



**A Sober Epistle
to his Dear Brothers in Stolberg,
that they might Avoid
Untimely Uproar**

18 July 1523

Letter written from Allstedt to unknown followers in the town of Stolberg. What prompted this letter is not known. But Müntzer went to the trouble of having it printed – possibly in two editions – in Allstedt or Eilenburg, by Nikolaus Widemar.

Dear brothers, may salvation through the spirit of Jesus be with you.

It is an overweening madness for many of the elect friends of God to imagine that God will alleviate the miseries of Christianity and come swiftly to their aid. For then no one is keen or strives to become poor in spirit through suffering and perseverance, Matthew 5, Luke 6. If someone has not experienced the poverty of their own soul, they do not deserve to be ruled by God; they are not even worthy of being assailed by the devil or the meanest creature. That is why they think to live comfortably, just as they like. But if they wish to arrive at the true, naked poverty of the spirit, then God must abandon them (or so we perceive it) and the person who is poor in spirit must rid themselves of all creature comforts. But because the Elect have not yet overcome their refusal to fear God's work, it is inconceivable that God should now do something; and so it is quite justifiable for God's fatherly goodness to make the tyrants rage more and more, Kings 8, until the countenances of his elect are covered with shame and slander; only then do they seek the name, the fame and the honour of God alone, Psalm 82 [83]. For the wages and reward of the elect who are lazy are exactly the same as those of the damned, Luke 12.

The true order of God advances joyously only when the Elect understand what God has created in the experience of their soul. Those who have not experienced the bitter adversity of belief will not know this, for they have not believed against belief, nor hoped against hope, nor hated against the love of God, 1 Corinthians 2. And so they do not know what is harmful and what is good for Christianity; they do not test their spirit, and they also do not

believe that God in his zealous and indefatigable goodness will teach the people and tell them everything that is necessary. That is the reason why the whole world lacks the main foundation of salvation, which is belief: we do not even allow God to be our schoolmaster, Matthew 23, James 3. Oh, woe for the great, stubborn disbelief which tries to justify itself with the dead letter on the page, but denies the living finger which writes in the heart, 1 Corinthians 3! What knowledge do these foolish people possess of that which stirs them to be Christians and not heathens, or why the Koran is not just as truthful as the gospel? For they cannot disprove the opposite from the divine order which the *Rassa*¹ – that is, the wicked people – denied.

Therefore there is much to be done if we are to let God rule over us: we must know for certain that our faith does not deceive us, by suffering the effects upon us of the living word; we must know the difference between the work of God and the work of creatures. Up until now, the world has not accepted this. And yet we draw on our garb of kings – that is, our strength – when we become aware of the power of God passing through us, and are girded around, as Peter was, John in the last chapter, Luke 12. Only then will the whole circle of the earth be granted to the congregation of the elect, and a Christian government will be founded which no barrel of gunpowder could ever overthrow. But because our zeal does not grow, our soul will not be prepared to be a throne of God; rather, he who sits on a seat of pestilence will be able to rule over those who do not permit God to rule them.

And that is why not even the truth will make them free, but only a bold insolence which in time they must abandon in shame and hardship. And so everyone must recognise the waves which come upon them from the torrents which rush through our spirit when it is sure of itself. A skilled navigator cannot and must not avoid the waves, but must be able to prove his mastery over them. All unbelief and sin will direct the elect towards judgement, Psalm 118 [119], for they will experience daily that God does not judge according to the laws of men : rather, what the world scorns, God will raise up, what is considered foolishness will be seen as wisdom, etc. That is why no untested person can rule themselves, unless they have undergone the living judgement of God, Wisdom 6, John 7; the testimonies of God must be believed above all else, for it is they who provide judgement such that the house of God – that is, the souls of men – is not corrupted; the judgement must be made in the most exact knowledge of God and from God, so that it lasts forever.

¹ *Rassa* or *raca* – a Hebrew word signifying ‘*ignoramus*’ or ‘*empty-headed*’ or similar. See Matthew 5,22.

I was intending, dear brothers, to have this Psalm 92 [93] printed or sent to you in some other way. For I am told that you are boastful and do not study; are negligent; when you are in your cups, you spout great words about our cause, but when you are sober, you are frightened poltroons. So improve your lives, dearest brothers. Avoid high-living, Luke 21, 1 Peter 5. Flee from lust and those who pursue it, 2 Timothy 3. Be bolder now than you have been before, and write to me telling me how much your talents have prospered. God bless you, and greet everyone who strives to do God's will according to the testimony of this teaching.

Dated *anno domini* 1523, on the 18th day of July, Allstedt.

Thomas Müntzer

*(Translated by Andy Drummond,
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