

Letter 248: 8 October 1525, Strasbourg, Capito to Johann Bugenhagen

The letter was carried to Wittenberg by Caselius (see preceding letter). The text is printed in O. Vogt, ed. *Dr. Johann Bugenhagens Briefwechsel* (Stettin, 1888; repr. Hildesheim, 1966), pp. 32-50, Ep. 15.

[*Summary*]: The Strasbourg preachers have sent Gregor Caselius to discuss the Sacramentarian controversy with Luther, but Capito wishes to be more specific about his position in the hope that Bugenhagen will make a personal effort to achieve concord among the reformers. So far, the reformers have acted in concert. Now, however, the peace has been disturbed, first by those who incited the peasants to rebellion and then by the tyrannical lords who, encouraged by Luther's book [*Wider die räuberischen und morderischen Rotten der Bauern*], took cruel revenge on them. Some six thousand people perished as a result. Capito has offered a suitable interpretation of Luther's book and has refrained from criticizing it to avoid giving the impression of dissension among the reformers. The Strasbourgers have been accused of boorishness in spite of the fact that they have urged the city council for two years now to found a college for the study of languages and rhetoric. Erasmus has undermined the gospel by writing against Luther, asserting free will. Capito did not write a reply to Erasmus, because he received no encouragement from Luther when enquiring about the matter. Now Karlstadt is causing uproar in Wittenberg, and attributing views to Luther, which he never advocated: that Christ was not God, that the people have the right to destroy images without the permission of the magistrate, that infant baptism is wrong. Finally he has pronounced on the question of the Eucharist, which was discussed previously in Zurich. Capito has sent all the relevant writings and the correspondence that passed between him and Zwingli on the subject to Luther. The Wittenbergers have always emphasized that faith was the decisive factor in taking communion, but until the return of Caselius the Strasbourg preachers will discourage any more detailed inquiry into the question of the Real Presence. Capito greatly regrets the aggressive tone of Luther's pamphlet against Karlstadt. Balthasar Hubmaier appeared on the scene, preaching Anabaptism. The disagreement over the two issues – baptism and the Eucharist – has disturbed people a great deal. Bugenhagen's letter to the church of Wrocław on the Eucharist contributed to the dissension. In defending Zwingli's opinion against Bugenhagen, Capito does not wish to be adversarial. In Capito's view the word *est* ("is") [in *hoc est corpus meum*] means "signifies", i.e. it is tropical. Yet he does not believe in being too inquisitive and investigating the matter too closely. It is enough to remember Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and to celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of him. The cup is a sign; we are delivered from our sins through faith. "We eat only the bread as a sign of his body" (*tantum panem signum corporis edimus*), the words *benedicere pani* do not mean "to consecrate the bread" but "to thank God for the bread." Sharing the bread, Christians become one in Christ. They are redeemed by faith, not by eating bread transformed by some miracle into Christ. Capito does not wish to become involved in a dispute about such things, which contribute nothing to salvation. He urges Bugenhagen to work for peace and unity in the church.