

**Letter written to Christoph Meinhard,
written from Nürnberg ,
ca. December 1524**

This letter was written by Müntzer, probably from Nürnberg and probably in late November or early December 1524. Müntzer seems to be preparing for a journey to south-west Germany, where he had heard that the peasantry was rising in rebellion. Some archivists suggest that the letter is of later date, perhaps January or February 1525. Note that Müntzer here several times uses the initial 'N', in an attempt to conceal actual names from the authorities, should the letter be intercepted.

Thomas Müntzer to his dearest brother Christoph N. living in Eisleben ¹.

May the peace that lies in unease be with you, dear brother Christoph. Our cause has become like a beautiful gold-red ear of wheat: clever people love it when it is within their grasp, but they think it will never grow again when it has been cast into the soil, John 12.

You have heard already, as a warning from God, how Dr Jodocus Jonas ² of Wittenberg has taken the field against me in the most magnificent fashion. It was certainly he who urged Luther to write against me ³, and it is no great surprise to me that I now stink in the nose of the world, which is shameful to those who fear God and irreparably distressing and shameful to the soft-living brothers and those who pussyfoot around. I know that my name is unwelcome, like the taste of a green shoot before it develops into ears of grain. But there are barley-spikes on it, and the grain must be ground before it can make bread. The law will overthrow the godless and their lamentations will not help them. If I once spattered them with musket-shot, now with God do I wish to make the cannons roar over their heads. They have been allowed to get away with their villainy for quite long enough. God shows us clearly that they cannot be excused.

¹ This sentence is written in Latin in the original. The remainder of the letter is in German

² Properly: Justus Jonas – the 'Jodocus' means 'ridiculous'.

³ A reference either to Luther's *Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit* of June 1524: or to his open letter to the authorities of Mühlhausen, dated 21 August 1524.

I have preached openly before many hundreds of people and yet they say that I creep into dark corners etc. I have had my teachings printed in Nürnberg ⁴ and now they want to earn the gratitude of the Roman Empire by suppressing them. I rest my case.

They cannot now say of me: Yes, it's all very well for him to preach and write – but if he had stayed with us, then his teaching would certainly have been refuted etc. I thank God that I have had far greater cause against them than Samson against the Philistines etc. My heart remains resolute in God our saviour, may he protect you for ever, Amen.

If you can manage it, please assist me with a contribution, however small.⁵ But if this request annoys you, then I will not accept a single penny. Greet Hans N. ⁶ from me: he may be my enemy or my friend, but he will still have to testify on the matter. He is overly-troubled by the attacks of wicked people. Even if his suffering is great, not one word of support should fail him if he is to gain enlightenment. Ah, what a fuss is made when the mask of the deceitful world falls from its face! But this is how it must be: even if they could eat iron as if it was straw, it is still my intention to unmask them, completely and utterly.

Note.

I could easily have played a fine game with the people of N[ürnberg], if I had wanted to stir up trouble in the way that the lying world accuses me of. But I want to turn my accusers into cowards by my words alone, such that they will not be able to deny it. Many of the folk in N. advised me to preach, but I told them that that was not why I had come, but only to state my case in print. When the city authorities heard that, their ears fairly sang, because they like having good days. The sweat of the working people tastes sweet to them, so sweet, but it will turn into bitter gall. And then no debates or mock-battles will help them – the truth will out. Neither will they be helped by their fraudulent acceptance of the gospel. The people are hungry, they must eat and they will eat, as Amos said, and Matthew 5.

(Translated by Andy Drummond, February 2016)

Original German text available at pages 383-386 of:
Thomas Müntzer: Briefwechsel, edited by S. Bräuer and M. Kobuch, Leipzig 2010

⁴ A reference to the printing of either TM's *Highly Provoked Speech of Defence* (*Hoch verursachte Schutzrede*) which was confiscated while still in the printing-shop in December 1524; or to his *Explicit Exposure of the False Belief* (*Ausgetrückte emplössung des falschen Glaubens*) which was printed, with almost all copies being confiscated.

⁵ Given that Meinhard was probably in Eisleben, which lies a good 230 kms north of Nürnberg, this request for money does raise some issues about the date, and place, on which the letter was written.

⁶ This is almost certainly Hans Zeiss, the castellan in Allstedt, whose loyalties were ambiguous at the time of TM's expulsion from Allstedt.