49. July 18, 1710. The Dutch Mennonite Committee sends a letter to Bendicht Brechtbühl and his associates, who were then at Mannheim, also with various papers, among which is an offer from the King of Prussia to colonize the Swiss refugees in his kingdom. The Committee strongly exhorts them as obedient subjects to give the needed attention to the command of the government to depart from the country.

[recto]

Bendicht Brechtbühl

Hans Bürki, and Worthy brothers in Christ’s salvation,

Melchior Zahler

On the 10th of this month our last letter was sent to you by way of Frankfort, which we hope you will have received and learned from it our thoughts and those of the brothers in Hamburg concerning your situation and that of the friends in Bern, as well as the resolution and offer of the King of Prussia. Since then we have received, in love, your letters of the 30th of last month and the four of this month.

Further, the accompanying letter from the friends of Hamburg and the more detailed letter from His Majesty of Prussia have come into our hands, which we consider so favorable and important, that we have not only deemed it necessary herewith to send you a copy of it, but it also seems to us that it is a very good opportunity for the brothers and sisters who are still in Switzerland, to be able to serve God in peaceful freedom of conscience and practice of their religion for once and to fulfill their pilgrimage here on earth. For this reason we were glad to see that, while the Bernese government, as the friends themselves write, still continues its persecution and cruel acts in all severity, and there is no indication of any mitigation, but instead [they] want to drive our fellow believers completely out of their territory, the friends have resolved to obey it in this and make use of this favorable opportunity.

For although it is a hard thing for the flesh to leave fatherland and to have to live in a strange land and among strange people, it is no less hard to be in danger every hour, indeed, every moment, to be torn away from dear wife and children, leaving behind everything one has, and to be handed over to the willfulness of evil people by a disturbed government that thinks it has double reason to do this: namely, so often giving them orders to leave and therefore accusing them of the most obstinate disobedience. Concerning which we doubt whether we will be able to get them declared innocent in the future.

We can certainly assure the friends that not one of us would ever dare to request intercession of any government whatsoever, not even of our most discreet States General, for those who have again had the liberty to leave with wife, children, and possessions to a land that offers them the free practice of their religion and a good opportunity for their temporal existence, and they, nevertheless, against all advice from higher and lower government officials, want to continue living in a country where this has been forbidden them in various edicts from the Sovereign Council.

And therefore, dear friends and most honored brothers and sisters in the Lord, we ask you kindly, but no less seriously, that you be so kind as to consider all these matters, letters, and documents and to ask yourselves whether it might not be the case that you, with father Abraham, have been called by the Almighty to go out of your land and your father’s house to a land[[1]](#footnote-1) that the Lord will show you (Gen. 12:1 and Heb. 11:8,9) and therefore, according to the lesson from your and our great and true Saviour (Matt. 10:23),[[2]](#footnote-2) if you are persecuted in one city, you are not obligated to stay there, and [you are] required to flee to another. For, beloved friends, since we have on this occasion so markedly seen and experienced the hand of the Most High in the moving of the hearts of our government (not only it, but also other authorities) so clearly in our favor, we cannot very well believe that the Most Wise Governor would also let the immovable hardness of the Bern government thrive, [but] would govern for His honor and glory and for the good of those enjoying His favor.

For this reason we would be very pleased if the friends could make an opportunity to inform the brothers still in Switzerland of all of the above, whether by word of mouth or in writing, if it could be done outside the circle of the deported friends, and if their resolve concerning this could be written out with all speed, since we cannot act on the matter in any way without being assured that at least some, if not all, are inclined to follow our advice on this. But having received this assurance, we will try to influence our States-General and other authorities in such a way, that by public announcement to the Mennonites or Anabaptists as they call them, those who are already imprisoned as well as those who are free from bonds,

will be given the liberty to register themselves in safety, with wife and children, for departure and be allowed a liberal amount of time [verso] to sell their goods and effects at the greatest advantage. Lord St.-Saphorin gave us good reason to hope for this when we were visiting him with you in The Hague.

We also think that, if the brothers are inclined to take the King of Prussia up on his offer, that two or three of them should be delegated to go to the Prussian court with a few friends from Hamburg (which we believe we can persuade them to do), in order to negotiate freedom of religion from the King in the form of an agreement for us in all parts of his jurisdiction and to achieve for the Swiss friends as much exemption from taxes as is possible. For this purpose, the friends could meet with the Hamburgers in Magdeburg or elsewhere at an appointed time and find each other. As soon as we have received your approval, we will inform the brothers in Hamburg and provide more details, dear brothers.

While writing this, a report has been given via Mr. Runckel that the persecution in Bern is still being carried through in all harshness, with the result that, as he learned, many have fled to various Protestant, even Roman Catholic countries to protect their lives. We therefore advise you earnestly that all the friends resolve with all speed to rise up and make use of the opportunity above. To which end we, in firm trust, commend you, all your companions and the honored brothers and sisters to the protection of the Almighty, who desires to strengthen you in faith and true endurance and a willing resignation to the will of God. Amen.

In our turn, we want to persevere in doing everything we can for your good and for the lessening of your oppression, remaining,

signed

July 18, 1710 Willem van Maurik Abraham Jacobz Fries

Hermannus Schijn Jacob Vorsterman

Jan Willink Janz Frans van Aken

Cornelis Beets

Letter[[3]](#footnote-3) from the Committee to

the three Bern friends in Mannheim

dated July 18, 1710.

1. 49 The incomplete reference in the margin could refer to Acts 9:6, where the Lord told Paul to go and it would be showed him what to do. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Dordrecht Confession of Faith, Article XIV on nonresistance, recommends fleeing rather than causing anyone to suffer by self-defense. In a different approach John Calvin recommends fleeing to avoid giving up the faith. Magna Carta Latina, Second Edition, edited by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (Pittsburgh, Pa.: The Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 248-251. Lactantius says that Christ set an example for Christians when he withdrew with His disciples before His passion. Divine Institutes iv, 18, 1-2 as given in Oliver P. Nicholson, “Flight from Persecution as Imitation of Christ,” Journal of Theological Studies (1989), p. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At the bottom of this page, upside down. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)