

Letter 319: 22 January 1527, Strasbourg, Capito to Johannes Oecolampadius

Printed in BrOek 2, pp. 4-6, Ep. 456.

[*Summary*]: When the scribe of Basel [Caspar Schaller or Heinrich Ryhiner] was here, Capito was in bad health. Yesterday, when it was announced that he was about to leave, Capito sought him out, but the scribe had a previous engagement with the city councillors. Capito could not join him because he had guests himself. Capito still hopes to be able to arrange a meeting with the scribe.

Capito believes that marriage is an honourable and sacred matter, especially for a Christian bishop, but the choice of marriage partner is crucial. Capito himself would have preferred to remain celibate, but was obliged to set an example and quell malicious rumours started by his opponents. He wanted to marry a woman of similar age and character as himself, a poor but well educated woman, but God had other plans. He married [Agnes Roettel], a citizen of Strasbourg and moderately wealthy, because her brothers promoted the match. She is obedient to her husband and to God, an attentive hostess, and inclined to charity. She is pious and listens to moral exhortations, but she is young and Capito is less than perfect, which may offend some people. Capito urges Oecolampadius to marry a godly and Christian woman. He wishes they could discuss the matter in person. "I would prefer the burden of celibacy over the yoke of an unequal marriage, and it will be unequal, I think, if you marry a woman, who is not sincerely and truly a Christian, that is, who is not self-denying."

The servant has just announced that the scribe will meet Capito at noon. He will be cautious in talking to him, not wishing to give offence to the magistrates. According to the scribe, the reaction from the Basel city council to Oecolampadius' proposed marriage has been mixed. Some people in Strasbourg approve of it, but many disapprove. Their opinion does not matter, however, since the reformers must depend on God. Capito believes that it is right for them to marry a woman in the Lord, if her character and lifestyle are approved by men of integrity. Oecolampadius must not think of his old maidservant. She does not have the right qualities. She is impure, quarrelsome and intolerable [see below, Ep. 321]. Oecolampadius should use Hans Army as his guide and go-between, and entrust himself completely to that prudent man.