

Letter 121: 20 and 21 December 1521, Halle, Capito to Martin Luther

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[*Summary*]: Capito has not written Luther in a while because he recognizes that he and Luther completely disagree about the best approach to reforming the church. Erasmus, whom he met in Cologne, has been advising a conciliatory approach to the issue. Capito has been urging Albert of Brandenburg not to act against Luther in the wake of the Diet of Worms. Capito even cherishes hopes of Albert becoming a supporter of Luther. He praises Albert's handling of affairs and highlights his own efforts to aid Luther's cause. After returning to Halle, Albert seemed to be backsliding. He attempted to reinstate indulgences, but was opposed by Capito. Luther's advice will benefit Albert [see summary of Ep. 120 above]. Capito expects that Albert's support for reform will increase with his reading of evangelical writings. Capito therefore urges Luther not to ridicule or discourage the archbishop. Albert has commanded that sermons on the gospel of Matthew be preached and has forbidden the monks at Halle to speak out against Luther, though commanded otherwise by papal bulls. Heinrich Stromer can attest to Albert's open-mindedness. Capito himself desires nothing but the spreading of the gospel, the well-being of Albert and an end to all invectives. He fears the threat of war and the accompanying bloodshed. Capito has many reservations about married clergy. He fears that some, after a few years of marriage, may seek an annulment, disregard the authority of their superiors and thereby turn the people against the reformers. Balthasar Zeiger married a woman from Switzerland in Vaterode, but the counts of Mansfeld, who disliked Zeiger, excluded her from their dominions. Zeiger insisted that he was lawfully married and so the matter was brought before Albert. He was eventually released from prison and abjured all vengeance, with Laurentius Zoch and Capito acting as witnesses. Unless the Spirit enlightens Albert, Capito will quit his court within four months. He asks Luther to respond via Melanchthon. In the postscript, written the following day, he mentions that Albert has responded prudently to Luther's letter. Again Capito stresses the need for moderation in order not to incite turmoil. He has written at greater length to Justas Jonas.