60. August 30, 1710. From Bern, Runckel replies to the Dutch Committee’s letter of August 15 (Document 56) that the conditions have not changed; the same persons are still imprisoned, and others scattered, with the result that the request of the King of Prussia for a list could not be fulfilled. Through the communication of confessions of faith, some are more favorably inclined; it is really necessary that printed copies should be sent and that with speed. In conclusion he proposes to ask the Bernese government on behalf of the Mennonites for the promise of religious freedom when they drain and reclaim two swamps and resettle there. For this quite a lot of money will be necessary, which he hopes to receive from the Dutch Mennonites and Mennonites from Hamburg.

[page 1]

Worthy,[[1]](#footnote-1) etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

I received your very welcome letter dated the 15th of the present month with the last mail together with the resolution of the High and Mighty Lords of the States General from the 2nd of the current month as well as the letter of exchange for 200 rixdollars in cash. Also, I safely received the King of Prussia’s enclosed reply to his minister at Hamburg as well as his [minister’s] most obedient report. From the first two communications also I have fully understood what the High and Mighty Lords are pleased to graciously entrust to me for the poor and hard-pressed Mennonites who are in the Illustrious Canton [of Bern] here. That which my highly honored Sirs wish further to bring to my review concerning these poor people, to examine fully and completely, I will [page 2] most obediently attend to, as well the gracious command of the High and Mighty Lords as the desire of my highly honored Sirs, to the best of my ability; or, if it pleases God otherwise, to live with the matter. And yet it would always be possible to bring about some alleviating of the cross for these unfortunate, persecuted, and badly tormented fellow men in some measure in accord with the intention of the High and Mighty Lords and my highly honored Sirs.

Since my last communication, as far as I know, not the slightest change has occurred for these good people, but the previously named prisoners are still imprisoned, and the fugitives scattered here and there are still fugitives.

Accordingly, down to the present hour, the exact and complete listing of the Mennonites in the Canton here, their trade, finances, etc., etc., which his royal Majesty of Prussia requested has not been produced, nor can it be produced.

In spite of this, on my part I have not neglected to exert myself privately (and with every opportunity caught sight of) that some relief might be created for these unfortunate people. For this purpose, now and then, I [page 3] have communicated some copies of a confession of faith[[2]](#footnote-2) composed by the three Bernese Mennonites both for the illustrious government at Amsterdam as well as for you my highly honored Sirs, the comments produced about the answer of the Illustrious Canton of Bern to the High and Mighty [Lords of the States General].[[3]](#footnote-3) By the grace of God this has produced so much fruit that a powerful change in favor of these unfortunate, persecuted fellow beings is felt in the attitudes of many.

Accordingly, there is real hope that with the help of the Most High and the Lord St.-Saphorin[[4]](#footnote-4) that my future proposals may perhaps not remain unfilled, especially if my highly respected Sirs would be pleased to send me with the next post a considerable number of copies of their confession of faith and what is added to it in the German language.[[5]](#footnote-5) With such [a number] I would not have the least hesitation in distributing them where they would be the most needed or could let them be distributed. Now the sooner I could have these confessions of faith, the better and more

advantageous it would be. Wherefore, I consider it immensely necessary [page 4] that they be sent without any regard to expense on the speediest mail coach to Frankfort and on from there to Schaffhausen and farther to here so that they might be obtained the sooner the better.

I will have the transmitted letter of exchange for 200 rixdollars cash presented to Messrs. Fäsch, Ryhener, and Socin[[6]](#footnote-6) at Basel, and having received the value, distributed, to the best of my knowledge, for the consolation of the unfortunate Mennonites here and keep suitable accounts of all, my highly honored Sirs. At this point I should reveal to my highly honored Sirs in confidence that among persons with moderate attitudes here the suggestion comes up that considerable effort should be expended perhaps to keep the poor Mennonites in the country. They [would bring] them together in one or two districts and also their preachers, away from the eyes of such who do not want to tolerate them in or around their communities. Thus they might obtain complete freedom of conscience for the Mennonites. To accomplish this purpose two certain swamps or morasses are suggested which, if they could be handed over to them to be drained and after the passing of a certain number of years of exemption [from tax], [page 5] the customary tenths could be paid to the government for them. But as to the reclaimed and fruitful fields, power over the tracts thus created would be always and forever their possession, and also they might have free and unhindered exercise of religion.

There are two of these swamps or morasses, the one between the Lakes of Neuchâtel, Biel,[[7]](#footnote-7) and Murten, between Murten and Aarberg; the other on Lake Neuchâtel between Yverdon[[8]](#footnote-8) and Orbe; and each with at least three or four hours journey in extent or circumference. The excavation and drainage of these swamps as also the construction of the required dwellings, barns, and stalls (although the former, namely the excavation at the said swamps, which are in a beautiful, level, and fertile land, can easily be accomplished according to the report of local experts in this matter)—[the work] would probably require considerable funds, which would be too heavy for the poor Mennonites here to bear alone.

So I wish to inquire of my highly honored Sirs, in regard to the said swamps: Suppose one might succeed with the Illustrious Canton of Bern in acquiring some tracts of land for the poor Mennonites. Could you not find it advisable with the help and support of your fellow believers at Hamburg [page 6] and elsewhere to hasten generously to the aid of your fellow believers here with a considerable amount of money and other liberal contributions until the drainage of these swamps and the improvement of the reclaimed lands have been fully completed? Thus by these means your fellow brethren might maintain [a place] in this country and be given complete freedom of religion for the future.

My highly honored Sirs, please think this over and let me know your thoughts about it as soon as possible in order that I also can take measures with the friends here in this matter. I live in the fixed confidence that if

the Mennonites here should approve this suggestion, and I do not want to doubt this, and people in this place could be assured that the Mennonite congregations in the United Netherlands, at Hamburg, and elsewhere according to their ability would grant support to those here, then with the help of God and the support of those moderates here, the settlement of the poor Mennonites here could bring about the desired effect. Then their misery and [page 7] oppression could end.[[9]](#footnote-9)

As soon as the Lord de St.-Saphorin arrives here, I will consult about the resolution of the High and Mighty Lords and my highly honored Sirs and about this suggestion and its execution and scrutinize with him how the poor Mennonites here can best be helped.

Up till now I have not been able to visit the poor prisoners in their bonds because the president of the Anabaptist commission,[[10]](#footnote-10) from whom permission must be obtained, was away. This visit shall take place quite soon. And

meanwhile I remain with a warm greeting

and my best commendations

to your most reverent prayer,

My highly honored Sirs’

Bern August 30,

1710

Most devoted servant

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

1. 60 This letter is referred to by Müller, p. 291; it is translated into Dutch in the Relaes of Jacob Vorsterman (A 1392), pp. 56-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The confession of faith made by the three Swiss Brethren refers to Bendicht Brechtbühl, Hans Bürki, and Melchior Zahler and their statements, reported in Document 43 and registered with the States General. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This obscure sentence was compared with the Dutch translation in the Relaes of Jacob Vorsterman (A 1392). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Swiss ambassador to the Netherlands. Gulik DB, 137; ME IV, 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tieleman van Sittert, who translated the Dordrecht Confession in 1664, added his own statement of the nonresistant Christian faith in German. See ME IV, 535-536; Die ernsthafte Christenpflicht, Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonitische Verlagshandlung, 1986, pp. 146-215; and pp. 216-217 of Hanspeter Jecker, “Das Dordrechter Bekenntnis und die Amische Spaltung,” in Les Amish: origine et particularismes 1693-1993: The Amish: Origin and Characteristics 1693-1993, ed. by Lydie Hege and Christoph Wiebe, Ingersheim: A F H A M, 1996, pp. 202-226; Jecker, Ketzer-Rebellen-Heilige, pp. 462-468. See also Documents 48 and 216.

   However, a reprint of the Dordrecht Confession with the testimonies of the three Swiss added at the end was soon made. A previously unknown copy of this Dordrecht Confession has recently come to light in a Zurich library. See Document 63a. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Fäsch, Ryhener, and Socin are important families in Basel commercial life. See Niklaus Röthlin, Die Basler Handelspolitik und deren Träger in der zweiten Hälfte des 17.und im 18. Jahrhunderts (Basel, 1986). This reference was supplied by Hanspeter Jecker. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lake Biel is in the Canton of Bern in Switzerland. Morat (Murten) lies on Lake Morat south of Lake Biel. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Yverdon and Orbe are in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland, Yverdon at the southern end of Lake Neuchâtel and Orbe southwest beyond that. Vaud (Waadt in German) is a Protestant, French-speaking Canton in the southwest of Switzerland, north of Lake Geneva. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For more details about the project of draining, see Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,”pp. 125-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. or chamber. See Lowry, Documents of Brotherly Love I, pp. 9, 19 n 9. Cf. Michel Ummel,   
    “‘…Sonder den ausser ir statt und land weisen…’ Exil, Auswanderung und Deportation im 16. bis 21. Jahrhundert,” Die Wahrheit ist untödlich: Berner Täufer in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Mennonitica Helvetica 30 (2007), pp. 149-152. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)