

Grievances and Demands—Thauer and Rettenberg (Tyrol) (May 15, 1525)

Abstract

The following document contains extracts from a petition submitted by Tyrolean subjects to their prince, Archduke Ferdinand (1503–64), the younger brother of Emperor Charles V and the ruler of the Austrian lands. The districts of Thauer and Rettenberg lay in the alpine land of Tyrol. The text differs from classic peasant grievance documents in its strong emphasis on religion. While the commune's right to approve and depose pastors has a certain traditional ring, the call for “the holy, godly, true Word of God” as the basis of Christian community has an unmistakably evangelical tone.

Source

Item, first of all, since it is written that man lives not from bread alone, but from every word that comes from the mouth of God, we believe that the same Word of God is the most important thing for the Christian community. Although up until now the holy, divine Word has been obscured by human teachings, so that the achievement of our salvation has been gravely endangered, now the divine Word has by God's will appeared clearly, fully, and unadulterated in the light of day. Those who, called by God, wish to adhere to the Word are not only persecuted, but they are led into error by the contradictory, godless teachings that grasping preachers give to the people, to the extent that the simple man doesn't know what to believe or support, and not knowing what he should do, is driven into conspiracies and rebellion. In order to prevent such things and to pluck the kernel of God's Word from the weeds of human teachings, but also to bring peace and order to the common people, who have been driven to rebellion by these and similar things, we humbly ask that Your Princely Grace, as a Christian Prince, graciously permit and allow that we may search for learned, godly men to serve our churches, [men] who will proclaim to us the holy, godly, true Word of God, clear and unadulterated, in no form other than that which agrees with and conforms to these new teachings. This should all be done for the love of God and neighbor, also to promote obedience to divinely established authority, to suppress this present rebellion, and to punish sins among all classes of people. We ask this in the hope that if such things are done, to which all Christian creatures are bound to lend their aid, even at the cost of life, limb, and property, then the eternal, almighty God will avert from us his divine wrath, which we have earned through our deeds, and give us all a clear, Christian understanding and make us live in the future according to His divine Will and in conformity with His laws and commands. We do this in the humble certainty that Your Princely Grace, as a Christian prince established by God, will graciously be willing to undertake this work and free us from these human errors.

Since we see that some Christians are held under arrest for supporting the holy Gospel, we also humbly ask that Your Princely Grace, as a Christian prince, will release them from prison without fines, will allow the exiled preachers of the Gospel to return to this land, and in the future will not allow anyone, laymen or clergy, to be insulted or injured for the sake of the holy Gospel and the doctrines based on it, unless they or others are indicted before a court of high justice. In the latter case, the law should be followed. And since it is clear what the clergy have done, where they possess secular jurisdiction, we ask that the clergy be deprived of their secular powers, and that they be told to fulfill the duties for which God chose them. We also ask for the power to install and depose our pastors and preachers after consultation with the wisest parishioners. [...]

Source of original German text: Hermann Wopfner, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges in Deutschtirol 1525*. Part I. Innsbruck, 1908, pp. 70–78. Modernized by Peter Blickle.
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