

Letter 519: [Between 10 and 19 October 1533, Strasbourg], Capito and the Strasbourg Preachers [to Caspar Schwenckfeld/the Reader]

Although included in Millet's list, this document is not a letter, but a statement or apologia in response to Schwenckfeld's *Schutzschrift*, which he had written at the end of August/beginning of September 1533. The response from the Strasbourg preachers sometimes addresses Schwenckfeld directly, at other times speaks of him in the third person (apparently addressing the Reader). The statement is signed by the Strasbourg preachers, among them Bartolomeo Fonizio, who had been appointed on 10 October, thus providing a *terminus post quem* for the apologia. On 19 October Bucer sent a copy to Ambrosius Blaurer (QGT 8:175, no. 438/Schiess 1:434–5, Ep. 370), which is the *terminus ante quem*. Schwenckfeld's *Schutzschrift* together with the response from the Strasbourg preachers is printed on facing pages in BDS 14:280–355, no. 5.

[*Summary*]: Schwenckfeld had no business to comment on their relationship with the Lutherans. He was asked to give his opinion on the teaching and practices of the Strasbourg church. He is wrong to suggest that Capito said they were in agreement with Schwenckfeld. He has called their teaching into doubt before a large audience at the synod. They themselves will not condemn anyone on account of external rites, as long as his life is upright and his teaching sound. They remind Schwenckfeld, however, that he is a visitor in Strasbourg and not a preacher. They accuse him of being ambivalent in his statements and want him to be precise of what he approves or disapproves in their teaching. He has said that he will judge preachers by the fruit they bear. He has been Capito's guest, and should be able to attest to his life and to the fruit of his preaching. Schwenckfeld condemns infant baptism and the Supper as celebrated in Strasbourg and has persuaded others to join him, which does not further the gospel. It is wrong of Schwenckfeld to demand proof of their mission in the form of miracles. He accuses them of reviving the synagogue. They remind him that Moses and Christ were Jews and deny that they are reviving the 'false synagogue' by practising certain rites. If he had any objections, he should offer them proof. It does not make sense for him to claim that they are in agreement and at the same time condemn their practices.

The Strasbourg preachers defend their method of administering the sacraments of baptism and the Supper and emphasize that this is not done in the 'superstitious manner' of the papists. They expect the participants to believe in the efficacy of Christ's grace to work improvement in them. Schwenckfeld argues wrongly that they must not take the sacrament because they are imperfect. They are all members of Christ and therefore his church. The weak brethren must be tolerated.

They protest his accusation that they have changed their teaching concerning the Eucharist. They have always rejected Luther's interpretation that there is a natural union between the bread and body of Christ; but since he allows a metaphorical interpretation, they stated that they agreed with him. They refer Schwenckfeld to Bucer's [*Vergleichung D. Luthers unnd seins gegentheyls vom Abentmal Christi. Dialogus*, Strasbourg, 1528] and deny that Bucer contradicted Luther. Zwingli did write against Luther, but he signed the articles of Marburg [1529]. 'We consider the church, in which Luther and his followers are serving and preaching salvation by faith in Christ alone, as the church of Christ and them as ministers of Christ' (p. 158). Johannes Brenz has written that it is the mouth of faith that eats Christ, and they agree with the Lutherans on that point. Schwenckfeld does not want to mingle the two elements – bread and body – but the Strasbourgers agree with the Lutherans that there is a sacramental union.

Schwenckfeld cannot hold the Strasbourgers responsible for being exiled as a result of the publication of his book [*Ein anwysunge das die opinion der leyplichen gegenwertigheyt unsers Herrens Jesu Christi im Brote oder under der gestalt deß Brots gerricht ist*, Zurich, 1528; printed in CS 3:1–23, no. 56]. He sent the book to Zwingli, who had it published. The Strasbourgers had nothing to do with this.

They do not need Schwenckfeld to explain Luther to them. They can read his books themselves. Schwenckfeld has no understanding of either Luther's or their own teaching. The sacraments require visible signs, but the Strasbourgers have always said that those without faith do not receive the Lord. Luther agrees with the Fathers that the bread is given into our hand, but the body of Christ is invisible and intangible. There is no need for Schwenckfeld to talk about transubstantiation, for the Strasbourgers have never accepted it. They have trusted Schwenckfeld's intention to further the church and are disappointed that he now seems to condemn their teaching. Their main concern is that he may hinder the progress of the gospel in Strasbourg. How can he criticize their teaching when it is the pure gospel message? They realize that they are imperfect, but Schwenckfeld is not the man to teach them. Let him truthfully explain what he finds unacceptable and give reasons for it. The Strasboug preachers will not deny that he may be inspired by Christ or deny their own weaknesses. They have not denied him practical aid. Capito has been his host for a long time. They have not persecuted him, but kept the peace and given him the benefit of the doubt, while he has brought dissent to their community and endangered the church. The secular authorities may well act against such a man.

The Strasbourgers reiterate that Luther preaches the true gospel of Christ and that they signed an agreement at Marburg. They excepted only the doctrine of the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which hinged on a difference in words. Afterwards Zwingli and Oecolampadius agreed with them and Luther on a wording, and they have never departed from this agreement.

Schwenckfeld has admonished them to be more tolerant, but they have never harmed any opponent. They have received them hospitably, even those who lied about them. Schwenckfeld accused them of being concerned mainly about attracting as many people as possible and offering the sacrament without worrying about their spiritual inclination. Caspar Hedio persuaded him to retract the first accusation, but the second was left standing. They are willing to forgive Schwenckfeld, provided he either demonstrates their error or confirms that their teaching is correct. They send this apologia to the brethren in Augsburg [cf. below, Ep. 520], and would have given it to Schwenckfeld, had he still been present.