



Volume 1. From the Reformation to the Thirty Years War, 1500-1648

From Reformer to Revolutionary – Thomas Müntzer, *Sermon to the Princes* (July 13, 1524)

Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489-1525) was a priest and early ally of Martin Luther. After Müntzer began pushing a more radical agenda, however, the two had a falling out. In 1521, Müntzer was expelled from Zwickau and fled to Prague. In 1523, he became a pastor in Allstedt in Thuringia, where he married a former nun. Later that year, he produced the first completely German liturgy. The following year, Müntzer produced this text, the *Sermon to the Princes*. In it, he implored secular authorities to advocate a radical reformation of society and not to content themselves with Luther's conservative agenda. In 1525, Müntzer became a leader of the Peasants' War in Thuringia and was beheaded after the battle of Frankenhausen (May 1525). His memory haunted the German Protestant movement for decades. Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes*, his best-known work, is a fiery piece of utopian apocalypticism that drips with a sense of imminent divine judgment. He was a teacher of what is called "the spiritual Gospel," which, in contrast to the written Bible, is inscribed on a Christian's heart by the Holy Spirit.

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### **An Exposition of the Second Chapter of Daniel**

Allstedt, July 13, 1524<sup>1</sup>

*Firstly.* The text of the aforementioned chapter of prophecy of the prophet Daniel will be recounted and translated and thereupon the whole sermon will be set forth in harmony with the text, as follows.

It is known that poor, ailing, disintegrating Christendom can be neither counseled nor aided unless the diligent, untroubled servants of God daily work through the Scriptures, singing, reading, and preaching. But therewith the head of many a pampered priest will continuously have to suffer great blows or [he will] miss out in his handiwork. But how ought one otherwise to deal with him at a time when Christendom is being so wretchedly devastated by ravenous wolves, as it is written in Isaiah (ch. 5:1–23) and in Ps. 80 (vs. 9–14) concerning the vineyard of God? And Saint Paul teaches how one should exercise oneself in singing divine praises (Eph. 5:19). For just as in the times of the beloved prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the others, the whole congregation of the elect of God had become so utterly implicated in the way of idolatry that even God could not help them but had to let them be led away captive and punish

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<sup>1</sup> The full title is: Exposition of the second chapter of Daniel the prophet preached at the Castle of Allstedt before the active and amiable dukes and administrators of Saxony by Thomas Müntzer, minister of the Word of God. [All footnotes were taken from: *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, edited by G.H. Williams and A. M. Mergal (*Library of Christian Classics Series*). The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1957, pp. 49-70.]

them in the midst of the heathen to the point where they once again recognized his holy name, as it stands written (Isa. 29:17–24; Jer. 15:11; Ezek. 36:8–12; Ps. 89: 31–38) so, no less is it true in the time of our fathers and our time, that poor Christendom is even more deeply obdurate and the more so for having the unspeakable semblance of the divine name with which the devil and his servants adorn themselves (Luke 21:5; II Tim. 3:5; II Cor. 11:13–15).

Yea, so nicely that the real friends of God are thereby misled; and even with the diligence of the most intense application, they are scarcely able to detect their error, as Matthew (ch. 24:24) clearly shows. This is what the simulated sanctity and the flattering absolution of the godless enemies of God accomplish. For they say the Christian church cannot err, even though, in order to protect against error, it should be continuously edified by the Word of God and held free of error.<sup>2</sup> Surely [the true church] should also acknowledge sin through ignorance (Lev. 4:13 f.; Hos. 4:6; Mal. 2:1–7; Isa. 1:10–17). But that is indeed true. Christ the Son of God and his apostles and indeed, before him, his holy prophets began a real pure Christianity, having sown pure wheat in the field, that is, [they] planted the precious Word of God in the hearts of the elect as Matthew (ch. 12:24–30), Mark (ch. 4:26–29), and Luke (ch. 8:5–15) have written, and Ezekiel (ch. 36:29). But the lazy, neglectful ministers of this same church have not wished to accomplish this and maintain it by dint of diligent watchfulness; but rather they have sought their own [ends], not what was Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2:4, 21). For this reason they have allowed the harmfulness of the godless vigorously to take over, that is, the weeds (Ps. 80:9–14). For the cornerstone, here [Dan. 2:34 f., 44 f.] indicated, was still small. Of this Isaiah (ch. 28:16) [also] speaks. To be sure, it has not yet come to fill the whole world, but it will soon fill it and make it full, very full. Therefore the prepared cornerstone was in the beginning of the new Christianity rejected by the builders, that is, the rulers (Ps. 118:22 f. and Luke 20:17 b.). Thus I say the church since its beginning has become in all places dilapidated, up to the present time of the "divided"<sup>3</sup> world (Luke 21:10; Dan. 2:35; I Esdras 4:45). For Hegesippus<sup>4</sup> (and Eusebius) in [*Ecclesiastical History*] IV, 22, concerning the [early] Christian church, declares that the Christian congregation did not remain a virgin any longer than up to the time of the death of the disciples of the apostles and soon thereafter became an adulteress, as had indeed already been prophesied by the beloved apostles (II Peter 2:12–15). And in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. 20:28–31a) Saint Paul said to the shepherds of the sheep in clear, translucent words: Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall ravenous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

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<sup>2</sup> Here Müntzer sets over against the authoritarian view of the historic church his own conviction as to the Gathered Church of the elect saints, ever renewed and corrected by the living Spirit and Word.

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the feudal age in which power is divided between lords temporal and lords spiritual, symbolized by the feet of the multimedallion statue.

<sup>4</sup> Church historian Hegesippus lived in Rome in the third quarter of the second century. His five books of memoirs of the church in the form of historical polemic against Gnosticism are preserved only in fragments in the larger History of Eusebius of Caesarea.

Accordingly the scribes refused him [Christ] (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:44–46; Mark 12:10–12; Luke 20:17–19), as they are still accustomed to do today. Verily in fact they have been reenacting the Passion with him, ever since the pupils of the apostles died. They have taken the Spirit of Christ for laughingstock and do indeed as it is written in Ps. 69. They have quite openly stolen him like the thieves and murderers (John 10:1). They have robbed Christ's sheep of the true voice and have made the true crucified Christ into an utterly fantastic idol. How has this happened?

Answer: They have rejected the pure handiwork of God<sup>5</sup> and set in his place a pretty little golden statue of deity, before which the poor peasants slobber, as Hosea has clearly said (ch. 4:8–10) and [again] Jeremiah in Lamentations (ch. 4:5): They that did eat fine spiced food have now received in its place dirt and filth. O woe to the abomination of desolation of which Christ himself says (Matt. 24:15) that he will be so wretchedly mocked with the devilish holding of Mass, with superstitious preaching, ceremonies, and manner of life! And yet all the time there is nothing there but a mere wooden statue of deity—yea, a superstitious wooden priest, and a gross, boorish, coarse people who are unable to conceive of God in the slightest. Is that not a great pity, a sin, and a scandal? Yes, I maintain, the beasts of the belly (Phil. 3:19) and the swine (of which it is written in Matt. 7:6, II Peter 2:22) have completely trampled the precious Stone Jesus Christ with their feet, as far as they could. For he has become for the whole world like a rag to wipe off one's boots. For this reason all the unbelieving Turks, pagans, and Jews have very cheaply ridiculed us and held us for fools, as one should hold senseless men who do not want to hear the [true] Spirit of their faith [even] mentioned. For this reason the suffering of Christ is nothing other than such a fairing at the hands of the desperate knaves as no lansquenet ever had [to give at Calvary] and as Ps. 69:2 says. Therefore, you dear brothers, we ought to arise from this filth and become God's real pupils, instructed of God (John, ch. 6; Matt., ch. 23). Thus it will be necessary for us that a great mighty power, which will be vouchsafed us from above, should punish and reduce to nothingness such unspeakable wickedness. This is the most clear knowledge of God (Prov. 9:10) which alone springs from the pure unsimulated fear of God. The same must alone arm us with a mighty hand for the avenging of the enemies of God with utmost zeal for God, as is written (Prov. 5:12; John 2:17; Ps. 69:9). For there is absolutely no excusing [of the enemies of God] by means of human or rational expedients, since outward appearance of the godless is above all measure pretty and deceptive like the pretty poppy among the golden ears of wheat (Eccl. 8:10). But the wisdom of God discerns this deception.

*Secondly.* We must examine further and well that abomination which despises this Stone. If we are, however, to recognize the rightfulness of him, we must be daily conscious of the [fresh] revelation of God. Oh that is become quite precious and rare in this wicked world, for the wily expedients of the captiously clever would overwhelm us every moment and hold us much more strongly from the pure Handiwork of God (Prov. 4:16–19; Ps. 37:12–15, 32 f.). Such a person one must stave off in the fear of the Lord. If only the same [the fear] would be assured in us,

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<sup>5</sup> This expression derives from German mysticism. It denotes the mystical way of salvation and the experienced Word in self-conscious rejection of Luther's stress upon doctrine.

then surely holy Christendom could come easily again to the spirit of wisdom and revelation of divine will. This is all comprehended in Scripture (Ps. 145:18 f.; Ps. 111:5, 10; Prov. 1:7). But the fear of God must be pure without any fear of men or creatures (Ps. 19:10; Isa. 66:2; Luke 12:4 f.). O how highly necessary fear is for us! For as little as one can happily serve two masters (Matt. 6:24), so little can one happily reverence both God and his creatures. Nor can God have mercy upon us (as the Mother of Christ our Lord says [Luke 1:50]), unless we fear him with our whole heart. Therefore God says (Mal. 1:6): If I be your Father, where is my honor? If I be your Lord, where then is my fear? Thus, ye amiable princes, it is necessary that we apply utmost diligence in these parlous days (I Tim., ch. 4), as all the dear fathers have delineated in the Bible from the beginning of the world, in order to cope with this insidious evil. For the age is dangerous and the days are wicked (II Tim. 3:1; Eph. 5:15 f.). Why? Simply because the noble power of God is so wretchedly disgraced and dishonored that the poor common people are misled by the ungodly divines all with such rigmarole, as the prophet Micah (ch. 3:5–37) says of it: This is now the character of almost all divines with mighty few exceptions. They teach and say that God no longer reveals his divine mysteries to his beloved friends by means of valid visions or his audible Word, etc. Thus they stick with their inexperienced way (cf. Ecclesiasticus 34:9) and make into the butt of sarcasm those persons who go around in possession of revelation, as the godless did to Jeremiah (ch. 20:7 f.):<sup>6</sup> Hark! Has God just recently spoken to thee? Or hast thou recently asked at the mouth of God and taken counsel with him: Hast thou the Spirit of the Christ? This is what they do with scorn and mockery.

[ . . . ]

*Thirdly.* You ought to know the view that God is so utterly well disposed toward his elect that if even in very minor matters he could warn them (Deut. 1:42–44; 32:29; Matt. 23:37), he would surely do it if they could but receive the same in the immensity of unbelief. For our text in Daniel agrees here with Saint Paul in I Corinthians (ch. 2:9 f.) which is taken from the holy Isaiah (ch. 64:4), saying that: Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. Therefore in short it is one's earnest conviction that we must *know*—and not merely be up in the air in our belief—whether what is given us be from God or from the devil or from nature. For if our natural understanding of the same [—what comes from God and what not—] ought to be captured for the service of faith (II Cor. 10:5), it must arrive at the final degree in [its capacity for] judgment as is shown in Romans (ch. 1:18–23) and Baruch (ch. 3:12–37). Of these judgments one is incapable of proving any in good conscience without God's revelation. For man will clearly discover that he cannot run with his head through heaven<sup>7</sup> but rather that he must first become wholly and utterly a fool (Isa. 29:13 f.; 33:18; Obad. 1:8; I Cor. 1:18). O what a rare wind that is indeed then for the clever, fleshly, sensual world! Thereupon follow at once the pains like [those

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<sup>6</sup> Müntzer is paraphrasing the text for dramatic effect.

<sup>7</sup> That is, cannot be saved by reason.

of] a woman in travail (Ps. 48:6;<sup>8</sup> John 16:21). Therefore Daniel (ch. 2:17 f.), and every single pious person along with him, finds that for him in all circumstances, exactly as for other ordinary people, it is impossible to search out all the things from God. This is what the wise man [the Preacher] means when he says (Eccl. 3:11) He who wishes to search out the majesty of God will be overwhelmed by his splendor. For the more nature gropes after God [to lay hold upon him], the further the operation of the Holy Spirit withdraws itself therefrom, as Ps. 139:6 clearly shows. Indeed if man were only aware of the presumption of the natural light [of reason], without doubt he would not seek improvised help with pilfered [passages of] Scripture, as the learned do with one or two little scraps (Isa. 28:10; Jer. 8:8), but rather he would soon feel the operation of the divine Word spring out of his own heart (John 4:14). Yea, he need not put up with the stagnant water in the well (Jer. 2:13), as our learned men now do. They mix up nature and grace without any distinction.<sup>9</sup> They impede the progress of the Word (Ps. 119:11b), which comes forth from the depths of the soul, as Moses says (Deut. 30:14): The word is not far from thee, behold, it is in thy heart, etc. Now you may ask, How does it then come into the heart? Answer: It comes down from God above in exalted and terrifying astonishment, which I shall let stand as it is [to be discussed] another time. And this astonishment as to whether it be God's word or not, commences when a child is six or seven years old as is signified in Num., ch. 19. Therefore Saint Paul cites Moses (Deut. 30:14) and Isaiah (ch. 65:1) in Rom. 10:8 and 20 and speaks there of the inner Word to be heard in the depths of the soul through the revelation of God. And what person has not become aware of and receptive to this [Word] through the living testimony of God (Rom. 8:9). He [who has not the Spirit] does not know how to say anything deeply about God, even if he had eaten through a hundred Bibles! From that anybody can well judge how far the world really is from Christian faith. But no one wants to see or hear. If man would now become aware of the Word so that he become receptive thereto, God must take from him his fleshly lusts. And when the motion of God comes in his heart, so that he wishes to slay all the desires of the flesh, [it is necessary] that the [man] give way to Him, in order that he may get the benefit of His operation. For the man of animal nature does not perceive what God speaks in the soul (I Cor. 2:14), but rather he must be adverted by the Holy Spirit to the serious consideration of the plain pure meaning of the law (Ps. 19:7 f.), otherwise he is blind in his heart and fashions for himself a wooden Christ and misleads himself. Look therefore in this respect how distasteful it became for blessed Daniel to interpret the vision to the king, and how diligently he sought out God in this matter and prayed. Thus, also, for the self-disclosure of God man must separate himself from all diversion (II Cor. 6:17) and have a heart resolute for the truth and must through the exercise of such truth distinguish the undeceptive vision from the false one. For this reason the beloved Daniel speaks in ch. 10:1 [that like Daniel himself] a man may very well have understanding of [certain] visions [and] therefore they are not all to be rejected, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Ps. 47, in the Vulgate. Here Müntzer stresses not only the epistemological significance of rebirth but also quite characteristically the anguish thereof.

<sup>9</sup> The reference is not only to the Catholic view that grace perfects nature but also to the Lutheran view of justification, according to which, so Müntzer holds, the work of God in the form of suffering is not allowed to operate to the point where the natural man is completely eliminated.

*Fourthly.* You ought to know that the elect person who wishes to know which vision or dream is from God, nature, or the devil must with his mind and heart and also his natural understanding take leave of all temporal consolation of the flesh; and it must happen to him as to beloved Joseph in Egypt (Gen., ch. 39) and with Daniel here in this very chapter. For no sensual person will accept it [the Word] (Luke 7:25), since the thistles and thorns—these are the pleasures of this world, as the Lord says (Mark 4:18 f.)—stifle the whole working of the Word, which God speaks in the soul. Therefore when God has already spoken his holy Word in the soul, man cannot hear it, if he is unpracticed [Ps. 49:20], for he does not turn in upon himself or look inwardly upon himself and the deeps of his soul. Man will not crucify his life with its vices and desires, as Paul the holy apostle teaches (Gal. 5:24). Therefore the field of the Word of God remains full of thistles and thorns and full of big bushes, all of which must be gotten out of the way for this work of God, in order that a person not be found neglectful or slothful (Prov. 24:3 f.). Accordingly, if a man has regard for the fruitfulness of the field and the rich growth at the end, then will such a person become aware for the first time that he is the dwelling place of God and the Holy Spirit for the duration of his days, yea, that he has been created truly for the one purpose that he might search out the testimonies of God in his own life (Ps. 93 and 119:95). Of this he will come to know in part, now in a figurative way,<sup>10</sup> then also in perfection in the deeps of his heart (I Cor. 13:10–12). In the second place he must notice well that such figurative comparisons in the visions or dreams with all their attendant phenomena are [to be] tested in the Holy Bible, in order that the devil may not intrude and spoil the unction of the Holy Spirit and its sweetness, as the wise man [the Preacher] says of the flies which die from it (Eccl. 10:1). In the third place, the elect person must take note of the working of the vision, that it not flow out by means of human improvisation, but rather that it flow simply according to God's immovable will; and [he] must look out quite carefully that not one little bit be lost of what he has beheld, for it [the vision] will positively come true. But when the devil wants to accomplish something, his rotten ugly brood betrays him, and in the end his lies peer out despite all, for he is a liar (John 8:44).

[ . . . ]

Again the beloved apostles had to be diligently attentive to [the meaning of] visions, as it is clearly written in their Acts. Indeed, it is a [mark of the] truly apostolic, patriarchal, and prophetic spirit to attend upon visions and to attain unto the same in painful tribulation. Therefore it is no wonder that Brother Fattened Swine and Brother Soft Life<sup>11</sup> rejects them (Job 28:12 f.) If [19], however, a person has not hearkened to the clear Word of God in the soul, he must have visions, as when Saint Peter in the Acts of the Apostles failed to understand the law (Lev., ch. 11). [ . . . ] From this now I infer that whoever wishes, by reason of his fleshly judgment, to be utterly hostile about visions [and dreams] without any experience of them, rejecting them all, or [again, whoever] wishes to take them all in without any distinction (because the false dream interpreters have done so much harm to the world through those who think only of their own

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<sup>10</sup> In the figures and allusions of vision and dream.

<sup>11</sup> The reference is to Martin Luther.

renown or pleasure)—that surely [*either* extremist] will have a poor run of it and will hurl himself against the Holy Spirit [of these Last Days (Joel 2:28)]. For God speaks clearly, like this text of Daniel, about the [eschatological] transformation of the world. He will prepare it in the Last Days in order that his name may be rightly praised. He will free it of its shame, and will pour out his Holy Spirit over all flesh and our sons and daughters shall prophesy and shall have dreams and visions, etc. For if Christendom is not to become apostolic (Acts 2:16 ff.) in the way anticipated in Joel, why should one preach at all? To what purpose then the Bible with [its] visions?

It is true, and [I] know it to be true, that the Spirit of God is revealing to many elect, pious persons a decisive, inevitable, imminent reformation [accompanied] by great anguish, and it must be carried out to completion. Defend oneself against it as one may, the prophecy of Daniel remains unweakened, even if no one believes it, as also Paul says to the Romans (ch. 3:3). This passage of Daniel is thus as clear as the sun, and the process of ending the fifth monarchy of the world is in full swing.

The first [kingdom] is set forth by the golden knop.<sup>12</sup> That was the kingdom of Babylon. The second [was represented] by the silver breast and arms. That was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The third was the kingdom of the Greeks, which, resounding with its science, was symbolized by the [sounding] brass. The fourth [was] the Roman Empire, which was won by the sword and a kingdom of coercion. But the fifth [symbolized by the iron and clay feet] is this which we have before our eyes, which is also of iron and would like to coerce. But it is matted together with mud,<sup>13</sup> as we see before [our] discerning eyes—vain, pretentious schemes of hypocrisy which writhe and wriggle over the whole earth. For whoever cannot [detect] the ruses must be indeed an imbecile. One sees nicely now how the eels and the vipers all in a heap abandon themselves to obscenities. The priests and all the wicked clerics are the vipers, as John the baptizer of Christ calls them (Matt. 3:7), and the temporal lords and princes are the eels, as is figuratively represented in Leviticus (ch. 11:10–12) by the fishes, etc. For the kingdoms of the devil have smeared themselves with clay. O beloved lords, how handsomely the Lord will go smashing among the old pots with his rod of iron (Ps. 2:9). Therefore, you much beloved and esteemed princes, learn your judgments directly from the mouth of God and do not let yourselves be misled by your hypocritical parsons nor be restrained by false consideration and indulgence. For the Stone [made] without hands, cut from the mountain [which will crush the fifth kingdom, Dan. 2:34], has become great. The poor laity [of the towns] and the peasants see it much more clearly than you. Yea, God be praised, it has become so great [that] already, if other lords or neighbors should wish to persecute you for the gospel's sake, they would be driven back by their own people! That I know for a certainty. Yea, the Stone is great. Before It the dim-witted world had long been afraid; It fell upon It when It was still small.<sup>14</sup> What should we then do now when it has become so great and mighty and when It has so powerfully,

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<sup>12</sup> A disparaging reference to the head.

<sup>13</sup> Müntzer further debases the clay by calling it “mud,” the German for which has also the secondary meaning of “ordure.”

<sup>14</sup> The allusion is to Christ's first appearance of which only the small number of elect within the mighty Roman Empire, the fourth monarchy, took cognizance.

imminently struck against the great Statue and smashed it right down to the old pots?<sup>15</sup> Therefore, you esteemed princes of Saxony, step boldly on the Cornerstone as Saint Peter did (Matt. 16:18) and seek the perseverance [imparted] by the divine will. He will surely establish you upon the Rock (Ps. 40:2). Your ways will be right. Seek only straightway the righteousness of God and take up courageously the cause of the gospel! For God stands so close to you that you wouldn't believe it! Why do you want then to shudder before the specter of a man (Ps. 118:6)? Look at our text well [Dan. 2:13]. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to kill the wise men because they could not interpret the dream for him. That was a deserved reward, for they wished to rule his whole kingdom with their cleverness and yet could not even do that for which they had been installed. Such is also the case of our clerics now, and I say this to you for a truth. If you could only as clearly recognize the harm being [done] to Christendom and rightly consider it, you would acquire just the same zeal as Jehu the king (II Kings, chs. 9 and 10); and the same as that which the whole book of Revelation proclaims. And I know for a certainty that you would thereupon hold yourselves back only with great effort from [letting] the sword exert its power. For the pitiable corruption of holy Christendom has become so great that at the present time no tongue can tell it all. Therefore a new Daniel must arise and interpret for you your vision and this [prophet], as Moses teaches (Deut. 20:2), must go in front of the army. He must reconcile the anger of the princes and the enraged people. For if you will rightly experience the corruption of Christendom and the deception of the false clerics and the vicious reprobates,<sup>16</sup> you will become so enraged at them that no one can think it through. Without doubt it will vex you and go right to your heart that you have been so kindly after they, with the very sweetest words, misled you into the most shameful conceptions (Prov. 6:1 ff.) against all established truth. For they have made fools of you so that everyone swears by the saints that the princes are in respect to their office a pagan people. They are said to be able to maintain nothing other than a civil unity. O beloved, yea, the great Stone there is about to fall and strike these schemes of [mere] reason and dash them to the ground, for he says (Matt. 10:34): I am not come to send peace but a sword. What should be done, however, with the same? Nothing different from [what is done with] the wicked who hinder the gospel: Get them out of the way and eliminate them, unless you want to be ministers of the devil rather than of God, as Paul calls you (Rom. 13:4). You need not doubt it. God will strike to pieces all your adversaries who undertake to persecute you, for his hand is by no means shortened, as Isaiah (ch. 59:1) says. Therefore he can still help you and wishes to, as he supported the elect King Josiah and others who defended the name of God. Thus you are angels, when you wish to do justly, as Peter says (II, ch. 1:4). Christ commanded in deep gravity, saying (Luke 19:27): Take mine enemies and strangle them before mine eyes. Why? Ah! because they ruin Christ's government for him and in addition want to defend their rascality under the guise of Christian faith and ruin the whole world with their insidious subterfuge.<sup>17</sup> Therefore Christ our Lord says (Matt. 18:6): Whosoever shall offend one

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<sup>15</sup> Here Müntzer lets the clay vessels, signifying the princes and prelates, stand for the iron and clay feet which together represent the whole of the Holy Roman Empire in the process of crumbling.

<sup>16</sup> The reference is primarily to the Lutheran clergy.

<sup>17</sup> Here [ . . . ] Müntzer is reinterpreting the politically conservative text of Rom. ch. 13, into a revolutionary document. By reversing the sequence of ch. 13:1–4 and construing vs. 1 f. as the sequel of vs. 3 f., he would make the Ernestine princes, by hortatory anticipation, the executors of God's wrath against the

of these little ones, it is better for him that a millstone be hung about his neck and that he be thrown in the depth of the sea. You can gloss over here and there as much as you like—these are the words of Christ. Now if Christ can say, Whosoever offends *one* of the little ones, what should one say then if somebody offends a great multitude in their faith? That is what the archvillains do, who vex the whole world and make it forsake the true Christian faith and say: No one may know the mystery of God. Everyone should behave himself according to their words and not according to their works (cf. Matt. 23:3). They say that it is not necessary for faith to be tried like gold in the fire (I Peter 1:7; Ps. 140:10). But in this way Christian faith would be worse than a dog's faith where he hopes to get a piece of bread because the table is being set. This is the kind of faith the false divines juggle before the blind world. This is not remarkable after all, for they preach only for the stomach's sake (Phil. 3:19). They cannot say anything further from [the experiences of] their heart (Matt. 12:34). Now if you want to be true governors, you must begin government at the roots, and, as Christ commanded, drive his enemies from the elect. For you are the means to this end. Beloved, don't give us any old jokes about how the power of God should do it without your application of the sword. Otherwise may it rust away for you in its scabbard! May God grant it, whatever any divine may say to you! Christ says it sufficiently (Matt. 7:19; John 15:2, 6): Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is rooted out and cast into the fire. If you do away with the mask of the world, you will soon recognize it with a righteous judgment (John 7:24). Perform a righteous judgment at God's command! You have help enough for the purpose (Wisdom of Solomon, ch. 6), for Christ is your Master (Matt. 23:8). Therefore let not the evildoers live longer who make us turn away from God (Deut. 13:5). For the godless person has no right to live when he is in the way of the pious. In Ex. 22:18 God says: Thou shalt not suffer evildoers to live. Saint Paul also means this where he says of the sword of rulers that it is bestowed upon them for the retribution of the wicked as protection for the pious (Rom. 13:4). God is your protection and will teach you to fight against his foes (Ps. 18:34). He will make your hands skilled in fighting and will also sustain you. But you will have to suffer for that reason a great cross and temptation in order that the fear of God may be declared unto you. That cannot happen without suffering, but it costs you no more than the danger of having risked all for God's sake and the useless prattle of your adversaries. For though even pious David was drawn from his castle by Absalom, he finally came again into ascendancy when Absalom got hung up and was stabbed. Therefore, you cherished fathers of Saxony, you must hazard all for the sake of the gospel. But God will chasten you out of love as his most beloved sons (cf. Deut. 1:31) when he in his momentary anger is enraged. Blessed at that time are all who trust in God. Free in the Spirit of Christ, say only (Ps. 3:6): I will not be afraid of a hundred thousand though they have set themselves against me round about. I suppose at this point our learned divines will bring out the goodness of Christ, which they in their hypocrisy apply by force. But over against this [goodness] they ought also to take note of the sternness of Christ (John 2:15–17; Ps. 69:9), when he turned over the roots of idolatry. As Paul says in Col. 3:5–7, because of these the wrath of God cannot be done away with in the congregation. If he, according to our view, tore down the lesser,<sup>18</sup> surely without doubt he would not have spared the idols and

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godless and the protectors of the revolutionary saints. But he warns them that if they fail to identify themselves with the covenantal people, the sword will revert to the people.

<sup>18</sup> Namely, the tables of the money-changers.

images if there had been any. For he himself commanded the same through Moses (Deut. 7:5 f.) where he says: Ye are a holy people. Ye ought not to have pity on account of the superstitious. Break down their altars, smash up their images and burn them up, that I be not angry with you. These words Christ has not abrogated, but rather he wishes to fulfill them for us (Matt. 5:17). There are [of course] all those figures interpreted by the prophets, but these [in Matthew] are bright clear words which must stand forever (Isa. 40:8). God cannot say yes today and tomorrow no, but rather he is unchangeable in his Word (Mal. 3:6; I Sam. 15:10–22; Num., ch. 22). [In reply to the argument] that the apostles of the Gentiles did not disturb the idols, I answer thus. Saint Peter was a timid man (Gal. 2:11–13). If he dissembled with the Gentiles, he was a symbol of all the apostles, so that Christ said of him (John 21:15–19) that he mightily feared death. And, because of this [fear, it] is easy enough to understand [that he] gave no occasion [to arouse the pagans] by such [action]. But Saint Paul spoke out quite sternly against idolatry. If he had been able to push his teaching to its conclusion among the Athenians (Acts 17:16–31), he would without any doubt have cast it down, as God through Moses has commanded, and as it also happened many times thereafter through [the action of] the martyrs in trustworthy histories. Therefore no justification is given us in the inadequacy and the negligence of the saints to let the godless have their way. Since they with us confess God's name they ought to choose between two alternatives: either to repudiate the Christian faith completely or put idolatry out of the way (Matt. 18:7–9). That our learned divines, however, should come along and, in their godless prevaricating manner, say in reference to Daniel (2:34) that the Antichrist ought to be destroyed without [human] hands is as much as to say he [Antichrist] is already inwardly collapsed, as was the [Canaanite] people when the Chosen were bent on entering the Promised Land, as Joshua (ch. 5:1) writes. He [Joshua] notwithstanding did not spare them [the Canaanites] the sharpness of the sword. Look at Ps. 44:5 and I Chron. 14:11. There you will find the solution in this way. They did not conquer the land by the sword but rather through the power of God. But the sword was the means, as eating and drinking is for us a means of living. In just this way the sword is necessary to wipe out the godless (Rom. 13:4). That this might now take place, however, in an orderly and proper fashion, our cherished fathers, the princes, should do it, who with us confess Christ. If, however, they do not do it, the sword will be taken from them (Dan. 7:26 f.). For they confess him all right with words and deny him with the deed (Titus 1:16). They [the princes], accordingly, should proffer peace to the enemies (Deut. 2:26–30). If the latter wish to be spiritual [in the outmoded sense] and do not give testimony of the knowledge (*kunst*) of God (cf. I Peter 3:9, 12), they should be gotten out of the way (I Cor. 5:13). But I pray for them with the devout David where they are not against God's revelation. Where, however, they pursue the opposition, may they be slain without any mercy as Hezekiah (II Kings 18:22), Josiah (ch. 23:5), Cyrus (cf. II Chron. 36:22 f.), Daniel (ch. 6:27), Elijah (I Kings 18:40) destroyed the priests of Baal, otherwise the Christian church (*kirche*) cannot come back again to its origin. The weeds must be plucked out of the vineyard of God in the time of harvest. Then the beautiful red wheat will acquire substantial rootage and come up properly (Matt. 13:24–30). The angels [v. 39], however, who sharpen their sickles for this purpose are the serious servants of God who execute the wrath of the divine wisdom (Mal. 3:1–6).

Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:46) perceived the divine wisdom in Daniel. He fell down before him after the mighty truth had overcome him. But he was moved like a reed before the wind, as ch. 3 (vs. 5 ff.) proves. Of the same character are many people now, by far the greater number, who accept the gospel with great joy as long as everything is going fine and friendly (Luke 8:13). But when God wishes to put such people to the test or to the trial by fire (I Peter 1:7), oh, how they take offense at the smallest weed, as Christ in Mark (ch. 4:17) prophesied. Without doubt inexperienced people will to such an extent anger themselves over this little book<sup>19</sup> for the reason that I say with Christ (Luke 19:27; Matt. 18:6) and with Paul (I Cor. 5:7, 13) and with the instruction of the whole divine law that the godless rulers should be killed, especially the priests and monks who revile the gospel as heresy for us and wish to be considered at the same time as the best Christians. When hypocritical, spurious (*getichte*) goodness becomes engaged and embittered beyond the average, it then wishes to defend the godless and says Christ killed no one, etc. And since the friends of God thus quite ineffectually command the wind, the prophecy of Paul (II Tim. 3:5) is fulfilled. In the last days the lovers of pleasures will indeed have the form of godliness (*Güttigkeit*), but they will denounce its power. Nothing on earth has a better form and mask than spurious goodness. For this reason all corners are full of nothing but hypocrites, among whom not a one is so bold as to be able to say the real truth. Therefore in order that the truth may be rightly brought to the light, you rulers—it makes no difference whether you want to or not—must conduct yourselves according to the conclusion of this chapter (ch. 2:48 f.), namely, that Nebuchadnezzar made the holy Daniel an officer in order that he might execute good, righteous decisions, as the Holy Spirit says (Ps. 58:10 f.). For the godless have no right to live except as the elect wish to grant it to them, as it is written in Ex. 23:29–33. Rejoice, you true friends of God, that for the enemies of the cross their heart has fallen into their breeches. They must do right even though they have never dreamed it. If we now fear God, why do we want to enrage ourselves before slack defenseless people (Num. 14:8 f.; Josh. 11:6)? Be but daring! He who wishes to have rule himself, to him all power on earth and heaven is given (Matt. 28:18). May He preserve you, most beloved, forever. Amen.

Source of modern German translation: Thomas Müntzer, *Schriften, liturgische Texte, Briefe*, edited and translated by Rudolf Bentzinger and Siegfried Hoyer. Berlin: Union Verlag, 1990, pp. 64-86.

Source of English translation: *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, edited by G.H. Williams and A. M. Mergal (*Library of Christian Classics Series*). Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957, pp. 49-70. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.

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<sup>19</sup> How many other changes were made in converting the sermon into a printed booklet is difficult to ascertain.