72. October 10, 1710. Around two weeks after the receipt of Document 59 from Rotterdam, the Committee Members from Amsterdam rejected Rotterdam’s complaints about proceeding with a collection without first consulting others.[[1]](#footnote-1) Nevertheless, in October letters of announcement were sent out asking for a meeting to approve another collection. Surviving copies concerning the announcement, Documents 72 and 73, are from the Zonist Congregation, interestingly, rather than from the Amsterdam Committee Members in general.

 Document 72 is a letter from the Church Council of the Zon to those at Purmerend to ask them to attend a meeting on November 5 to regulate the management of money collected for the Swiss and to discuss the settlement of the refugees.

[page 1]

To the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation in

Purmerend, the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation

at the Zon in Amsterdam, signed below, wish much grace and peace

from God our heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ in the

powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Respected friends and beloved brothers,

As we do not doubt that the respected brothers will have received our letters concerning our request to hold a collection for the benefit of the oppressed brothers and sisters in Switzerland, the Palatinate, and surrounding areas and already have acted on them, in our judgment it was best that everything be brought into one fund and under one leadership and be distributed and disbursed where it is needed. We, with the friends from the Toren and the Lam, have resolved to request a few representatives from surrounding ministerial groups to appear in the church council room of the Mennonites at the Toren on the coming November 5 at 9:00 a.m.

Our purpose is establishing the amount each has collected for those poor people, and in that way discovering from the whole what percentage must be contributed and added by those who prefer to reserve their money on hand in case of need,[[2]](#footnote-2) or who remit a small amount of money. [Also proposed is] setting up such regulations for the directing and distributing of it, as shall be commonly considered most advisable, concerning all of which

the Committee members here shall write a brief report of what they have done up to the present in these matters according to their commission and what the state of affairs is at present.

In particular, [the following matters] shall be proposed for consideration: the invitation of the King of Prussia to take in the deported and yet to be deported Mennonites from the Canton of Bern in Switzerland into his territory in Prussia or the Brandenburg Marches[[3]](#footnote-3) and to let them live there in the free exercise of their religion. Or whether they could be placed in the Groningen countryside or elsewhere in this country, since the strong recommendation of their High and Mighty Sirs’ Resident[[4]](#footnote-4) in Bern in his latest advice is to acquire a secure refuge not only for the thirty brothers and sisters who are now again imprisoned in Bern, but also for those who are still in that Canton—unless a certain proposal that he shared with us in confidence and that has been suggested by a few moderate gentlemen there [goes forward].

It was resolved and accepted here, that we would gladly see that your representatives might be adequately informed concerning the plan for draining and making productive two marshes situated in the Bern area at our expense, allowing the Mennonites to live there together and support themselves in a situation of permanent free exercise of their religion and to maintain themselves (thereby giving all matters a reasonably broad perspective), this for the purpose of making a decision about it that would be judged of most benefit to those miserable ones. Or, if in all this the brothers, [page 2] after having labored concerning this, were to put it into the hands of the Committee members […] for these matters, we request that we be informed about the various matters in a letter. Whereby, much appreciated brothers, we remain, after sincere greetings,

Your affectionate friends and brothers in Christ,

the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite

this October 10, 1710. congregation in Amsterdam on the Singel at the

Zon, and signed on their behalf

Hermannus Schijn

Steven van Leuvenigh

To the respected, tactful,

Paulus Drakes

at Purmerend[[5]](#footnote-5)

73. October 10, 1710.*A collection or gathering of three copied letters, labeled I, II, III—(two from the Zonist Congregation at Amsterdam to that at Goedereede about the needs of the Mennonites in Bern, establishing a fund on their behalf, the offer of the King of Prussia, making polders of swamps in the Bernese area, and possible Swiss settlement in the Netherlands. A third letter from Rotterdam informs about persecution of the Swiss.*

I.

[folio 1 recto]

1st Gathering

Letter from the friends of Amsterdam 1710

Copy to those of Goedereede[[6]](#footnote-6)

To the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation

in Goedereede from the undersigned ministers and overseers of the

Mennonite congregation of Amsterdam in the Zon:

Much grace and peace from God our heavenly Father through our Lord

Jesus Christ in the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Respected friends and beloved brothers:

As we do not doubt that the respected brothers will have received our letters concerning our request to hold a collection for the benefit of the oppressed brothers and sisters in Switzerland, the Palatinate, and surrounding areas and will have already acted on them, in our judgment it was best that everything be brought into one fund and be distributed and disbursed on the spot by one person[[7]](#footnote-7) where it is needed. We, with the friends from the Toren and the Lam, have resolved to request a few representatives from surrounding ministerial groups to appear in the church council room of the Mennonites at the Toren on November 5 this year before2 9:00 a.m.

Our purpose is establishing the amount each has collected for those poor people, and in that way discovering from the whole what percentage must be contributed and added by those who prefer to reserve their money on hand in case of need,[[8]](#footnote-8) or who remit a small amount of money. [Also a proposal is made] to set up such regulations for the directing and distributing of it, as shall be commonly considered most advisable,

concerning all of which the Committee members here shall write a formal2 report of what they have done up to the present in this matter according to their commission and what the state of affairs is at present.

In particular, [the following matter] shall be proposed for consideration: the invitation of the King of Prussia to take in the deported [folio 1 verso] and the yet to be deported Mennonites from the Canton of Bern in Switzerland into his territory in Prussia or the Brandenburg Marches and to let them live there in the free exercise of their religion. Or whether they could be placed in the Groningen countryside or elsewhere in this country, since the strong recommendation of their High and Mighty Sirs’ Resident in Bern in his latest advice is to acquire a secure refuge not only for the thirty brothers and sisters who are now again imprisoned in Bern but also for those who are still in that Canton, unless a certain proposal that he shared with us in confidence and that has been suggested by a few moderate gentlemen there [goes forward].

It was resolved and accepted here, that we would gladly see that your representatives might be adequately informed concerning the plan for draining and making productive two marshes situated in the Bern area, at our expense, allowing the Mennonites to live there together in a situation of permanent free exercise of their religion and to maintain themselves, (thereby giving all matters a reasonably broad perspective) this for the purpose of making a decision about it that would be judged of most benefit to those miserable ones. Or, if in all this the brothers, after having labored over this, were to put it into the hands of the Committee members here for these matters, we request that we be informed about the various matters in a letter. Whereby, much appreciated brothers, we remain, after sincere greetings,

(here under) Your affectionate friends and brothers in Christ

the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation

dated in Amsterdam on the Singel at the Zon,

this October 10, 1710. and signed on their behalf

Hermannus Schijn

Steven van Leuvenigh

(N.B. From the Old Church Book, folios 138, 139, of the Mennonites in Goedereede it appears that a letter from the friends of Amsterdam was sent earlier in the month of August, containing a report of the miserable situation of these Swiss fellow believers, who were robbed of all their possessions, or killed by the sword, or sent to America as slaves, even that a premium of 400 rixdollars was fixed for anyone who was able to turn

in a minister [folio 2 recto] in such a way that he ended up in the hands of justice. For this reason the friends mentioned found it necessary to exhort other congregations to provide support and to hold a collection for the benefit of these miserable ones.)

II.

Second letter from those of Amsterdam to those of Goedereede, etc.

To the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation in Goedereede, we, the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite congregation at Amsterdam in the Zon, wish much grace and peace, etc., etc.

The beloved brothers will undoubtedly have understood from our recent letter of the last October 10 what the purpose and goal of the general assembly (held on November 5) was, and, although various members were prevented through inconvenience from appearing, we consider it useful to share with the friends briefly the resolutions made at the meeting.

This is what happened. After the long account of the management of the matters [at hand], and the reading aloud of various letters, resolutions, and advice regarding it, and in particular from the latest [communications] of Mr. Secretary Runckel (residing in Bern on behalf of their High and Mighty Sirs), the assembly has seen clearly that draining the two marshes mentioned is not at all advisable, being too difficult to achieve. However, Mr. Runckel proposes another plan to establish a place for those miserable brothers, etc., in their fatherland, namely in regards to a certain uncultivated wooded area near the border with, yet still in the Canton of Bern, and of which the Bernese government gave a portion for a few years to some deported Waldenses[[9]](#footnote-9) some time ago. It was resolved to request Mr. Runckel to acquire information about this in detail and to write the Committee members about this, since they would like to make resolutions on this matter as to what they judge to be most advisable for those unfortunate people. Further, the congregations and Committee members of the Amsterdam congregations were thanked for the trouble they had taken and for their zeal in this matter. They were requested kindly to continue and persevere, further to act and to resolve on principle the aforesaid matters in the way they consider the most proper and best to achieving the goal of the assembly and the relief of the suffering brothers and sisters, [and] to appoint one or two deputies from the congregations of Haarlem, Leiden, and Zaandam to assist them in important matters which offer clear perspectives.

Secondly, the money already collected has been totaled up, and the money from congregations who are inclined to keep their money separate from the Amsterdam purse [folio 2 verso] will be divided into a number of categories. Whenever the aforesaid Committee members call for some money, the percentage will be brought forward in proportion to the amount that they possess and have collected. The congregations who have not yet held a collection for the above purpose are asked to do this on the first [of the month] and to turn over the amount collected to the Committee members so that everything can be regulated in an orderly fashion before the coming New Year.

Thirdly, [the assembly] deliberated concerning the presentation of the King of Prussia regarding the taking into his country of our Swiss brothers, etc. However, since it appears clear that the friends there are very much disinclined to go there, and the King seems to want to have them, it is feared that there may be some pressure involved, with the result that the assembly has come to the understanding not to negotiate further with that King, but rather to try, if possible, to place those poor people elsewhere under the jurisdiction of this country. This is to be written to Mr. Runckel, who will be asked to work it out with the Council of Bern, that they may leave the country freely with their possessions and enjoy a reasonable period for selling their effects and cashing them in, provided we could take over [responsibility] for them at our expense and deliver them to free soil, giving a choice as to who wants to move to Prussia or to this country.

This, respected brothers, is the essence of what passed at the assembly. We hope and desire that the Almighty will be pleased to bless these and further resolutions and undertakings to such effect that they may serve the honor and glory of His great name for the rescue, release, and solace of these His severely oppressed children and for attaining their and our souls’ eternal salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Remaining,

(was signed) Your favorably inclined friends and brothers in Christ,

the ministers and overseers of the Mennonite

congregation in Amsterdam on the Singel at the

Zon, and signed on their behalf

Hermannus Schijn

Henderik Thesing,[[10]](#footnote-10) etc.

[folio 3 recto]

III.

Letter from those of Rotterdam etc.

Very good and cherished friends, our fellow believers,

and beloved brothers in our redeemer Jesus Christ,

on the island of Goedereede: May grace and peace be multiplied to you etc.

We do not doubt, much cherished brothers, that you will have heard about the severe compulsion with which the conscience of our fellow believers, the Mennonites living under the government of the Protestant magistracy of the Canton of Bern in Switzerland, is being oppressed on account of their confession and living out of the articles of our Christian faith which we, as Mennonites, share with them.

Therefore you will know that for some time more than fifty persons have been put in prison, where they received for their nourishment nothing more than some water and bread, and this was not provided them until they had earned it with heavy work. Indeed, several died of hardship in that dreadful dungeon.

After that, the Lords of Bern attempted to transport our friends as prisoners to America, but, since they had to do it through this country’s territory, the praiseworthy government of these free lands graciously prevented this in spite of being expressly asked by the Lords of Bern for permission to do so.

Not only did their High and Mighty Lords of the States General block the stated aims of the Bernese Lords, they also wrote them a long letter in which their High and Mighty Sirs speak in a most fatherly way in favor of the Mennonites, acknowledging them to be peaceful subjects of our fatherland.

However, in spite of the strong arguments presented in that letter, the aforesaid Lords of Bern did not cease their severe persecution of our fellow believers, and, indeed, advanced it so unmercifully that they kept parents away from their children, children from their parents, husbands from their wives, wives from their husbands, and withheld from the prisoners all human contact in the prison buildings, and as if that were not enough, the Lords have seen fit to lay heavy fines for their lodging…

1. 72 This was a letter of September 15. Gulik DB (1908), pp. 93-95, referring to Toren’s Aenteekening (A 1009), pp. 122-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Does this mean the needs of the congregation itself or the needs of the suffering Mennonites mentioned in the letter? It seems more likely that the reference is to the latter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Part of Prussia surrounding Berlin. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. That is, Ludwig Runckel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ME IV, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 73 Goedereede is southwest of Rotterdam on the former island of Goeree. ME II, 535. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This first letter (I) is very similar to the previous letter to Purmerend (Document 72), but the Dutch here is slightly different and changes the meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See note in Document 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For Waldensian refugees temporarily in Switzerland see Albert de Lange and Gerhard Schwinge, eds., Pieter Valkenier and das Schicksal der Waldenser um 1700 (Heidelberg:Verlag Regionalkultur, 2004), reviewed by Arjan van Dijk in Dutch Review of Church History (2005), pp. 541-543. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For Thesing(h) family, see DB 24(1998), p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)