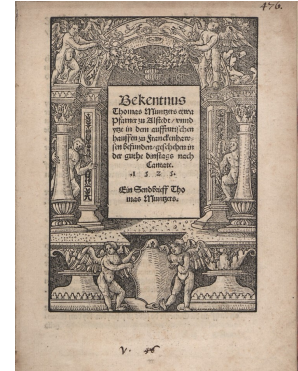


**Thomas Müntzer's Confession and Recantation,
Heldrungen Castle,
May 1525.**

The confession was printed, complete with various minor amendments and errors, by the Lutheran printer Wolfgang Stöckel in Leipzig. The first printing took place in May, and several reprints – at least six, in Leipzig, Erfurt and Regensburg – followed in rapid succession. The original ran to six printed pages.



The Confession of Thomas Müntzer, 16th May 1525. ¹

The Confession of Master Thomas Müntzer, formerly preacher at Allstedt and now present among the rebellious bands at Frankenhausen, made voluntarily on the Tuesday after Cantate 1525.

1. He does not want the holy, most revered sacrament to be worshipped outwardly, only inwardly in the spirit, but every man should be able to decide for himself.
2. He says that he offered the sacrament to the sick and that he himself has taken of it in the afternoon, after he had eaten, and also at night if that suited; he took wine and bread and consecrated it.
3. In Klettgau and Hegau near Basel, he had drawn up various Articles on how one should govern according to the Gospels, from which other Articles were made; the people there would have liked him to join them, but he turned them down with thanks. He had not stirred up the troubles there, since they had already started before he arrived. Oecolampadius and Hugwald had told him where to go and preach to the people; and he had preached that the noblemen there were unbelievers, and that the people were also

¹ The standard questions to be asked of prisoners captured during the Princes' campaign against the rebellious peasants and radicals ran as follows. Obviously, those asked of Müntzer would be a little more detailed.

The prisoner should be asked

Where he comes from,

What his trade and employment are,

Why he had got involved in this rebellion against our dear lord etc Philip [of Hessen],

Who was his captain,

Who had started the rebellion and had spread it among the people,

And to state their intentions and what they would have done if things had gone their way.

unbelievers, and that a reckoning must come down on them. The letters which had been written to him were kept in a satchel in Mühlhausen by his wife.

4. States that the castles are very oppressive because of their compulsory services and other burdens upon the subjects.

5. States that he had said that the Princes should only ride with 8 horses, a Count with 4 and a nobleman with 2, and no more than that.

6. In his League were firstly Barthel Krumpe, a tanner of Allstedt, and Balthasar Stubener, a glassmaker from the same place; these two raised the rebellion alongside him. The castellan² was also involved, although he had at first opposed it. The League was against those who persecute the Gospel and the list of names of the members was kept by the two men named above.

7. Master Tilo Banse, preacher of Sangerhausen, had urged him to write a letter to the congregation there, encouraging them to stand by the Gospel and to prosecute those who opposed them; this he did.

8. States that he had spoken to Dr Strauss at Weimar when he appeared there at the summons of Duke Johann of Saxony etc. At that time, when Strauss was disputing with the Franciscans, he had let the brothers know his opinion as follows: that if the Lutherans were intending to do no more than annoy the monks and priests, then they might as well desist. Since that time, Strauss had written in a letter to Johann Kohler of Mühlhausen that if he had not been deterred by the long journey, he would come to Mühlhausen himself and drive him out. Perhaps this was because he would have liked to have been there himself.

9. The reason he had slandered and scolded my gracious lord Count Ernst of Mansfeld, prince of these lands, was because his subjects had complained that the word of God was not being preached to them and was in fact forbidden, and the lord did not want them to travel to hear it. ³ He had therefore ordered them to report this, each to his own lord, And wherever the word was not being preached, then they should simply come to hear him, for he would preach it to them and no one would try to prevent it.

10. The people of Mühlhausen had admitted him and Johann Rotte, a furrier, and the distiller by St Blasius church had welcomed him.

² Hans Zeiss of Allstedt.

³ See Müntzer's letter to Count Ernst of Mansfeld, dated 22 September 1523.

11. Was present at Mallerbach ⁴ and saw that certain people from Allstedt carried images out of the church and afterwards burned down the church; had preached that it was a house of ill-fame and idolatry when people carried in figures made of wax, and that this was not permitted by God. The watchman was urged to leave this place, which then happened. Afterwards, as stated, the church was burned down.

12. Sir Apel von Ebeleben's house was plundered and torn down by brothers from Mühlhausen, since the brothers complained about that house in a number of articles, which were unknown to him. These were partly made up of the Twelve Articles of the Black Forest peasants and partly other ones.

13. The Mühlhausen town-council did not voluntarily support the League, but permitted the common man to do so.

14. Niklaus Storch and Max Stübener from Zwickau ⁵ had met with Luther in a small room in Wittenberg in which he had once been. Luther had taken up a stance against them, and claimed that he had given the Allstedt Spirit one on the snout; but he himself was not there in person at that time.

15. Master Gangolf, the chaplain in the hospital, had taken charge of one detachment, in which the people of Heringen and Graussen served.

Confessed under torture:

1. Heinrich and Hans Gebhart of the Hundesgasse in Zwickau, along with their supporters, were wool-weavers and had joined his league.

2. Master Heinrich Pfeiffer had maintained that it was enough to have one castle in one district, and that the others should be destroyed.

3. On behalf of the community, he had passed judgment on Matern von Gehofen ⁶ and the other servants of Count Ernst, and had agreed to it and had done it out of fear.

4. He had made Mühlhausen his refuge and base, for he had always liked it there and it was a fortified town. His main supporter there was Hans Kule at All Saints and the two mentioned before, the furrier and the distiller at St Blasius.

⁴ The destruction of the Mallerbach Chapel in late March 1523 caused the regional lords considerable annoyance and was the trigger for Müntzer's appearance before the Princes.

⁵ These were the 'Storchites' who had collaborated with Müntzer in Zwickau, and who had disputed with Melancthon in Wittenberg.

⁶ Matern von Gehofen was one of three of Count Ernst of Mansfeld's representatives executed by the rebels on 12 May 1525

5. Confesses that, if he had taken the castle at Heldrungen, as he and his supporters intended, then he would have taken off Count Ernst's head, as he had often said.

6. He had stirred up the rebellion in order that Christianity should make all men equal and that the Princes and noblemen who did not wish to support the Gospel should be driven out and put to death.

7. The leaders of the Allstedt League were

Bartel Krumpfe

Bartel Zimmermann

Peter Warmuth

Niklaus Rucker

Andreas Krumpfe

Bischoff of Wolferode

- all from Allstedt.

8. The Articles which they proposed and were putting into effect were: 'Omnia sunt Communia' [*all things are to be held in common*]⁷, and should be shared out amongst everyone according to his need, as occasion demanded. Any Prince, Count or nobleman who did not want to do that, having been once reminded of it, should have his head chopped off or be hanged.

9. Also enrolled in the league were:

Hans Rodemann

Peter Schutze

Peter Beher – all from the Mansfeld Valley

Tilo Fischer from Weimelburg

Tilo Banse from Sangerhausen

Peter Rodemann, ditto.

The register, in which the names of the members of the league are written, is in the possession of Bartel Krumpfe of Allstedt.

10. In his youth, when he was a vicar in Aschersleben and Halle, he had organised a league as well. Members were Peter Blinde of Aschersleben, Peter Engel a verger from Halle, Hans

⁷ Note, firstly, that this egalitarian demand was not specifically attributed to Müntzer here, only to the leadership of the Allstedt League; secondly, that there is no particular corroborating evidence for any such demand.

Buttener and Kunz Sander of the same place, living at the Steintor. This league was made against Bishop Ernst of most praiseworthy memory.⁸

11. If he had succeeded in his plan, and as he had intended, it was his opinion, and was common knowledge among all the members of his league, that he would take control of all the land for 10 miles⁹ around Mühlhausen, and the land of Hessen, and deal with the Princes and noblemen as indicated above. Most of them knew this quite well.

12. The people of Mühlhausen had given him eight small artillery pieces. The Count von Stolberg had given a small cannon to the people of Frankenhausen.¹⁰

Fragment with further statements by Müntzer:

1. In Zwickau, the parishes of both St Katherine and Our Dear Lady had elected him as preacher. I was there one year, for my testimony was highly respected.

2. Master Heinrich Pfeiffer first took the field in order to support the people of Salza.

3. Master Heinrich Pfeiffer began the first rebellion in Mühlhausen; preached there for 1½ years.

4. I spoke to the peasants of Klettgau and Hegau near Basel, asking them if they wanted to march to Mühlhausen and this area. They said that they would do that if they were paid.

Thomas Müntzer's Recantation, 17th May 1525

The statements which follow were made by Thomas Müntzer, willingly and after due contemplation of his own conscience, in the presence of the noble high-born lord Philip count of Solms etc, Master Gebhard count and lord of Mansfeld etc, Master Ernst of Schönburg, Lord of Glauchau and Waldenberg, our gracious, constant and judicious lord Apel of Ebeleben, knight, Simon von Greussen, Hans von Berlepsch and Cristoff Lau, and he asked them to remind him of these in case he forgot, so that he could repeat them in front of everyone before he died and affirm them with his own lips.

Firstly, in respect of the nobility, to whom one should always be obedient and give due service, he had preached quite the opposite in immoderate language, and his audience and

⁸ Note that this would have been in 1512 or 1513.

⁹ 10 German miles in Saxony = approx 90 kilometres

¹⁰ Count Bodo von Stolberg ransomed his son, Wolf, who had been captured by the rebels, by donating a 'halbe Schlange' – a small cannon capable of firing 7lb shots.

the lords' subjects listened immoderately, and he had then involved himself with them in shocking and wanton sedition and rebellion and disobedience; he begged them now not to be angered by what he had done, but rather to obey this same nobility as God had ordained and established, and to forgive him.

Secondly, since he had preached many kinds of opinions, madness and errors about the most revered sacrament of the holy and divine body of Christ, and also had preached rebelliously and seditiously against the order of the common Christian Church, he now wants to yield peaceably to all that this same Christian Church has always maintained and still maintains, and now to meet death as one who is wholly and truly conformed in it, begging them for God's sake to pray for him before God and the whole world, and to forgive him as a brother.

Finally he begs that the letter which he recently wrote should be sent to Mühlhausen, and that all his possessions should be left to his wife and child.

Dated at Heldrungen Castle, Wednesday after Cantate, 1525.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
June 2015)*