

Mission Sparks



Academic Journal of Asia Region

Second Edition - December 2016



500 years
Church

Reformation

And its influence to
Churches and Societies today

MISSION SPARKS: Academic Journal of Asia Region

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UEM Mission Sparks: Academic Journal of Asia Region is published twice a year in
January - May and June - December.

Cost (per copy): In Indonesia - Rp. 50,000.00

For subscription, please sent email to: uem.medanoffice@gmail.com

Attn: Yuli Gulo or Homar Rubert Distajo

Payments should be made through fund transfer: BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia)

Account name : UEM ASIA

Account Number : 0128002447

Note: Payment for Mission Sparks Journal

ISSN 2527-9890



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Unification of Lutheran and Reformed in 19th Century Batavia as Initiated by the King of the Netherlands (Gereja Immanuel)¹

Dr. Yusak Soleiman and Huub Lems

Political situation 1795-1815

By the start of the nineteenth century Dutch East India was in a deplorable situation and prospect for improvement was unfavorable. The once so mighty Dutch East India Company (VOC) had been declared bankrupt and its assets were taken over by the Dutch State.²

In 1795 the last head of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, Stadtholder Willem IV together with his son Willem Frederik Prins van Oranje Nassau fled to England after a French Army moved into the Southern States.

A day later, Batavian Republic was declared to be the new governance in Dutch East India which was a client state of the French Republic of Napoleon Bonaparte. And in the latter years, it turned out to be the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1806-1810) under the reign of Napoleon's Brother Louis Bonaparte. After the turned of events it was formed as an integral part of the French Republic in 1810. A republic that was already in decline after its defeat from Russia and which had ultimately been defeated at Waterloo in 1815.

The Dutch Kingdom had only been restored at the Congress of Vienna when Willem Frederik returned to the Netherlands in November 1813, who had sailed with the English army vessel named 'The Warrior' and now became 'Coning Willem I' (King William I).

Reformed Seven United Netherlands

In the Low Countries that were at war with Spain it was Calvinism that got the upper hand. Willem van Oranje had been of Lutheran persuasion but was changed to Calvinism as it defended that lower governments had the God-given rights to stand up to higher governments³. Governments that must reign according to the law of God's kingdom and one that would protect the church. And when a government promulgated laws that were in conflict with the will of God, people were not obliged to obey them. Despite John Calvin's justified fear of anarchy and subsequent strong insistence that even tyrannical rulers be obeyed, he cautiously opened the way for resistance and rejection of tyrannical rulers.⁴ For instance, Willem van Oranje rallied the support of members of the Dutch Reformed Church to resist and reject the rule of King Philip II of Spain in 1568.

The Dutch Confession, normally called Belgic Confession drawn up by Guido de Brès in Doornik (Tournai) stated clearly in Art. 36 the Calvinist view of the task of the State; first, to promote public order by curbing licentiousness and punishing criminals through the use of the sword, second, protection of the pious, third, protection of the holy service of the Word and therefore fend off all idolatry and false religion, fourth, to destroy the kingdom of the antichrist and finally, to promote and allow the

preaching of the kingdom of Jesus Christ everywhere (italic by authors). The purpose thereof, was to ensure that God was honored and served by all, as commanded in His Word.⁵ The Reformed Church in the Republic accepted the Belgic Confession as one of its confessions and used it as a source to define its own view on what was allowed and what was not in the public sphere of the Republic. Drawing from this Belgic Confession she pointed the government on its duty to accept, protect and support on its territory the "true (Reformed) religion" against Roman-Catholicism and other "false" religions and beliefs.⁶ As a consequence, Dutch Government patronized the Reformed Church as its Public or State Church but also adhered to two principles: Freedom of religion both for individuals and for churches. Individual freedom of religion was in line with the *Unie van Utrecht* (Union of Utrecht) of 23 January 1579 where the States declared to fight together against the King of Spain but retained their freedom to arrange internal affairs in the way they wanted. This included arranging for religion as long as 'every individual will have freedom of religion' and 'nobody will be prosecuted because of his/her religion'.⁷ For other churches and other religions, like that of the Jews, and its believers the Republic kept on being tolerant. Lutherans, Roman-Catholics, Mennonites and Remonstrants were not to be prosecuted and they could have their churches as long as it was not visible or could be heard in public. This religious situation in 16th and early 17th century Netherlands was remarkable if we compare it with other Christian nations during the first and half century of Reformation. Like for example, both Germany and England suffered a series of civil unrest when Reformation was introduced there.

Church under the Dutch East India Company

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, although the Low Countries were at war with the King of Spain as a seafaring nation, it became stronger and stronger. It started to search for new ways to East and West India and get direct access to valuable spices only growing in those areas. In order to end competition between ships from the various cities, the government decided to start the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC).⁸ It was the first and very large share funded multinational company established on 20 March 1602. The VOC received a monopoly from the Republic for sailing and trade on all countries between Cape of Good Hope and Strait of Magellan. Its Octrooi or patent given by the States General of the Republic also ruled its organization and gave it a number of sovereign rights. It was not only a commercial organization but also a political one in giving such rights.⁹ The VOC-Octrooi of 1602 did not state articles on pastoral care for its personnel, church planting or mission. In addition, this new commercial enterprise has puzzled many historians on its goal and character, even Schutte commented that it should not be the case. In those times stating the obvious explicitly was uncommon. Like, at first we have seen interference with religion and church was thought to be inherent to the task of the government. So, the same cases happened every time VOC would establish strongholds and trading posts, from the Republic in Europa which extended to each and every corner in the world between the Cape and Magellan Strait.¹⁰

During those times whenever VOC ships were on navigation, concrete pious activities were administered on board by ministers and sick comforters were posted to take care of the religious needs of sailors, traders and armed personnel. On its first years 41 of them joined the 76 ships

leaving. And in 1611 the first official pastor's seat at Victoria Castle – Ambon was established.¹¹

At the renewal of the VOC-Octrooi 1622/23 "the conservation of the public Reformed religion" was mentioned explicitly, taking away any doubt that might occur on the issue. All the important Dutch people those days – including those of the VOC – acknowledged no other religion as the legal one than that of the Reformed religion. Whenever amongst the local population people were converted to Roman-Catholic under the Portuguese rule they were simply taken to be reformed instantly. "They got a pastor instead of a priest, a sermon instead of a Mass, and a Bible instead of a crucifix."¹² Before anything else, everything had been cleared for Roman-Catholic priests so they might not be caught unaware that the Reformed religion was legalized. Therefore, at several occasions this led to extradition of those priests who continuously practice their duties leaving them no choice because the rule and the strict application of it must be implemented, mostly after the (Reformed) Consistory several complaints about it were hand over to the proper authorities.

Lutheran Church under the VOC

It was not until 1743 that an exception was made from this strict rule. On June 12 one of the "Brethren of the Augsburg Confession" met with Governor-General Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff, who happened to be a Lutheran himself. They discussed about establishing a Lutheran Congregation in Batavia. That time 'Augsburg Confession' was considered one of the most important confessions of the Lutheran Church.¹³ So, on 8 October 1743 according to Coolsmathey were granted approval to get a site where to build a Lutheran Church. Moreover, on 1 November

they got allowance to collect money from 'among themselves and not in public' to finance their church building. De Bruijn¹⁴ has pointed at an earlier date, "By resolution of April 3, 1742 the Heeren XVII – the Board of directors of the VOC – allowed the Lutherans in Batavia (Jakarta) to form an officially recognized congregation and to worship in public." It actually formed the legal basis for GG Van Imhoff to implement it soon after his arrival in Batavia. In his official position he kept on being a member of the Reformed Church but supported the new Lutheran congregation in private. He was only seen present when the foundations of the Lutheran Church building were laid in 1747 and when the first sermon was held in the new church by the Lutheran minister in 1749.¹⁵

According to Van Lieburg, the first Lutheran minister's place in Batavia was established in 1745 and in July 1746 Rev. Christoffel Michels arrived as the first official Lutheran minister. In practice and not in line with the 'religious freedom for Lutherans' in Batavia the Reformed consistory backed by Reformed Governors General had put a lot of trouble to hamper the growth of the Lutheran Congregation. She was unsure about the potentially large growth and therefore its own decline in power, influence and authority. This was not without reason as De Bruijn explained: there were 6000 European citizens of Batavia around 1743 and some 2000 Lutherans who lived in the city.¹⁶ The religious background of VOC officers, soldiers and others to be sent to Batavia was not important for the VOC as long as they joined the Reformed Church until 1743 and the numbers of foreigners (non-Dutch) among VOC personnel increased over time from one fifth in 1691 to two thirds in 1778. Among them were several Europeans from countries where Lutheran faith was mainstream. In 1750, the Lutheran Congregation of Batavia got a second minister, later a third and in 1765 even a fourth one.

By that time they were obliged to occasionally preach in the Reformed Church.¹⁷

It seemed that the actual way in which the Lutheran Church lived its faith was not so different from the one exercised in the Reformed Church. Indeed, both copied the liturgy from the one in use in the Republic and they corresponded to their church bodies through the office of the Governor General then again to their respective church bodies, for instance, The Hague for the Reformed and Amsterdam for the Lutherans. But besides that the church services were quite comparable, the social classes of the members were also pretty reflected by their church seats and entourage and the wealth of its ministers were comparably overwhelming.¹⁸

Great changes in the East (1800-1815)

The Church in the Dutch East Indies, just like the VOC itself, started to diminish as we look at the numbers of ministers. Between 1725 when the number was at a peak of forty it gradually decreased to twenty nine in 1775, and the decline did not stop. Posts at Banda Islands and Formosa had been closed altogether. Other churches like those in the Moluccas, the Indian Coasts (Coromandel, etcetera) and the Cape were reduced in number.¹⁹ In Batavia at the peak seventeen ministers were at the payroll of the VOC: 6 for the Reformed Church, 4 for the Lutheran Congregation, 4 for the Portuguese Congregation and 3 for the Malay Congregation.²⁰ In 1800 the number was reduced to four: J.Th Ross (Reformed)²¹, J. Schill (Lutheran), J.H. Häfely (Portuguese) and A. Zomerdijk (Malay). Then, in 1808 the latter one as well as A.A. Engelbregt who came from Ceylon the year before he died served as ministers leaving Ross and Schill to serve the whole of Batavia. In

1810 F.C.H. Cluver came to their help but he was posted in Malacca already one year later. While, in 1811 Raffles occupied Java. He brought with him a Baptist missionary named W. Robinson and was allowed in May 1814 to preach in church which he only did for one or two years. This showed us how political developments in the Republic had influenced much of the situation in the former VOC area. In 1800 the responsibility of the former VOC came into the hands of the Dutch Government, at that time the Batavian Republic of the Dutch Patriots were the ones who appointed the Governor General.²² From 1806-1809 the Kingdom of the Netherlands totally governed Batavia but from 1810 onwards it was ruled by the French Republic. Due to the war between Napoleon and England the latter seized Dutch possessions including Raffles occupying Batavia.

For many years French rule became dominant in Low Countries, it started in 1796. Freedom of Religion and separation of Church and State were declared. It lasted until Daendels became Governor General in 1808, Freedom of Religion was also declared in the Dutch East Indies. This made great relief for the Roman-Catholics that were until then denied to express their faith in public. Moreover, British rule by Raffles did not change this fundamental principle. Although Daendels had decided in a resolution that Batavia would have 4 Reformed, 2 Lutheran and 2 Roman-Catholic clerics which could be considered wishful thinking in the years to come.

King Willem I

We were told that the son of Stadtholder Willem IV, Willem Frederik took office after the request of Dutch nobles for him to return from England in 1813. In the remarkable turned of events, the following year an announcement had been made by the Convention of London that most of the Dutch possessions in Asia be returned by England to the now Kingdom of the Netherlands under King William I.²³ Furthermore, the Dutch East India Administration was re-organized, and also the position of the church was attended to. The Dutch Constitution of 1815 gave full power to the King over its colonies, including the churches there. King William I's goal was to merge all Protestant churches into one church organization. But, he did not succeed in its implementation in the Republic itself and so as in the colonies both in Curacao and in the Dutch East Indies.²⁴ In practice this meant for Batavia a union between the Reformed and the Lutheran churches.

King William I was then under the influence of the ideals of a general brotherhood of all religions and of great tolerance for those adhering other religions or philosophies. In 1817 his brother in law King Friedrich William III of Prussia succeeded in uniting the majority of Lutherans and a minority of Reformed Prussians. But conditions like that were not favorable in the Republic. However, he was determined to succeed in Batavia. So, he revitalized the churches by sending in new ministers, like D. Lenting and G. van den Bijlaardt in 1813.²⁵ The reality however, was that due to the shortage of ministers the first three missionaries sent to the Dutch East Indies were also ordained to serve the churches: Supper in Batavia, Brückner in Semarang and J. Kam in Ambon.²⁶ The Dutch Missionary Society (*Het Nederlands Zendeling Genootschap* NZG), founded in 1797 in Rotterdam, was the one responsible to send ministers as missionaries at that time.

Regulating the Churches in the Colonies

- ⇒ The King explained his approach to the matter based on Royal Decree no. 5 of 4 September 1815:
- ⇒ All church matters that are usually dealt with by the Government and all correspondence regarding church matters will be handled and processed by the Department for Trade and Colonies;
- ⇒ A Committee composed of seven ministers living in The Hague, Delft or surroundings together with some correspondent members in other areas was formed;
- ⇒ The tasks of this Committee will be:
 - Making proposals aimed at the wellbeing of the Churches in the Dutch East Indies
 - Corresponding about this with the Bible and Mission Societies
 - Commenting on all papers submitted to it by the Government
 - Examining the candidate ministers for service in East and West Indies and arranging for their confirmation for those who will be appointed by the King.

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Although in the considerations it was mentioned that there was a need to make arrangements for the relationship of the churches in patria and in the Dutch East Indies but nothing was found about this in that Decree.²⁷

In Royal Decree No. 113 of 7 December 1820 some more clarification were given. It can be summarized as follows:

1. All Protestant Churches in the Dutch East and West Indies will be united under one and the same board;

2. To look after its interests a Committee for Matters regarding Protestant Churches in the Dutch East- and West-Indies, seated in The Hague and supervised by the Department for Matters of the Reformed Church will be responsible in line with the policy of the Department where the matters of the Colonies are dealt with;
3. The Committee will be commenting on all papers presented to it by the Government and will be entitled to make proposals from its side;
4. The Committee will have regular correspondence with the churches in the Dutch East Indies;
5. The Committee will have regular contact with Bible- and Mission Societies, the leading bodies of the Protestant Churches, Theological Faculties and Professors.
6. Examining candidates;
7. The Departments will consult the Committee before presenting Regulations on the Protestant churches in the East- and West-Indies to the King for approval.
8. Supervision of students of Theology preparing for the churches overseas;
9. The Committee will represent the Protestant Church in the East- and West Indies at the General Synod Meeting of the Reformed Church;
10. The Committee will be composed of seven ministers, of which 5 are still active, among them are the secretary to the General Synods of the Reformed Church and of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and that of the Provincial Church Board of Zuid Holland.²⁸

It would be understood that forming one church boarding Batavia was a significant first point, together with many other interesting and important points.

It seemed that the implementation and progression of the Decree was very slow and that further regulation was needed. Royal Decree no. 88 of 11 December 1835 was mandated and aimed for the Church in the Dutch East Indies;²⁹

1. The Protestants in the Dutch Indies will form one church organization. The Reformed and Lutheran congregations in Batavia will be unified, unless the two congregations one way or another will have serious objections which need to be considered;
2. In case this will come into effect there will be one high Church Board for all protestant congregations in the Dutch Indies, seated in Batavia and corresponding with the Committee in patria. This Church Board will be composed of one member of the Council of the East Indies (president), the ministers residing in Batavia (one of them Vice-President, one Secretary) and three dignitaries from Batavia.

Its implementation took a while because it was only by Royal Decree no. 57 of 28 October 1840 that the new Regulation of the Protestant Church in the Dutch-Indies was approved. And was soon activated only by a publication in the Javasche Courant of 30 October 1844 and then the first meeting was held on 30 November 1844.³⁰

Actual unification of Reformed and Lutherans in Batavia

With the institution of one church board for the Protestant Church in Dutch-Indies in November 1844 the Reformed Consistory was no longer the church board for all Reformed churches in the Dutch East Indies, like it had been from the early days of the VOC. It only had to deal with its own local church area of Batavia and had to report to the newly formed Protestant Church Board.

For the unification however, it needed steps from the Lutheran Church Board as well. It took 10 years of waiting. The Lutheran Congregation had known several periods without a Lutheran minister.³¹ In 1852 the newly appointed Walloon minister Adrien Abraham Théophile Mounier arrived and he took direct action to unite the two congregations. He succeeded without much trouble. The Lutherans were so used to being served by Reformed ministers and their sense and understanding of Lutheranism were so low that there was hardly any resistance. The unification was signed at 1 June 1853 and ratified by Royal Decree no. 74 of 19 August 1854. But, King William I had not seen the fruits of his endeavors to unite the two churches in Batavia as he passed away in 1843 after assuming the throne in 1840.³²

United by force, will or heart?

Looking back at this process of unification of the Reformed and Lutheran congregations in Batavia, this question could be posed, what in the end made this unification happened. These few observations might help us in answering this question.

1. It was for sure the strong will of King William I which was considered as the driving force behind this unifi-

cation that might otherwise not, not as fast or not in this way have happened. Although some things could be dealt with by the Governor General, the Raad van Indië, and other institutions in Batavia. However for many things, at least when it comes to policy the decision taking power was in The Hague. The new constitution allowed the King to include also church life in matters to be ruled and regulated. His personal preference for united churches which he was able to arrange for in the southern part of the Netherlands, inspired as it might be by the unification in Prussia by his brother in law, has played an important role here.

2. That the churches in Batavia were not happy with the forced unification can be understood. It was clear from the lack of speed with which implementation took place (1815-1854). The Government in Batavia was not happy with the shift of power in church matters from themselves to The Hague, the church boards of both the Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church did not like the deviation from their church synods in the Netherlands to the secular power attached to the government³³ and the churches in the Netherlands felt their role reduced to almost zero. Nevertheless in the end they all had to agree.
3. In the whole process no mention has been made of any resistance to the unification based on differences in theological thinking between Reformed and Lutheran. Didn't it matter at all, was it neglected because church policy and socio-cultural position were of more importance? It is interesting to learn that Lutherans due to large episodes of ministers' vacancies were demanded by Reformed to teach in their churches and did not seem to have difficulties with that. And also as

what Van Boetzelaer stated, he made mention that 'there was little Lutheran consciousness'. De Bruijn points to the fact that many Lutherans in Batavia did not move to the Lutheran Church, but for career or status reasons stayed in the Reformed Church. And also that the way in which Sunday Church Service was held in both churches was quite similar. Even the status and wealth of its ministers were quite in line with each other. Differences that might have separated the two denominations like in the case of the Netherlands which appeared not to have been the case in the tropical part of the Kingdom.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Paper presented at the EUKUMINDO Study Tour on 500 Years Reformation, 5 August 2016, Marburg, Germany.
- ² Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds.), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2008, 137.
- ³ Jan Hendrik Nieder-Heitmann, *Christendom at the Cape. A Critical Examination of Early Formation of the Dutch Reformed Church*, University of Cape Town, 200, 106.
- ⁴ Nieder-Heitmann, 174, quoting C.G. De Groot, *Johannes Calvin: Getuie Vir Jesus Teen Wil en Dank (1509-1564)*, Brosjures van die Instituut Vir Reformatoriese Studie, vol. 30 (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir CHO, 1985), 48.
- ⁵ Nieder-Heitmann, 105, quoting Hendrikus Berkhof & Otto J. de Jong, *Geschiedenis der Kerk* (Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach BY, 1975), 1967.
- ⁶ Jan A.B. Jongeneel, *Nederlandse zendingsgeschiedenis. Ontmoeting van protestantse christenen met andere godsdiensten en geloven (1601-1917)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2015), 20.
- ⁷ Ibid. 21.
- ⁸ Also a West Indian Company (WIC) was established at 3 June 1621 following the structure of the VOC.
- ⁹ G.J. Schutte, De Kerk onder de Compagnie, in G.J. Schutte (redactie) *Het Indisch Sion. De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 43.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 46-47.

- ¹¹ F.A. van Lieburg, Het personeel van de Indische Kerk: een kwantitatieve benadering, in G.J. Schutte (redactie) *Het Indisch Sion*, 73 and 83.
- ¹² S. Coolsma, *De Zendingseeuw voor Nederlandsch Oost-Indië*, (Utrecht: D.H.E. Breijer, 1901), quoting J.F.G. Brumund, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis der Kerk in Batavia*, Tijdschrift KITLV XXIII, (Den Haag/Batavia, 1864), 1-189.
- ¹³ Augsburg Confession was published at the Diet of Augsburg of the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V on 25 June 1530. It was written by Philipp Melanchthon, professor at the University of Wittenberg and a close friend of Martin Luther.
- ¹⁴ M. de Bruijn, The Lutheran congregation at Batavia 1743-1800, in *Documentatieblad voor de Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Zending en Overzeese Kerken 2e jaargang nr 1, 1995, 1-26*, (Kampen: Werkgroep voor de Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Zending en Overzeese Kerken).
- ¹⁵ Ibid. 16.
- ¹⁶ According to J.A.C. van Einem, *Proeve eener volledige Kerkhistorie der achttiende eeuw I, 1779*, quoted by Th. Jutting, *Geschiedenis der Gemeente te Batavia, Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de Evangelisch-Lutherse kerk in de Nederlanden, Zesde stuk (1845), 83*.
- ¹⁷ Coolsma, *De Zendingseeuw*, 8.
- ¹⁸ De Bruijn, The Lutheran congregation, 25-26 gives the example that best-known Lutheran minister Jacobus Hooyman (1766-1789) was a wealthy coffee producer and his colleague Jan Brandes could buy a country estate in Sweden after having served for 6 years (1779-1785) and both owned a country house and slaves during their term of office in Batavia.
- ¹⁹ Van Lieburg, 87.
- ²⁰ Coolsma, *De Zendingseeuw*, 12.
- ²¹ Johannes Theodorus Ross was inaugurated as Batavia Reformed minister 9 November 1788. In 1808 he was granted the title Doctor H.C. in Theology and got a higher annual reward from Governor General Daendels. He retired in 1822. *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch woordenboek Deel 3, 1914 s.v. Ross, Johannes Theodorus*.
- ²² Pieter Gerardus van Overstraten (1796-1801), Johannes Siberg (1801-1805) and Albertus Henricus Wiese (1805-1808) - VOC website.
- ²³ H.E. Niemeijer, *Het Archief van het Bestuur over de Protestantse Kerk in Nederlands-Indië/Indonesië (PKNI)*, 48 // *Arsip Pengurus Gereja Protestan di Hindia Belanda/Indonesia (GPI) 1844-1950*, (Jakarta: ANRI, 2010), 18.
- ²⁴ G.P.H. Locher, *De kerkorde der Protestantse Kerk in Indonesië. Bijdrage tot de kennis van haar historie en beginselen*, (Amsterdam: Kampert en Helm, 1948), 42-43.
- ²⁵ C.W.Th. Baron van Boetzelaer van Asperen en Dubbeldam, *De Protestantsche Kerk in Nederlandsch-Indië. Haar ontwikkeling van 1620-1939*, (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1947), 283.

- ²⁶ Coolsma, *De Zendingseeuw*, 63.
- ²⁷ Van Boetzelaer, *De Protestantsche Kerk in Nederlandsch-Indië*, 285-286.
- ²⁸ Ibid. 286-287.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 289.
- ³⁰ Inv. No. 1 Vergadering van 30 November 1844 - *Archief van het Bestuur over de Protestantse Kerk in Nederlands-Indië*.
- ³¹ Van Boetzelaer, *De Protestantsche Kerk in Nederlandsch-Indië*, 294 note 2 mentions the following record of ministers since 1789: Jeremias Schill (1789-1814), Martinus Schiffer (1817-1818 died), Johann Friedrich Krämer (1819-1831), Theodor Jutting (1839-1844) and Adrien Mounier (1852-1853).
- ³² Ibid. 294.
- ³³ The Committee for Matters regarding Protestant Churches in the Dutch East- and West-Indies soon to be known as *De Haagse Commissie* (The Hague Committee).

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