

The 'Letter of Articles' of the Black Forest Peasantry ¹

8th May 1525

The peace and mercy of God the Almighty we wish you, Mayor and Council and whole community of the town of Villingen. We urge you to decide whether you too want to come to the assistance of godly justice and of the holy gospel of our lord Jesus Christ, and to join with the Christian brotherhood in a brotherly manner according to the terms of this Letter of Articles which we hereby send to you. Therefore we request a written answer without delay, by the hands of this messenger. Dated at Vöhrenbach ² on the Monday after the Feast of the Holy Cross.

From the captain and council of the peasant army of the Black Forest.

The Letter of Articles

Honourable, wise, and favourable lords, friends and beloved neighbours. In the past heavy burdens, which are against God and all justice, have been imposed on the poor common man in the towns and in the countryside by spiritual and worldly lords and authorities. These have not affected these lords in the slightest, with the result that these burdens and grievances can no longer be borne or tolerated, unless the common man is willing to condemn himself and his children to a life of begging.

Therefore, it is the proposal and intention of this Christian alliance, with the help of God, to make itself independent, and to do this, so far as possible, without taking up the sword and without bloodshed, which can only succeed with brotherly admonishment and unity in all relevant matters which affect the common Christian good, which are contained within the attached Articles.

It is therefore our friendly request, demand and brotherly entreaty that you should join with us in this Christian alliance and brotherhood voluntarily and amicably, so that Christian service and brotherly love can once more be established, built and increased. If you do this, then the will of God will be achieved in fulfilment of his command on brotherly love.

¹ This letter acted as a covering note for the 'Twelve Articles' of the Swabian Peasantry. It has been suggested that Müntzer played a role in drafting this letter, specifically the section dealing with 'Castles and Monasteries' but this seems unlikely, not least on account of its date – Müntzer returned to Mühlhausen in February 1525. The more likely author is perhaps Balthasar Hubmaier.

² Vöhrenbach is a small town about 30km east of Freiburg im Breisgau, and 10km west of Villingen.

But if you reject this request, which we do not at all expect to happen, then we will impose a worldly ban on you by the power of this letter, for as long as it takes for you to distance yourself from that decision and come willingly into the ranks of this Christian brotherhood. But we do not wish to act thus with you as our dear lords, friends and neighbours of whom we have a good opinion. We hereby request of the Council and community a written answer to be sent by this messenger. May God be with you.

The worldly ban is set out below.

All who have joined this Christian alliance, by their word of honour and the highest duty which they have undertaken, will have and maintain no fellowship with those who have cut themselves off and refused to join the brotherly alliance and to promote common Christian service. They will neither eat, nor drink, bathe, mill, bake, plough, mow with them, nor supply them with food, corn, drink, wood, meat, salt or anything else; no one will be permitted or allowed to buy anything from them nor to sell anything to them, and they will be left alone as limbs cut off from the body in all matters which do not promote, but rather oppose, the cause of the common weal of Christianity and the public peace.

And they should be denied access to all markets, woods, meadows, pastures and waters which do not lie within their own possession and jurisdiction.

And anyone who joins the alliance, and then ignores this ban, will be immediately expelled, with the same ban laid upon him, and sent along with wife and children to our opponents and enemies.

Regarding Castles, Monasteries and Church Institutions

Since all treachery, coercion and corruption arise and grow from castles, monasteries and church institutions, these shall from this hour onwards be placed under the ban.

But if the lords, monks or priests should voluntarily leave their castles, monasteries and institutions and live in common houses like any other pious people and join this Christian alliance, then they will be made welcome and be righteously admitted with all their goods and possessions. And afterwards everything which they are due according to God's law they shall be permitted to keep faithfully and honourably with no hindrance.

***Regarding those who house, assist or entertain
the Enemies of this Christian Alliance***

And all those who house, assist or entertain the enemies of this Christian alliance will be amicably requested to cease such activity. But if they do not do this, then they will also be placed under the worldly ban, without any delay.

Translated by Andy Drummond, March 2016