

**Letter written to Friedrich ‘the Wise’,
Allstedt, 4 October 1523**

This letter was written by Müntzer to Prince Friedrich in Lochau, justifying his conflict with Count Ernst of Mansfeld. The Catholic Count, who had no jurisdiction over Allstedt itself, had prohibited his subjects from attending Müntzer’s very popular reformed church services. Müntzer had written to Ernst in September, attacking him for his attempts to silence the church reforms. Ernst had then complained to Friedrich who, in turn, asked for clarification from the authorities in Allstedt.

To the most illustrious high-born Prince and Lord Friedrich, Marshall of the Holy Roman Empire and Electoral Prince, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia and Margrave of Meissen, my dearest lord.

I greet you in Jesus, the son of God.

May the righteous fear of God and the peace which is an enemy of the world be with you, most illustrious high-born Prince and Lord, Your Electoral Grace. Dearest lord, ever since almighty God made me an earnest preacher, I have always been accustomed to sound the noisy battle-trumpets, that they might resound with the zeal of the knowledge of God, sparing no one on this earth who stands in the way of God’s word, as God himself commanded through the prophets, Isaiah 58. That is why my name has of necessity (and quite properly) become abhorred, hateful and atrocious to the worldly-wise, Matthew 5, Luke 6. My name has the sweet aroma of life to the small band of the poor and needy, but for the lecherous it has a horrible taste which foretells their imminent destruction, 2 Corinthians 2. And it is now true that the heartfelt desire of poor, miserable, pitiable Christianity has swallowed me up, and that is why the slanders of the godless have been poured upon my head, Psalms 68 [69]¹, that is why I have been driven from one town to another without any justifiable reason, Matthew 25, and that is why my cause has been quite hatefully mocked, Jeremiah 20. From all this I have often reflected, Psalms 1, how I should like to throw myself forward as an iron wall before the needy, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 13; I have seen that Christianity can only be saved from the jaws of the raging lion if we draw forth the

¹ In the original text, the numbering of Psalms follows the Vulgate version of the Bible; in modern times, we are more used to the Hebrew-Masoretic numbering version. As a general rule, from Psalm 9 and 10 onwards, the numeration is one different: where Müntzer cites Psalm 68, for example, we should consult Psalm 69; where he cites 18, we should check 19; and so on. Müntzer’s original numbering has been retained in this translation.

clear, pure word of God, and put aside the cover or lid under which it has been hidden, Matthew 5, by dealing honestly with the truth of the Bible before the whole world, Matthew 10, and testifying before both the lowly and the mighty, Acts 26, and do nothing other than present Christ the crucified to the whole world, 1 Corinthians 1; we must sing and preach without equivocation and without rest. To conduct such a religious service in the church, so that no time is wasted in vain, but instead strengthening the people with psalms and hymns: these basic principles of the German Mass are quite clearly explained in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 14.

But all my speeches and protests counted for nothing, when the well-born Count Ernst of Mansfeld spent the entire summer forbidding more and more of his subjects from attending my services, even before the edict of his most illustrious high-born grace the Emperor had even been published,² all of which caused our people and his people to come close to rebellion, something my arguments would have been unable to prevent for any length of time; therefore, on the Sunday after the Nativity of Mary³ I appealed to him from my pulpit, earnestly inviting him to come to my little flock, saying: I ask Count Ernst of Mansfeld to appear here along with the ordinaries of the diocese and to prove that my teaching or office is in any way heretical. But if he refuses to do this (may God forbend) then I will denounce him as an evil-doer, a rogue and a rascal, a Turk and a heathen, and show this to be true with the evidence of the Bible. That was what I said, and nothing else, as I can prove.

He dealt with me then without any justification, and now he cites the Imperial edict as if his action was somehow authorised by it, which is obviously not the case. So he should have brought his scholars along with him and instructed me courteously and modestly. Should I have been vanquished by him, then he could have accused me before Your Electoral Grace and then afterwards he could have forbidden his people from listening to my church services. But if it becomes common practice to obstruct the gospel with human laws, Isaiah 29, Matthew 15, Titus 1, and if the wording of the edict is not executed according to the letter, then there will be confusion amongst the people, who should love their princes rather than fear them: Romans 13, where it says that the princes should not terrify the pious. But if that does happen, then the sword will be taken away from them and given to the zealous

² This is a reference to the Imperial Edict of 6 March 1523, which banned 'divisive preaching'. It was published in Saxony by Prince Friedrich at the end of May 1523.

³ 13 September 1523

people to destroy the godless, Daniel 7, and that noble jewel, which is peace, will be taken away from the earth, Revelations 6: he that sits upon the white horse set out to conquer, but he conquered not. O high-born, benevolent Elector, here you must work tirelessly so that our saviour, who sits on the right hand of God on the day of judgement (when he himself will put the sheep to pasture and drive the wild beasts away from the flock) can mercifully topple the might of kings, Psalms 109 [110], Ezekiel 34. Oh, but God would be well pleased if that is not brought about by our own neglect.⁴

In this long lesson of mine, I have tried not to conceal anything from Your Electoral Grace, Ezekiel 3. I would request also that you look favourably upon my writings and allow me, by the law of God, to let my defence be heard to show whether it be justified. If I were now to yield, then my conscience and my life would not be countenanced in the eyes of Christians, 1 Timothy 3. Your Electoral Grace must also act boldly here, for you know that God has stood by Your Electoral Grace since the very beginning, may He protect you and your people in all eternity. Amen.

Written in Allstedt in the year 1523 of Our Lord, on the day of St Francis.

Thomas Müntzer of Stolberg, a servant of God.

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
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⁴ Something of a *non sequitur* here: we assume that Müntzer means to say that Friedrich should take action now to avoid the possibility of confusion and rebellion.