

***Enemies of the Cross. Suffering, Truth, and Mysticism in the Early Reformation* by Vincent Evener (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). 432 pp. ISBN 9780190073183. £64.00.**

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The quincentenary of Martin Luther's publication of his 95 theses in 2017 occasioned celebrations as well as a wide range of publications, amongst them best-selling biographies of Luther (for example by Lyndal Roper, or new editions of those by Volker Leppin and Thomas Kaufmann). Vincent Evener's monograph is part of this stream of publications, though it offers a comparative perspective rather than a biography. Evener's primary aim is to demonstrate how Luther, his less well-known contemporary Andreas von Karlstadt, and Thomas Müntzer read and developed late medieval mystical writing, in particular the works by Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler, even if they reached different conclusions. Evener argues that despite major differences between the reformers, for example in their views on the ontology of the *unio mystica*, all three "wanted Christians to interpret and respond to their own suffering, whether spiritual or corporeal, in new ways reflecting what they regarded as newly rediscovered divine truth" (p. 7).

After setting out his main goals in an extensive introduction, Evener opens with a summary of the Eckhartian influence in the Late Middle Ages, outlining the paths through which the reformers came into contact with these writings (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 focuses on Martin Luther and the development of his ideas: Evener sets out Luther's arguments, in particular the decreasing emphasis on human agency in the salvation process, as evidenced in his Theses as well as the subsequent Explanations. Luther recognises that this might lead to despair; however, as a former Augustinian friar, he argues that such a tendency to despair needs to be countered by a mystical *Gelassenheit* (surrender of the self-will). In Chapter 3, Evener coins the term "friends of the cross" (p. 162), to refer to Luther and Karlstadt, highlighting their efforts to convey the paradigm of suffering Christians to their followers, converting the true Christian

into God's instrument and being dependent solely on God's presence. Chapter 4 turns to Karlstadt and his public writings, in which he builds on the 'Theologia Deutsch' in particular to radicalise the idea of a reduction of the self into nothingness (*reductio ad nihilum*). The proper Christian aim should be to "recognize, lament, and struggle against human failing, individual and communal, before God's law" (p. 196). In Chapter 5, an even more extreme reading of mystical writing is described in the writings of Thomas Müntzer tracing his development from his first contacts with the reform group in Wittenberg up to his fierce criticisms in 1523. Evener argues that this transforms mystical thought into a "nexus of promise and faith" (p. 237). Chapter 6 provides an overview over the various interchanges between the three reformers in the years 1524 and 1525, not only summarising their previous writings but also their reactions to and views about their fellows' writings. Whereas the majority of scholarly works on the Reformation centre on the arguments between reformers and their antagonists, the focus on the discussions and disagreements between the reformers provides a gripping and thought-provoking perspective. Ultimately, despite several attempts at reconciliation, the three reformers agreed to disagree on central aspects, such as the nature of humans' self-assertion as well as the union with God.

Evener's main method of analysis is the meticulous study of annotations in the reformers' copies of books. These allow insights into their reading of earlier mystical writings, and the appropriation of it into their own works. This emphasis on the material aspect may occasionally appear very detailed, yet it results in a much more nuanced evaluation. It is regrettable, though, that the monograph – either by choice or editorial policy of the publisher – refers to Luther's texts in English translation throughout, only giving central terms in parentheses, often unsystematically and therefore confusingly mixing Middle High German, Early Modern German, and Modern German versions – occasionally leading to errors (p. 15 and p. 236: "*Anflectung*", recte: "*Anfechtung*"; p. 236: "*Verwünderung*", recte: "*Verwunderung*"; p. 315,

app. 41: "Mcginn", recte: "McGinn", in several instances "*Lebmeister*" instead of the much more common "*Lebemeister*"). Similarly, titles of primary sources are given in English. Whereas the book deals well with the secondary literature of the Reformation, it might have been desirable to include too developments in recent German scholarship, especially with regard to the influence of Eckhart and his followers, exemplified in the main series of the annual *Eckhart-Jahrbuch* (including a recent one on Eckhart and Luther, published in 2019 – which might have been too late for inclusion into this book).

The book provides useful notes and indices, although the lack of a bibliography makes it difficult to follow up references – a serious draw-back for a scholarly publication. On the other hand, Evener includes useful summaries at the end of each chapter and guides the reader through his structure. This means that, depending on the reader's interest, all chapters can be read either as stand-alone pieces, or, with a few – often helpful – repetitions, as a sustained argument. An extensive appendix with notes (pp. 299–405) and an index, containing both names and key terms, round off the book.

In summary, Evener has produced an extremely helpful study on the intellectual history of the early Reformation, especially for a readership without any knowledge of German. His book will hopefully be included in the reading of scholars writing on related events whose quincentenaries are looming.