# Review Essay:
# Recent German Research on Thomas Müntzer

PETER MATHESON*

*Thomas Müntzer: Briefwechsel.* ed. Siegfried Bräuer und Manfred Kobuch. *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Vol. 2. ed. Helmar Junghans und Armin Kohnle. Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. 2010. [ThMA 2]

*Quellen zu Thomas Müntzer.* eds. Wieland Held und Siegfried Hoyer. *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Vol. 3. eds. Helmar Junghans und Armin Kohnle. Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. 2004. [ThMA 3]

*Thomas Müntzer-Zeitgenossen-Nachwelt. Siegfried Bräuer zum 80. Geburtstag*. eds. Hartmut Kühne, Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Thomas T. Müller und Günter Vogler. Mühlhausen: Thomas-Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 14. 2010 [ThMV 14].

Fleischauer, Alexander. *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus. Thomas Müntzer und die Frühbürgerliche Revolution—Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur in der DDR.* Münster: Aschendorff, 2010.

Goertz, Hans-Jürgen. *Ende der Welt und Beginn der Neuzeit. Modernes Zeitverständnis im "apokalyptischen Saeculum": Thomas Müntzer und Martin Luther.* Mühlhausen: Thomas-Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 3. 2002 [ThMV 3].

Heise, Joachim und Christa Stache, eds. *Dialog über Luther und Müntzer. Zwanzig Expertengespräche zwischen kirchlichen und marxistischen Reformationshistorikern der DDR (1981-1990).* Berlin: Evangelisches Zentralarchiv. 2011.

Jonscher, Reinhard. *Der Bauernkrieg in Thüringen.* Ausstellungsbegleiter. Mühlhausen: Mühlhäuser Museen. 2003.

Müller, Thomas T. *Thomas Müntzer in der Mühlhausen Chronistik*. Mühlhausen: Thomas-Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 6. 2004 [ThMV 6].



*Peter Matheson is a fellow of the theology and religious department, Otago University, Dunedin North, New Zealand.

Müller, Thomas T. *Bauernkrieg nach dem Bauernkrieg. Die Verwüstung der Mühlhäuser Dörfer Dörna, Hollenbach and Lengefeld durch Eichsfelder Adel und Klerus*. Duderstadt: Mecke Verlag. 2001.

Müller, Thomas T. "Macht Aufruhr durstig?" *Mühlhäuser Beiträge* 27 (2004), 84-89.

Müller, Thomas T. "Müntzers Werkzeug oder charismatischer Anführer? Heinrich Pfeiffers Rolle im Thüringer Aufstand von 1525," in *Bauernkrieg zwischen Harz und Thüringer Wald*. Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft, Beiheft 69. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 2008, pp. 255-259.

Opfer-Klinger, Björn. *Zwischen Staatsideologie und Vergessen—Thomas Müntzer im deutschen Schulbuch*. Mühlhausen: Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 11. 2008 [ThMV 11].

Stayer, James and Hartmut Kühne. *Endzeiterwartung bei Thomas Müntzer und im frühen Luthertum.* Mühlhausen: Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 15. 2011 [ThMV 15].

Vogler, Günter. *Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit.* Mühlhausen: Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 4. 2003 [ThMV 4].

Vogler, Günter, ed., *Müntzer in der Erinnerungskultur. Das Beispiel bildende Kunst*. Mühlhausen: Thomas-Müntzer–Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 10. 2008 [ThMV 10].

Vogler, Günter, ed., *Bauernkrieg zwischen Harz und Thüringer Wald*. Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft, Beiheft 69. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 2008.

Vogler, Günter. *Thomas Müntzer in einer Bildergeschichte. Eine kulturhistorische Dokumentation*. Mühlhausen: Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 13. 2010 [ThMV 13].

Wolgast, Eike. *Der gemeine Mann bei Thomas Müntzer—und danach*. Mühlhausen: Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft, Veröffentlichungen 7. 2006 [ThMV 7].

Thomas Müntzer is one of the few personalities in the early modern period to attract attention far beyond academic historians and theologians. His example was brandished as a dread warning against radicalism well into the seventeenth century and beyond, and by no means only in German or Lutheran circles. Equally striking has been his popularity among social and political historians, not least Marxist theorists, historians, and philosophers such as Ernst Bloch. His *Sermon to the Princes* recently appeared in Verso's paperback series on revolutions.[1]

1. *Thomas Müntzer's Sermon to the Princes*, ed. Wu Ming (London: Verso Books, 2010).

His involvement in the Peasants' War has fascinated dramatists and film directors as well as advocates of liberation theology and public theology such as Dorothee Sölle. And throughout the Cold War he figured as a shuttlecock in the propaganda war between East and West, as the champion of a People's Reformation as opposed to Luther's magisterial Reformation.

Müntzer has been fortunate in the historians attracted to him: Karl Holl, at the very beginning of the twentieth century;[2] in the post-war years, the inspiring Methodist scholar Gordon Rupp, the first to nudge the English-speaking world to take him seriously as a theologian[3]; Günther Franz; and the Nestor of German Marxist scholarship, Max Steinmetz. The names of Siegfried Bräuer, Günter Vogler, Gottfried Seebass, Tom Scott, and Hans-Jürgen Goertz, that marvelous midwife of German scholarship to the English-speaking world, are also among those who spring to mind. And the revisionist work of James Stayer on the Radical Reformation has helped to place Müntzer within a larger context.

The 1989 anniversary—it is thought that he was born in 1489—proved a turning point in two respects. For more than a decade, Marxist and church historians in the then German Democratic Republic, had been quietly listening and learning from one another. At the Halle conference in the autumn of 1989, just before the Wall came tumbling down, the fruits of this encounter—and also of contacts with West German and other historians such as Goertz and Eike Wolgast—became evident. Yet 1989 was important for another reason: the flood of biographies and other publications in that year, including a momentous volume on Müntzer's theology.[4]

Interest ebbed away, however, as the Communist régimes toppled. This had multiple grounds: the abrupt end to the dialogue between Marxist and church historians; vast political and cultural readjustments and considerable financial and administrative chaos in the former G.D.R.; and not least, a certain disenchantment about the significance of Müntzer for the early modern period. Conservative Lutherans breathed a sigh of relief that they could forget about this troublesome figure, while old generalizations about the blood-thirsty Müntzer began to creep back into English-speaking historiography as well. With few exceptions, such

2. Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," in Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932), 1:420-467.

3. Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (London: Epworth Press, 1969).

4. Siegfried Bräuer and Helmar Junghans, eds., *Der Theologe Thomas Müntzer. Untersuchungen zu seiner Entwicklung und Lehre* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989).

as Emmet McLaughlin's work on his apocalyptic,[5] the curtain appeared to have come down on Müntzer.

These appearances proved deceptive. During the past decade the Thomas Müntzer Gesellschaft in Mühlhausen has been quietly fostering a remarkable amount of research, impressive both for its wealth of informative detail and for the new perspectives offered. Indeed, 2010 may well prove to be even more seminal for Müntzer studies than 1989. That year saw the appearance of an epochal scholarly volume—the critical edition of Müntzer's correspondence, edited by Bräuer and Kobuch, running to 581 pages and including tens of thousands of dense footnotes—together with a Festschrift for Bräuer, largely devoted to Müntzeriana. The correspondence is the second of the three volumes of the new Müntzer edition to appear. Volume 3, Siegfried Hoyer's valuable collection of background sources, came out already in 2004 and it is hoped that volume 1, containing Müntzer's writings, edited by Helmar Junghans,† Gottfried Seebass,† and Eike Wolgast, will appear without much further delay. The complex history of the volume on Müntzer's correspondence can only be hinted at here.[6] Anyone who has been involved in such editions will realize, however, the mountain of work involved, endlessly complicated in this instance by constant shifts in the political scene.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of the new edition of the correspondence. The lifework of Siegfried Bräuer, doyen of Müntzer studies, achieved incredibly in his "free time" after work and with the assistance of the archivist Manfred Kobuch, it is a staggering achievement that transforms the research landscape. In its time the 1968 Günther Franz edition of Müntzer's writings had represented real progress; but its limitations, errors and omissions, have long been felt.[7] To give but one example: instead of three pages on the crucial letters sent by Müntzer to Albrecht and Ernst of Mansfeld at the height of the Peasants' War, the new edition boasts twelve (pp. 461-473). We now have full information about the manuscript copies of the letters, the countless editions of Luther's *Ein Schrecklich geschicht und gericht Gotes*, and the later editions and commentaries on the letters, including translations. As is the case throughout the edition, every source has been checked, and sometimes double-checked, against the original, all textual

5. "Müntzer and Apocalypticism," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 95 (2004), 98-131.

6. For a survey cf. ThMA 2:xxv-l.

7. Günther Franz, ed., *Thomas Müntzer. Schriften und Briefe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1968).

variations have been noted, biblical references scrutinized and amended, the meanings of words elucidated (many, such as *muster* or *kunst*, had a quite different sense than they do in modern German), and proverbial sayings explained.

Thus, scholarship of the last forty years has been meticulously harvested with numerous corrections on every page regarding dating, orthography, authorship, and scribal hand (e.g., p. 434, n.1), much of it stemming from Kobuch and Bräuer's own research. Judgments on disputed questions are cautious unless the sources are unambiguous. Kobuch has also deciphered previously illegible words (e.g. p. 426/11-12) and Bräuer's skills in language, historical context, theological interpretation, and reception are evident throughout. Helmar Junghans gave painstaking attention to layout; cruelly, a heart-attack prevented him from seeing the finished work. In the entire 591 pages there is hardly a single misprint.

The following brief excursions into the material may help to illustrate the advances in scholarship. The edition begins with the scattered references to Müntzer's connections in Brunswick and as provost in Frose, building in part on Bubenheimer's research.[8] The request of the rector of the Martin's School in Brunswick for Müntzer's opinion on indulgences is especially intriguing (pp. 14-18). In the editors' view, the controversy around Luther's 95 Theses is not necessarily mirrored here despite the reference to Christ's suffering as the treasure of church.[9]

Although, as Bräuer has demonstrated, the letters from the Swiss Brethren of September 1524 never reached Thomas Müntzer, their contents remain crucial. The new edition provides comprehensive data about manuscript copies, editions, the English, French and Japanese translations, and the secondary literature, as well as generous biographical notes, cross-references to Müntzer's writings, fuller biblical citations, and explanations of Swiss terms (pp. 347-366). One is struck by the elation of the Zürich radicals at discovering "brotherhood" and "friendship" across the regional divide, by the "compulsion" they felt to write (*getriben vnd betzwungen*), and by their frank itemizing of concerns. With typical caution the editors do not assume that "we have heard through our *brucher*" is a misprint for *bruder* (p. 356, n.83), and they abandon the reading, going back to the eighteenth century, of *wit werend noch deß alten gsatztes* as *wir.* As the original shows, *wit* stands for *weit or weithin* (p. 357, n. 87).

8. Ulrich Bubenheimer, *Thomas Müntzer. Herkunft und Bildung* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

9. As with all the Latin writings, readers will find a literal German translation, prepared by Winfried Trillitzsch and Friedemann Richter.

There are also numerous historical corrections throughout the new edition—for example, regarding the role of the Mühlhausen linen weavers (pp. 366-372)—and sheaves of new information about individuals such as Christopher Meinhard in Eisleben (pp. 383-386). The editors devote fourteen pages to Müntzer's notorious letter of April 26, 1525, calling on the Allstedt covenanters to join the revolt, compared with only two in the Franz edition, offering extensive information about manuscript copies in the princely chancelleries and the print editions. They also present the manuscript text in parallel with Luther's print version, noting that Luther increases the number of insurgents by a hundred fold and has their sword drip blood. Although they ultimately argue that the differences are not that significant, a distinctive term such as *gelassen* is missing in the printed copy and *bewegung* is read as *bewogen* (pp. 403-417).

Müntzer's final letter of May 17, 1525, written to supporters in Mühlhausen shortly before his execution, has thirteen pages devoted to it, with seven pages on textual variations of the various editions. On interpretative issues, such as whether the final section was added by a scribe, the editors refer to the relevant literature.

Until ThMA 1 appears the Franz edition will still be required for cross-references to Müntzer's writings. Indeed, those in the English-speaking world without access to the full range of German reference material, periodicals, and monographs will have problems in grasping the full portent of some of the comments. Some English-speaking literature—for example, that of Tom Scott—is not noted. However, there is a full index of people and places, and an invaluable list of biblical references.

Paradoxically, the last volume of the new critical edition, edited by Held and Hoyer, was the first to appear. The 176 sources, all largely contemporary, relate directly to Müntzer and constitute an invaluable background for understanding his life and thought. Footnotes are duly cautious where necessary and splendidly lucid—they correct or amplify previous scholarship and provide frequent textual corrections. The scholarly apparatus is superb.

The volume begins with brief sources on Müntzer's birth and university studies. Then follows the full text of the pamphlet of the Jüterbog Franciscans denouncing Franz Günther and Thomas Müntzer for their critique of the papacy, the cult of the saints, and much else. Here, as elsewhere, where the document is presented in the original Latin, a German translation is provided. Then follow forty-four documents, which illumine Müntzer's time in Zwickau. Here we see the

City Council attempting to manage the social disruption caused by Müntzer's fiery sermons against the Franciscans, Nicholas Hofer of Marienthal, and the Erasmian, Egranus. Words often escalated into violent actions. Wolf von Weißenbach, representative of Duke John of Saxony, reports his concerns about Müntzer's polemic (pp. 66-67). The satirical poems directed by partisan followers against both Müntzer and Egranus are given in full. Four documents follow on Müntzer's stay in Prague. An intriguing extract from Urbanus Rhegius reports that Müntzer instructed a peasant about the faith *aus naturlichen dingen (*p. 112). The incomprehensible *ich schiß dir eyn werk in die schrifft* (Franz, p. 565) from his debate with Wolfgang Stein is amended to *eyn dreck* (p. 114), one example among many of textual corrections. And we read of Felicitas von Selmenitz receiving the Eucharist in both kinds from Müntzer in Halle.

The Held and Hoyer volume devotes some forty documents to Müntzer's time in Allstedt (pp. 122-181), including: his wedding; Luther's warnings against him; the protests of Ernst von Mansfeld to Frederick the Wise about Müntzer's abusive preaching; the formation of the Allstedt Covenant; extensive background on Müntzer's summons to Weimar; information on reports from the Elector's spies; and the mounting pressure on Hans Zeiss and the Allstedt Council to silence Müntzer.

Five documents cover Müntzer's first stay in Mühlhausen. Then follow reports by Oecolampadius and Bullinger on Müntzer's activities in southwest Germany, information on the confiscation of his writings in Nuremberg, and sources dealing with his second stay in Mühlhausen, including a lengthy extract from the city chronicle, still attributed to Nicholas Fritzler (cf. ThMA 2, p. 402, n.2). The four reports of Sittich von Berlepsch to George of Saxony are packed with details about events in Mühlhausen and the footnotes provide rich biographical data.

Material on the Peasants' War is restricted to sources referring directly to Müntzer. The ambivalent role of Hans Zeiss, the Elector's administrator in Allstedt, is highlighted in a letter to his wealthy relative, Christopher Meinhard, written just before the battle of Frankenhausen, arguing that Müntzer is a preacher rather than a military leader, and that God is about to knock the mighty off their thrones (Nr. 148). Remaining documents deal with Müntzer's capture, interrogation, confession, alleged recantation, and death. Particularly vivid is Hans Hut's account (Nr. 153) under interrogation of Müntzer's visit to him in Bibra and the battle of Frankenhausen. The words of the confession and "recantation" are not those of Müntzer but a summary that reflects the views of the interrogators. The volume includes an excellent index.

A careful reader will note very minor differences between ThMA2 and ThMA3, for example, on whether Thomas Müntzer arrived at Frankenhausen on the 11th or 12th of May 1525. A greater, though temporary, difficulty is again the absence of ThMA 1, so that one has background material, for example, on the Prague Manifesto or the Mühlhausen Articles but not the revised texts themselves. Already, though, these two volumes represent a huge advance in scholarship.

Vogler's 2008 edition of twenty-eight articles on the Peasants' War in Thuringia is a treasury of information on the social and economic background to the war, but also contains important material on Müntzer. Vogler himself attributes the unique role of apocalyptic motifs in this region of the war to Müntzer's influence and offers a fresh account of his religious, political, and social radicalism. In the "Rainbow Flag and Rainbow" Rainer Wohlfeil reminds us that the identification of the halo around the sun just before the battle of Frankenhausen, along with Müntzer's flag promising God's covenant help, throws light on the motivations of the insurgents. Hans-Jürgen Goertz's article referred to below, "Apocalyptic in Thuringia," is also proving seminal.

We turn now to the lively Festschrift for Bräuer. Goertz argues in thesis form that the entire Reformation was radical—in its confrontation of power with saving truth, in its zeal for root and branch reform, and in the way its discourse moved into "spontaneous socialization." Goertz also underlines commonalities between Luther and Müntzer. Hartmut Kühne and Carina Brumme offer a detailed, well-illustrated article on indulgences and pilgrimages in Brunswick and Königslutter; and Thomas Kaufmann reminds us in a massively documented article on the "Priesthood of the Believers" that in the early years of the Reformation no one advocated the empowerment of lay people more strongly than did academic theologians such as Luther and Karlstadt. Then there are articles on printers and bookbinders; on the peasants in the little village of Struppen; on the mention of Müntzer in funeral sermons; on Werner Tübke's panoramic portrayal of the Peasants' War at Frankenhausen; and on the conversion of the Mühlhausen Marienkirche into the Peasant War museum. Helmar Junghans gathers together everything we know about Thomas Müntzer in Zwickau. Junghans doubts Müntzer's dependence on Storch and suggests that he advocated "Josephite," or asexual, marriages. Günter Vogler emphasizes how little we know of the relationship between Müntzer and the Erasmian Catholic Georg Witzel; and Marion Dammaschke provides a bibliography of Bräuer's editions, books, and articles on Müntzer, numbering almost seventy items and going back to 1969.

Heise and Stache's documentation of the dialogue between Marxist and Protestant historians in Communist East Germany is also dedicated to Bräuer. The interviews with him and Adolf Laube are frank and make fascinating reading. It is useful to have their articles—on the Marxist view of Luther since 1945 and cooperative research in Reformation history, respectively—in accessible form, as well as the reports on a decade of highly creative, discreet interaction. It reminds us of the productivity (and stressful life) of both groups of historians. Today's scholarship owes an immense debt to their patient listening across ideological boundaries.

A key issue in Müntzer's theology is his understanding of apocalyptic. In his 1967 monograph, Goertz had famously downplayed its importance compared with Müntzer's mysticism.[10] In 2002 he revised this perspective. The apocalypticism of the Reformation put an abrupt end to the relativization of all time by eternity, typical of Augustine and the Middle Ages. Thus, it was the Reformation, not the Renaissance or Enlightenment, that ushered in modernity. Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes* hails the imminent transformation of the world that will flow from the work of the Spirit in the abyss of the heart. Müntzer is the herald of modern attitudes—"Luther expected the Kingdom of God on the far side of history, Müntzer within history."[11] In 2008 Goertz developed this perspective further, first reviewing all recent interpretations of Müntzer's apocalypticism. Goertz argues, for me convincingly, that from Zwickau to Prague, to the "Sermon to the Princes," to the impetus gained from the South Germany visit, Müntzer sharpened his sense of a cosmic struggle taking place in the heart of the elect but evident in the "new movement of the world in our days," as he wrote to Zeiss in July 1524. The "Eternal Covenant" in Mühlhausen, which then morphed into the armed campaigns in Thuringia, was required to resist the clerical and princely frustration of God's will and was a proleptic anticipation of the coming Kingdom. Unlike Hans Hut, there was no millenarian timetable—the Last Judgment was now! The forthcoming volume 15 of the Thomas Müntzer Society continues the debate with two substantial articles: In "Prophet, Apokalyptiker, Mystiker: Thomas Müntzer und die 'Kirche' der Patriarchen, Propheten und Apostel," James Stayer affirms the this-wordly orientation of Müntzer's apocalyptic and argues, like McLaughlin, that he should be understood primarily as a prophetic thinker. Hartmut Kühne puts Müntzer's interpretation of the sun halo at Frankenhausen in the context

10. *Innere und äussere Ordnung in der Theologie Thomas Müntzers* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).
11. ThMV 3:14; my translation.

of the pervasive, though often downplayed, fascination with signs in the heavens in Reformation and early Lutheran piety.

Twelve articles by the distinguished Marxist historian Günter Vogler are gathered in *Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit*. The essay titled "Thomas Müntzers Sicht der Gesellschaft seiner Zeit" argues, like Goertz, that Müntzer's apocalyptic understanding of faith drove his quest for this-worldly transformation. Ethical, social, and political considerations were inseparable. As pastor, Müntzer's priority was changing people; but that was impossible while oppressive structures constrained them and vitiated any hope for peace. God had transferred power to the people from the corrupt tyrants. Yet Müntzer developed no overall program for social change. Economic justice was not the issue, but God's rule and emancipation from material ambitions.

"Anschlag oder Manifest?" deals with the four enigmatic writings Thomas Müntzer produced in Prague in 1521, in Latin, German (in shorter and longer form), and in Czech. The Manifest was never actually displayed in public, and the term "manifesto," with its programmatic implications, is misleading. Instead, it was a confessional *cri de coeur*, denouncing abuses and proclaiming the reconstitution of the true apostolic church to begin in Prague. Envisaging a potentially universal audience Müntzer probably hoped it would be printed.

Vogler's essay, "Thomas Müntzer und die Städte," notes that in his short life Müntzer stayed in some fifty different places. We tend to think of him as a peasant leader. In fact, he addressed himself almost exclusively to town-dwellers and their councils—that is, to *bürgerliche Kreise*—though of course the boundaries between town and countryside were porous at this time. Nearly all his letters to the towns were written in the time of the Peasants' War. Other articles deal with his relationship to the princes during his Allstedt period and with his famous letters to Albrecht and Ernst von Mansfeld, appealing for their conversion. Vogler analyzes the highly-differentiated social situation of Mühlhausen as the background to the abortive uprising of September 1524, leaving open many questions, such as that of the relative role of Pfeiffer and Thomas Müntzer.

Müntzer's contacts with Nuremberg were few, apart from the short stay there in relation to the printing of his last two publications. In "Thomas Müntzer and Nürnberg," Vogler refers to Bubenheimer's discovery of a series of religious questions addressed to Müntzer by an influential member of the city council, a mine-owner, Christoph Fürer, that may have been passed on to Müntzer by another mine-owner, Christopher Meinhard of Eisleben, whose contacts with Müntzer are

well-documented.[12] Here we see Müntzer in contact with influential, prosperous members of society.

"Sozialethische Vorstellungen und Lebensweisen von Täufergruppen" compares Müntzer's views with those of the Anabaptists. Both explored alternative forms of community life; both gave priority to *Gelassenheit* over specific social aims; both were often motivated by apocalyptic expectations; both demarcated themselves from the "godless," looked back to the apostolic age, and had an edgy relationship to princely power. Another article examines the ephemeral Eisleben group of Anabaptists, mainly handworkers. A juicy tidbit is the report (p. 172) that "Thomas Tischers Weib habe des Thomas Müntzers bücher in der hand gehapt und dorauß gebet," presumably referring to his liturgies. A review of Ernst Bloch's elegiac, if historically erratic, biography of Müntzer, written in the tragic aftermath of World War I, closes the collection. Bloch's later utopian masterpiece, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, reflects something of his admiration for Müntzer as a theologian of revolution.

In *Der gemeine Mann bei Thomas Müntzer—und danach*, Eike Wolgast notes that after the Peasants' War Müntzer, the "living Devil," came to symbolize the threat which the common folk represented to social order. Yet Müntzer did not initially define the *Volk* in terms of wealth or class, but rather as lay people, including princes, as opposed to the clergy. After the experience of rejection in Allstedt, however, he increasingly defined the "poor" in material as well as in spiritual terms, while condemning the "tyrants" allied with Luther. Also, the rainbow flag became the sign of God's covenant with the lowly and Daniel 7:27 becomes a key text for the transfer of power to the people. The Peasants' War was not a total catastrophe for the common folk, but had a certain "cathartic effect"—a warning to rulers who imagined that they could get away with any form of oppression. Following the Peasant's War legal remedies became more prevalent and a minority turned to Anabaptism.

For the moment at least, Müntzer, together with most early modern history, seems to be disappearing from German school curricula, as Björn Opfer-Klinger shows. The splendidly illustrated *Thomas Müntzer in der Erinnerungskultur*, on the other hand, testifies to the remarkable creativity of sculptors and artists who exploited to good effect the G.D.R.'s cultivation of "legacy and tradition" (*Erbe und Tradition*). Werner Tübke's monumental and unforgettable mural, with its "abundance of metaphors, symbols and signs" (p. 28), may be best known, but it by no means stands alone. Klaus Messerschmidt describes

12. TMA 2:217-222.

the evolution of his striking Müntzer sculpture in Stolberg (pp. 72-82). Thus, even after the collapse of the G.D.R. creativity in Müntzer-related art has continued. Indeed, for the moment his memory may be best preserved for the wider public in the world of art.

Readers of this journal will be intrigued by a hitherto unpublished collection from the State Library in Berlin consisting of "a hundred illustrated scenes on the origin, beginnings and actions of the first important Anabaptists up to their end and disappearance," including fourteen illustrations of Thomas Müntzer. Günter Vogler has edited the puzzling material. Guy de Bres, of the Netherlands, provides the 1565 text, based on the 1525 *Histori Thome Muntzer*, which traces Anabaptism back to Storch and Müntzer, completely ignoring its Swiss genesis. Anabaptism here is a subversive movement, without theological substance. The c.1720 illustrations, however, are something else. Lively and original, packed with credulous, simply dressed men and women, being baptized, seeing visions, facing execution they convey vividly how Anabaptists were regarded in the later sixteenth century, without any trace of Gottfried Arnold's more differentiated view.

Thomas T. Müller's study of the Mühlhausen Chronicle dates the work to the years 1589-1592. Intended to justify the actions of the magistrates during the Peasants' War, the Chronicle's account of the respective role of Müntzer and Heinrich Pfeiffer is tendentious. The alleged conflicts between Müntzer and Pfeiffer have no basis in the sources. Müller's *Bauernkrieg nach dem Bauernkrieg* details the devastation of four Mühlhäuser villages by vengeful Eichsfeld noblemen and clerics in the immediate aftermath of the Peasants' War, and the abortive attempts of the villagers to gain legal compensation. We owe to Müller the delightful insight that the peasants consumed some 50,000 liters of beer in the five days of the Eichsfeld campaign. The attractive catalogue of the Peasants' War Museum in Mühlhausen, with text by Reinhard Jonscher, reminds us of the crucial nature of material history, and illustrates the balanced view of Müntzer that now prevails. Fleischauer's monograph, on the other hand, *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus,* shows how party and state in the old G.D.R. revised and amended their view of Müntzer as they sought to legitimize their claim to be his true heir.

The commemorative publications of 1989 brought with them the recognition of the primacy of pastoral and theological concerns in Müntzer's work. Since then social and regional historians have done an immense amount of patient research, to which the new edition testifies. If, as Wolgast has suggested, it seems unlikely that there will be great advances in our current knowledge, what challenges lie ahead for

scholarship?[13] The "instrumentalisation" (that glorious German term!) of Müntzer down the ages, by opponents and hagiographers alike, suggests that he needs to be put in the widest possible context—his aims and achievements, whether liturgical, pastoral, theological, linguistic, hermeneutical, social or political, must be related to those of all the other varieties of reform. How, as Vogler has asked, does Müntzer stand in relation to the Anabaptists, or to the Spiritualists? And what of his relation to Luther? Holl, Rupp, and Goertz have noted in the past that there are points of convergence as well as difference. And what of the Swiss reformers or, indeed, the British? John Knox, after all, strikes similar notes to those of Müntzer. Perhaps we need to emerge from our separate compartments and attempt some post-confessional comparisons.

And then there is the small matter of terminology. As Emmet McLaughlin has queried: what exactly do we mean by Müntzer's apocalypticism? Or indeed by his mysticism, so important for his hermeneutics and for his understanding of pastoral care? Or take his alleged penchant for revolution. Few issues have been so hotly debated as whether or not Müntzer was a revolutionary. There is certainly a consensus that he had no fixed program for a future society, but the new worldwide clan of public theologians might well be interested to probe Bloch's view of him, which also emerged at the end of the G.D.R., as a theologian of revolution. Müntzer's structural critique of society could well be of relevance to us today.

Finally, there is the person, Thomas Müntzer. Much has been written about his actions and a considerable amount, thankfully, on his theology. But what of the man himself? What accounts for the ease with which he sidestepped conventional views about, say, the Turks, or the political hierarchies of his time? What explains his emphasis on suffering, or his bizarre views on sexuality, or the exceptional sharpness of his polemic? How did he operate as a scholar? Could he make and hold onto friendships? On the human level, his success as a liturgist, a preacher, and a pastor suggests considerable gifts of empathy. Yet wherever he went, there were ructions.

He continues, in other words, to puzzle us. As we, I suspect, would puzzle him.

13. Wolgast, *Der gemeine Mann bei Thomas Müntzer*, 5.