

The Eleven Articles of Mühlhausen ¹

22/23 September 1524

In the name of Jesus. In order to praise God, the community of Mühlhausen, the congregations of the churches of St Nikolaus, St Georg and St Margaret, the linen-weavers of St Jakob and many of the other craftsmen of the town have acted upon decisions made on the basis of God's word. But if these decisions are shown to oppose God's word, then they should be improved and changed.

[1] we should establish a new Council, for the following reasons: that it will act in accordance with the fear of God; that old hatreds do not linger on; so that arbitrary actions are no longer undertaken; and that both those who do evil and those who approve it should receive the same punishment, Romans 1, Luke 19 concerning the wilful servant; and that there is no confusion in the community about who is outside the community and who is inside, for that would result in harm, since it is a hard thing to accept judges who are themselves guilty.

[2] we should dispense justice and deliver judgements according to the commandments of God in the Bible and the holy word of God, for this reason: that the poor man should be treated in the same way as the rich, as in Zechariah 7, Leviticus 19 and 26, John 7, Matthew 5, Luke 18.

[3] we should not set a fixed term for the Council to govern, neither one year nor two, for this reason: that they should not be permitted to do whatever they please, but should come to correct decisions, and not puff themselves up and consider themselves to be lords. Jude in his canonical epistle, and 2 Peter 2 concerning the seed of godless people etc; and Deuteronomy 16 concerning godless rulers.

[4] the Council should do what is right and abandon what is unjust, under pain of loss of body and life, namely execution, for this reason: that justice may be maintained and wickedness should not be left unpunished. Isaiah 5, Luke 19 concerning those who resist godly rulers, Numbers 14, Deuteronomy 4, 20 and 21 concerning unjust judges and 25 on the commandment of God to execute unjust rulers who do not wish to follow the commandment of God which calls for the punishment of the wicked.

¹ These articles were almost certainly drawn up under the active advice of Müntzer, shortly before he and Pfeiffer were expelled from the town on 27 September. The multiple references to the Bible make his involvement clear, as does almost certainly the reference to 'the fear of God' in the first article.

[5] No one should be forced into government; if someone does not do it willingly, he should be replaced by another, for this reason: that no one should be able to use this as an excuse for themselves to do nothing. Luke 19 concerning lazy servants, and 1 Peter 5, Exodus 23 about not following the godless horde into injustice; Matthew 7 concerning the good building; Deuteronomy 13 about not obeying your mother and father against the commandment of God, as in Luke 14.

[6] we should also look after those who are in need, for this reason: that they have no reason to be greedy, and that they do not have to scrimp and save to stay alive, as is written in Exodus 18, where the greedy and proud and uncomprehending liars and haters are unfit to govern, as is written in Acts 20 concerning government and Matthew 10 about the labourer who worthy of his wage, and 1 Corinthians 9 concerning the provision of care, and Luke 3 on being content with your wage.

[7] documents should now be sealed with the new or secret seal ², which is to be used for the honour of God and in the service of the town, so that all deception and falsehood may be set aside and avoided, as in Luke 16 concerning the children of the world, where he says that in their generation they are cleverer than the children of light, Jeremiah 2 where it says that people are clever when it comes to doing evil, but are not able to do good. Genesis 6 says that the flesh of man is always inclined to evil. Romans 6.

[8] if they [the old council] do not wish to be directed by the common good, then we will make a list of their wicked deeds on paper, all that they did twenty years ago out of spite against the common good, and how they deceived the town, will be written down so that everyone can see what kind of people they were, and this will let everyone see and hear how they have treated us. Then everyone will say that these people have been treated far too leniently and have been put up with for far too long, as is written in Psalm 82 [83] – you should fill their faces with shame so that they will seek thy name, O Lord. See Deuteronomy 6, Ruth 7 and Matthew 21 concerning the servants who did not want to give their master his fruits, where the Lord killed these evil-doers and gave his vineyard to other labourers.

[9] if all this is not ordained according to the word of God, then we aforementioned will not give any authority to the Council, for this reason: that God's righteousness and justness should be advanced and all false powers and selfishness be abandoned, we will

² The town's old seals were taken away by Allstedt's mayors when they fled the town on 20th September – along with the town keys and flag and the town horse.

not come to any agreement with the Council or with the ‘*Achtmänner*’³, neither with craftsmen nor with commoners, unless they can propose something that is of better service and more like God’s justice and truth than our proposal. 1 Thessalonians 5, prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.

[10] if, as a result of disruption by our opponents, the new Council is not approved, then we the aforementioned will demand damages from our opponents, for this reason: that they have not wanted to follow our advice, which we gave them on the basis of God’s word. so that they could avoid responsibility for the trouble. Exodus 21, 22, 23, Proverbs 1.

[11] above all we wish to act according to God’s word in all these things, without any delay, for this reason: that if we are not permitted to carry out the commandment of God, then we want you to tell us what the pious Lord, and his only son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, have done to you, that you do not let him rule over your miserable bag of maggots: has he, who is perfectly just, lied to you or deceived you ? Psalms 10 [11] and 14 [15], Deuteronomy 10.

In conclusion: it is the opinion and decision of all of us that all our works and dealings should be measured against God’s commandments and righteousness, to determine whether they are harmful to the people or God. If they are pleasing to people and harmful to God, or pleasing to God and harmful to people, then we will choose between the two: and we would much rather have God as a friend and the people as enemies, than God as an enemy and the people as friends, for to fall into God’s hands is a torment. Genesis 7, Exodus 15, Romans 3 and 9, Matthew 14, concerning the Last Judgement, and Luke 21, Matthew 20, you should fear him who has the power to cast your body and soul into the fires of Hell etc.

In the name of Jesus. We write this to you, Christian brothers, so that you will now know how to conduct yourselves.

Translated by Andy Drummond, March 2016

³ The ‘*Achtmänner*’ were district representatives or councillors in the so-called ‘Council of Eight’ which had been set up in Mühlhausen in 1523 as a concession to the radical faction.