

posed to God and end my life following God's will, to the honour and praise of his holy name. Amen.

Thus I yield myself to the discipline and punishment of God my heavenly Father, his holy congregation and Christian church, as long and however much as is pleasing to the Holy Spirit. May the will of God be done²⁰ in me according to his grace, along with all those who desire it and who are in need. Amen.

This is my will and final decision at present. May God the Lord require of me whatever he wills. I forgive (forget), and pardon from the bottom of my heart those whom I suppose to have done things against me. I ask God also to forgive and pardon them, yes, that God would give them grace to help them recognize their sin (as has happened to me through grace). Amen.

Praise God!²¹

Whether a Christian can hold a government office [Leupold] S[charnschlager]

The following text continues the instructional mode found in Leupold Scharnslager's earlier epistles (no. 19, "Congregational Order for Christ's Members"; and no. 20, "General Admonition and Reminder for Reformation"). It reminds us that he was a teacher by profession. No date is given, but the text has affinities with the author's thoughts on government in his "Farewell to the Strasbourg Council".²¹ Here he briefly states his position on a central social-ethical question: can a Christian fulfil an office of political authority? This was a query every peaceful Anabaptist had to be ready to answer. The form of the text strongly suggests that Scharnslager had prepared a handy standard answer for church members who routinely faced this question in court hearings and public disputations, rather than as an apology to the authorities and their interrogators.

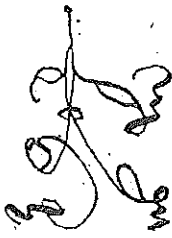
[Leupold] S[charnschlager], *Ob ein Christ ein Amt in der Obrigkeit wahrnehmen kann*. Translation by Victor Thiessen. *Obrigkeit* is commonly translated "government" or "magistrate." The title speaks of "an office of," suggesting the more generic term.

²¹ William Klassen, trans., "Scharnslager's Farewell to the Strasbourg Council," *MQR* 42 (1968): 211-18.

²⁰ Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2.

²¹ [Original: *Laus Deo*.—Trans.]

The answer to this question, the author notes, depends on the answer to another question: what is a Christian? He answers it succinctly and revealingly, paying greatest attention to the love of enemy. If an officeholder binds himself to the Christian way, as described here, he can remain in office. The reference to Michael Sattler's "booklet," the Schleithem Articles of 1527, is instructive. It is evidence for the claim that these articles by the Swiss Brethren were accepted as authoritative in the wider Anabaptist world. In addition, the full acceptance of the separatist argument suggests that the well-known differences between the Swiss and the Pilgrimages, sharply highlighted in some of the correspondence in this volume, had less to do with theological principles than with the spirit in which they were applied. Scharnschlager adopts the earth-heaven dualism of the articles and then adds a contrast of his own, between weapons of the flesh and weapons of the Spirit.



A question: You do not want a Christian to become a magistrate?²

Answer: Do you mean those Christians in name only, be they adherents of the papacy, Lutheranism, Zwinglianism? I mean those whose walk is limited to nature and natural love, who live according to the flesh, outside of the love and Spirit of God, and the new birth from God. They live without the discipline of the Holy Spirit; they do not have, observe, or willingly undergo brotherly discipline or other ordering³ of the Holy Spirit. These people are not our concern. Nor do we deny them anything, or have any grounds to judge or discipline them whether or not they wish to be

² [Original: *obrer*.—Trans.]

³ [Original: *ordnung*.—Trans.]

rulers of the world. For Paul says, "Of what concern are those of the world to us?" [1 Cor 5 (12)]. This means those who do not do the will of Christ or walk according to the content of the gospel in love, patience, and other forms of obedience. And therefore when you ask us whether a Christian can be a magistrate, it is necessary to discuss and come to understand what is the essence of a true Christian, or how he must live.⁴ That is, someone who lives, abides, acts, and forsakes in such a way that he may be saved.

The things he must obey if he wishes to be a Christian—that is, a child of salvation and of God, also a disciple of Christ, and considers God to be his God—are the following. He must do the will of God, that is, obey his commands.⁵ Further, he must abide by the sayings and teachings of Christ,⁶ for these teachings of Christ are like the law of God: to love God with the whole heart and all strength, and one's neighbour as oneself⁷—indeed, in addition, to love his enemies⁸ [Mt 5 (39f., 44)]. He does not resist evil: when someone strikes him on the right cheek, he patiently offers the other one without resisting; also, he does not seek revenge for himself or for others. Moreover, he blesses those who curse him, does good to those who hate him, prays for those who insult and persecute him. Likewise, he shall be saved who walks in the patience of Christ⁹ without impatience, and lives without any sin. That is, he has died to the old life, submits to brotherly discipline,¹⁰ does not rule over, pressure, or make demands of anyone in the church of Christ [Rom 6 (10f.); Col 3 (3)],¹¹ walks in the fruit of the Holy Spirit—that is, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, friendliness, goodness, gentleness, and the like, as the gospel generally points to and commands [Gal 5 (22)].

And when you ask us about these Christians, whether we admit that they may become a secular magistrate, we answer thus. If it is equal-

⁴ [Original: *wie er sein muß*.—Trans.]

⁵ Mt 19:17; Jn 14:15, 21.

⁶ Jn 8:31.

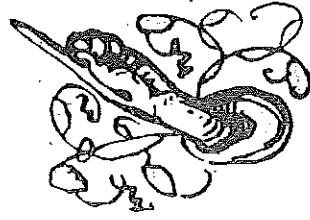
⁷ Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18; Mt 22:37–39; Mk 12:30f., 33; Lk 10:27.

⁸ Lk 6:27, 35.

⁹ 2 Thes 3:5; Rv 1:9.

¹⁰ Mt 18:15–18.

¹¹ Mt 20:25f.; Mk 10:43f.; Lk 22:25f.; 1 Pt 5:3.



ly possible to remain true to these things—observe, obey, and retain them—upon which his salvation rests, namely, those things that have been mentioned above, without which no one can be saved or enter into the kingdom of heaven, or have God as his God, then it is equally possible for him to become a secular ruler and act and continue as one, just as it is also written in Michael Sattler's booklet, in the article about magistrates.¹² He says there that it is not appropriate for a Christian to be a magistrate. The reason is: "The magisterial authority¹³ is of the flesh, whereas the Christian authority is of the Spirit. The houses and dwellings of the former are grounded in this world, whereas those of Christians are in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, whereas the citizenship of Christians is in heaven."¹⁴ Their battles and weapons are fleshly and directed solely against the flesh; the weapons of Christians, however, are spiritual, aimed against the fortress of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armour of God, with truth, justice, peace, faith, well-being, and with the Word of God" [Eph 6 (12ff.); 2 Cor 10 (4)].

"God has ordained magistrates for every people; but Israel is the Lord's portion" [Sir 17 (17)]. Christ the Lord says, "The worldly kings rule, and the mighty are called 'gracious lords'; but it is not so with you" [Mt 20 (25f.)]. This is where the ways part! "But the greatest among you shall be as the youngest, and the most esteemed as a servant" (Lk 22 [25f.]; Mk 10 [42f.]).

Written by him whose name is an L. and an S.



Admonition and comfort in all manner of sorrow

To the brothers in the Grisons (Graubünden)
and Appenzell

L[eupold] S[charnschlager]¹
[after 24 May 1544]

This letter and the next one (no. 31, "An Epistle of Comfort concerning the Love of God") by Leupold Scharnschlager have to do with the same events. In May of 1544 the government of the Swiss district of Chur responded to pressures from clergy of the state church to take legal action against the local Anabaptists. Martin Plaickner, Ulrich Hafner, and Anna Schererin were threatened or were actually served with expulsion papers.² Plaickner was able to report to Scharnschlager in the midst of the tumult, and in Scharnschlager's first letter (no. 31), he replies immediately to Plaickner. Placing the first reply after the second one might simply have been an editorial error, or it might have been a considered decision: first there is an admonition to faithfulness, and second, a call to rejoicing in the midst of persecution.

¹ [Leupold] S[charnschlager] an die Brüder in Graubünden und Appenzell: *Ver-mahnung und Trost in Allerlei Trübsal*, [nach dem 24. Mai 1544]. Translation by Victor Thiessen and John D. Rempel.

² This use of initials was probably an attempt to veil the author's identity in a setting of political oppression.

³ Heinold Fast, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz 2: Ostschweiz* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1973), Letters 630 and 631, by Johannes Comander to Heinrich Bullinger, the head of the state church in the canton of Zurich.

¹² [The reference is to the Schleithem Articles of 1527, whose chief author was Michael Sattler. See John H. Yoder, trans. and ed., *The Schleithem Confession* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977).—Ed.]

¹³ [Original: *regiment*.—Trans.]

¹⁴ Phil 3:20; Heb 13:14.