5. December 25, 1709. A letter in Dutch, but probably translated from German, by someone in Zurich to an unnamed recipient, evidently in the Netherlands, about the number of Anabaptists in the area of Bern and the stance of the government toward them. He lists reasons why they are persecuted, based on an edict of Bern and a book written by a theologian, now deceased. He promises to send these two items, if the recipient does not yet have them.

[recto]

Copy Zurich, December 25, 1709

Much honored sir and dear friend:

I have made inquiries as best I could concerning the unfortunate people imprisoned in the Bernese territories, and have asked two brothers among my relatives, who were travelling to the market in Bern, to seek out the facts somewhat, but they have not brought me a single name since they are not imprisoned in Bern but in the countryside. They have told me this: that more than 200 persons, all men (and including preachers), are still imprisoned; that, after being out of the country, they returned to the same, and here and there gave instruction secretly; others have refused to leave the country. It cannot be denied that the government in our lands has published edicts against them.

If you were to recall what I discussed with you four years ago concerning this, you would certainly understand this. The summation is based on the following:

1) In our Switzerland two religions, namely the Reformed and the Papist, are allowed, and it has been decided by the rulers of our country that no other shall be tolerated.

2) There is growing and open jealousy, from the direction of the Papists, even secret great hostility towards us [the Reformed].

3) In view of the fact that our communities are so mixed, every canton has residents of both religions,

4) while your religion forbids that the oath of allegiance be made to the government and refuses, in case of distress, to help protect city and state with material weapons,

5) our government views the matter as highly dangerous, that is to say, if such opinions should become the majority, its enemies would easily be able to “…destroy lands and woefully murder, imprision, and scatter persons…” it not being in a position to resist them, because those who should offer help

do not want to do such things on the basis of their teaching. Since therefore the authorities,

6) on the basis of their [own] conscience and God’s command, are responsible for ensuring that such people (having convictions pernicious to their country) not be present so as not themselves to be found to be unfaithful rulers.

Their intention is not, however, to exterminate such people in a harsh anti-Christian way through a general persecution, but it [the government] is granting them permission to leave the fatherland peacefully, or to adapt themselves to the laws of the government in the nation. However, if they do not want to depart from the country, nor live according to its regulations, it will discipline them into conformity as disturbers of society and state. These are, in summary, the reasons and motives of the government. I am surprised that you do not have the Bernese edict against them, nor the book made by a certain pious [verso] theologian in Bern,[[1]](#footnote-1) now resting in God, who always kept the middle road. If you do not have these two documents, I will send them to the coming Frankfort Easter fair.[[2]](#footnote-2) You will get a great deal of information from these. May the great God, the only One praised in the highest, one day bring us to unity in faith to his praise and our salvation. Amen.

1. 5 This probably refers to Georg Thormann (1655-1708), author of Der Probier-Stein , a book 693 pages in extent. See Res Rychener, “‘Der Probier-Stein’ Pfarrer Georg Thormanns ‘Gewissenhaffte Prüffung des Täufferthumbs’ 1693,” Mennonitica Helvetica (1991), pp. 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Frankfurter Ostern Messe. This was a renowned international fair of commerce and trade dating from the mid-1500s, visited by Dutch business people, including Mennonites and book publishers in particular. Thanks to Piet Visser for this information. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)