

Letter 525a: [After 18 December 1533], Strasbourg, The Strasbourg Preachers to the City Council of Strasbourg

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[*Summary*]: A summary of their teaching was presented to the pre-synod [‘Vorsynode’ or ‘sonderliche Synode’ on 3–6 June 1533] by the four churchwardens, Hans Lindenfels, Michael Rot, Friedrich Ingolt, Hans Chunradt, and four preachers, [Wolfgang] Capito, Martin Bucer, Caspar Steinbach, and Melchior [Cumanus]. The last three articles in this presentation, concerning the role of the secular government, were contested by [Bernhard Wacker], Anton Engelbrecht, Wolfgang Schultheiss, and Johannes Sapidus. The opponents were not satisfied with Bucer’s and Capito’s explanation. After some discussion, Anton Engelbrecht decided to present his views in writing; the present letter is the preachers’ response.

To begin with, they deny that Engelbrecht had been authorized to change or emend the articles presented. Indeed, at a meeting in October, the preachers agreed to seek a compromise among themselves, but Engelbrecht reacted to their proposals in a hostile fashion. Angered by the admonitions of Capito, Hedio, Zell, and Bucer, he no longer attended their weekly meetings, stopped preaching in the cathedral, and wrote against them. After a hearing before representatives of the city council (Jacob Sturm, Egenolf Roeder, Daniel Mieg, and Matthis Pfarrer), Engelbrecht handed over his writings and pledged to refrain from such polemics in future. It is vital for the church to preserve unity and defend the gospel truth.

The articles under discussion are:

No. XIV: Secular government must serve God by doing everything in its power to honour the name of God, to increase the heavenly kingdom, and to promote his will among their subjects.

No. XV: The government will do so if it ensures the purity of the gospel and of preaching, maintains public morality, and punishes sectarians.

No. XVI: It is wrong to deny the distinction between the elect and those condemned to eternal punishment.

The preachers offer the following explanation of these articles: Although the authority and the office of the secular government differ from that of the preachers, the government has a duty to ensure that the people are taught correctly and live a life in accord with the gospel. They are therefore entitled to impose punishment, even if they cannot control people’s conscience or faith. Engelbrecht likens this to papal tyranny (‘das drumb ein erger papstumb uffkommen werde dann hievor’, BDS 5, p. 448). The kingdom of God cannot be defended only by the Word. What Engelbrecht adduces out of Erasmus’ and Hilary’s writings is either irrelevant or does not contradict their teaching. The preachers quote extensively from the Bible and the writings of Augustine to corroborate their teaching. They decline to discuss Zwingli’s teaching (cited by Engelbrecht), leaving him to the judgment of the Lord, and deny that they are at variance with Luther’s [*Von weltlicher oberkeit*]. On the contrary, they cite Luther’s *Unterricht der Visitatoren [...] zu Sachsen* in support of their teaching. They answer Engelbrecht’s allegations that Capito is prevaricating (‘nit redet, wie es bei im imm hertzen stünde’, BDS 5, p. 474) and that both he and Bucer are inconsistent.

The preachers sum up their beliefs in five points: the secular government is able to serve and promote the kingdom of Christ; the government does so on the command of God and is inspired by the Spirit of Christ; the ruling body is able to make decisions about what is Christian teaching and is entitled to abolish what goes against it; it may inflict punishment on heretics; the

preachers must inform and counsel the secular rulers and admonish them if they fail to follow their advice.