

## EARLY 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY BAPTIST INFLUENCES ON DUTCH MENNONITE MISSIONARY ENDEAVORS<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

In the Netherlands, Baptists and Mennonites (or *Doopsgezinde*, as they call themselves) never had intensive contacts. The Dutch Mennonites, especially from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, have been influenced by rationalism and the Enlightenment. The Dutch Baptists, on the other hand, are basically an offspring of the pietistic Baptism that started with Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884) in Hamburg. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oncken influenced a Reformed pastor, Johannes Elias Feisser (1805-1865), who had to leave his office in 1844 because he refused to recognize infant baptism. In the same year two representatives of Oncken, Julius Köbner and A.F. Remmers, visited Feisser; Köbner baptized Feisser in May 1845, and a few months later Oncken baptized seven other members of Feisser's congregation in Gasseltenijveen, a poor hamlet in the eastern moorlands of the province of Drenthe. These visits can be considered as the beginning of Dutch Baptists. After 1850 Oncken's Hamburg congregation even supported evangelism in Amsterdam during several years.<sup>2</sup>

Both theologically (ecumenical attitude, peace church influence and reservations towards state and government *versus* an evangelical attitude and openness to participation in the government) and sociologically (predominantly urban middle and upper class over against poor farmers and farmhands) Dutch Mennonites and Baptists differed and, in some degree, still differ from each other.

As part of their renewal efforts, Oncken and his followers also assisted certain groups of Mennonites in Prussia (the present Poland) and in present day Ukraine. Oncken had already visited Prussia in 1833, and he preached there among the Mennonites for six weeks. From 1858 he exchanged letters with Mennonites in the Molotschna who read his *Missionsblaetter der Gemeinde getaufter Christen*. This resulted in a visit there in 1869. Religious life in the Mennonite settlements of the Ukraine had been dull and dry; however,

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is an abridged and adapted version of an article that was published in the Dutch language as "'Een kleine vonk die een groot vuur doet ontbranden'. Baptisten als initiators van doopsgezinde zending in de negentiende eeuw", in Chris de Jong (ed.), *Een vakkracht in het Koninkrijk. Kerk- en zendingshistorische opstellen*, Herenveen: Groen, 2005, 115-138.

<sup>2</sup> See J. van Dam, *Geschiedenis van het baptisme in Nederland*, Arnhem: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, 1970, 15-30.

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a portion of these Mennonites was looking for spiritual renewal. Oncken baptized some of them and ordained elders, preachers and deacons. This was the beginning of the so-called Mennonite Brethren. However, at that time these newborn Mennonite Brethren continued to have some reservations about the German Baptists (who were in favour of military service and smoked cigars, for instance!) and did not associate themselves with the new Baptist movement spreading over Europe. “Even Oncken himself smoked occasionally which practice also was copied to some extent among us but which did not serve the cause of peace”, according to P.M. Friesen, the well-known historian of these Russian Mennonites.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, contacts were continued and the first missionaries from the Mennonite Brethren in the Ukraine, Abraham and Miriam Friesen, received their training at the Baptist seminary in Hamburg before starting their missionary service in Nalgonda, Hyderabad, India on behalf of the *American Baptist Missionary Society* (1889). During recent decades, a much more complex situation of entanglement of Baptists and evangelical Mennonites has taken place among German *Umsiedler* or *Aussiedler* returning from Russia and the Ukraine to Germany. I do not intend to deal with these contacts with continental Baptists in this paper; several experts in this field of research have already done so or have described the *Umsiedler* exodus from Russia to Germany and the struggle of those people to start a new life.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, I want to return to the situation in the Netherlands. There, the English Baptists exerted an initiating and important influence upon the Dutch Mennonites as to their missionary endeavours. In this article I will emphasize this side of the early Baptist-Mennonite missionary contacts. Through these English Baptist efforts, the Dutch Mennonites became the first Mennonites in modern times to start mission work.<sup>5</sup> The main protagonists I will mention below are Samuel Muller, Professor at the Mennonite Seminary in Amsterdam and driving force behind the European Mennonite missionary efforts during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and William Henry Angas, a tireless missionary evangelist in the UK and on the European continent.

### **Beginnings of English Baptist Mission**

In 1792 the *Baptist Missionary Society* was founded by a group of Particular Baptists. After several aborted efforts, young William Carey and others, like Andrew Fuller and John Ryland junior, founded the “Particular Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel among the Heathen” in Kettering, Northamptonshire. Carey went to Bengal, India, the next

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<sup>3</sup>P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia 1789-1910*. Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature. General Conference Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980 (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition), 285, 289, 461-467.

<sup>4</sup>See for instance the recent article by John N. Klassen, ‘Mennonites in Russia and their Migrations’ in *Testing Faith and Tradition. Global Mennonite History Series: Europe*, Intercourse, PA/Kitchener, ON: Good Books/Pandora Press, 2006, 181-232, and the literature mentioned at 312-314.

<sup>5</sup>The Mennonites in Heubuden, near Dantzig, started to show interest in mission in the same decade as the Dutch Mennonites and may even have done so earlier yet; however, this did not lead to lasting efforts.

year; in 1799 William Ward, Joshua Marshman and others followed him. The mission work developed well in four important fields: proclamation of the gospel; translating and printing the Bible; a network of schools for indigenous pupils; and the foundation of a College “with the primary use of training Christian Indians to be missionaries to their own people.” Apparently the costs of this College in Serampore, “in which every branch of a sound and liberal education might be inculcated”<sup>6</sup> were rather high. For this reason, William Ward (1769-1823) was sent to Europe in 1819 to look for sponsors, both in England and on the continent. As part of this quest he came to the Netherlands in 1820.

### William Henry Angas

We do not know whether this visit of Ward’s was an initiative of the BMS Board itself in London. In any case, Ward’s companion during this visit, William Henry Angas (1781-1832), played a significant role. Angas, born in Newcastle on Tyne as the son of a ship owner, had an adventurous youth. Aboard one of his father’s vessels during the Napoleonic years of French-British war, his ship was boarded near Denmark by a French pirate ship, and brought in to France. Near the coast of Ostende the ship wrecked in stormy weather. Angas’ life was saved, though for one and a half years he was held prisoner in France. This incident led to his conversion and consequently to a lifelong missionary effort, both within the BMS and within the so-called *British and Foreign Sailors’ Society*.<sup>7</sup> On behalf of the latter organization he made numerous visits to harbours in England and the European continent, building networks. In 1822 he was ordained as “missionary to seafaring men”, in a church service in the “floating chapel” at Bristol.<sup>8</sup>

After being released from prison, Angas went to Brussels to study theology, and soon became rather fluent in the French, Dutch and German languages. He visited Dutch Mennonites in the harbour city of Rotterdam as well as the Moravian Brethren in Zeist near Utrecht in 1818-1819. On January 20, 1820 he wrote a letter from Rotterdam, to the Mennonite pastor Samuel Muller in Amsterdam, indicating that he had visited the Mennonite pastors S.K. Sybrandi, M. van Geuns and A. de Vries in Haarlem (one of the most influential Mennonite congregations, sometimes called “the Mennonite heaven”!) and informing Muller that he hoped to soon meet the Rotterdam pastor N. Messchaert.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Stennett, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. William Ward, Late Baptist Missionary in India*, London: J. Haddon, 1825 (second printing), 189.

<sup>7</sup> See F.A. Cox, *Memoirs of the Rev. William Henry Angas*, London: Thos. Ward & Co, 1834, 11ff. Cox uses many direct quotations from letters by Angas. See also Walter Dunlop Potts, “Captain William Henry Angas. Lessons for members of the Churches of the Northern Baptist Association, from the Life of one of the noble examples of their own locality”, in *Letter to the Churches of the Northern Baptist Association*, 1888.

<sup>8</sup> Cox, *Memoirs*, 68. The service was presided by John Ryland, a BMS Board member, who preached on 2 Cor. 5:14, “The love of Christ constraineth us”.

<sup>9</sup> Letter in the private collection N.M. Muller. Messchaert at that time was already an active member (“directeur”) of the interdenominational *Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap*, founded in 1797. Only the Dutch Moravian mission was older: in 1793 they had founded the *Zeister Broeder Sociëteit tot verbreiding van het Evangelie onder de Heidenen*.

Therefore, Angas was an excellent guide during Ward's fund-raising mission. One of the most influential Dutch Mennonites they were to meet was the aforementioned Samuel Muller (1785-1875). Muller was secretary of the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (the association of Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands, founded in 1811), pastor in Amsterdam, member of the Netherlands Bible Society and of numerous other institutions in the field of education and benevolence. In 1827 he became a professor at the Mennonite Seminary in Amsterdam, and a recent PhD study typifies him as the "Mennonite Pope of the Netherlands during the 19<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>10</sup>

#### **Auxiliary Society of the BMS in the Netherlands**

Ward and Angas must have talked with him and others very seriously. In any case, as a result of their discussions, Muller took the initiative in founding an *Auxiliary Society of the BMS*. Dutch Mennonites had their pride, so first of all, he addressed the BMS Board in London with several questions. What would be the status of this *Auxiliary Society* (the first of its kind abroad!)? How was the work of the Serampore missionaries to be defined?

Is that sphere exclusively confined to the British possessions in India, or are they also permitted to enlarge that sphere and to visit the settlements of other nations? ...

Is it possible that the affairs could be managed in such a manner, that the Dutch settlements in India<sup>11</sup> might reap some benefit from the labours of the Baptist Missionary Society in Serampore...?

And, finally, "What kind of relation does exist between the British nation, and the nations of India (Hindu's)?" Is the conversion of these Hindu's "a voluntary act, or does the British Government intercede with his influence?"<sup>12</sup>

The answers to these practical, strategic and missiological questions must have been satisfactory.

The idea to found such an *Auxiliary Society* in the Netherlands was attractive for at least three reasons. First of all, around 1820 several Baptist missionaries worked in the Dutch Indies. From 1811 till 1816/7 (when the Netherlands were a part of Napoleonic France) the English ruled in the Dutch Indies, and their governor Thomas Stamford Raffles was very sympathetic towards the Baptist mission; he knew the work of the BMS at Serampore. At least ten Baptist missionaries served at Sumatra, Java and Ambon, among whom were William Carey's son Jabez<sup>13</sup> (on the island of Ambon in the eastern part of the

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<sup>10</sup> Annelies Verbeek, *Menniste Paus Samuel Muller (1785-1875) en zijn netwerken*, Hilversum: Verloren, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Probably the Dutch East Indies are meant here.

<sup>12</sup> Letter by S. Muller to John Ryland, from 1815 till his death in 1825 secretary of the BMS, September 22, 1820. Archives BMS Oxford, under Dyer, H7/5.

<sup>13</sup> See information on Jabez Carey not only in the BMS Archives but also in P.H. van der Kemp, "Van den Ambonschen zendeling J. Carey", *Mededeelingen Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap* 61 (1917), 218-235; Chr.G.F. de Jong (ed), *De Protestantse Kerk in de Midden-Molukken 1803-1900. Een Bronnenpublicatie. Eerste deel 1803-1854*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2004, 9-10, and the documents 7 (40-41), 9 (43-46) and 11 (49-51);

Dutch East Indies), and the German Gottlob Brückner<sup>14</sup> (in Semarang, Central Java). So far, their missionary contribution has rather remained in the shadow. In any case, Muller, with some right cherished the hope that in the *Dutch* colony missionary efforts could also be possible. After all, the Baptists certainly were related to the Mennonites!

Secondly, the idea of supporting a “College” seemed very attractive, the more since it provided “a sound and liberal education” as we heard earlier. In the prospectus Muller and two others sent around to all Mennonite pastors in the Netherlands in 1821, this Serampore College was called “A Seminary to educate indigenous people to become preachers and missionaries”.<sup>15</sup> Education took an important place in the prevailing missionary philosophy of conversion by civilization which also dominated Muller’s thought. Dutch Mennonites themselves had a highly respected seminary, affiliated with the Amsterdam University.

Finally, a third argument can be mentioned which made the founding of an *Auxiliary Society* attractive. In his writings and letters Muller always translated the word *doopsgezinde*, literally ‘baptism-minded’, with *Baptist*. In the 1821 leaflet he writes, that the English Baptists form a “denomination, which is closely connected with the *doopsgezinde* on the European continent, and especially in the Netherlands, by history, spirit and tenor.” On the other hand, William Ward, in his *Farewell Letters* (1820) considers the “Mennonites” as a variety of the Baptists; “Dutch Baptists”, he calls them.<sup>16</sup> This semantic identification may also have been a justification for the Dutch Mennonites to dissociate themselves from the interdenominational, but in practice Reformed *Nederlandsch Zendinggenootschap*, which so far had been supported by several Mennonites in the Netherlands. Even after the Dutch *doopsgezinde* started their own *Doopsgezinde Zending Vereeniging* in 1847, and dissociated themselves from the Baptists, Muller continued to translate *doopsgezinde* as “Baptists”. For instance when in a letter to John Dyer in 1848 he translates the name of the newly founded Dutch mission association: “An Association for

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and I.H. Enklaar, *Joseph Kam. 'Apostel der Molukken'*, 's-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1963, especially 46-48. In a report by a Dutch Indies' government official in 1818, Jabez Carey is called a “doopsgezinde zendeling”. Enklaar, 47.

<sup>14</sup>G. Brückner (1783-1857) was a German from Linda, Saxony (Lausitz). Influenced by Joh. Jänicke he wanted to become a missionary. In 1808 he went to the Netherlands and followed training in the NZG mission house in Rotterdam, but due to the war the NZG was unable to send him out. Therefore, he (and two others) went to London, where the London Missionary Society commissioned him to go to Java. He arrived in 1814 and in the following year he got in touch with the Baptist missionary Thomas Trowt who brought him to the conviction that he needed to be baptised by immersion (April 1816). After that, he became a missionary on behalf of the BMS. Unfortunately not much correspondence between Brückner and the BMS Board is to be found in the ABMS in Oxford. See J.L. Swellengrebel, *In Leijdeckers Voetspoor. Anderhalve eeuw bijbelvertaling en taalkunde in de Indonesische talen Deel I, 1820-1900*, Amsterdam/Haarlem:NBG 1974, 39-49.

<sup>15</sup>*Berigt wegens het Zendinggenootschap der Baptisten in Engeland en Ontwerp ter bevordering van deszelven belangen in de Nederlanden*, a 16 pages leaflet, which in May 1821 was sent to all Mennonite congregations and pastors.

<sup>16</sup>William Ward, *Farewell Letters to a few friends in Britain and America on returning to Bengal in 1821*, London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1821. Also available on [www.wmcarey.edu/carey/ward3](http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/ward3). Ward's considerations have been written as if they are letters to friends. The letters XIX-XXII deal with the Mennonites.

diffusing the Gospel by Nederland-Baptists, particularly in the Dutch colonies.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Unrealized Expectations**

The “Nederlandsche Afdeeling van het Zendeling-Genootschap der Engelsche Baptisten te Serampore in Oostindië” started its work in 1821 with broad support among the Dutch Mennonites. The second yearly report, 1823, mentions an impressive list of prominent (and, well-to-do!) Mennonite names from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Zaandam and Haarlem, next to many others. For that reason, expectations on both sides of the North Sea were high. At the end of 1820 the BMS *Missionary Herald* already expressed the hope:

We shall be favoured with the valuable co-operation of our Christian friends in those provinces – an event which we anticipate with much delight, not only as promising much effective aid for our Society, but as tending to bring about a pleasing union with a branch of the Church of Christ, with which we have hitherto had scarcely any intercourse.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately the Auxiliary Society never lived up to these expectations. In 1823 almost 6000 Dutch guilders were collected (4000 of which came from the Amsterdam congregation!). Since the Dutch were cautious bankers, only Fl. 2460,- were sent to London, that is: 200 pound sterling – not much money in English eyes. During the next years, this amount even decreased. Of course, the BMS Board in London continued to speak of “the continued kindness and regard” of their Dutch brethren. The BMS minute books, however, speak a different language:

Resolved that the secretary write Mr. Muller, Secretary of the Auxiliary Soc.y lately formed in Holland, respectfully suggesting the propriety of making journies and preaching sermons in aid of its funds among the Mennonite Churches, throughout the United provinces.<sup>19</sup>

And William Henry Angas, the tireless BMS propagandist on the continent, even writes in a letter from Rotterdam to J. Dyer in the London office (1825):

Pound 200 for 30.000 Dutch Baptists. Is something to be sure: but what is it among so many? Let us however be thankful it is no less. It would be more if they would take my advice which is: divide Holland into districts & for their ministers to pay missionary visits to them every year.<sup>20</sup>

Five years later he even sounds rather sceptical as to the faith of these Dutch Mennonites:

In our conversations on the state of religion among the Mennonites in Holland, you may more than once have heard me remark that I know not where I could lay my hand upon one instance of Evangelical piety among either their ministers or people.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime Muller, too, began to reconcile himself to the fact that this

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<sup>17</sup>Letter to John Dyer, February 18, 1848, ABMS 7/5.

<sup>18</sup>*Missionary Herald*, XXIII (November 1820) 84.

<sup>19</sup>*Minute Book*, 13.9.1821, ABMS H 7/2.

<sup>20</sup>W.H. Angas to J. Dyer, Rotterdam, June 15, 1825, ABMS, H 7/2.

<sup>21</sup>W.H. Angas to J. Dyer, Amsterdam, Sept. 15, 1830, ABMS, H 7/2.

Auxiliary Society was not to become a great success. A number of reasons can be mentioned here. First of all, Muller was totally dependent upon the reports he got from London in the yearly letters he wrote to the contributors in the Netherlands. Several times he had to remind the BMS to send these reports; apparently the friends in the Netherlands did not receive a high priority in London. Of course, the fortunes of the Baptist missionaries in the Dutch East Indies were especially referred to in the Dutch reports. In 1825, for instance, Muller reports about Brückner, in Semarang, Central Java:

In many cases he prevented violence and bloodshed by his interference and counsel; yet in general he has to deal with an almost animal-like stupidity, which makes the subjects of his concerns entirely indifferent as to the [spiritual] interest to which he wants to win them. (in: *Vierde Verslag*, 11-13)

Unfortunately, after the Dutch colonial regime took over from the British again, hardly any new Baptist missionary entered the colony and rather often the perspectives of the remaining Baptist missionaries seemed bleak. Also, not much was known about their fate in the inlands of Sumatra.

Theological, ecclesiological, practical and political differences between Dutch Mennonites and English Baptists may have played a dampening role. According to some scholars theological issues were the main reason why this Auxiliary Society never flourished, and was finally dissolved in 1847. They point to differences in baptismal practices (sprinkling *versus* immersion), and to an increasingly strict Biblicism on the side of the Baptists (though this was mainly apparent among the German Baptists). Others refer to anti-English sentiments because of the anti-Dutch role of the British when in 1830 the Belgians seceded from Holland, and again in 1841, when England occupied Serawak, part of the island of Borneo in the Dutch East Indies. Muller himself time and again attributes the meagre results of his Auxiliary Society to the increasing number of benevolent institutions in his country, which all appeal to the same class of well-to-do, and to calamities in the Netherlands such as a flood disaster in 1824/5.

Nevertheless, in my opinion the main factor for the lack of success was the fact that these proud Dutch Mennonites, who played a prominent role in foreign trade and shipping to both the USA and South East Asia, especially the Dutch East Indies, were not allowed to carry any responsibility themselves on behalf of the mission work and the missionaries. They had neither a task of their own, nor a mission field nor missionaries of their own. Samuel Muller explains the dissolution of the Auxiliary Society in an extensive, English language letter, May 11 1847, to the BMS Board as follows:

[t]he still more pervading persuasion, that, though it may be laudable to lend assistance to foreign missionary Societies, who work for countries, alien to us as members of our State, it is in the first place the duty of the Netherland Christian, to promote the cause of evangelization amongst the Mohammedans and the heathens in the Netherland dominions and

therefore either to establish an institution for that purpose, or to aid the efforts of already existing missionary Societies, who operate with the same tendency.<sup>22</sup>

In the years between 1820 and 1847 Muller maintained a friendly, though limited correspondence with the BMS secretaries. His counsel was sought only a few times. One time about a very critical pamphlet against the mission in India, which argued that the missionaries considered Hinduism “idolatry” and required Hindu’s to leave their caste environment to become Christians. The second advice sought from him concerned the position of poor, old Gottlieb Brückner in Semarang. Apparently the BMS Board was unhappy with the meagre results of Brückner’s missionary efforts. Brückner had explained to the Board that he was not allowed to baptize indigenous people,

because the King of Holland says in one of the regulations concerning the churches in Java that none shall be allowed to exist except the Dutch Reformed Church, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic. Now a Baptist Church would be against this Regulation. It seems that the Mennonites are not permitted to exist here as a separate communion, because all of them join the Dutch Church; neither has ever come out a Minister of this denomination; whereas this denomination exists separately in Holland and enjoys equal privileges with all other Christian bodies.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately Muller’s reaction could not be traced in the BMS Archives or elsewhere. Three years later, however, Brückner’s position was shaky again. Joseph Angus, secretary of the BMS, had sent him a very critical letter with painful questions such as:

Are your children pious? I remember you spoke at them as baptized, but we had a doubt whether your practice (in that respect) does not resemble that of our Mennonite friends.<sup>24</sup>

Again, we do not have Muller’s comments here, but the affair was disappointing to Brückner and in 1849 he asked and received permission to retire, at 64 years of age. The Dutch Mennonite missionary Pieter Jansz, who arrived on Java in 1851 and started his work in Jepara, not far away from Semarang, held Brückner in high esteem. For, as we would say now, contextual theological reasons, Jansz even wanted to baptize his first five converts in 1852 by way of immersion. That, however, was absolutely a bridge too far for the DZV Board in Amsterdam!

### **Back to William Henry Angas**

Now we have to return to William Henry Angas. Soon his network among the continental “Baptist” brothers was much broader than that in the Netherlands. Due to his

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<sup>22</sup> Letter to BMS Board, ABMS H 7/5; the content of the decision is also mentioned in *Missionary Herald* August 1847, 524.

<sup>23</sup> A copy of Brückner’s letter to Joseph Angus, December 8, 1843, was attached to a letter by Angus to Muller, May 31, 1844, in Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, Archives Muller PA 1132/7.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Joseph Angus, February 13, 1846, GAA Archives Muller PA 1132/7.



double loyalty to the BMS and to the sailors' mission, he visited many harbours, including Hamburg and Dantzig. There he contacted prominent Mennonites as well.

In Hamburg-Altona he visited Gilbert van der Smissen, a prominent deacon of the Mennonite church and an influential merchant. Angas describes him as a man, "full of years and full of that glory which crowns the hoary head that is found in the way of righteousness." Through the intervention of Van der Smissen he was allowed to evangelise among sailors and he founded Sunday schools "upon the English plan".<sup>25</sup> No wonder, he felt disappointed since these wealthy Hamburg Mennonites only once sent a modest gift of 57 pounds for the BMS work.

Nevertheless, he did not give up and continued his traveling to Dantzig and Elbing. Cox' *Memoirs* (not always free from hagiographical tendencies) report that the Mennonite congregations there "had been awakened to missionary exertions by his efforts."<sup>26</sup> Angas even published an extensive, 26 page long German booklet in which he called upon the elders, preachers and members of the West-Prussian Mennonite congregations to support the work in Serampore. He used this propaganda work elsewhere, too.<sup>27</sup> Being a real networker and organizer, he also suggested that a seminary or college should be founded to educate the youth, and he even suggested a director's name: Jacob van der Smissen, who at first was a pastor in Friedrichstadt and later the first fully salaried pastor in Dantzig. Such a college would mean evangelisation through education!

Between 1823 and 1830 Angas extended his evangelising journeys in Europe. From Prussia he went to the Palatinate and even to Switzerland and the Alsace. His observations, to be found in letters and in the above-mentioned *Memoirs*, provide useful outsider information about the introvert groups of Mennonites in these areas. Not only did he want to ask financial support for the BMS work in Serampore, but also, he wanted to arouse these traditional congregations from lethargy. They were also the objects of evangelisation themselves!

Because of the increasing amount of work in this field, from 1829 on he received the assistance of Carl Christian Philip Tauchnitz (1798-1884), a Lutheran student of theology from Leipzig, who had read Angas' pamphlet in Prussia and already in 1824 had come in touch with the BMS Board. In 1829 Angas wanted to "engage his services for the revival and diffusion of religion among the Mennonites"<sup>28</sup> who were "scattered sheep". In June 1830 Tauchnitz attended a BMS Board meeting in London. This board, however, refused to appoint Tauchnitz, both for financial and fundamental reasons: evangelism in Europe did not belong to the task of the BMS! Thereupon Angas financed Tauchnitz's work

<sup>25</sup> Cox, *Memoirs*, 75-76.

<sup>26</sup> Cox, *Memoirs*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> W.H. Angas, *An die Aeltesten, Lehrer und Mitglieder der sämtlichen Mennoniten Gemeinden in West Preussen*, Danzig, 1823 (26 pp). An original English version in MS, 'To the deacons and members of the Mennonite-Baptist Churches in West Prussia', 14 pp, can be found in ABMS H7/2.

<sup>28</sup> Cox, *Memoirs*, 130.

himself. The latter, who later became a prominent personality in Leipzig, worked very faithfully and traveled through all of Europe, even to Gnadenfeld in the Ukraine. Like Angas, he felt disappointed by these Mennonites. "I am sorry to say that I have found among the Mennonites of this country still less interest for the mission than I expected", he writes to BMS secretary Dyer from Heubuden in West Prussia on October 22, 1830. Also, he concluded that Angas' reports had been too optimistic, and that Angas too easily identified Baptists with *Taufgesinnte* or Mennonites. Cox and other English Baptists did not accept Mennonites as members of their churches, and the Prussian Mennonites refused 'church fellowship' with these Baptists, "because the latter do not think it unlawful to bear arms and to take an oath." Even though both groups refused infant baptism, their positions were as far apart from each other as Lutherans were from Calvinists!<sup>29</sup>

In two regions Angas' efforts bore some fruit. First, in the Palatinate where according to Angas some 3000 Mennonites were living. His visits there led to the founding of a regional conference of Mennonite congregations in the Palatinate and Hessen. Leonhard Weydman, the first pastor who had finished theological studies, reported this in a letter to Samuel Muller (1823). Two or three times these congregations sent a small financial contribution to London.

Secondly, Angas went to Basel, to Langnau in the Emmental and to the Swiss Jura. In the neighbourhood of Moutier he visited several small communities. These traditionally dressed people were holding off and it was difficult to gain their trust:

I was a foreigner; my dress was against me; and my bare chin nothing in my favour. After a good deal of work, I got the ice broken at last, and have kept it open ever since.<sup>30</sup>

In the village of Champoz, between Moutier and Tavannes, he visited a brother Moser, whose wife was "not without a missionary spirit"; Angas was invited to report on the BMS work and was allowed to pray and preach. Moser did send 14 pounds to London, but his hope that other congregations such as Sonnenberg and Chaux-de-Fond would follow, remained only a dream. There was too much resistance from within.

Nevertheless, Angas remained an optimist. The first "missionary prayer meeting" in Langnau, "will be probably a spark, concerning which it will be said, how great a fire a little kindled", he writes from Brussels to Dyer in March, 1825. And in Basel he even published a German book with an extensive description of the BMS work, dedicated to "their brothers in Switzerland". It ends with a missionary admonition.<sup>31</sup> However, here like elsewhere his hope that he could found an *Auxiliary Society* was idle. First of all these people needed education! A few times Angas, and after his death, Tauchnitz, speak about the possibility of founding a teacher training college. Though Tauchnitz doubts whether this

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<sup>29</sup> Letter by Tauchnitz to Dyer, Basel, November 23, 1831, ABMS H 7/1.

<sup>30</sup> Cox, *Memoirs*, 83-95 and 131-153; quotation on 88.

<sup>31</sup> *Ein Andenken christlicher Liebe von den englischen Taufgesinnten für ihre Brüder [in der Schweiz]*. Basel: Nik. Müller, 1824, 167.

dream would ever become true, he states,

in fact I see no other way for the effectual and general improvement of the Mennonites than by training of young men, in a plain but evangelical way, for schoolmasters and preachers among them.<sup>32</sup>

Angas and Tauchnitz even planned to send some promising young men to the *freywillige Armen-Schullehreranstalt Beuggen*, which had been founded in 1820 by Christian Heinrich Zeller. None of the candidates were satisfactory. It would take quite a while before the Swiss Mennonites sent their lay pastors to the *Pilgermissionanstalt St. Chrischona!*

### Conclusion

During the nineteenth century important missionary contacts existed between Baptists and European Mennonites. The seed planted by Angas in Prussia, the Palatinate and Switzerland unfortunately did not bear much fruit. The Mennonites there were still too introverted in these years. The Dutch Mennonites owe much to the English Baptists, even though they distanced themselves from them. In my opinion they did so not primarily because of theological motifs, but because of their feelings of self-confidence within their society. They wanted to carry responsibility on their own as to mission work in their own colonies. It is not surprising that from its start in 1847 onwards their new *Doopsgezinde Zendings Vereniging* rather easily succeeded in finding both sufficient finances and missionary candidates! After 1847 Muller continued to have contact with several English Baptists and in 1862 he published an extensive article on them in the *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*. Admittedly, in this article he is critical of the German Baptists. On the other hand, some groups of Russian/Ukrainian Mennonites owe inspiration and a new start to Oncken and the Hamburg Baptists.

Summarizing we can quote what Samuel Muller wrote in his 11 May 1847 letter to the BMS in which he announced that the Dutch Mennonites had decided to found their own missionary society:

to your Society will always belong the merit of having roused the spirit amongst the Netherlands Baptists [= *doopsgezinde* or Mennonites] for the sacred cause of the mission.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Letter by Tauchnitz to Dyer, Basel, August 20, 1833, ABMS H 7/1.

<sup>33</sup> See note 20 above.