

Letter written by the Council of Allstedt ¹
to Duke Johann of Saxony,
14th June 1524

To the most illustrious high-born prince and lord, Lord Johann, duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thüringen and Margrave of Meissen, our more merciful lord and prince.

May the true and eternal upright fear of God be with Your Grace. Gracious lord, we poor people, the Council and community of Allstedt, have always been completely subject and willingly obedient to Your Grace's brother, Duke Friedrich, the praiseworthy Electoral Prince, and intend to continue to be so, as is due, to the best of our abilities, and we have shown this unequivocally in the matter of the nuns of Naundorf. ² Although this same matter has been a great burden for us, yet we have permitted His Electoral Grace to advise us to hand over to them both interest payments and tithes without any justifiable Christian obligation, in order that the matter might be settled without any uproar. But that seems to have done no good, for they have now imposed themselves on us in the matter of the chapel at Mallerbach, and, along with other people, have deceitfully and unjustifiably misrepresented us, so that in this hateful and envious manner they can bring their godless and unchristian suit in a favourable light to Your Grace. But if their application is granted by Your Grace, we poor people will be greatly burdened by it; we cannot take responsibility for it before God, for we would thereby assist in and defend the blaspheming of God. For, by the witness of the holy scripture, we are most certainly innocent. It is common knowledge that the poor people, out of ignorance at the time, worshipped the devil at Mallerbach under the name of Mary. Now that this same devil has been destroyed by well-intentioned pious people, why should we now assist the devil by arresting these people and putting them in prison? For we know surely from the witness of the holy apostle Paul that Your Grace has been given the sword to take revenge on evil-doers and the godless, and for the honour and protection of the pious. But since no particular damage has been done by our people, and nothing that affects the common good, and since we continue to undertake

¹ This letter was almost certainly composed with Müntzer's active participation.

² The Cistercian nunnery of Naundorf was situated just outside Allstedt. The nunnery owned the small chapel at Mallerbach nearby, dedicated to the Virgin Mary; the chapel was looted and set on fire on 24th March 1524, almost certainly at the hands of people from Allstedt. This episode was to have far-reaching effects on Müntzer's career.

duties and show obedience to the praiseworthy Electoral Prince, any other course would mean that His Grace would be respecting Man more than God, a thing which we would never believe of Your Graces; we poor people are not asking for any protection from our enemies; we poor people do not wish to burden either Your Grace or the praiseworthy Electoral Prince; and yet we have to live at all times in danger of death at the hands of our enemies who persecute us mightily and with hateful wrath on account of the gospel.

And so we ask you, for God's sake, that Your Grace should treat us as a Christian and praiseworthy prince should do, and to take to heart what the Creator himself said to pious Moses, Exodus 23: "Thou shalt not defend the godless". But because the whole world is now aware that monks and nuns are idolatrous people, how can they justifiably be defended by pious Christian princes? We wish to put our bodies and goods at the disposal of Your Grace and our praiseworthy Electoral Prince whenever something justifiable is asked of us. But to ask us to permit the worship of the devil at Mallerbach, and that our brothers should be handed over as sacrifices – that is something we cannot do, for it would be like being subject to the Turk. If, as a result, force is used against us, then the whole world, and especially the pious elect of God, will know the reason for our suffering and will see that we are becoming conformable to Jesus Christ, may he protect Your Grace in the righteous fear of God.

Written at Allstedt in the year 1524 after the birth of Christ our saviour, to Your Princely Grace from the Council and the whole obedient community of Allstedt.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
March 2016)*