

Letter written to Thomas Müntzer
by Johann Agricola ¹,
Wittenberg, February/March 1521

To the Christian theologian, Dr. Thomas Müntzer, preacher of Zwickau, his most beloved brother in Zwickau.

In the name of God.²

Dear Thomas, if ever you have had occasion to sound the trumpets, now for certain you have trumpeted more splendidly than ever in the new moon ³; I am overwhelmed by admiration for your powerful eloquence which has confused both heaven and earth and mingled both fire and water. For your letter bears witness to a ferocious rage; not a single word does not betray a growing emotion. But I will now reply.

Firstly you write that our letters bear falsehoods like Ziba ⁴, the worst kind of flatterer; for, since we were carried away by the spirit of dizziness (as you have expressed it), we have accused you of immodesty. Believe me, Thomas: we know that what we wrote to you about your importunity was not said without some cause. I have never spoken about this immodesty which you have used against Egranus. For in this matter you and I are of a similar opinion, and I admit freely that Egranus understands nothing of the holy scriptures. Who can avoid seeing how untamed that man's mind really is ! Moreover, I know from hearing him in Leipzig and Wittenberg what a child that man is in matters of true theology. But what we are talking about here in truth is that you are attacking people indiscriminately, regardless of where you are. Certainly, some of those who only wish the best for you have heard that you are abusing the position of your office, and that when you are duty-bound to teach correctly, you abuse others without any justification and even by name. And – to cut a long story short – they stated that YOU BREATHE ONLY SLAUGHTER AND BLOOD

¹ Johann Agricola was one of Luther's right-hand men, and here replies to a letter from Müntzer, now lost, which relates to the controversy with Egranus in Zwickau.

² This letter is written entirely in Latin, apart from a couple of phrases here and below; this one word '*Theos*' (God) is in Greek lettering: Θεός..

³ A reference to Psalm 81,3.

⁴ Ziba, a lying and flattering servant who appears before David in 2 Samuel 16.

⁵. Do you want to know who said this? They were not the kind of people who tell lies. For it is not possible for the mind of a whole community to be easily fooled, if they are directed by zeal. Those who wish to correct you have written to us about these matters. And there is no reason for you to be so angry. We have done what we needed to do. It is now your task not to condemn those who have admonished you. Let the exaltation of your spirit come down to our low level. Do not be high-minded ⁶. For it is written: do not become conceited ⁷. And there is no necessity for you to follow the example of Paul in being let down from the wall in a basket ⁸. For not even then was Paul forced to pay for his beliefs, since the plots were all secret ones. It is in order to avoid such things that we ought to submit to our judges. Regardless of whether it is Lysias or Porcius or a tribune of Caesar ⁹ who sits in judgement, dear Thomas, do not be of a contemptuous spirit. It is undeniably necessary for us to submit: otherwise what need was there for Christ to appear before Pilate? And they are not a scourge of the good, only of the wicked. But more of this at another time, for there is not enough time now to properly discuss so many things with you.

Farewell in Christ and put aside this personal enmity which shows so plainly in your letters. You understand what I am telling you. But whatever you do, do it scrupulously! If you protect the faith, then the Lord of life will give you more than merely life and goods. As regards those who rise up against you: reprove them, rebuke them, correct them whether it be in season or out of season, and in such a way that your modesty is plain to see by everyone. Farewell. Write back to me. Greet the schoolmaster from me and all the good people.

MDXXI

Johann Agricola of Eisleben.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
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⁵ This phrase appears in capital letters in the original.

⁶ This phrase written in Greek, a reference to Romans 11,20

⁷ 'Do not become conceited' – also written in Greek, referring to Romans 12,16.

⁸ Reference to 2 Corinthians 11,33.

⁹ Lysias – an orator in Greece, 445BC to 380BC; Porcius Festus, procurator of Judea from AD 59 to 62.