

Letter 164: 6 July 1523, Strasbourg, Capito to Desiderius Erasmus

Printed in Allen V, pp. 305-306, #1374 and CWE 10, Ep. 1374.

There is a considerable overlap and the occasional verbal resemblance between Ep. 161 and Ep. 164 (see examples in summary). It is possible, therefore, that Capito dispatched only one of the two letters, i.e. the more elaborate Ep. 164. Although he explains that the delay in answering Erasmus' letter (now lost) was due to the lack of a courier, it is more likely that he held back because his own situation was volatile. Capito had relinquished his position in Mainz, but his provostship in Strasbourg was still the subject of litigation in Rome. Although he asks Erasmus to intercede on his behalf with the pope, he carefully omits any mention of the fact that he is about to take out citizenship – often a preliminary step to leaving the Catholic church. See below Ep. 167a, in which he defends his action.

[*Summary*]: Capito explains that due to the lack of a courier, his response to Erasmus' last letter is still in his possession. He has kept silent out of respect for Erasmus and in recognition of his own limited capacity (*reverentia tui ac meae imbecillitatis conscientia* in Ep.161; *conscientia... inscitiae meae atque tuae reverentiae* in Ep. 164]. He knew for some time that people questioned Erasmus' integrity, but did not wish to set himself up as Erasmus' advisor. A rumour was circulating in Nürnberg that Erasmus had attacked the importance of faith over works in a dialogue. Capito is defending Erasmus' reputation but fears that he will not be able to protect him against the accusation of hypocrisy. Yet he regrets Luther's virulence against Erasmus. Luther has also attacked Capito, which might in fact help his reputation in Rome. The provostship is once again under litigation, and he is burdened with debt. Nevertheless he has resigned his position in Mainz and will not return there, although the archbishop has asked him repeatedly to reconsider his decision. The Lutheran party has vilified Capito in print, accusing him of being a Judas, and mocking his silence. [This is a reference to the anonymous *Passio Doctoris Marthini Lutheri* in which Albert of Brandenburg is Caiphas, and Aleandro and "Pedico" ("Foot," punning on Capito's name Köpfel, "head") are said to have betrayed Luther like Judas]. Hutten's attack on Erasmus [*Expostulatio*] has been published. If Erasmus so desires, Capito will reply on his behalf.