58. August 27, 1710. Letter by Bendicht Brechtbühl and fellow elders at Mannheim, to accompany a previous communication (Document 51) and with intercession for the prisoners. He has no further report from Switzerland and awaits an answer to the proposal made for them concerning colonization in Prussia. It would suit quite well for the Swiss at Mannheim to think about this. As soon as the prisoners arrive, he will send news.

 The language of this letter is mixed with Dutch, as was an earlier document, introduced probably for the benefit of recipients in the Netherlands. Brechtbühl, a native of the canton of Bern,[[1]](#footnote-1) had been taken from Switzerland down the Rhine River along with other deportees as captives bound for America, but was released in Nijmegen on April 6, 1710,[[2]](#footnote-2) when he arrived on Dutch soil. This may have been his first contact with speakers of Dutch. Brechtbühl was later in the Netherlands on other occasions, for example, on his trip to Lithuanian Prussia in the fall of 1711. In the letters written by Brechtbühl, the number of Dutch words introduced into the German text increases as time passes.

 Even when he was in the Palatinate, Brechtbühl probably was reading and learning Dutch as his interest in getting copies of the Martyrs’ Mirror shows.[[3]](#footnote-3) Brechtbühl left the Palatinate with a group of immigrants to America in the spring of 1717. In 1717 the first German translation of Die Wandelnde Seele from its Dutch original was published at Speyer in the Palatinate, not far from Mannheim. The publisher was the otherwise unknown Gustav Rosten. Although no absolute proof exists, Piet Visser in his study of Schabalie, author of the Dutch original, presents very convincing evidence that the translator from a Dutch edition of 1706 into German was Bendicht Brechtbühl.[[4]](#footnote-4) If Brechtbühl were preoccupied with translating a Dutch book, this would help explain the constant admixture of Dutch words in his letters to the Committee during this time. As wanderers and strangers in foreign lands, Brechtbühl and his fellow believers from Switzerland could have easily identified with the pilgrim theme in Die Wandelnde Seele. Brechtbühl died in Pennsylvania in 1720.[[5]](#footnote-5)

[recto]

Mannheim, August 27, 1710

The love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the strengthening of the Holy Ghost be and remain with you and all of us. Amen.

On August 26, 1710, we received this enclosed letter with concerns of the brethren in it (those who have signed below are agreed); in which you will also be able to read about the distressing condition of the imprisoned fellow believers at Bern. Accordingly, without any further loss of time, we have determined to send it on to you, our beloved friends and brothers in Christ. And if it could be possible and the prisoners should arrive in Holland, then we the undersigned ask all of you in general and especially the beloved friends in the Lord, such as the teachers and deacons of the congregations in Holland, at Amsterdam and elsewhere, that you would attempt to release our imprisoned fellow brothers in Christ.

We have, however, no further report to write as to where those are who have moved up again through the land. We hope that they have not put themselves into danger.

I, the writer of this letter, send you this warm-hearted greeting and add, as further information, that since your last letter I have received no further report from Switzerland. But now I am longingly awaiting moment by moment the arrival of my dearest wife, or at the least a letter from her.

I have written for the counsel and wishes of the friends in Switzerland concerning the good offer of the King of Prussia. But no answer has come yet to me, for I realize the brothers in Switzerland are quite scattered, one here and one there, just as the friends [farther north] have supposed. However, as soon as I get an answer, I want to write you.

How does it go here in the Palatinate? We are all rather healthy—to the Lord be praise. Our people are quite well pleased here. That they should resolve to move into Prussia, or instead might live where it might be most convenient—? So much news for this time. Now we commend you to the Most high God and to the Word of His grace, who wishes to make you and us all fit and useful to do His will. Amen.

Note: If they should arrive here

as prisoners, then we want to inform

the dear brothers post haste.

It would be my desire to make this report

known to all those from whom I have

received information. C. V. d W. H. t. C.

H. S. J. W. J . A. J. F. C. B. J. V.[[6]](#footnote-6) Bendicht Brechtbühl

Tielman Kolb

and Hans Jacob Schnebely

from Mannheim

[verso: address]

Deliver this letter to the friends on the

Committee at Amsterdam such as

Mr. Jan Jansz Willink, Jacob Vorsterman, Cornelis Beets, merchants

In Amsterdam to kind hands

Amsterdam

1. 58 Bendicht Brechtbühl, youngest son of Bendicht Brechbühl and Madlena Müller, was baptized in the church at Rüderswil in 1666. He grew up in Ranflüh of the parish of Lützelflüh and later moved with his parents to Krummholtz in the Parish of Trachselwald. He became an Anabaptist in the late 1680s and married Verena Meister of Kurzeney in Sumiswald around 1699. He was banished in 1702 and 1708 and again imprisoned in 1709. Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,” p. 142. See also Ruth, Earth Is the Lord’s, p. 140. Schijn also mentions Brechtbühl in his history. Geschiedenis dier Christenen…Mennoniten genaamd worden I, pp. 345-347. See note in Document 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Document 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Document 124, February 2, 1711. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Piet Visser, Broeders in de geest (Deventer: Uitgeverij Sub Rosa, 1988), I, 277; II, 159-161, 247, 408; for an interesting discussion see I, pp. 360-364. See also the footnote for the signature of Document 157, May 7, 1711. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. April 26, 1720. Ruth, Earth Is the Lord’s, pp. 207-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Among others, these initials appear to refer to the addressees on the verso of the letter: Jan Willink Joanson, Jacob Vorsterman, and Cornelis Beets, who were members of the Committee for Foreign Needs.

   In the order given here in the list, the first set of initials probably refers to Christoffel van de Walle (mentioned in Document 55); the second set of initials to Herman ten Cate (mentioned later in Document 108); the third Herman Schijn (1662-1727); fourth Jan Jansz Willink (1676-1722), wine merchant of Amsterdam, deacon of the Lamist church; fifth Abraham Jacobs Fries, secretary of Committee; sixth Cornelis Beets, deacon of the Amsterdam Zonist church; the last Jacob Vorsterman (?-1729), deacon of the Amsterdam Zonist church. ME I, 262-263; II, 344-345, 402; IV, 454, 854, 958. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)