

## Thomas Müntzer's "Speech at Frankenhäusen"

Translated by Andy Drummond,  
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The text of this speech was set down by Philip Melanchthon, who included it in his pamphlet "The History of Thomas Müntzer" (*Die Histori Thome Müntzers*), printed in June 1525. It is supposedly the speech by which Müntzer roused the rebel troops as they gathered on the hill above Frankenhäusen, on 17 May 1525, facing up to the combined armies of the Saxon and Hessian princes.

There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the words are Müntzer's; he certainly made some kind of speech, and an idea of what he said was reported by men such as Hans Hut, who had been at Müntzer's side. But Melanchthon was on that day in Wittenberg, 150 kms distant, and certainly would not have been able to record the words spoken. At best, the text is reported third-hand and faulty; at worst, it is a complete fabrication.

No respected biographer or researcher of Müntzer has ever suggested that the speech is Müntzer's work, and for that reason it has never been included in the various 'collected works' volumes.

The text which has been translated below is taken from the collection "Die lutherischen Pamphlete gegen Thomas Müntzer", edited by Ludwig Fischer, and published by DTV (Tübingen, 1976). The relevant text appears on pages 34-37 of that volume (the entire pamphlet is on pages 28-42).

A digitised version of the original 1525 edition is available online at

[http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO\\_%2BZ184788100](http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_%2BZ184788100)

Some words from Melanchthon's introduction to the speech have been included, as well as his report of the immediate reaction in the army (*in italics*).

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*The princes saw all this and took pity on the mad, miserable people and took steps to warn them off, and sent envoys telling them to desist and to hand over the leaders and inciters of the uproar. The poor people were terrified and would have agreed to this, but the Devil wanted to have his way through Thomas, and he drove Thomas to admonish them to stay and to arm themselves, and so he stepped up and spoke as follows.*

Dear Brothers, you see across there the tyrants who are our enemies, and how they are planning to strangle us; but they are so afraid that they dare not attack us, and only demand that you retreat and hand over the ringleaders to them. Now, dear brothers, you know that I only began all this at God's command, and not for selfish reason or out of boldness, for I have never been a soldier in all my days; but because God spoke to me and told me to march forth, then I have a responsibility to stay with you to await the end. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his own son; now, Abraham did not know how that would end, but he obeyed God all the same and set out to sacrifice and kill the pious child. But God saved Isaac and kept him alive. And that is just like us, for we have had a command from God, and we must wait for the end, and let God take care of us.

But I have no doubt that it will turn out well and that this very day we will see God come to our aid and our enemies utterly destroyed, for God often said in the scriptures that he wished to help the poor and the pious and uproot the godless. Now we here are the poor, and wish to receive God's word, and so we should not have doubts, for fortune will be on our side.

But what are these princes? They are nothing but tyrants, who fleece the people, and exhaust our blood and sweat with their splendour, with useless pomp, with their whoring and villainy. God commanded in Deuteronomy that kings should not keep many horses or go around with great pomp and ceremony, and that a king should every day have his book of laws in his hand. But what do our princes do? They do not accept their responsibilities as rulers, they do not listen to the poor people,

they do not give justice, they do not keep the roads clear, do not prevent murder and robbery or punish offences and evil, do not defend widows and orphans, do not help the poor to justice, do not allow young people to be brought up correctly and with good morals, do nothing in the service of God – which is the very reason that God created the rulers – but simply ruin the poor more and more with new impositions, do not use their power to maintain peace, but only for their own betterment, and make sure they are strong enough against their neighbours, ruin the land and the people with unnecessary wars, with robbery, arson, murder. These are the princely virtues which they parade around.

You should not imagine that God will let this go on for much longer, for, just as he destroyed the Canaanites, so he will destroy our princes. And even if we were able to endure all this, God can not forgive them for defending the servants of a false god, the priests and monks. Who does not know about the horrible idolatry which they practice with their buying and selling during Mass; just as Christ threw the money-changers out of the Temple, so will he destroy the priests and all their hangers-on. And just as God praised Phineas when he punished the fornicating of Cozbi, so God will give us the good fortune to punish the fornicating of the priests. And so you should be comforted and work in the service of God and cut down our sinful rulers. For what good would it do if we were to make peace with them, for they will continue their attack and not let us go free, and drive us into the arms of idolatry – then we would be guilty and would be better to die than to submit to their idolatry. It would be far better if we were to become martyrs than that we should allow the gospel to be taken away from us and be oppressed by the abuses of the priests.

I know for sure that God will help us and will give us victory, for he spoke to me and told me so and commanded me to reform all ranks. It is not to be considered a miracle that God will give victory to such a few unarmed people against so many thousands, for Gideon, with only a few people, and Jonathan with only his servants, defeated many thousands, and David, unarmed, brought down the giant Goliath. So I have no doubt that the same will happen again now and that we, however poorly armed, will have the upper hand. Heaven and Earth themselves would have to change before we will ever be abandoned, just as the very nature of the sea changed in order to help the Israelites when Pharaoh was pursuing them. Do not let your weak flesh be terrified, but attack the enemy with courage, you must not fear their ammunition, for you will see that I will catch in my sleeves all the bullets that they fire at us.

Yes, you will see that God is on our side, for he now gives us a sign. Do you see that rainbow in the sky? – that tells us that God will aid those who have a rainbow upon their banner, and will pass judgement on the murderous princes and punish them. So you must not be terrified, you must trust in the help of God, and stand by your weapons: God will not permit you to make peace with the godless princes.

*And when Thomas had finished speaking, the majority of the army were desperate and wanted to get away from there, for they saw that the water was about to overflow the bucket. But there was no order or discipline which allowed anyone to take good advice on what to do. And there were also some malicious villains who just wanted to fight and cause misfortune all by themselves; and while they still had courage, they stood by Thomas and were not only stirred to anger by Thomas' speech, but were even more greatly moved by the rainbow which had appeared as Thomas spoke, for they had a rainbow painted on the flag which they carried and thought that God had given them this as a sign of victory...*