

#70/HN#13

Angry Letter from Jacob Hoepfner to Ältester Cornelius Warkentin - 1797

1) Translation by Helen Ens Sep 2019

Honourable Ohm (Elder) Warkentin!

Judging from the writing you sent me and which I now return to you, I must say, I felt very hurt, knowing you, I was very surprised and have waited almost a year before replying. There is an opportunity now and since I am convinced that you have written in a hurry, without proper consideration, and thinking you could not do much harm to me, I demand to know who has written all these "truths" about me to you, since I live among people whom I am unable to understand or analyze. Last summer, before I received your communication, my wife and I took holy communion. I didn't know I was that kind of a person, so I hope it will not have harmed my soul. From now on I will not partake, the church has not banned me until now, and if I am that person I insist that the church release me, but you, good friend, before you write a person as you did, you should do more research to find grounds for your accusations. Through this you have lost your good reputation with me. I have heard many negative things said about you to our superiors but I have always defended you, but from their correspondence to me and Bartsch and the Lord Baron, a copy of which I also send you, I see who you really are. That you threaten me does not inhibit me as much as you might think, for I know that I have very little to fear. Where I live, and if circumstances allow, I will personally go to Prussia and I am not afraid to answer your accusations. 1797

Jacob Hoepfner
Chortitz Island

Checked by GHP 8 Sep 2019

2) Translation by Edwin D. Hoepfner 1 Oct 2004, with Ed's comments.

Honourable Ohm Kornelius Warkentin

Since I feel offended by the letter which I am returning to you I must make you aware that I was amazed and waited nearly a whole year before writing. However, since the opportunity exists and I am so completely convinced that you were overhasty and I reflected that you can not do very much to me, I request from you the letter out of which you wrote thus to me, I want to know who wrote you such truth, for I am among people whom I can not judge. Last summer before I received your letter I and my wife had been to communion. I had not known that I was that kind of human, and hope that it will not injure my soul. But in the future I will keep myself back for the congregation has not expelled me until now, and if I was that man I would deservedly request

my separation, but you, best friend, before you write like that to people, should have sought for more information about the matter. Through what you did you will enter into bad repute with me, I have heard many bad things said about you near our lord [possibly Baron von Brackel] but always defended you, but from your letter to me and Bartsch and the one by the lord Baron, a copy of which I also enclose, I see who you are. I do not give as much regard as you might think to what you threaten me with, for if I live and circumstances permit, I will personally come to Prussia next summer and do not fear to justify myself to you.

1797

Jacob Höppner

Insel Chortitza

Ed Hoeppner's notes:

1. This letter only began to make sense to me after I belatedly realized that Ohm Korn. Warkentin was the minister who accompanied Elder Regier to Russia in the spring of 1794 to make peace in the Chortitza Flemish congregation and who returned in triumph to Prussia via the Hutterite Colony at Vishenka and via Riga later that summer of 1794. Some years later Czar Alexander I presented a gold watch and chain to Warkentin for his services in promoting the emigration to New Russia.
2. Jacob Hoeppner has merely dated his letter 1797 – I postulate that it likely was early that year because in his letter he refers to the lord Baron which must identify Director Baron Johann von Brackel and we know that some time in 1797 von Brackel was replaced by Brigontzi.
3. In 1796 Brackel received a “Order” from the Governor, a 14-point order which, in point 8, reinstates Hoeppner and Bartsch as Delegates and appointed Hoeppner as Mayor on Insel Chortitza and made him responsible for everything that happens there, and also appointed Bartsch as mayor of Rosenthal with similar authority and responsibility. I have shown elsewhere that the reinstatement of Hoeppner and Bartsch with significant administrative authority, must have been perceived as an affront by the Chortitza Flemish Church leadership and was one cause of renewed friction emanating from that church leadership. These church leaders, still smarting from earlier serious criticism of their conduct made by the group supporting Hoeppner and Bartsch in September 1793, will have transmitted their renewed hostile comments to church leaders back in Prussia, particularly to Warkentin who made a formal peace the two factions in the spring of 1794. Warkentin will then likely have written a strongly worded reprimand to Hoeppner and Bartsch [in] 1796, which must be the letter of nearly a year ago to which Hoeppner refers here. It was the letter that Warkentin had received in 1796 and identity of its author that Hoeppner is requesting. His reference to “such truth” must be seen as a ironical reference.
4. It is an interesting commentary on both the Director's circle in the administration and on Warkentin that “bad things were said” about that latter by the former and within Hoeppner's

hearing, and that Brackel had written a letter, apparently critical of Hoeppner and Bartsch, to these two delegates in which Brackel appears to have repeated adverse comments, which had come to von Brackel from Warkentin.

5. Hoeppner's reference to his being "among people whom I cannot judge" appears to be a reference that he, Hoeppner, had, as a result of Regier and Warkentin's peace making mission, been persuaded to retract some criticisms of the church leaders and to forgive others, had been forgiven by them in turn and, with peace ostensibly restored, was a church member in good standing and so could not, in good conscience "judge" his fellow church members, especially after Warkentin's admonitions in 1794. Possibly, also it was his way of saying, ironically, that he does not understand his fellow Mennonites and church leadership who have resumed hostile conduct towards him.

6. Involuntarily one begins to have the impression that, after Regier and Warkentin had suppressed the Hoeppner and Bartsch party's serious criticisms relating to the integrity of the Chortitzer Flemish church leaders, the Ohms and Ältester of both Prussia and Chortitza were united in a process of undermining the two Delegates, perhaps in order to "punish" them for having had the temerity as laymen to publicly criticize the church leadership at Chortitza. Regier and Warkentin, after all, did not "punish" the erring church leaders but left them in place – and when Hoeppner and when Hoeppner and Bartsch attempted to carry out their new responsibilities as assistants of the Director and as Mayors, they had to be crushed again. In a papacy only the church leaders have the "right" to judge!

7. So far as we know Hoeppner never made that journey to Prussia in 1798. It was some time in 1797 that von Brackel was replaced by Brigontzi and it was in August 1797 that Hoeppner "refused" to obey Brigontzi's order to hand over his grown-up daughter for Brigontzi's immoral purpose. After that Hoeppner and Bartsch were in serious trouble. Hoeppner continued to live but "circumstances" did not permit him to travel.