

Letter 165: 30 July 1523, Wittenberg, N to the Reader

This *apologia* is printed in WA Br. II, 435-443 from a manuscript in the Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Ki.Ar. 23a. The identification of the hand as Capito's is doubtful.

Dated Wittenberg 1523, the *apologia* is an open letter to the reader (who is addressed in lines 1, 110, 160 and 174 of the printed version). The manuscript itself bears the address "To Jakob Truchsess" (above Ep. 41 note) in a hand different from that of the writer. It is unclear whether Truchsess had any role in this affair beyond that of a letter carrier. In fact, nothing is known of Truchsess' whereabouts in 1523. In 1520, when he was still in Capito's employ, Egranus advised him to move to Wittenberg (see above, Ep. 47). Other members of the Truchsess family were resident in Basel.

The piece was composed in the wake of an unauthorized publication by the Strasbourg printer Hans Schott in January 1523, which contained Luther's *Iudicium de Erasmo*, Melanchthon's *Elogion de Erasmo*, both uncomplimentary to Erasmus, and a letter from Luther to Capito (Ep. 131 of 17 January 1521), which identified him as a crypto-Lutheran and criticized his underhanded methods. The *apologia*, which may have been ghostwritten by Capito, comments on this publication as well as on Hutten's *Expostulatio* which, like the *Iudicium* and the *Elogion* was critical of Erasmus. In his last letter to Erasmus (above Ep. 164) Capito had volunteered to compose a reply on his behalf. The present piece is, however, put into the mouth of a third person, who refers to himself as Schott's *affinis* (relative by marriage in classical Latin, but in the 16th century sometimes used indiscriminately for both blood relatives and in-laws) and ostensibly sent from Wittenberg. This person has not been identified so far. Millet suggests Felix Ulscenius, but there is no independent evidence to connect him with the piece. The question has been raised why the manuscript ended up in Basel. We can only speculate that it was submitted for approval to Erasmus, then resident in Basel, and that he decided against its publication. Perhaps he no longer wished to be associated with Capito and other Lutheran supporters mentioned in the *apologia*, or he preferred to write his own defence and to focus on Hutten's attack. Erasmus' *Spongia*, written in reply to Hutten's *Expostulatio*, was published barely two months after the date given in this *apologia*.

[*Summary*]: The writer regrets the unauthorized publication of Luther's and Melanchthon's *Iudicia* and Luther's letter to Capito. It gives the enemies of the Reformation cause to rejoice and an opportunity to point out that Erasmus, Luther, Melanchthon, and Capito disagree among themselves. The same effect has been produced by Hutten's *Expostulatio* against Erasmus. Capito had tried to persuade Luther to proceed with moderation and abstain from attacks on Albert of Brandenburg. His call for diplomacy aroused Luther's suspicion. Yet Capito incurred risks on behalf of the Reformation cause. The writer mentions other men at Albert's court who favoured the Reformation, among them Caspar Hedio, Johann Stumpf von Eberbach and Johann Drach. Defending Albert, the writer notes that the actions taken against married priests in the see of Mainz had not been Albert's personal initiative. The letter continues with a defence of Erasmus against Hutten's aspersions and his accusations of hypocrisy. The writer wishes to counteract the impression created by the indiscreet publication of Schott and asks the reader not to pass unfair judgment on Erasmus, Luther, Melanchthon and Capito.