Chapter 3
The City of God (Urbs Dei)

A Christian should have no money, and his silver or gold belongs to everyone.

From one of Rothmann’s sermons

The blacksmith Jakob, who had been caught by the horsemen of the Westphalian Landstände (provincial diets)—and thoroughly interrogated before being executed in the manner of the period—shows himself in the face of death to be a defiant and upright man; he repents not a single word of Anabaptist teachings, staunchly calls the pope the Antichrist and infant baptism an abomination, and reveals during his interrogation a good deal of the strange, heretical world that is stirring the hearts behind Münster’s walls.

In accordance with “the prophecy of Zacharias,” the city has been divided into three parts, and they begin to expunge the old days by renaming the streets. There has also emerged a prophet from Leyden whose name Meister Jakob doesn’t know; he remains in the background for now but in any case has been sent out to proselytize as had been Enoch.¹

As for himself, Meister Jakob ran from the city because he had been having strange visions that he now wanted to reveal here outside the city walls. Everyone in the city has such visions, and from the pulpits the prophets proclaim that there will come a time when Münster will be so overpopulated that they will have to build a house on the cathedral square, so teeming, in fact, that empty churches will have to be turned into homes; this, of course, long after the homes of the emigrants have been confiscated.²

Because, gentlemen, the godless and all the followers of Rome and Luther have fled; Knipperdelling was barely able to prevent this
mysterious Leyden prophet from destroying them and their wives and babies with his sword, “like an evil infection.” But now, on the Friday after *Invocavit* (the first holy day of the Lenten season, the sixth Sunday before Easter), they had been driven from the city, and only a few had at the very last minute bought themselves the right to stay by accepting a much belated baptism.

“The weather was bitter with ice and snow,” adds Münster eyewitness Meister Gresbeck, “not even a dog would have been chased out of the city on that Friday.” In Gresbeck’s account the Münster rabble was standing around in a circle yelling: “Get out, you godless trash, God will soon awaken and punish you.” The Leyden prophet was one of the loudest to so scream.

And this was truly a horrible departure; there were frail old people and small, pitifully crying children. Punches and blows rained down on them; pregnant women gave birth in the snow just outside the city walls. The bearers of old, well-known patrician names had their clothes torn off of them and were forced to leave almost naked; and Prophet Matthys put a spear to the body of Provost Dungel, a venerable old man, calling him “an old buffoon and a fraud” and let him go only after plundering him completely.

So that’s how it went in Münster. But, Meister Jakob, we out here have known all this for quite some time now, since all these refugees have come to His Grace the Bishop lamenting and reporting of events in Münster. But what is going on inside you people, that is, in your hearts, and what devil rules your minds such that those who yesterday were diligent, industrious citizens now commit such atrocities?

And Meister Jakob, thus questioned, begins to talk. He speaks of the Judgment Day that will come between Lent and Easter—horribly soon, gentlemen—and engulf the whole world. But here not one in ten people will escape, and only Münster, God’s own city, will be spared.

“The prophet rules the people and teaches them God’s word and how to live virtuously, and he prophesies how the world shall be punished.” Thus speaks the blacksmith just before he is pinched to death with glowing hot tongs and, so to speak, with all due honors. There are later more detailed and erudite accounts of the *Gottesstaat* (God’s state), but for now let us stay with this first document. Judgment, punishment, penitence, the end of the world, good works...is it not the Old Testament with its tablets and red trumpets and its inconsolable wailing which looms behind all this emphasis on earthly life and in this concealment of the deliverance in death? And has all our gothic struggle for salvation through Christ been forsaken for this Anabaptist