

Why Missions to Holland?

The title of this article is taken from a pamphlet "Why Missionaries to Holland?" which is distributed by Baptist Mid-Missions.

Holland a mission field? "Yes," say Canadian and American fundamentalists. Holland has only formalistic churchianity but not Christianity. The Dutch have heard about Christ but only a few know the Christ. The Dutch are "living behind `The Stained Glass Curtain'." (1) Church life is kept up for tradition's sake. The religious spirit is strong. The people are proud of their churches, their schools, yet without Christ! The heart of the church is dead! The gospel is not being preached. Yet, the need for the living evangel is not realized. The gospel is resisted, for the church people are not aware that they are lost and dying without Christ. What are some of the causes for this spiritual deadness? Formalism and religious indoctrination, almost to a saturation point, are the root of the problem. As a result, only "a scattered few know what it is to be born again", (2) and there are only relatively speaking "a handful of places where true Christians meet regularly for fellowship, worship and teaching." (3) The Bible Christian Union says "Spiritually speaking, the Netherlands is actually a poor land because so few who call themselves Christians are born again or have the assurance of salvation. Eighty-five per cent of the people in Holland are unable to explain the way of salvation. One of the reasons for this is that most of the people lack real Scriptural understanding of the gospel of grace. Although there is a real respect for the Bible in Protestant families, studying the Scriptures is almost unknown. There is little Bible teaching in the churches and still less interest in it. Fundamentalism is frowned upon; and Barthianism is preached more and more. This religious climate promotes the growth of many false cults." (4) Thus, Holland is a needy foreign mission field, for the great majority doesn't know the way of salvation. A missionary to Holland, who spent thirty-three years there before emigrating to another country, and afterwards returned to bring the gospel, wrote "During those thirty-three years, no one introduced me to Jesus Christ or told me that He had died for me." (5) This same missionary also said "No one in the " so-called Christian world should have to wait thirty-three years to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... but how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" (6)

The fundamentalists see Holland as a country in deep spiritual need, to the point of being pagan. This spiritual challenge has been met in various ways. Missionaries have left their homes in the U.S.A. and Canada to bring their gospel. On May 21, 1954, Rev. and Mrs. Herbert Boyd of Baptist Mid-Missions set sail for Rotterdam, their mission field was to be Eindhoven. Of course they had to learn the Dutch language before the actual ministry could begin. At time of writing, (March, 1968) the church founded through the work of Rev. Boyd has twenty-two members, and ten to fifteen interested. The Bible Christian Union, which is an interdenominational faith mission, has also missionaries in Holland. Tracts and Scripture texts are being printed in Holland. Evangelistic literature is being translated from English into Dutch. Workers go from village to village, conducting open-air meetings, and witnessing from home to home Sunday school classes are being conducted in various parts of the City of Rotterdam. A tent is being used to

conduct evangelistic campaigns, especially in the southern provinces. Inter-Varsity and Navigators are doing evangelistic work among the students. The Bible Club Movement specializes in children's work. In one of Amsterdam's famous canals, you will find a house boat occupied by two lady missionaries who work mainly among the children of the inner city. Pentecostals, such as Rev. Oslorn, have found large and receptive audiences. They have no missionaries as such. However, the movement is growing rapidly and is a cause of concern for the Reformed church, for many converts are drawn from these circles.

Perhaps most readers from Dutch background find this foreign activity rather irritating. Why should all this money and effort be spent in a country which has been for so long a bulwark of orthodox Protestantism and is sending out their own missionaries? I agree there is no need for American or Canadian fundamentalist and sectarian imports. But, their efforts should not be shrugged off as the work of fanatics. They have gone to Holland to respond to what they believe to be a spiritual need. Have they gone because the Reformed faith in Holland has lost its fervour and warmth? Sectarianism and fundamentalism are reactionary movements. They react to the shortcomings in the church. The Baptist Mid-Missions, with its emphasis on chiliasm, calls upon the church to pay renewed attention to the coming of Jesus Christ and God's promises to Israel. The Pentecostal movement reacts to cold "intellectualism," and the Bible Club Movement and the like call for personal Bible study. Perhaps the Reformed faith has also failed to make clear what it stands for. Sometimes too much is taken for granted.

Baptist Mid-Missions says "And almost as numerous as the countless dikes of Holland are the cities and towns where additional missionary couples could go to live and work . . . are you hesitating to place your life in a city in Holland where God wants to raise up a testimony for His name?" (7) This is rather typical of the claims made by the promoters in the Netherlands. It shows that the religious situation is not fully grasped by them. There are very active Dutch fundamentalists. The Union of Baptists is small but vigorous. It even supports its own Seminary. The Maranatha movement (Zoeklicht) is well known by many Protestants. Johannes de Heer's name is still familiar with the older folks. Of course there are also other groups. Calvinistic Christians have also done their share in evangelistic work.

It is interesting that by American fundamentalists there is no mention made about the Christian radio broadcasts and the mass of good Christian literature. Of course, if you think of it, it is not so strange after all. Fundamentalism, in its narrow sense, has little appreciation for culture. The fundamentalist has a hyper-individualistic understanding of the gospel and a Biblicistic approach to the vital issues of life. The missionary goes abroad to snatch souls away from the world, like a man snatches a child from a burning house. Individuals, when saved, form voluntarily a group of their own. Thus it is no wonder that Calvinistic covenantal theology is so little understood and even less appreciated.

Missionaries in Holland? No! There are other fields, which are needier and more challenging, such as Quebec, India, and Africa.

Bibliography:

- (1) .Herbert Boyd. The Stain Glass Curtain.
- (2) Why Missionaries to Holland? pamphlet, Baptist Mid-Missions of Canada.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4)The Netherlands Today. Pamphlet, Bible Christian Union.
- (5) Evangelical Baptist, April, 1964, p. 7.
- (6) Ibid., p. 19.
- (7)Why Missionaries to Holland?

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