatians 4:21-31; cf. Genesis 16:15ff.

2 MSB, p. 498.

3 MSB, p. 510.

4 Some of Müntzer's correspondence with his book dealer Achatius Glor has survived. On 3 January 1520 he confirms that he received the historical works of Eusebius and Hegesippus. MSB 2.17, p. 32-34 (see also the bibliographical information in footnotes 8 and 10). In the same letter he orders the acts of the Constance and Basic councils, which shows his interest in Huss and the Hussites.

5 MSB, p. 495. Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, (quoting Hegesippus): "And after James the Just had suffered martyrdom, as the Lord had also on the same account, Symeon, the son of the Lord's uncle, Clopas, was appointed the next bishop. All proposed him as second bishop because he was a cousin of the Lord. Therefore, they called the Church a virgin, for it was not yet corrupted by vain discourses." *Church History* IV.21:4, translation taken

What happened, according to Müntzer's reading of Eusebius, was that the people of the church neglected the elections of the priests and, thus, allowed the satanic clergy to take control. Unsurprisingly, therefore, none of the councils was able to see the order of things (*ordo rerum*), and even less the clerical hierarchy governed by the "Babylonian whorehouse" of the Roma Curia. Thus the rule of the damned over the elect continues to this day<sup>1</sup>. As a result the differences between the reprobate and the elect have become almost indistinguishable<sup>2</sup>. But now the disorder will come to an end:

Such errors had to happen, since the works of all humans, the elect and damned, had to come into being (*must ins wesen komen*). For in our time, in which God will separate (*absundern*) the wheat from the tares, so one may see as in the bright light of midday, who has seduced the church for so long<sup>3</sup>.

Müntzer is almost obsessed with this process of *absundern*, of separating the damned from the elect. This, in fact, is the origin of his rage: Judgment Day is now. Christ is rallying his elect by speaking into their hearts, while the Antichrist and his clerical following are obstructing the awakening of the elect by preaching the dead letter of the Bible. Müntzer, therefore, must alert the people to the inner word so they may also participate in God's judgment. Otherwise they will not learn about their election and, as "inert elect," fall prey to the antichristian clergy<sup>4</sup>. "I oblige you and adjure you by the blood of Christ that you make a decision between me and your Roman priests; the judgment is yours."<sup>5</sup> The whole purpose of the reformation, of renewing the apostolic church, is to separate the elect from the reprobate, so that friend and enemy become visible. Moreover, this separation means not to reestablish the pure community of early Christianity, but also to reestablish the order of creation.

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from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series 2, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Grand Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 1890), p. 199.

1 MSB, p. 502ff, 509f.

2 MSB, p. 501.

3 MSB, p. 504; *cf.* p. 510.

4 For the expression "inert elect" see Müntzer's letter to the citizens of Stolberg from 18 July 1523: "*Dan das lon vnd die außbeutbe der faulen außserwelten ist schier gleich dem teil der vordampften, Luce 12*". ThMA 2.59, p. 177b.

5 MSB, p. 510.

In the *Prague Manifesto* this process is still primarily presented as God's activity. Three years later, in the *Sermon to the Princes*, Müntzer would call on the rulers of Electoral Saxony to "remove and separate (*weckhun und absundern*) the wicked ones who obstruct the gospel". To make himself perfectly clear, he explained that this means to kill the priests and monks<sup>1</sup>. After the appeal to the princes had failed, he eventually took the sword into his own hands. At the time of the *Prague Manifesto*, however, Müntzer still believes that the renewed apostolic church (*renovate ecclesia apostolica*), which would proceed from the Bohemian lands to the whole world, could be created by preaching; while God himself would take care of the annihilation of the wicked – possibly by sending in the Turks<sup>2</sup>.

However, once the ravage of the Turks and the Antichrist has come to an end, Christ "will give the dominion of this world (*das reich dysser welt*) into the hands of his elect for all eternity". This will happen "shortly" (*yhm kortzen*)<sup>3</sup>. The Latin version says in the same context that the Lord will rebuild, console, and unite the broken, abandoned, and dispersed church, up to the point where "the God of the Gods will appear on Zion forever (*donec videat deum deorum in Syon in saecula saeculorum*)". The message is clear: the transformation of this world will result in an eternal Kingdom of the saints. This promise is not at all new; it was rather commonplace in apocalyptic literature and already pronounced in the Book of Revelation<sup>4</sup>. Yet the rule of the saints had always been presented as an intermediary stage, before the return of Satan, his final defeat and the subsequent establishment of God's final order in the world to come. In Müntzer, the this-worldly rule of the elect is the end of the story and qualified as eternal order. In the elect Christ, the Logos has established his government over the world, from which the reprobate will then be removed. It would be hard to prove that Müntzer actually refuted the idea of a Beyond; yet it is clear that he had no interest in it.

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1 MSB, p. 258, 262. Cf. Matthias Riedl, "Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action: Thomas Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes*," in *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Apocalyptic*, ed. Michael A. Ryan (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

2 MSB, p. 504, 510.

3 MSB, p. 505.

4 Revelation 20:1-6.

## CONCLUSION

The meaning of the *Prague Manifesto*

The merit of Eric Voegelin's *The Political Religions* is that it does not define secularization naively as a withering-away of religion, but rather describes it as the loading of innerworldly contents with religious meaning – especially with respect to the process of history<sup>1</sup>. This is exactly what happens in the *Prague Manifesto*. Augustine had once insisted that secular history would be meaningless to humans and that, in this world, the communities of the damned and the elect would always remain mixed and indistinguishable. Only on Judgment Day, the reprobate would be separated from the elect and the meaning of historical events would become manifest<sup>2</sup>. Müntzer by contrast thought that Judgment Day was now; therefore the separation had to occur before his own eyes. Present-day events were to be seen as results of Divine agency and Satanic counter-agency, as the final clash between good and evil, in which human collectives – the clergy, the monks, the Bohemians, the lay people, and so forth – had to take their roles. To Müntzer, human history was loaded with meaning.

Moreover, Müntzer's mystical experience confirmed for him his own infallible place among the chosen. The Divine had entered the world in his person, in his ego; and from there it would spread to all the elect around the world. His experience endowed him with a sense of participation in eternity; once this would be shared by the other elect, the eternal Kingdom of God would manifest itself here, in this world. Müntzer's original combination of mystical theology and apocalyptic narrative created the image of reformed pure church which collectively achieves the *unio mystica* in this life. And he makes a markedly secular promise to the Bohemians; if they should become the avant-garde in this process: fame (*gloria*)<sup>3</sup>.

The secularization of the *Reichsapokalypse* in Müntzer is not complete. God is still the transcendent creator of the world and organizer of

1 E. Voegelin, "The Political Religions," p. 33 and 71; cf. "The New Science of Politics," p. 185.

2 Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.2.

3 MSB, p. 510.

history, even though His presence as the Logos has a divinizing impact on the elect. The innerworldly community has been sacralized, but is presented as a result of God's preexistent predestination. To arrive at a fully secular religion, further steps had to be taken.

Nevertheless, the continuities between Joachim of Fiore, Thomas Müntzer, and modern secular religiosity are not the discovery of intellectual historians, but of the communists<sup>1</sup>. Friedrich Engels' reading of Müntzer betrays the Hegelian background, but he summarizes his "precursor's" teaching not inadequately when he writes :

Faith [to Müntzer; M.R.] was nothing but the coming alive of reason in man; that is why also the heathen could have faith. Through this faith, through this coming alive of reason, man would become divinized and blessed. Heaven, therefore, was nothing otherworldly, but was to be sought after in this life. And it was the calling of the believers to establish this heaven, this Kingdom (*Reich*) of God here on earth<sup>2</sup>.

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1 The most influential communist studies of Müntzer are Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2000); Karl Kautsky, *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1909) 2:7-103; Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (Berlin, 1960); M. M. Smirin, *Die Volksreformation des Thomas Müntzer und der Grosse Bauernkrieg* (Berlin, 1952).

2 Friedrich Engels, "Der deutsche Bauernkrieg," in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 43 vols. (Berlin, 1956-1990), vol. 7, p. 327-413, at p. 353.