

ON FRAUDULENT FAITH



Original title: “Von dem getichtten glawben auff nechst Protestation aussgangen Tome Müntzers, Selwerters zu Alstedt”

The full title on the cover reads in English:

“On fraudulent Faith, Following the Recent Protestation¹ issued by Thomas Müntzer, Pastor at Allstedt. 1524”

This pamphlet was printed in early 1524 by Nikolaus Widemar of Eilenburg. It was re-printed at least three more times – twice in 1524 by Widemar, and then again in 1526 (by Melchior Ramminger in Augsburg; it appeared under a different title, and with the author pseudonymously named as “Christian Hitz” of Salzburg). The text covers 11 pages. The various editions have different woodcuts on the title page, each being simply standard decorative templates available to the printer. This pamphlet is almost devoid of Biblical citations within the main body of the text. However, in all of Müntzer’s three Allstedt pamphlets of 1523/24, the citations were not contained within the main body of the text, but festoon the margins. For reasons of simplicity, these marginalia have not been reproduced here.

Against the Fraudulent Faith of Christianity

Firstly

The Christian faith is a covenant that we might rely on the word and teachings of Christ. If anyone wishes now to grasp this word with a righteous and sincere heart, then his ears must be swept clean of the melodies of care and lusts. For just as the furrow in the field cannot bring forth a great harvest without the action of the ploughshare, so a person cannot say he is a Christian if he has not first suffered the cross which allows him to receive the work and word of God. In such tribulation the elect friend of God suffers the word; the fraudulent listener cannot be one of these, only the eager pupil of his master, one who considers his master constantly,

¹ NB. The *Protestation or Petition* is the other pamphlet published by Müntzer in late 1523 or early 1524; clearly, that pamphlet pre-dates this one.

sparing no diligence, so that he becomes comparable to him in everything, according to his ability.

Secondly

Whenever a person hears or sees what Christ has laid before him, he accepts it as a miraculous testimony of how to chase away his lack of faith, to kill it and to crush it completely. In this way, he will see the entire holy Bible as a double-edged sword, for everything which is contained within it could just as easily strangle us as bring us to life. An inexperienced person, when he tries to make a great show of the words of God, will simply be snatching at the wind. Since the beginning, God has cast great temptations before all of his elect; he did not even spare his own son, so that he would aim at the true goal of blessedness; he showed him the only narrow path which the lusting scholars can never find in all eternity. So an elect friend of God cannot come easily to faith. Regardless of how many people boast about it, their faith will remain deceitful and quite fraudulent, unless they can give an account of the origin of their faith, in the same way as those who are described in the Bible. It is simply not acceptable that such crazy and self-serving men should even be called intelligent heathens, let alone Christians. They are the kind of people who appear in the form of angels, but we should guard ourselves against them as against the Devil.

Thirdly

God let Abraham be miserable and abandoned so that he would feel protected only by God and not by any creature. Therefore he was tormented by the promise of God. In order that the punishment might immediately precede the promise, he was condemned to wander in a foreign land, far from any seeming comfort; which, to his rational thinking, he found hard to comprehend, just as St Stephen did when he chided the tender, finger-pointing scholars in the Acts of the Apostles. People who are damned always want to keep a firm grip on themselves and at the same time grab hold of the forsaken Christ. The tenth and eleventh chapters of Genesis describe this in the light of the twelfth chapter, where everything is brought together: after great suffering and painful toil, Abraham became worthy of seeing the dawn of the day of Christ. For God has, from the beginning, had no other way of doing this. If the light of nature was thus snuffed out in Abraham, how must it happen in us?

Fourthly

Moses, who showed us how to use the law to recognise the false light of nature, was not prepared to believe the living promise of God. For he had yet to come to realise his lack of faith clearly, before he could place his honest trust in God, and before he knew for certain that the devil was not leading him astray ². But Moses might have considered God to be a devil, if he had not managed to see that distinction between the wiliness of creatures and the straightforwardness of God, which is set down in the order between God and creatures. Even when the whole world accepts something as if it came from God, the man who is poor in spirit will not be satisfied unless he has first experienced desolation.

Fifthly

In short, every pious, decent elect person could go through the books of the Bible and, leaving behind any preconceptions, see that all the fathers, all the patriarchs, prophets, and especially the Apostles, came to faith only through great difficulty. None of them wanted to just leap in like our nonsensical lusting swine who get so terrified by the raging winds, the crashing waves and the vast sea of wisdom. For they know quite well that they would at last be lost in such a storm. So they, with all their fine promises, are like that foolish man who builds his house upon sand: all such buildings fall down etc.

Sixthly

The messengers of God heard the bearer of the gospels himself; Christ said to Peter that he had not seen the truth through flesh and blood, but through God himself. However, even they could not accept any of the promises made, without turning red with shame and becoming blasphemous: in this way, their lack of faith was sorely tested. For none of them wanted to believe that he rose again, that it was really him. They thought that it was a ghost, or some trick. And untested people such as us esteem ourselves so highly that we think we can get along with a fraudulent faith and

² Literally: *the Devil was not punishing a dog in the presence of a lion* – i.e. teaching the mighty a lesson by punishing the weak. The metaphor here is of obscure relevance, but the meaning seems to be ‘led astray’.

with a fanciful idea of God's mercy; we gladly accept a natural assurance or promise and would storm heaven with it. Oh no, dearest Christians, let us take a good look at the holy Bible, and understand that it is made to kill us (as we have shown above) and not to bring us to life; it is only the living word, which an emptied soul can hear, that brings us to life. We should not pick just one piece here and another there; we should take everything together in the teaching of the spirit, and not of the flesh. This is explained in every book of the scriptures – it comforts us and terrifies us. If the deceitful faith is not fully exposed, then we will always accept the superficial word; and this will fail to shelter us in the storm. So people must be brought to the greatest ignorance and astonishment if they are to be rid of their fraudulent faith and instructed correctly in righteous faith.

Seventhly

A preacher who has experienced God's justice does not receive the word of God in his mouth accompanied by the taste of sweet honey or hypocrisy, but rather with a burning and righteous fervour that obliges him to root out the false Christians, and to scatter and destroy all their wicked beliefs which they have stolen from hearsay or from the books of men, like spiteful thieves.

Eighthly

As long as poor, miserable, pitiable, wretched Christianity does not recognise its own injuries, no help can be given; as long as it does not cast off its fraudulent faith, which is hidden behind a fig-leaf in the mere form of true faith, then it cannot be counselled or assisted. This affliction is common to all: none of them will admit that they are the same in the first beginnings of their faith as the Turk, heathen, Jew or any other unbeliever; rather, each one adorns himself with his faith and good works and polishes them up, even though he understands neither cause nor reason for any of it. This is why our coarse and blundering fathers handed over the whole world (with the exception of themselves) to the devil, and refused to be held accountable, which of course gave rise to all the sects and schisms, most of which have been caused by disunity regarding ceremonies and church-rites (without any consideration being given as to whether these arose from fraudulent or true faith).

Ninthly

In order to save miserable coarse Christianity from such grievous abominations, we must firstly and above all listen to a serious preacher, one who, like John the Baptist, cries wretchedly and pitifully into the waste, the mad, raging hearts of men; only thus will they learn through the working of God within them how to receive his word after many tribulations. Only after this will the fountainhead of salvation be shown, the son of God, a mild lamb who did not cry out when it was slaughtered and thus bore the sins of the world. And we, like him, like sheep will experience our slaughter all day and every day; but in our suffering we should not whimper nor moan like whining dogs, but rather be like sheep in the pasture in which he has spread the salt of his wisdom, experienced in suffering and in no other way.

Tenthly

The sheep are poisoned by bad grass, but are nourished by salt. If you preach a sweet Christ to the fleshly world, then you deliver the worst poison that has ever been given since the days of Christ the lamb. For if someone wants to become god-like by accepting this fare, then he will certainly never want - nor even have the least desire - to become Christ-like. At bottom, he is not even true to himself, but is – like a salamander or a leopard – inconstant in all his actions. That is why Christ stressed: ‘My flock hears my voice and does not follow the voice of the stranger.’ A stranger is one who allows the path to eternal life to become overgrown, lets the thorns and thistles flourish, and merely repeats: ‘Believe, believe ! Stand firm, firm with a strong, strong faith, one that can hammer mighty posts into the ground.’

Eleventhly

One should not climb into a house through a window, neither should one have any other foundation to faith than the whole Christ, not just half of it. Whoever does not wish to experience the bitter Christ will gorge himself to death on honey. Christ is a corner-stone. Just as it is shaped, so must the master-stonemason shape us so that we grow into a solid building in life. Not a single shard should be lost your whole life long; every Christian must be examined through and through, and use his

talent or gift to the utmost to become like Christ. For he who does not die with Christ, will not rise again with him. How can he be true to his life if he has not yet cast off his old coat? Therefore those who give comfort rather than tribulation are thieves and murderers, they want to do good works before Christ has come to them, and they know not whether they are coming or going.

Twelfthly

Christ, immutable like his father, has no more joyful love to show to his elect than the fact that with his labours he has made them like the sheep for the slaughter; whereas the damned can only think about being expelled and killed and all memory of them will be erased from the earth. And anyone who looks upon the lamb in this way, and sees how he takes away the sins of the world, will say: I have heard with my own ears how the old fathers in the Bible dealt with God and he with them; none of them joined with him until they had first prevailed with their suffering (which was due them from all eternity). This transfigures us through the glory of God from brightness to brightness. This is what is meant when the Lord says: 'No man can take away from my keeping the sheep which my father gave to me.' These words refer to the pasture which is destined for the sheep in heaven. For after the slaughter is complete, it says: O Lord, rise up from your slumber ! Why do you avert your face from me? For the sake of your name, help me place my feet firmly on the rock. And then I shall say: you alone have done this. I will never permit my lips to be sealed, but in your great church I will proclaim the righteousness which you alone can awaken.

Thirteenthly

On such a foundation true Christianity will be built, leading to eternal life, if we can first learn to guard against and remove the leaven of those villainous scholars who turn even the pure word of God into leaven with their worm-eaten, limping humbug. For all that their teaching succeeds in doing is to let people puff themselves up falsely in a fraudulent manner with their untested faith, and say with bland self-

assurance that they are brave enough to cope with any assaults of faith. But they have not learned how a man should achieve this.

Fourteenthly

My elect brother, just have a good look at all the words in Matthew chapter 16 ! There you will find that no one can believe in Christ unless he has become formed like him beforehand. In the midst of unbelief, the elect person will find that he has cast off all the fraudulent faith which he has learned, heard or read in the scriptures; then he will see that no outward testimony can create anything of essence inside him – it can only do what it was created to do. And so he will not be distracted by the advice of inexperienced people, but will become eager for revelation, like Peter who was an example to all who came after him, saying: ‘I know for sure that Christ is the son of the living God.’ The unbelief which is concealed in my own flesh and blood is almost suffocated by those desires which the mustard-seed and good yeast will penetrate and consume, until at last complete unbelief is achieved. Despair and the greatest adversities need to be suffered. Hell must first be endured if one is to guard against the cunning of its devouring portals. How the damned accept faith is very different from how the elect accept it. The godless place great store in the scripture. They build a firm faith on the basis that someone has already suffered for them. But if they are asked to contemplate the lamb who opened up the book for them, then they have no desire to lose their soul, do not wish to become like the lamb and in their worldly way are content to rely on clear texts. That is wrong.

The scholar, to whom the whole Bible has been explained by men, can in no way understand it even if he were to burst; he has to wait until it is explained to him by the key of David; he will be crushed along with all his habitual ways in the wine-press; he will become so poor in spirit that he will be almost unable to find any faith at all in himself: he will only wish to learn true faith. That, then, is the faith which is as small as the mustard-seed. Then the man must see that he has to endure God’s work, and that he will grow from day to day in the knowledge of God. Then the man will be taught by God alone, not by anyone else. Everything that is known to creatures will become to him like bitter gall, since its ways are perverse. May God

protect and save all of his elect from these ways, once they have fallen into them. May Christ bring this to pass. Amen.

[Addendum] ³

To his dear brother Hans Zeiss, castellan at Allstedt.

There is one thing I forgot to mention in my discussion on why people think that suffering is placed on Christ alone, and why we need not suffer because he truly suffered for our sins. We also need to remark that it is a delicacy of the spirit which gives us such perverted peace and unjustified tolerance. Adam, when compared with Christ, is the epitome of fault; Christ is the very opposite. The disobedience of creatures is annulled by the obedience to the word which has become flesh in nature, and our fleshly nature must somewhat fade away due to the effect of faith, just as it happened to the entire Christ who is our head. That is why Christ atoned for all the damage done by Adam, so that all the parts should still remain attached to the whole, as the holy apostle of God clearly says: I fulfil that pain which the suffering of Christ did not complete; for his body, the church must suffer. Paul was unwilling to suffer for the church unless it was as a member carrying out his duties. We must all walk in the footsteps of Christ, and be armed with such thoughts; no manner of explanation can help anyone who thinks they, with their bodily habits, can defeat those who place all their trust in good works; for they poison the world even more with their fraudulent faith than the others with their foolish works. And so, to put all this clearly, we say that they are neophytes, that is untested novices, and that they should not be permitted to be carers of souls, but should remain catechumens for a long time yet, eager students of his godly work, and should not be allowed to teach until they themselves have been taught by God.

This writing of mine ⁴ is still not yet ready to be published in the mad world. In all the chapters where I have not yet cited the Bible, I still have to reference the chapters of the Bible in order to destroy the fleshly academics, for their fraudulent faith has given rise to all kinds of iniquity. And so it cannot be printed just now, for it would

³ Included in the 1524 edition of this pamphlet is the text of a letter which Müntzer wrote to Johann Zeiss of Allstedt, 2 December 1523. In one handwritten copy of this letter, it is prefaced, slightly confusingly, 'Sixteenthly...'

⁴ Possibly a reference to 'On fraudulent Faith'?

be going out into the world completely unarmed against those who think themselves well-armed. You should also be aware that they have attributed my teaching to the abbot Joachim ⁵ and they mock it by calling it an eternal gospel. I find much that is very good in the testimony of Joachim, but I have only read his writings on Jeremiah. But my teaching is way above that, I do not take it from him, but directly from the speech of God, and I will now prove it using all the books of the Bible. So let us leave things as they are just now, and let us always preserve careful copies of our letters.

Dated Wednesday after St Andrew's Day, in the year 1523.

(Translated by Andy Drummond, December 2015)

Original German text available at pages 288-299 of:
Thomas Müntzer: Schriften, Manuskripte und Notizen,
edited by A. Kohnle and E. Wolgast, Leipzig 2017

Digitised copies of the 1524 original text are available online via
<https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/sammlungen/historische-drucke/recherche/vd-16/>

⁵ i.e. Joachim de Fiore, Italian mystic (1135-1202)