

## Another Letter to the Swiss Brethren (1543)

### Introduction

This letter is a sequel to Judgment and Decision (#8), and deals more directly with the issue of schism in the church. Marpeck enumerates three causes of schism, but the text itself makes clear that it is the last of the three that afflicts the Swiss, who have once believed, but who have fallen asleep and have grown so careless that the enemy has come in and caused confusion. He insists that they have given him no just cause why they do not consider him and his group a true church. For his part, he refuses to regard them as a true church; he has clearly told them that he does not so regard them because of their "unjustified censoriousness and use of the ban."

Here, the glosses by Rothenfelder are as critical as those in the previous letter. In fact, one could gather from their tone that he was one of the group criticized. He was a member of the Swiss Brethren fellowship and, although he was always in tension with them, he nevertheless seems to have had considerable sympathy for them as well. Unless some new sources are uncovered, the confusion and uncertainty surrounding these glosses will persist. Perhaps Rothenfelder had come to have sentiments not unlike those found in the last statement of Hans Denck, which reflects a disillusionment with the controversy and disagreements of the Reformation era. Or perhaps Rothenfelder wished to offer, on behalf of the Swiss Brethren, a response to some of Marpeck's more severe censures.

Another letter sent to those called the Swiss Brethren 1543

To the beloved, by virtue of their zeal for God in Appenzell, and wherever they gather, and especially in reply to Uli Scherer<sup>1</sup> and Jörg Maler.

Our fervent desire and prayer for you, and us all, is the pure and true knowledge of Christ. Amen.

Beloved, we write to you again, because of the zeal you have for God and because of the good we hope for in you, which we expect you also hope for in us, to see whether the mercy of God is sufficient for a true unification and fellowship in Christ. May God the Father give and grant us this through His Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have heard from you that you have a serious grievance against us and you consider it unjust that even now we do not regard nor acknowledge you correctly understood as a congregation of God in Christ. It is our hope that, if you will carefully consider these our reasons, you will not bear us ill will, but rather you will praise and thank God for the revelation of His understanding, since eternal life consists alone in the knowledge of God the Father and His // Christ. Therefore, beloved, accept these reasons diligently and honestly, with humility of heart, and do not slanderously despise them, which only leads to your own bitterness. Remember what injury the enemy may inflict on you and us. No small loss has come to you because, through slandering us, you have become embittered and resentful. Thereby the enemy of truth has prevented you from believing and from being concerned about this so that you are now close to destruction.<sup>2</sup> May God preserve you from this. Amen.

A schism has three causes. The first is the

Jn. 14 [7]

63v

All schism  
from three  
causes

dissembling and hypocrisy of the lying, false prophets who desire that the church and truth of Christ never have unity and fellowship. In them there is no hope of unity nor will the churches of Christ ever desire to unite with such false prophets and churches. Work expended on them is in vain and to no avail.

64r

The second reason is lack of understanding: ignorant, angry, hasty zeal for old customs, for blood relatives, for fellowship based on natural love, for one's own teaching, knowledge, and understanding, which loves to puff itself up and // which causes communal strife before it has come to self-knowledge. With such characteristics of the flesh nearly all men are burdened. Still the law and fear of God is by nature written on their unclean hearts. Because of this, but still not washed from sin, they accept faith in Christ in baptism, discipline,<sup>3</sup> and the Supper without the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit, presuming in ignorant zeal to be teachers before they have become disciples of Christ. Such persons bring schism into the church of Christ. Nor may they be called a church of God in Christ. But one may be zealous and work for them with hope until they are brought to true understanding. That, briefly, is the second reason of all schism.

Gloss: Thus  
those in Asia  
and Corinth  
also were not  
churches in  
Christ

The third reason is that men go to sleep in the faith and become careless, even though in baptism they have been washed from sin through the blood of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Since our enemy never sleeps in order to devastate us, they soon fall from the bulwark of faith and true knowledge when they are tempted. If the true believers do not then wake up, especially the watchmen of the people who should give guidance, they misdirect the people // as well as themselves. They do it in ignorance,

64v

which God brings upon us because of our carelessness. Thus, schism follows in order that the godly and faithful ones may be revealed. They are the ones who have remained alert through admonition, who arouse those who sleep, who direct the sick to Christ the Physician and portray Him to them in order that they may come to true knowledge. They spend their time where God has not in grace sent someone so that the people to whom they are sent may not remain in the error of their ignorance without being admonished. For ignorance is not innocent before God; for, where there is no one, whom God alone gives and sends with the truth, to warn, admonish, teach, and preach, there is no grace, and the wrath of God remains on these as well as on those who do not believe the truth. We write this in order that you clearly perceive it and that you may open your hearts to God, which we will also properly do with you, otherwise there is nothing but deception and hypocrisy. Then God will give us His grace for true union. Amen.

65r

For such zeal without knowledge limits itself of fellowship and robs itself // of profit. Even if men were to regard such zealous people as a congregation, God would not so regard them. For we are unable to participate with you in the fellowship of the body and blood of Christ (which all true Christians have eternally in faith and love) when it is done in impure fear and ignorant zeal—as indeed you have not participated with us, and still may not do so, because of a seared conscience. False, unjust judgments and verdicts follow from such impure fear, and Christ the Lord denies to His own the rights to these judgments and verdicts. He warns them not to judge and condemn in order that they be not judged and condemned. The Lord does not forbid just judgments in this present life, and these

nota

Mt. 7 [1 f.]

the true believers are commanded to make in the Holy Spirit, since the spiritual man judges all things and is himself judged by no one. But the Lord prohibits judgments made falsely and in ignorance, for thereby one judges and condemns oneself. For wherein one judges another and thereby himself becomes guilty, he judges and condemns himself.

Therefore, dear friends, we must properly wake up and exercise the judgments and ways of God with trembling and fear in just and true knowledge. // "Judge with right judgment," says the Lord. For, where judgment is perverted, all of God's action, bodily and spiritually, is suspended. Wherever the spirit of justice and truth does not rule in carnal<sup>4</sup> unbelievers (that is: where earthly government is concerned; this is why true believers pray for human government, that God may give it the spirit of true understanding to judge justly), there also just carnal judgments are not possible. How much less in spiritual judgments, which human reason can never reach without the Holy Spirit of Christ who forgives and retains sin, and which are concerned with the eternal and not with the temporal realm. For, says Paul, whoever does not have this Holy Spirit of Christ according to the measure of faith does not belong to Christ. And John says: "Whoever does not abide in the teaching of Christ has no God." For this reason we could not and cannot regard you as a church of Christ, for you have no just accusation against us to which your own conscience will testify. Paul also regarded the Galatians thus (until, with great anxiety, he had given birth to them a second time in the image of Christ). Foolishly and without justification, you also have continued to regard us as not being a church of Christ. Thus, neither of us regards the other as // a church of Christ. We are much more justified in

65v

Jn. 7 [24]  
Gloss: It follows that it was suspended for the Romans, too. But Paul does not do that.

Rom. 14 [3 f., 10, 13]

Rom. 8 [9]

2 Jn. [9]

Gal. 4 [19]

66r

Gloss: God knows who is innocent

Not consider a church of Christ

Eph. 4 [5 f.]

67v<sup>5</sup>

making this accusation of you than you of us, since you have no justification for not regarding us as a church of Christ. Rather, you should look to yourselves, since you have not yet shown us a fault which our conscience confirms. Nevertheless, we do not thereby regard ourselves as justified before God, but only through His grace. But, because of your unjustified censoriousness and use of the ban, we have until the present justifiably denied you fellowship with us in Christ.

This, then, is your case against us, the reason why you do not consider us a church of Christ: because we exercise the freedom, which we have in Christ, too much, contrary to His Word. If you would prove this to us with a concrete case so that our consciences could be certain, we would gladly accept your not recognizing us as a Christian church. For, it is certainly true that the proper and true fellowship of the body and blood of Christ is unity, and unity in the Holy Spirit is true fellowship. For, there can be no rift in the body of Christ since there is only one faith, one Lord, one Spirit, one God and Father of us all. And this fellowship is without exception, baptized with one Spirit, with water, into one unsundered, undivided body with united members. //

Therefore, once more our admonition to you who are guilty (we recognize here that all innocent consciences are excepted and we hold them blameless as always) is that, since you are guilty, bear, in the patience of Christ, the charge of this article, namely, that we did not and do not consider you a church of Christ. Let not your hearts complain against us any longer when you correctly recognize the causes. Cast away your own honor, which cannot stand before God, and tread it into the mud! We continue to hope that you will no longer bear us ill

will, but that you will rather praise and thank God with us for His grace and revelation. May you pray that knowledge of Him may be revealed to His honor and praise, and pray also for our need of salvation. May He give us, together with you, the teaching of His Holy Spirit for true knowledge of Him, in which knowledge alone eternal life consists. May we achieve this through God alone. Amen.

Concerning your understanding of the oath on which we have sufficient clarity from you, we cannot bind anyone's conscience nor put a rope around anyone's neck, nor are we able to submit our consciences to your understanding.<sup>6</sup>

## 4

# To Caspar Schwenckfeld (1544)

### Introduction

In 1542 Marpeck produced a book on baptism<sup>1</sup> which also came into the hands of Caspar Schwenckfeld.<sup>2</sup> Schwenckfeld was requested by some of his followers to write a reply, which he did.<sup>3</sup> His rebuttal occasioned an exchange of letters between the two men. However, Marpeck's original letter is missing. Schwenckfeld's reply is extant,<sup>4</sup> and it is perhaps to this letter that Marpeck now replies.

The letter accompanied Marpeck's reply to the first half of the *Judicium*.<sup>5</sup> The second half followed years later, to all of which Schwenckfeld did not see fit to reply.

In this letter Marpeck chides Schwenckfeld for lack of that simplicity which Christ said was necessary to receive God's revelation. If Schwenckfeld had it, he would certainly have understood Marpeck. Marpeck evidently knew of Schwenckfeld's view that the Anabaptists were not intellectually capable of convincingly presenting their case.<sup>6</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, Marpeck acknowledges both his fallibility and his readiness to continue the discussion.

### The Text

To Caspar Schwenckfeld, 1544<sup>7</sup>

Dear Schwenckfeld: I pray and hope that God through Jesus Christ may grant you understanding of yourself. Self-understanding must precede all other understanding; without it, all

14  
To the Church in  
St Gallen and Appenzell  
(1551) (#34)

Introduction

In 1551 Marpeck tried once again to reach the Swiss Brethren. This letter is one of a series written at this time by both parties. Marpeck had written at least once, had received a reply, but was unsatisfied and mystified by their response. What the "demand" of the Swiss Brethren is to which he refers is not clear, but it may well be that they resented his long, admonitory letters which, like Paul's, are sometimes "hard to understand," and that they had suggested that if he would only stop, things would right themselves. In any event, he felt their attitude as a bellicose attack on himself. He counters with a sustained warning against Christians exposing themselves to the wiles of the devil by being censorious and quarrelsome. He laments the divided state of the Anabaptist fellowship, and emphasizes that the Holy Spirit works in His own way and not necessarily according to human rules and regulations. The Holy Spirit can do His uniting work only if Christians will talk with each other, or in his case, write.

While it is not hard to see how his letter could further antagonize the Swiss—since he charges them with unwillingness to listen to the Holy Spirit—the letter is testimony to his concern for the unity and peace of Christ's church.

The Text

To the Church in St. Gallen and Appenzell

272r This letter was carried to the churches at St. Gallen and in Appenzell by old Thomas Schuhmacher for reasons that you will understand.

Grace and peace from God, our heavenly Father through and from the Lord Jesus Christ be and remain with us to eternity. Amen.

Dearly beloved, loved in Jesus Christ, our Healer. We, and especially I, Pilgram, have received your letter at the hand of the carrier, your and our dear brother. However, neither through the oral nor the written account am I even now able to discover or understand any reason for your demand and desire from which not a human or carnal but a godly impulse or movement, caused by the grace of God, might follow. Thus I also recently wrote you requesting information and anything else that was pertinent, but you did not acknowledge [our letter] nor indicate where it had reached you and how you thought and felt about it. Similarly your messenger was unable to report to us. Nor did he know whether our letter had been brought before the congregation.//

272v

Because of this we are gravely concerned, especially I, Pilgram. Your whole demand is shrouded in uncertainty. Consequently I also find in me no urging of the Holy Spirit without whom all striving and intention is in vain. I am ready, however, to take the blame myself rather than to blame you. Perhaps God does not consider me worthy to serve you in your grave concern about which you wrote and complained in your letters, twice before and again now. Nevertheless, I would have to do it even if I would rather not, and even if a whale, that is, any human power, regime, or temporal service or business—which I trust to God would not hinder me—had swallowed me, I would still have to come out, as frequently occurred, and carry out and accomplish the bidding for which God sent and urged me. In such matters and situations (please understand me right that I mean that strife, error, disunity, and

antipathy which flows from fleshly acclaimed wisdom and self-chosen feigned spirituality) I would rather have God urge, drive, press, and thrust me out by force // than that I (not to speak of an unknown cause) should act myself.

273r

More yet, I might even be justifiably censured without discernment by spiritual people if I had a strong driving of the Holy Spirit in me to engage in the strife, error, and attacks referred to above. Then I would slowly and sadly submit and desist. It is not that I desire to resist the prompting of the Holy Spirit! God forbid! Rather, my reason is to test the prompting carefully, not because of the Holy Spirit, but because of my own human inability, weakness, ignorance, lack of understanding, folly, inconstancy, and fickleness.

Gloss

The Holy Spirit often drives the guilty to their own fall because of their presumptuousness in order that they acquire self-knowledge.

The following must be included in testing the urging of the Holy Spirit: whether I have been clothed with the power from above to cover my weakness; that I feel enablement against my inability; that I sense and recognize true knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of God against // my ignorance and folly in order to know wisdom; that I have laid hold of steadfastness on the firm foundation of truth against my fickleness, and only then to accept the urging of the Holy Spirit with fear, anxiety, and trembling, in order that one acts with certainty and not in uncertainty. However, no one should hide behind the sense of the above with a false appearance, or deliberately to obstruct, but to persevere in good faith in the fear of God. For the enemy of our salvation does not slumber nor take a nap<sup>1</sup> with his cunning and deception, everywhere to lead men astray. He stirs up much discord and

273v

fighting in man—who does not know why—and all with a persuasive appearance of godly zeal, although he is concerned only for himself and not for divine honor and truth. Thus he mortally wounds men and brings them to the verge of destruction from which they are saved, won, and healed again only with great difficulty. Whoever meddles to separate men without a specific urging and command of God sustains great harm, indeed destruction, which has overtaken many as examples for us.

274r

I am not writing this to show that you are forsaken by God// but to admonish you earnestly not to enter into quarreling and strife with one another, but to bear with one another in sincere love and to confess your sins to each other in trust, to bring about true repentance. For we are not ignorant of the designs of our enemy, for he is the greatest envier and hater of man's salvation. Therefore it behooves us to watch over our souls, our own and each other's, especially to observe and search out whether the enemy has secretly started a fire in our innermost heart, conscience, and soul in order to consume soul, conscience, and heart in the wrath of God. There is among you a hidden fire which has an evil, stinking smoke and taste of fire, which the enemy of truth is seeking to conceal in order that he may ignite, destroy, and burn to ashes many hearts before it is discovered, as the means of the wrath of God which burns brightly everywhere.<sup>2</sup> Thus he also kindles his strife with deceit, lies, cunning, false suspicion, evil, faultfinding, mistrust, gossip, blandishment, flattery, greed for personal honor, scolding, slandering, anger, envy, hate, antipathy, unfriendliness, stubbornness, boastfulness, and pride. From this it follows that no one will yield to anyone else. These are the weapons of his knight-hood with which he conducts his campaign to sneak

274v

up on and slay men. Now when the fire in the houses (that is, human hearts in which God should dwell) burns most fiercely so that fire and sword, hunger after the truth and famine meet, then he looks about for help lest it be too late.

Gloss The fire must be understood to mean the wrath of God; the sword the deceit and cunning of the enemies; on the other hand the sharp sword of God's Word that slays those who resist; famine: the withdrawal of the Word of grace and the faithful builders, workers, and servants.

When it is all but burned down, then is the time to rescue and defend with haste; to intervene and to obstruct the cunning, deadly strokes of the enemy with the sharpness of the Word of truth after one has already been fatally wounded. Only then the hungry must be given bread to eat, and good wine to the thirsty (that is, the comfort of the Holy Spirit) so that the heart may be made glad, since the enemy has ravaged and consumed it, scattered and slain the builders and workers, and devastated/ / the earth (that is, the earthly man).

275r

What can one workman do in such a situation? He really ought also to burn, be killed, or die of hunger, since the earth has been cursed, laid waste, and execrated. I do not write this to point at someone specifically but only for our mutual warning so that we put out the fire and save, apply the greatest earnestness, care, and diligence to get each other out of the fire before we perish, and learn to fight with the sword of the Spirit before we are attacked, wounded, and killed by the enemy with the weapons described above. [It is a warning] not to allow our land and soil to be wasted and to bear thorns and thistles (which, if it happens, means that the curse is near) and so to surrender it to the

destruction of the enemy, but rather to build up our earthly body and to root out the weeds which grow from the evil seed of the enemy in order that the blessing of God may follow our labor, so that the fruit may prosper. If there are faithful builders and laborers, they should be loved and respected. If by the blessing of God fruit is produced, they should be supported, cared for, and given diligent attention; that we do not leave the bread lying under men's feet nor carelessly throw out the wine which gladdens our hearts. Thus when hunger/ / and thirst come we can be comforted by them, made glad, satisfied, and guided.

275v

I say it before God, that great gifts and the fruits of God's blessing could have come in our time through many faithful workers if we had only been more careful of the fruit, if we had stored and kept it in the cupboard of our hearts, since it came to our doors so utterly without cost. Had we truly cared for and gathered them and thanked God for them, it would surely not have been possible for us to go to someone else for bread and run around and beg. We would have our fill, and enough for all other peoples.

Still, my God, we can only lament before you about ourselves, for the fault is ours and not yours. You have richly given to us, but we have not given thanks, nor listened diligently. That is why we are in dire need in all places and in many ways, so that we must now search for that which we did not care for and have lost, and now have to call on you with ashamed face. And even if you continually turn us away,<sup>3</sup> refusing to hear or advise us, you would do no wrong. For first you recompense us for our carelessness and idleness in order to rouse our sleepy spirits and to warm/ / our lukewarm hearts with the fire of poverty. Thus, my God, you have ample right

276r

to tell us that we ought to be ashamed of our request because we have regarded as trifling your gift and grace. Nevertheless, we will continue shamelessly and importunately to beg with hope that you will listen to us for the sake of your own peace. And we will not be surprised nor deterred from our urgent prayer by your delay, in the hope that you will grant us assistance to fill our needs. No one who has not felt it knows how hot the fire of God's wrath is. Nor does anyone know the strategy of the enemy and the injuries he can inflict with his poisoned weapons who has not often gained salvation and victory in the battle. Again only he who has been thirsty and hungry knows what true hunger and thirst is. In these experiences God teaches his own to care for, protect, and watch over their souls for His sake, and to pray earnestly not to be led into and be destroyed by the temptation which will come.

Truly, my dear brothers, in a variety of ways the Lord sends a concise, direct word to those people to save their souls. Regardless of the form, whether it be in writing or in speech, it behooves us// to accept (as Christ Himself) whatever in them is the testimony and the truth. Even though because of our carnal mind many things are difficult to understand and incomprehensible, and even though because of guilt and human weakness we may not immediately be able to understand or grasp, the time does come when we grasp and receive it with thanksgiving and when, in tribulation under the rod in the school of Christ we truly learn to understand, and become wise with the wise. Thus Saint Paul says: "Test everything, keep the good, and discard the evil". He has written many things in great wisdom and divine earnestness, some of which are hard to understand. Peter

2 Pet. 3:15, 16

also testifies to this when he says: "About which our dear brother Paul writes much (notice, much), of which some things are hard to understand, and which the ignorant twist—as also they do other Scriptures—to their own destruction."

Thus it behooves us that we carefully examine and test all things, and that we do not judge, reject, misinterpret, nor falsify what we do not understand, in order that in so doing we do not condemn ourselves and be plunged into error. For the gifts of the Holy Spirit are weighty.<sup>4</sup> He moves as, when, and// where He wills, giving them to whomever He desires, through Scriptures, speech, discipline, fear, tribulation, and judgment as He desires and pleases. He gives through profound and mediocre understanding, in length and breadth, in height and depth. Everything is His. He is Lord and Sovereign over all, over written and spoken Scriptures which men test, learn, experience, witness to, and judge to the praise of God and their own salvation, and from them judge themselves and others.

Therefore whoever despises and scorns the written and spoken aid of the Holy Spirit as though it would do more harm than good, and it were better not to write or speak so much and things would thus be better all round, accuses the Holy Spirit and the aid of His gifts. He scorns and mocks what he has never known and what serves his salvation. He expects to learn about the Holy Spirit and His gifts by putting himself in the place which belongs to God the Holy Spirit alone.

Thus it were well for every person to take care what he says against the spoken and written gifts of the Holy Spirit, against whom he complains<sup>5</sup> and speaks, and whether it is man or God that he mocks and scorns. All good gifts// come from God except evil. Therefore one must hold on to what God loves

277r

277v

276v

1 Thess. 5:20, 21



and let go of evil which God hates. May God save us from such judgments, despising, scorn, and accusation. For it would be an abominable error to despise the written and spoken gifts of the Holy Spirit. That be far from us! I write this because you have never given me a testimony in the Holy Spirit nor gratitude to God about my repeated writing which are our due because of His gifts. Fear and worry have seized me and have caused me to write you in my faithful care for you, to save and shield our souls from the deceit and cunning of the enemy of our salvation.

May our heavenly Father grant this through Jesus Christ our Lord from now on to eternity, Amen.

Fervent greetings in Jesus Christ to each of you by name from me and all of us. Let us pray God earnestly to save us from this and all our temptations. Amen.

Dated at Augsburg, the 9th day of August anno 1551.

In the Lord Jesus Christ,  
Servant to you and all the  
faithful, and comrade in the  
tribulation in Christ.

Pilgram Marpeck

# 15

## Concerning the Humanity of Christ

(1555) (#15)

### Introduction

Although Marpeck never developed a comprehensive theological system, it is generally agreed that Christology formed the center of his concern. In respect to his doctrine of Christ he laid emphasis on the humanity of Christ and its implications for church order. For him Christ was true God and true man and the implications of the latter for the Christian life and for the corporate body of Christ attracted him like a magnetic field.

The present letter was written close to the end of Marpeck's life and may indicate that he was an active participant in the Christological discussions which were in full swing around Strasbourg at that time. The letter was written from Augsburg and is addressed to his followers in Langnau, near Schopfheim in the Kinzig valley. At the end of the theological treatise Marpeck dispenses some medical advice to various members of the community. Apparently he was very well acquainted with this group.

Despite the fact that the tract carries the title it does its most important section deals with the difference between servile and filial obedience and gives some indications on how to discern whether we are being led by the Spirit. It is thus a prime example of the way in which theory becomes a part of the practical life of the church for Marpeck.

### The Text

#### Concerning the Humanity of Christ<sup>1</sup>

This epistle deals with the humanity of Christ and the Son of Man, etc., also with the Christian life