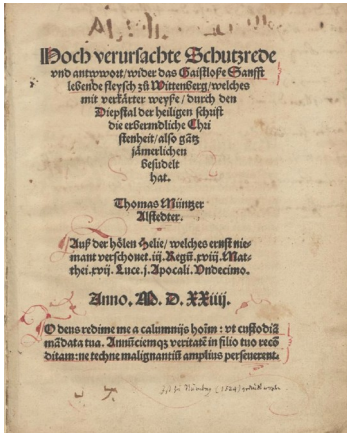


HIGHLY PROVOKED VINDICATION



This pamphlet was printed in Nürnberg, probably in December 1524, in the printing workshop of Hieronymus Höltzel. It was evidently passed to the printer by Müntzer himself. Before it could be distributed, however, a raid on the print-shop by the city authorities discovered it, and it was confiscated. It is unlikely that any copies escaped into the public domain, although at least one is preserved in the archives. The edition has no decorative features, beyond the central alignment of the text on the cover page and penultimate page, and an ornate capital letter at the very start of the text. The text runs to 32 pages.

Highly Provoked Vindication and Reply to the Spiritless Easy-Living Flesh in Wittenberg who has Sullied Wretched Christianity with his Falsification and Theft of the Holy Scriptures.

Thomas Müntzer of Allstedt.

From the Cave of Elijah, whose Zeal Spares No One.
3 Kings 18, Matthew 17, Luke 1, Apocalypse Eleven.

In the Year M.D.XXiii.

O Lord, deliver me from the calumnies of men
so that I may keep your commandments.
And I will proclaim the truth which is hidden in your son,
so that the guile of the evil-doers will not persist any longer.¹

To the most illustrious first-born prince and almighty lord Jesus Christ, to the gentle king of kings, the bold duke of all believers, my most merciful lord and faithful protector and his sole grieving bride, poor Christianity.

May all praise, fame, honour and worthiness, all homage and all splendour be yours alone, you eternal son of God, Philippians 2. Your holy spirit has always had the misfortune to be regarded by those merciless lions, the scholars, as if it were the worst work of the Devil, John 8, even though you possessed it in infinite measure

¹ This final section of the title-page is in Latin in the original publication. It reads as follows: *O deo, redime me a calumniis hoim: ut custodia madata tua. Annuciemque veritate in filio tuo reco ditam: ne techne malignantiu amplius perseuerent.*

from the very beginning, John 3. All the elect have received it from you in your fullness, John 1, so that it now lives within them, 1 Corinthians 3 and 6, 2 Corinthians 1; Ephesians 1; Psalms 5. You grant it to all those who hasten towards you, according to the strength of their belief, Ephesians 4, Psalms 67 ². And whosoever does not have the spirit of Christ and cannot give unequivocal testimony of it, he will not belong to you, Christ, as Romans 8 gives irrefutable testimony, Psalms 92.

It is therefore no great wonder that the most ambitious scholar of them all, Doctor Liar, ³ is becoming more arrogant and foolish for every day that passes, and covers himself with your holy scripture without once sacrificing his own self-glorification or comforts. He makes use of it most deceitfully, but nonetheless wishes to keep you as far away as possible, Isaiah 58, just as if he had gained mastery of your judgements (for you are the gateway to truth). And he stands insolently in your sight and utterly despises your righteous spirit, for he presents himself in his true clothes when, from raging envy and the most bitter hatred, he mocks me, a chosen limb of your body, he makes me a laughing-stock before his scornful, mocking and most ferocious cronies, and portrays me to the simple-minded as a Satan or devil, he slanders and sneers at me with his corrupt, scandalous opinions, to my irreparable harm.

But in you am I full of joy and quite sated with your mild comforting, as you so graciously announced to your true friends, saying in Matthew 10: "The disciple is not above his master." O innocent duke and comforting saviour: if once they blasphemously named you a Beelzebub, then how much more do they slander me, your tireless foot-soldier, after I expressed my thoughts about the flattering rogue of Wittenberg and in doing so followed your voice, John 10. Aye, that is how things must be if we are not ready to challenge the soft-living self-seekers with their fraudulent belief and their pharisaical trickery, rather than bringing an end to their fame and splendour. Even you were not able to convince them of your superiority.

² 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 67, for example, we should consult Psalm 68; where he cites 118, we should check 119; and so on. Müntzer's original numbering has been retained in this translation.

³ i.e. Martin Luther, who is the primary target of this entire pamphlet.

They even thought that they were more learned than you and your disciples. Aye, but even they were more learned, with their stubborn book-learning, than our Doctor Ludicrous can ever be. Even if they had all the fame and the greatest reputation in the world, it was still not right for them to act against you nor to try to refute your teachings with the text of the scriptures, as they did with Nicodemus, John 7, and also concerning the Sabbath, John 5 and 9. They piled up the entire Bible against you, just to prove that you deserved to die for claiming and freely confessing that you were a son of God, born of the eternal father, just as we now confess it. So they said: we have a law, and according to that law he must die. And they brought against you the text of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, but did not bother to look further at the context of these same chapters; and in the same way, that cunning stealer of scripture acts against me today: where the scripture is at its clearest, that is where he aims his burning jealous mockery, calling the spirit of God a Devil.

The entire holy scripture talks of nothing other (and it is also proven by all creatures) than the crucified son of God, which is why he himself explained his ministry by referring firstly to Moses and then all the way through the prophets. He explained that he had to suffer and to enter into the glory of his father. This is clearly set out in the last chapter of Luke. And Paul also said that he could preach nothing other than Christ the crucified, 1 Corinthians 1, after he had studied the law of God more deeply than all of his companions, Galatians 1, and that he could find nothing else in there except the suffering son of God; as Matthew 5 says, he did not come to abolish the law or to tear up the covenant of God, but rather to complete it, to explain it and to fulfil it.

The hateful scholars could not understand any of this, for they did not investigate the scriptures with all their heart and soul, as they should have done, Psalms 118, and as Christ also commanded them, John 5. In this matter they were as learned as the apes who wanted to copy the cobbler and make shoes, but ended up spoiling the leather. And why? They wanted to accept the comfort of the holy spirit, but not once in their lives did they come to the foundation of faith through the sadness of their hearts, which is the correct way if one wants to see the righteous light shining in the darkness and receive the strength to become the children of God, as is clearly described in Psalms 54 and 62, and John 1.

Thus if Christ is being preached simply by accepting the testimony of the old and new Testaments of God without the enlightenment of the spirit, then that will result in far worse hoaxes than those perpetrated by the Jews and heathens. Anyone can see with their own eyes that the present-day scholars do nothing different from the Pharisees of yesteryear, priding themselves in their use of the holy scripture, writing and scribbling whole books full and chattering more and more loudly: believe, believe ! But they deny the very foundation of faith, they scoff at the spirit of God and quite simply believe in nothing, as you can see. None of them wants to preach unless he is paid 40 or 50 florins. Aye, the best of them want more than a hundred or even two hundred florins; in them has become true the prophecy of Micah 3: “the priests thereof teach for hire”; they want peace and a comfortable life and be afforded the greatest respect on earth. They boast that they understand the foundation of faith and then they do the exact opposite so that they can scold the righteous spirit as a wayward spirit or Satan; all this under cover of the scripture. The same happened to Christ when he used his innocence to proclaim the will of his father, which was just too much for the scholars and quite repugnant to them, John 5 and 6.

And you will find nothing different today, when the godless are exposed by the law – they reply quite breezily: Ha, but that law no longer applies. But when it is explained properly to them how it has been written in the heart, 2 Corinthians 3, and how one must pay close attention to its instructions in order to find the correct path to the foundation, Psalms 36, then the godless man attacks the righteous and drags forth Paul with such a clumsy lack of understanding that even children can see that it is just a puppet-show, Psalms 63. Yet even so, he wants to be the cleverest person on earth, and boasts that he has no equal. Moreover, he calls all people who are poor in spirit “fanatical spirits”, and claps his hands over his ears whenever anyone mentions the word “spirit”. He has to shake his clever little head, just as Proverbs 18 says, for the devil cannot listen when someone talks about the foundation of faith, for he has been cast out. And so he uses deceitfulness, 2 Corinthians 11. Using the full width of the double-octave, he reaches the highest register of the musician, and sings shrilly from the letter of Paul to the Romans 12: “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.” He rather likes that kind of mixed broth, but

otherwise he is afraid to taste the basic stock on its own. He says that one should simply believe, but cannot see what is necessary for that. Solomon says of such people that they are blockheads, as is written in Proverbs 24: “The wisdom of God is too high for a fool.”

Just as Moses did, Christ began with the foundation of faith and explained the law from beginning to end. So he said: “I am the light of the world.” His preaching was truthful and so well argued that he even captivated the human reasoning of the godless, as the evangelist Matthew describes in chapter 13 and Luke also explains in chapter 2. But because the teaching was too high for them, and the person and life of Christ was too low, they grew angry with him and his teaching and said quite openly that he was a Samaritan and was possessed by the devil. Their judgement was directed by the flesh, just as the devil likes it to be, and they just blurted out their opinion, for they did not object to a world which is good to Brother Soft-life, Job 28. Everything that they did was aimed at pleasing the world, Matthew 6 and 23.

And the godless Wittenberg flesh treats me in the same way, since I approach the Bible correctly and – in accordance with the first chapters therein – strive for the purity of God’s law, Psalms 18, and I explain the fulfilment of the spirit of the fear of God by using all the texts of the Bible, Isaiah 11. And I do not allow him his corrupt way of teaching the new Testament of God without reference to God’s law and the foundation of faith, which is only experienced after the punishment meted out by the holy spirit, John 16. For the spirit only punishes unbelief after the law is recognised, and no one can recognise it unless he has previously embraced it as zealously as the most unbelieving heathen. From the very beginning, all the elect have recognised their unbelief by submitting to the law, Romans 2 and 7. I recognise Christ and all his members as the fulfiller of the law, Psalms 18, for God’s will and work must be carried out to the letter by observing the law, Psalms 1, Romans 12; if this is not done, then no one could possibly distinguish belief from disbelief, other than by some contrivance such as that used by the Jews who, with their Sabbath and their scripture, never understood the foundation of their faith.

I have done nothing to that cunning black raven (which Noah sent out from the Ark as a sign) but this: like an innocent dove, I have flapped my wings which are covered with silver through a sevenfold purification, and gilded my back with gold,

Psalms 67; I have flown over the carrion on which he likes to perch, and despised it, for I want the whole world to know that he flatters the godless scoundrels, as you can see for yourself in his pamphlet against me ⁴, and – in short – he defends them. And from that it is quite evident that Doctor Liar does not reside in the house of God, Psalms 14, for he does not despise the godless; on the contrary, on behalf of the godless he vilifies many god-fearing people as devils and rebellious spirits. The black raven knows this full well. So that he has carrion to eat, he pecks the eyes of pigs out of their heads, he makes the pleasure-seekers blind; he tolerant of their sins so that he can have his fill of honour and possessions and especially the finest-sounding titles.

The Jews tried to insult and humiliate Christ at every opportunity, in the same way as Luther now treats me. He rebukes me most fiercely and reproaches me with the mercifulness of the son of God and his dear friends, because I have preached the importance of the law and have said that there should be no reduction of the punishment handed out to the spiritless transgressors (even if they be our rulers), but rather that it should be carried out with the utmost severity. Paul taught his disciple Timothy, and through him all pastors, how to preach to the people, 1 Timothy 1; he says clearly that punishment should come down on all those who fight and struggle against nourishing doctrine; no one can deny this, for a bright, clear judgement is provided in Deuteronomy 13, and Paul pronounces the same over the unchaste sinner, 1 Corinthians 5.

Although I have had printed the sermon which I gave before the princes of Saxony, without any reservations, and told them from the scripture how they should use the sword to avert an insurrection – in short, that disobedience must be punished regardless of whether you are great or small, Numbers 25 – despite this, along comes Father Tread-Softly, that lenient fellow, and says: this one wants to provoke a rebellion ! That is what he understood from my letter to the miners. He says one thing, but keeps silent about the most significant point, which I clearly put to the princes, that a whole community should have the power of the sword, just as they should have the key to forgiveness; I taught them from the texts of Daniel 7, Revelations 6, Romans 13 and 1 Kings 8, that the princes were not lords over the

⁴ This is Luther's pamphlet *A Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit*, June 1524.

sword, but rather its servants, and that they should not act however they want, Deuteronomy 17: they should bring justice. And that is why it is traditional for the people to be present whenever someone is brought for judgement before the law, Numbers 15. And why? Because if the rulers try to miscarry justice, Isaiah 10, then the Christians in attendance should reject their judgement and not permit it, for God will demand payment for innocent blood, Psalms 78. It is the greatest outrage in the world that no one is prepared to take up the cause of the needy, and that the mighty do what they want, as Job describes in chapter 41.

Our poor flatterer wants to cover himself with Christ by using fraudulent compassion, in contrast to Paul's text in 1 Timothy 1. But he writes in his book *On Trading and Usury* that the princes should not hold back from mingling with thieves and robbers. In the same book, however, he keeps quiet about the source of all theft. He is a herald who wants to earn gratitude from the bloodshed which arises over people's possessions, which God certainly never approved. Look, the origin of usury, theft and robbery lies with our lords and princes, who treat all creatures as their possessions: the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth – everything must be theirs, Isaiah 5. And then they proclaim God's commandments to the poor and say: God has commanded that you shall not steal; but that does not help them at all. For while they compel everyone to slave and scrape, the poor peasant, the workman and all who live, Micah 3, if any of the poor commits the smallest crime then he must hang. And to this Doctor Liar says: Amen. The lords themselves make the poor man their enemy. They cannot remove the cause of rebellion, so how can it turn out well in the long run? That is what I say – and if that makes me a rebel, then so be it.

He has absolutely no shame, like the Jews in John 8 who brought Christ a woman who had been found in adultery, then tested him to see if he would disobey the will of God, for then they could easily call him an evil-doer. For if he had let the woman go free without passing judgement, then, they said, he would be a defender of the unrighteous. But in the gospel it is written that Christ explained the father's strictness by his own mercy. The mercy of God extends to all the works of his hand, Psalms 144. It is not cancelled out by the severity of the law, and the elect do not strive to escape it, as Jeremiah says and also Psalm 6: he wants to be punished in

justice and not in wrath; in all eternity, wrath has not come from God, but rather from the perverse fear of men against God, when they are terrified by pain; men cannot see that, through all the pain and the phantoms of fear, God leads them to eternity.

All members of the Christian community who have become evil-doers as a result of Original Sin must, as Paul says, be judged according to the law. Then the strictness of the father can clear the godless Christians out of the way, and remove all those who strive against the soothing teaching of Christ, so that the righteous have the time and the space to learn God's will; it would be impossible for a single Christian to contemplate God's will amidst such a tyranny, in which evil deeds remained unpunished, but the innocent would have to suffer punishment. The godless tyrants would be able to justify their attacks on the pious, saying: I have to martyr you, Christ also had to suffer, you should not resist me, Matthew 5. That would be a great evil. We have to be quite clear here, since the oppressors are claiming to be the best Christians.

The devil has some really cunning tricks for fighting against Christ and his followers, 2 Corinthians 6 and 11, sometimes with indulgent flattery, as Luther does when he defends the godless with the words of Christ; and sometimes with terrible severity, as when he uses his corrupt righteousness to defend material possessions. However, the holy spirit represented by the finger of Christ, 2 Corinthians 3, has not infused his severity with the friendly strictness of the law, nor with the crucified son of God: we are brought to an understanding of God's will and its best-intended strictness by combining both of these, 1 Corinthians 2. That man however despises the law of the father and uses the most cherished treasure of Christ's mercy to feed his hypocrisy; he disgraces the father and all his strict laws by alluding to the patience of his son, John 15 and 16; and he thereby disdains the distinction made by the holy spirit, debasing one by adulterating it with the other to such an extent that there remains no understanding in the world, Jeremiah 5. He proposes that Christ only taught patience so that the Christian godless could torment their brothers.

Christ was castigated as a devil when he directed the Jews to the works of Abraham, and made for them the very clearest distinction between punishment and forgiveness – punishment, that is, according to righteous severity; and so he did not

abolish the law, as he says in the seventh chapter of John (without contradicting the eighth chapter) : judge not according to the appearance, but give a righteous judgment. No other judgement was asked of them than what was written in the laws, to judge according to the spirit of the law. Therefore one should also forgive according to the gospels, with the spirit of Christ, for the furtherance of the gospel and not its hindrance, 2 Corinthians 3 and 13. It is because I have made such distinctions that I have been called a devil by Doctor Liar and his fellow-scholars, who say: have we not taught correctly in our writing and teaching? But you bring forth no other fruit than rebellion. You are a Satan and – even worse – not a very good Satan etc. Behold, you are a Samaritan and are possessed by the devil.

O Christ, I consider myself unworthy of such exquisite suffering, and of fighting with you in common cause, although the opinion of my adversary has the support of many biased and corrupt judges. With you, I say to the proud, swollen-headed, sly dragon: Listen to me ! I am not possessed by the devil, I am trying to preach the name of God with my ministry, the name which gives comfort to the sad, but brings ruin and illness to the healthy, Isaiah 6, Matthew 9 and 13, Luke 8 and 4. And if I were to say that I would give it all up because it was giving me a bad name or because of all the lies told about me, then I would be no better than you, Doctor Liar, with your corrupt slanders and abuse. You could not help squabbling with the godless. But when that was over, you set yourself up in the place of those same evil-doers whom you had just been belabouring in the greatest wrath. And now that you see that things might go too far, you are trying to transfer your worst reputation to another man, one whom the world already treats as an enemy, and thereby transform yourself into an angel of light as the devil does, so that no one could possibly recognise your wickedness. That is why the prophet, in Psalms 90, calls you a basilisk, a dragon, an adder and a lion, because, as is your habit, sometimes you flatter people with your poison and sometimes you rage and rave.

The blameless son of God succeeded in comparing the most ambitious scholars with the devil and allowed us to make our own judgement from both the gospel and God's law, Psalms 18. Their bloodthirsty desire was to have him put to death, for they said, John 11: "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe in him and the people will support him; see, already they run to him in great crowds; if we let him

continue in this way, then we will lose everything and we will become poor people.” And in just the same way along came our Caiaphas, Doctor Liar, and gave good advice to his princes; he made a strong argument, saying that he was worried about his fellow countrymen who lived near Allstedt. But it is the honest truth, and the whole land can bear witness, that all the roads were full of people from every village, who wanted to hear how the church office was conducted in Allstedt, the way we sang and preached the Bible. And even if he were to burst, he could not do the same in Wittenberg, as one can see from his own attempts at a German Mass; how jealous Luther was, and so very angry that he initially tried to persuade his princes to ban the printing of my Service. But when the Wittenberg Pope’s decree was not obeyed, he thought: well, just wait, I will come up with a plan to smash up this pilgrimage. The godless man has a ready and inventive mind for solving problems like this, Psalms 35; his scheme, as you can see, was to use the layman’s hatred for the priests. If he had had a righteous love directing his punishment, then he would not have substituted himself for the Pope, and he would not be so hypocritical with the princes, as is clearly written in Psalm 9. In fact, he translated this self-same Psalm and used it to attack the Pope – but his attack could so neatly be made on himself as well, for he wants to make St Peter and St Paul into bailiffs who will defend his hangmen.

But our Doctor Liar is a simple man, for he writes that I should not be prevented from preaching, but rather that the princes should keep an eye on me to make sure that the Allstedt Spirit keeps his fists to himself. See, dear brothers of Christ, is he not a learned man? Aye, of course he is learned, for even in another two or three years the world will still not realise what murderous, perfidious damage he has done. But when he writes in this way, he hopes that his hands will be washed in the waters of innocence, and that no one will notice that he is a persecutor of truth. He insists that his preaching must be the word of God because it suffers from so much persecution. I am greatly astonished how this shameless monk can bear the burden of terrible persecution, with all that good malmsey wine and those delicacies found in whorehouses. But he cannot behave differently from his scholar’s nature, John 10: “We do not want to harm you for a good work; but for blasphemy we wish to stone

you to death.” That is what they said to Christ, just as this one speaks against me: they should drive me out, not because of my preaching, but because of my rebellion.

Dear brothers, it really is not a straightforward thing which is happening just now. You have no idea what is involved here; you imagine that if you no longer give anything to the priests then everything will sort itself out. But you do not realise that things are a hundred times – a thousand times – worse than before. From now on you will be shat upon by a new doctrine which distorts the word of God. But to combat that you have the commandment of Christ, Matthew 7, for if you examine things from your heart, then no one can deceive you, say or write what he will. But you must pay close attention, as Paul warned the Corinthians, saying in 2 Corinthians 11: “I fear that your minds will be corrupted away from the simplicity that is in Christ.” The scholars have understood this simplicity to mean the entire treasure-house of divine wisdom, Colossians 6, in contradiction to the text in Genesis 3, where God warned Adam in a single command about the damage which would be done if he allowed himself to be confused by creaturely desires, rather than finding satisfaction in God alone, as is written: delight thyself in the Lord.

Doctor Liar adduces a mighty argument against me by saying that his teaching is honest and straightforward and can burrow through every obstacle. So my preaching alone does not upset him, for, as he says, there must be sects; he begs the prince not to forbid my preaching. I had hoped for nothing else than that he would argue with words, debate before the whole world, and make himself available to argue only with words; but now he turns it all around and wants the princes to deal with it; so everything would be settled in advance, and no one could say: oh, but now they themselves want to persecute the gospel, do they? They should just let me preach and not forbid me from doing so. But I am supposed to keep my hands idle and not even express myself in print. Aye, that is a fine thing, just as it was with the Jews: “We do not want to harm you for a good work; but for blasphemy.” These truly pious people said that if one swore an oath, but it was not sworn by a gift to the altar, then it was worthless. And they had plenty more tricks like that, Matthew 23, Luke 11. And for all that, they were pious people; aye, they do no harm, as long as you believe that the weak should be spared.

The Jews could not take this blasphemy seriously, as you can understand from the gospel. Neither were they very concerned about good works, much the same as Luther. That is why God reproached them with the works of Abraham, John 8. But the Jews did have a terrible hatred and they wanted to appear pure before the people, just as now our Virgin Martin does. Oh, such a demure Babylonian woman, Revelations 8 ! He says that he will deal with everything with words alone and yet does not even begin to justify or condemn my position with words; he only presents me in a bad light to the big shots, demanding that no one should be allowed to follow my teaching since it incites to rebellion. But anyone who wants to have a clear judgement here should by no means approve of rebellion, nor should they be against righteous retaliation; they must hold to a reasonable middle ground, or else they will hate my teaching too much or praise it too highly, according to their inclinations, and that is something I would never want.

It would be more advantageous for me to instruct the poor people with good teaching than to get tangled up with this blasphemous monk, who claims that he is a new Christ who has gained much for Christianity with his blood and on top of that he has achieved that fine thing – that priests may now take wives. How am I supposed to answer? I will perhaps not find much to say, since you ⁵ seem to have thought of everything (or so you think). Just look, how well you sacrificed the poor priests on the butcher's block, when you commented on the first Imperial Edict ⁶: it had to be endured etc, so that the teachings which you had initiated would not be brought to account. So you were quite hypocritically prepared to allow them to be taken away. And that would of course allowed you to treat them as modern martyrs and you could compose a little ditty or two about them, and straight away become a proper saviour. And then indeed you could sing in your own way: *Nunc dimittis* ⁷ etc, and everyone would have sung along. Monk, when you want to dance, then the whole world pays court.

But if you are a saviour, then what a most wonderful saviour you must be. Christ gives praise to his father, John 8, and says: "If I honour myself, my honour is

⁵ Note that at this point Müntzer changes from a third-person description of Luther to a second-person direct address. Note also that he uses the familiar, or contemptuous, 'du' pronoun.

⁶ Luther's work *Against the Perverted and False Imperial Mandate* of 1523 in which he proposed that the punishment of married clergy should not be opposed by secular authority.

⁷ This refers to Luther's hymn *A New Song Shall Be Begun* celebrating the Brussels martyrs of 1523.

nothing.” But you want to have full honour from the people of Orlamünde⁸. You take and steal (as is the raven’s nature) the name of the son of God and want to earn thanks from your princes. Have you not read, you most learned rogue, what God said to Isaiah in chapter 42: “My glory I will not give to another.” Can you not just address all these good people in the same way that Paul addresses Festus in Acts 25?⁹ Why do you address them as ‘*most illustrious princes*’? That title is not theirs, it belongs to Christ, Hebrews 1, John 1 and 8. Why do you call them ‘*high-born*’? I thought you were a Christian, but you are an arch-heathen making them your Joves and Muses, born not of the womb of women, Wisdom 7, but rather from the forehead. Oh, it is too much, all too much !

Shame on you, you arch-rogue, you wish to snuggle up to the wayward world like a hypocrite, Luke 9, and are prepared to justify anyone. But you know full well whom you should slander. The poor monks and priests and merchants cannot defend themselves, so that’s why you scold them. Oh, but no one is allowed to pass judgement on the godless rulers, even when they trample Christ under their feet. However, in order to please the peasants, you write that the princes will be cast down by the word of God, and you say in your response to the latest Imperial mandate¹⁰: the princes shall be cast down from their thrones. Yet you prefer them to the merchants. You should tweak your princes’ noses too, they probably deserve it much more than the others. Why should they get away with it? What about their interest charges and their oppression? But once you’ve given the princes a scolding, you cheer them up again, you new Pope, by presenting them with monasteries and churches, so they are quite content with you. Aye, that’s what I would recommend you do, lest the peasant takes matters into his own hands.

You are always talking about belief, and writing that I want to attack you under your shield and protection, but here one can see my decency and your idiocy. Under your shield and protection I have been like a sheep in the charge of a wolf, Matthew 10. Have you not had more power over me here than anywhere else? Is that not a consideration? And what other consequences would that have had? I was in your

⁸ A reference to Luther’s annoyance that the reformed congregation of Orlamünde, where Karlstadt preached, refused to address him with his proper academic titles.

⁹ Paul did not give the Roman procurator any title at all when he spoke to him.

¹⁰ Luther’s *Zway keyserliche uneynige und nydderwertige gepott den Luther betreffend* (*Two discordant and unpleasant Imperial mandates concerning Luther*) of 1524.

principality precisely so that you would have no excuses for ignoring me. You say I am under your shield and protection: oho, how you reveal yourself! What – are you some kind of prince? How dare you puff yourself up with this talk of shield and protection. Have I not stated in all my letters and pamphlets that I did not want his¹¹ shield or protection. I only asked that he did not distress his own people just because of that goat-shed at Mallerbach with its picture of Mary. Because of that event, he was proposing to attack hamlets and villages; he did not consider that the poor people must live daily in danger for the sake of the gospel. Do you imagine that the whole country does not know how they shield and protect? Have Christians not a shield in the grace of God, he who created them, Psalms 110?

You say that I was exiled for three years and wandered about; you say I complain about many hardships. Let us look into the truth of this. With your pen you have libelled me to many decent fellows and you have abused me, as I can well prove. With your slanderous mouth you have called me a devil. Aye, that is what you do to all your opponents. Just like the raven, all you can do is croak your own name. You know very well with your unroasted Laurence of Nordhausen¹² that the evil-doers took the hint: they wanted to kill me etc. You are no murderous or rebellious spirit, of course: but you stir up trouble and provoke Duke Georg like a hell-hound, urging him to attack Prince Friedrich's territory and break the common peace. And of course you do not advocate insurrection, for you are the cunning serpent that slithers over the rocks, Proverbs 30. Christ says in Matthew 10 and 23: "when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." But this messenger, who is certainly the devil's arch-chancellor, says that if I have been driven out, then I must be a devil; he tries to prove it with Matthew 12, but comes to a conclusion opposed to that of the holy spirit, which he disdains, and so smites himself on his own head, Psalms 26.

He makes such a pig's breakfast and mockery of God's word, saying that I call it a heavenly voice and that the angels talk to me etc. I reply that I do not boast about whatever almighty God does with me or says to me; for everything that I preach to the people comes from God's testimony in the holy scriptures; I do not wish, God willing, to preach from my own inner experiences. But should I ever do that, then I

¹¹ i.e. Duke Johann of Saxony

¹² Reference to the Lutheran preacher and opponent of Müntzer, Lorenz Süsse of Nordhausen; St Laurence was roasted alive; Süsse remained unmartyred.

will most willingly let myself be chastised by God and my dear friends, and hold myself responsible to them. But I am not duty-bound to the scorner, Proverbs 9: it is forbidden to eat of the jay, Leviticus 11, therefore I will not imbibe the filth of the godless scorner. I only want to know just what your exemplar might be? Since you are from the Harz district, perhaps you would like the mystery of God's words to be called a set of heavenly bagpipes? For then the devil, your angel, could pipe out your little tune. Monk, when you want to dance, then all of the godless pay court.

I speak of the divine word and its manifold treasures, Colossians 2, which Moses offered to teach in Deuteronomy 30, and Paul in Romans chapter 10. The 84th Psalm describes how the word should be listened to by those who turn towards it wholeheartedly and who use the teaching of the spirit to apply the mercy and justice of God equally in all their judgements. But you deny the righteous word and only present the appearance of it to the world. In this coarse manner, you make yourself into an arch-devil; with no understanding at all, you use the text of Isaiah to make God the cause of all wickedness: is that not the most terrible punishment of God upon you? You are blind and yet want to guide the blind world, you want to blame God because you are a poor sinner and a poisonous worm, you with your shitty humility. You came to all this from your fantastical understanding of St Augustine: truly a blasphemous thing, pouring derision on man's free will.

You say that I want to proceed without delay to the use of force and to give no one any time to think. With Christ I say that he who is of God will hear his word. Are you of God? Why can you not hear it? Why do you mock it and pass judgement on things that you have never experienced? Are you only now considering what it is that you should be teaching other men? A better name for you is a crook, not a judge. That is something that poor Christianity will become aware of, how your fleshly understanding has in truth been directed against the undeceiving spirit of God. Let Paul pass judgement on you, 2 Corinthians 11. You have always acted straightforwardly – aye, with the straightforwardness of a fox (or obscured like the onion with nine skins). Behold, you have become a raging fox who barks before daybreak. And now that righteous truth will out, you want to scold the little ones and not the great ones. As we Germans say, you climb into the well like the fox: he went down in the bucket to eat the fish, and then he persuaded the silly wolf to

climb into the other bucket so that he travelled up and the wolf stayed down. The same fate will come to the princes who follow you and the noble highwaymen whom you are goading against the merchants. Isaiah gives his judgement on the fox in chapters 13 and 34, concerning the beasts, the wild animals which Christ calls wolves, John 10. All of them will suffer the same fate as a trapped fox, Psalms 72. When the people begin to pay attention to the light, then the small hounds will enter the den of the fox, Matthew 15. All they can do is snap at the fox's mouth from in front; but a fresh dog will shake the fox by its fur and pull it from its den. Its days of eating hens are over. See, Martin, did you not get a scent of this fox as it was being roasted, like the ones served up to greenhorns at the hunting-lodge instead of a hare? You, Esau, will have your just reward when you are pushed aside by Jacob. Why did you sell your birthright for a bowl of soup?

Ezekiel tells you all you need to know in the 13th chapter and Micah in the 3rd. You have confused Christianity with a false faith and, now that we have reached a time of urgency, you cannot correct it. But because you have been playing the hypocrite with the princes, you think everything is just fine; you have made a great name for yourself. You cannot stop boasting that in Leipzig you stood before a most dangerous audience. Are you trying to blind people? You were perfectly safe in Leipzig, you rode out through the city gate with a crown of carnations on your head and drank the good wine of Melchior Lotter. And when you were in Augsburg, no danger threatened you at all because Staupitz¹³ stood right beside you as an oracle, and was ready to help you – although now he has abandoned you and has become an abbot. I really am afraid that you might follow him, for the devil truly does not hold fast to the truth and can never leave off his wiles; but in his little book about rebellion¹⁴, he fears the prophecy about his abominations. So he speaks against the new prophets as the scholars did against Christ, John 8. Which is why I have cited almost the whole of that chapter in this present work. Paul speaks about prophets in 1 Corinthians 14: a righteous preacher must of course be a prophet, even though the world will laugh at him with scorn; the whole world must become prophetic if it is to

¹³ Johann von Staupitz was a leading Catholic scholar, for a time sympathetic to Luther's ideas. He was afraid that Luther would be arrested by the Papal authorities in Augsburg in 1518 and collected money to enable Luther's escape if it became necessary.

¹⁴ Luther's 1522 pamphlet *Sincere Admonition Against Insurrection and Rebellion*

pass judgement on the false prophets. But how can you judge people when you abandon your ministry in your book about the Monk-Calf? ¹⁵ And you say that you smacked me in the mouth: this is untrue. Aye, you lie through your teeth, for I have not met you for six or seven years. If you made fools of the good brothers, who did visit you, ¹⁶ then the truth of that will come out eventually. That is what is meant by the injunction that you should not despise the little ones, Matthew 18.

We could quite easily fall asleep listening to your boasting and nonsensical foolishness. The fact that you were able to stand before the Empire at Worms is all thanks to the German nobility, whose mouth you have smeared well with honey, because they fully expected that you would make them some gifts of the Bohemian kind with your preaching – that is, hand over monasteries and religious foundations to them – as you are now promising the princes. If you had wavered at Worms, then you were just as likely to have been stabbed by the nobility as set free, everyone knows that. Truly you have no right to take credit for risking your noble blood there, as you like to boast. You and your cronies made use of wild deceptions and cunning: at your own suggestion you let yourself be captured and pretended that you were taken unwillingly. Anyone who did not understand your roguery would swear to all the saints that you were a really saintly Martin. Sleep peacefully, dear flesh! I would rather smell you roasting in your obstinacy in an oven or a pot beside the fire of God's wrath, Jeremiah 1, than stewing in your own juices. May the devil gobble you up, Ezekiel 23. You have the flesh of an ass, you would take ages to soften and your mealy-mouthed companions would find you a tough meal.

Dearest brothers in Christ, when all this controversy started I was weary lest it should stir up unappeasable anger in the poor masses; but if Doctor Liar had let me preach, or defeated me in argument before the people, or let the princes judge me when I was at Weimar being interrogated at the urging of this same monk, then I would gladly have let this whole affair die down.

It was finally decided that the prince would let the case be judged by the strictest judge on Judgement Day; and that he would not restrain the tyrants who wanted to use the gospel to intervene in his own territories. It would be good if the law-courts

¹⁵ Luther's pamphlet of 1523 *Deutung der zwo grewlichen figuren Bapstesels zu Rom und münchkalbe zu Freyburg in Meyssen funde etc.*, in which he refused to interpret an abnormality of birth because he was not a prophet.

¹⁶ The 'Zwickau prophets' – Niklaus Storch et al – visited Wittenberg in 1522.

were also ordered to act in this way: the peasants would greatly appreciate that. It would also be good if every judgement was delayed until Judgement Day, for then the peasants would have a good case. But when the princes should be meting out justice, they say instead: I'll leave it for the Highest Judge. And in the meantime, the rod of the godless continues to be used.

When I came back home from the hearing at Weimar, I intended to preach the strict word of God. But along came my town-councillors and tried to hand me over to the bitterest enemies of the gospel. When I realised this, I knew I could not stay there any longer. I brushed their dust from my shoes, for I saw with my own eyes that they respected their own oaths and duties more than the word of God. They preferred to serve two masters against each other, although God quite clearly would have succoured them; he who once delivered them from the bear and the lion would also have delivered them from the hands of Goliath, 1 Kings 17. And although Goliath relied on his armour and his sword, David got the better of him. Saul also started something good, but it was David who, after wandering around for a long time, completed the task. And this is a symbol of you, o Christ, in your dear friends whom you will protect in all eternity.

Amen.

Anno M.D.XX.iiii

Vulpis, fecisti merere mendaciter cor iusti: quem dominus non contristavit. Confortastique manus impiorum tuorum: ne revertantur a via sua mala: ob id peribis: et populus dei liberabitur a tyrannide tua. Tu videbis deum esse dominum, Ezechielis xiii capitulo.

Which is translated thus: O Doctor Liar, you wily fox. With your lies you have saddened the hearts of the righteous, whom God had never saddened; and you have increased the power of the godless villains so that they have remained in their old ways. And for this you will end like a captured fox. The people will be free from your tyranny and God alone will be lord over them.

(Translated by Andy Drummond,

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