

EARLY REFORMED MISSIONS IN THE EAST INDIES

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In his monumental seven-volume work, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Kenneth Scott Latourette has rightly called the years from 1500 to 1800 "The Three Centuries of Advance."

Not only did Christianity during this period make a deeper impression on the citizenry, the culture and even the contours of the European continent, it also spread from this center to all parts of the world.

It accompanied Europeans on their wanderings and to their new settlements. The nations of European blood which arose in the Americas, in Africa, and in the South Seas were professedly Christian, and in several, including the most powerful of them, Christianity was as active as in any land in Europe. Some non-European peoples came over almost bodily to Christianity. In others large Christian groups arose. A profound influence was exerted on non-European cultures and upon peoples who remained non-Christian. Never had any religion spread so widely. Never had any religion so great an effect upon so large a proportion of mankind.¹

To this world-wide movement the Reformed churches in the Netherlands also made their contribution, negligible as it too often has been judged by those who had little more than passing acquaintance with their efforts.

Already soon after the Reformation began and continuing for years, apologists for the Roman Catholic church have urged that Protestantism neither was a true church nor possessed the true faith. How could this be otherwise, since while Jesuits and other orders spread their message among all the "heathen" within reach, missions among those who had left Rome were conspicuously absent? To be sure, for this lack of

¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939). Vol. 4: "Three Centuries of Advance, 1500-1800." 2.

mission activity several reasons were advanced. Spain and Portugal, fanatically loyal to the Roman faith, ruled the seas. Meanwhile evangelicals were zealously engaged in preaching and teaching countless numbers in Europe itself. Too long had the gospel been effectively submerged in a welter of religious rituals which bordered on superstition. How could such work be successfully prosecuted until the new churches were organized and strengthened in the face of violent opposition? Nor did these have at their disposal the well-organized and disciplined orders of monks and priests who could be sent out with ecclesiastical commission and funds.²

What did becloud the issue for early Protestants was an uncertainty among its leaders as to the proper interpretation of the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Not until Adrianus Saravia (1531-1613),³ the earliest advocate of worldwide evangelization among the Reformed, wrote his *De diversis gradibus ministrorum*, was this matter cleared up for many.

He argued that the command to preach the Gospel to all peoples is obligatory upon the church since the Apostles were taken up to heaven, and that for this purpose the apostolic office is needful.⁴

The basis for this conviction he found in Matthew 28; the power and authority for it in the pledge of Christ's abiding presence in the church; the urgency in the fact that the apostles left this work incomplete; the incentive in the precious fruits which had been harvested in the past when the church through its servants had won tribes and nations for the faith.

²A.M. Brouwer, "Het Onstaan der Protestantsche Zending," in *De Zending in Oost en West: Verleden en Heden*, 2 vol., H.D.J. Boissevain, ed. ('s Gravenhage: Alg. Boekhandel von Inw. en Uit. Zending, 1934), 19-24. Here the 1915 criticism of R.C. Maurus Galm on early Protestant neglect of missions is summarized and answered. In the absence of primary and many secondary sources I have depended for many details, including statistics, on the first volume, hereafter listed as *Zending*.

³Cf. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950) X:206. Also, G. Kawerau, "Adrianus Saravia und seine Gedanken über Mission," in *Allgemeine Missions Zeitung* (1899), 333-343. From 1582 to 1587 Saravia taught theology at Leiden. Leaving for England he became an ardent proponent of episcopal polity, for which reason he fell out of favor with the Reformed and exerted little or no direct influence on their mission enterprise.

⁴*Schaff-Herzog*, X:206.

Also early Protestant missiologists, while giving a passing nod to what the Reformed churches in the Netherlands tried to do, provided no in-depth study of that work in its many ramifications. Too often the era of Protestant missions was dated from the beginnings of the Danish-Halle mission in the early 1700s or, among the English-speaking, with the life and labors of William Carey and the organization of missionary societies throughout the Protestant world. Even Reformed leaders and people know far too little of the story which belongs to their spiritual heritage.

All this should not come as too much of a surprise.

The records of this enterprise, which spanned a period of two centuries, repose almost exclusively in Dutch archives. And most of the secondary sources have been penned in the Dutch language with which many a scholar interested in missions finds himself too unfamiliar.

To redress what we think a lamentable omission this article has been prepared. And although the Dutch through their agencies and representatives brought Christianity in its Reformed form to the Orient all the way from Persia (Iran)⁵ to Japan, with marked success for a brief season on Formosa (Taiwan)⁶ and with more lasting fruits on the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)⁷, our attention will be directed to what was done in the East Indies where the Dutch exercised their greatest influence and power.

Here is no attempt to glamorize that work. Far too inescapably painful and patent are its many failings. But in spite of human weaknesses, mistakes and palpable sins, the gospel did register by God's grace its triumphs, so that, when new opportunities arose after the Napoleonic era for Reformed missionaries, they discovered that foundations had been laid on which they could now build more strongly and solidly.

⁵Geographical names are given throughout as in use during these centuries, with modern names in parentheses.

⁶Latourette, III: 359-360. Although the Dutch mission lasted barely a generation (1624-1662), it deserves a far more detailed rehearsal. Bibliography is given in Latourette, III: 360, note 124.

⁷Latourette, III: 285-292, 289-291. Numerically its successes seem astounding: 65,000 in 1663 (without doubt nearly all ex-R.C. converts); 424,392 in 1722; still 342,000 in 1801. A few Reformed congregations still exist in and around Colombo despite the emigration of large numbers of members after independence.

Lying like a necklace of sparkling jewels the islands long known as the East Indies (Indonesia, since 1945) stretch for more than 3000 miles across tropic seas. They are stepping-stones between the continents of Asia and Australia.

Of the more than 13,000 only some 6,000 have any inhabitants. These are chiefly of the Malay-Polynesian type, divided into hundreds of tribal groups, each with their own customs and speaking some 250 languages and dialects. All who arrived in successive waves came from the Asian mainland, a fact which seems to be indisputable because of genetic, linguistic and cultural affinities with those who live on the Malay peninsula.⁸

When the first peoples came is lost in the mists of time. But between four and five thousand years ago newcomers began to settle here, driven likely in search of food and security. Apart from tribes living in the swamps or mountains of New Guinea (Irian Jaya), all the peoples of the islands demonstrate marked physical similarities.

Few areas in the world are richer in either natural resources or products. The surrounding seas, often dangerous and stormy in the monsoon seasons, united as well as divided the islands from each other. At an early age those living along the coasts showed great skill in seafaring and trading. They traveled with their cargos of spices and sandalwood, of gold and silver and other precious commodities as far as India and China. While speaking many languages and dialects, the people soon adopted Malay as their *lingua franca*. Over a period of centuries this traffic introduced a world of new ideas into the islands.

At no time did the political units which sprang up correspond with the islands. Rather, these at times comprised parts of two or more coasts which faced each other across the waters. Those living in the interior, especially in more mountainous areas, were fewer in number and continued longer in comparative isolation. Within recent memory some like the Dyaks on Borneo (Kalimantan) continued to practice cannibalism. But where civilization advanced, petty rulers sprang up to consolidate their power, producing a wave of hostilities and wars which continued for centuries.

⁸Cf. on early history of the East Indies (Indonesia) Ailsa Zainu-'ddin, *A Short History of Indonesia* (New York-Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), Vol. 2, ch. 3-5, "Indonesia before the Eighteenth Century," 27-98.

Soon after the inception of the Christian era, Hindu and Buddhist influences began to prevail especially in the coastal regions. As these religions were adopted by the nobility and the merchants, not infrequently in the interests of trade, they spread among the masses but without eradicating animistic beliefs and practices deeply imbedded in the soul of the peoples.⁹ What did change was the development of local rulers into kings with ambitions of empire. One of the earliest was the great Srivijaya empire, centering in southern Sumatra and controlling the Malay peninsula and much of Java. Its amazing monument is the temple (stupa) at Borobudur enshrining relics of Gautama. When it declined about 1275, the last of the Hindu empires, the Madjapahit, arose in central Java to endure for some two centuries. But while claiming hegemony over much of the archipelago, its control was largely nominal. By this time profound changes began to affect the islands and its inhabitants with the gradual but inexorable spread of Islam.

Contact by way of traders from the west had begun earlier, possibly not long after Islam had overwhelmed much of the Levant. By the late 1200s this took deeper root, beginning at the tip of Sumatra and spreading from west to east. When the rulers of the coastal cities embraced the new faith, it soon filtered down to all classes. Here was a simple and straight-forward faith without a paid priesthood or clergy. Aside from certain basic but quite superficial demands in practice it left untouched the soul of the people.

Animism with its fear of the spirits, its use of amulets and divination and many customs concerning birth and death, planting and harvesting, was left intact. Even at this late date, after the rise of nationalism and the revival of Islam, it is estimated that but twenty-five percent of the people are ardent Muslims. Yet in nearly every village, town and city, mosques with their soaring minarets call attention to its influence. And every year 50,000 or more make their pilgrimage to Mecca. By the time the Europeans came after 1500, Islam had achieved such a position of strength that it has ever since constituted the most formidable barrier to the advancement of the Christian faith.

What lured newcomers to these islands was the spice trade. This centered almost exclusively in the Moluccas (Maluku), a congeries of

⁹Volumes on "Animism" abound, also because it assumes so many forms in so many parts of the world even today. For a brief but helpful introduction, cf. Gordon Hedderley Smith, *The Missionary and the Primitive Man*, (Chicago: Van Kampen Press, 1947).

larger and smaller islands lying to the east of Celebes (Sulawesi). For about a century Sumatra, Borneo and even Java were left almost untouched and unchanged by the European influx.

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The first of the European nations to arrive in the Spice Islands were the Portuguese. They brought with them their Roman Catholic faith.

A brief rehearsal of their story helps to set the stage for the struggles and successes of the mission endeavors of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands.¹⁰

The coming of the Europeans was fired by their insatiable desire for such spices as pepper and nutmeg, cloves and mace which at the time flourished only in the East Indies. Ever since the days of the Crusades these had served to relieve the monotony of many a daily diet. Trade soon flourished between Italian trading ports and Levantine towns which obtained these and many other luxury items from overland Arab traders. But as the Ottoman Turks pressed their conquests to the west and north, prices soared and commerce languished. Other paths to the Orient would have to be found.

With its face to the ocean Portugal found itself in a most favorable position. For decades it had engaged in exploring the African coasts. After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, these efforts were redoubled. By 1484 Diego Kam with his ship had sailed as far as the Congo. Twelve years later Bartholomew Diaz reached the southern tip of Africa. What he called Storm Cape was soon renamed by his monarch, John II, the Cape of Good Hope. Now the way was open. In 1498 Vasco de Gama landed at Goa on India's west coast. Six years earlier Columbus, sailing under the flag of Spain, discovered the Americas.

Soon jealousy, inflamed by an unquenchable passion for new commercial wealth, rose to fever pitch between Spain and Portugal. To prevent any outbreak of hostilities between the two, Alexander VI issued the papal bull which divided the world between them. Spain was awarded the right to claim sovereignty over all lands beyond a line drawn one hundred miles west of the Azores; Portugal was granted the same rights over all lands lying to the east. This Treaty of Tordesillas

¹⁰Cf. A.M. Brouwer, "De R.K. Missie onder het Portugesch Bestuur" in *Zending*, 9-19; also Latourette, III: 300-302.

(1494) required that in every conquered country the inhabitants were to be won for the Roman faith.

Immediately the Portuguese took advantage of their discoveries. By 1506 Goa had become the seat of Portuguese power for all lands from India to Japan, including the East Indies. At that time that city with its several churches and schools became the seat of ecclesiastical authority. By 1511 Alfonso d' Albuquerque had conquered the strategic town of Malacca and made it an entrepot for goods of all kinds which hopefully would flow into Portuguese coffers from China, Japan and the islands of the sea. One year later ships filled with soldiers sailed into and took control of Banda, then of Amboina (Ambon) and thereafter of Ternate. Here the Sultan, in exchange for military help against his enemies on Tidore, Djilolo and Batjan, expressed his willingness to receive Christian baptism. Warehouses and forts, manned by Portuguese soldiers with the consent of local rulers, were speedily built. Contracts supposedly to be of benefit to all parties were drawn up, signed and even celebrated with much festivity. In this way many of the smaller islands came under tenuous control of the foreigners. Larger islands to the west, however, could not be penetrated due to the bitter resentment of the Javanese who saw their lucrative trade in spices sharply diminished.

In accord with the treaty drawn up in 1494 every Portuguese ship carried with it one or more priests. But beginning missionary work was delayed for another ten years. The story of these endeavors is largely one of deep tragedy, far too often occasioned by the cruelty and treachery of the Portuguese commanders.

The first attempt to Christianize the people was made on Ternate in 1522. Here a company of Franciscan monks arrived with Antonio de Britto. Within weeks several hundred were converted and baptized. But when some of the monks engaged in the spice trade on their own, they were summarily expelled.

Twelve years later a second attempt was made, now on Halmahera. Here, too, the local Sultan sought military help against Muslim pressures. After many were baptized, two priests settled down to continue the work. But again hostilities broke out, and the work had to be abandoned. At this time those Christians who refused to join the resistance were killed as was one of the monks, Simon Vaz.

A new era dawned for Roman missions with the coming of Francis Xavier (Francisco de Jassu y Xavier) in 1546. As one of the first disciples of Ignatius Loyola, he had been ordained in 1537 and sent out three years later as "Apostle to the Orient." While waiting for passage

to the Spice Islands, he learned the creed and certain prayers in the Malay language.

Upon his arrival in Amboina he found seven nominally Christian villages, but with the people for the most part still unbaptized. Every day, armed with a bell, he would go through the village where he had lodged, teaching the people to recite the creed, say the prayers and make the sign of the cross. Anyone who could do this to his satisfaction was thereupon baptized. For more than a year he taught and administered the sacrament in this manner in all the islands somewhat under Portuguese control. Others took up the work after he left to plant the cross and erect simple churches everywhere. But never was the supply of clergy adequate to meet the need. In many places the people saw a priest only once or twice a year. Thus, while for twenty years the number of converts swelled, complaints were uttered with monotonous regularity in reports sent to Goa about the abysmal ignorance of the people. Seldom did the life-style of the baptized rise above that of the pagans around them.

By 1570 the influence of the Portuguese and with it that of the missionaries began to decline rapidly. One rebellion after another broke out. Even the assistance given by Spanish forces from the neighboring Philippines did not avail. Everywhere Islam was on the march. Large numbers of those who had been baptized apostatized. In 1593 Father Antonio Marta, superintendent of the work, urged in his report to Goa the discontinuance of the mission.

By the time the Dutch arrived little remained of any strong Christian influence. While the missionaries labored faithfully, the commanders with the soldiers and merchants had sealed the destruction of Portuguese power in the islands.

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Commerce from which flowed the lifeblood of Dutch cities near the sea drove also the Dutch to find their way to the Spice Islands.

For some centuries their ships had plied with success the waters which surrounded Europe. But spices could be obtained only from the Portuguese. Each year Dutch ships in large numbers docked in Lisbon bringing fish, cloth and other commodities in exchange for the precious products of the Far East. All this changed radically when Philip II, king of Spain, began his rule also over Portugal. At the time Spain was engaged in fierce conflict with the Hollanders fighting for their political and religious freedoms. Now their ships sailing into Lisbon's harbor

were confiscated. By 1585 pressure mounted for them to find their own way to the islands.

Not until 1592, however, could they obtain trustworthy sea charts.

Credit for this is given to that unusual Amsterdam pastor, Petrus Plancius (1552-1622).¹¹ Born in the southern Netherlands near Ypres, he had at his disposal sufficient funds to study for some years in Germany and England. There he directed his attention not only to theology but also to geography, mathematics and astronomy. After serving a few pastorates in his homeland, he was compelled to flee in 1585 when Brussels fell to the Spanish foe. Soon the Amsterdam consistory and congregation eagerly sought his services. Knowing how invaluable was the correct use of the charts, Plancius repeatedly instructed captains and sailors.

By 1595 the first Dutch expedition sailed for the East Indies under Cornelius Houtman. So successful was this venture that many of the investors, including Plancius, found themselves well on the way to wealth. When three years later another expedition prepared to leave, he was in a position to invest nearly 100,000 florins. This gave him freedom to persuade the merchants and captains to provide spiritual care for those who would be away from home for two years or more.

The captains thereupon appealed to the city council of Amsterdam to appoint three candidates for the gospel ministry. Costs were to be assumed by the city. When three were appointed, Plancius urged the captains to seek consistorial approval so that it could use its influence to persuade the appointees to sail with the fleet. When these proved unwilling, the captains apart from consistorial involvement engaged two *ziekentroosters* ("comforters of the sick").

Soon, however, Classis Amsterdam concerned itself with these matters. On the first venture, Philippus Pieterszoon of Delft, without ecclesiastical sanction, had baptized a native on Mauritius. For this the captains were chided. At the same time Classis instituted a new "office," that of *vermaner* ("exhorter").¹² He was allowed to

¹¹Cf. *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1925), IV:580. Also W. Geesink, *Calvinisten in Holland* (Rotterdam: n.p., 1887), 52-114.

¹²In practice the "vermaner" differed little from the "ziekentrooster." Decision quoted in *Zending*, 26, from E.C. Th. van Boetzelaer van Dubbeldam, *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de Zending in de dagen der O.I. Compagnie* (Utrecht, 1906), 22f.

"dat het absoluut noodig was, dat een zoo groote menigte van Christenen niet zonder onderricht zouden zijn op hun reis, dat het op dit moment absoluut niet mogelijk was, iemand te vinden, die als predickant kon gaan, dat men hoopte, dat hij de gelegenheid

administer baptism but not the Lord's Supper. Significant are the grounds which that body gave for its decision:

that it was absolutely necessary that such a large company of Christians should not be without instruction on their journey; that at this time it was absolutely impossible to find a minister who was willing to go; that it is to be hoped that he (i.e., the exhorter) might also find opportunity to instruct the people there sitting in darkness in the true Christian religion.¹³

That decision of November 21, 1599, as Brouwer aptly comments, constitutes the birth of Reformed missions in the East Indies.

Within a year Classis was again approached. This time a request came which urged that it assume responsibility for searching out suitable candidates for spiritual work among not only the Europeans but also the inhabitants of the islands so that, having arrived there in the East Indies by God's grace, they might provide the pagan inhabitants with the preaching of God's Word and the use of the holy sacraments.¹⁴

The request was forwarded to the Synod of North Holland. It declared this to be an ecclesiastical responsibility. Anyone who felt led to sail with the fleet as exhorter was to apply to one of the captains and the Company. If his services were desired and deemed necessary, then the consistory was charged to conduct the proper examination of doctrine and life. Upon its approval he would be sent with all the proper ecclesiastical credentials.

So successful were the first expeditions that soon no less than ten competing companies sprang up in the Netherlands. The ships with their sailors not only engaged in conflict with the Portuguese; they often fought fiercely against each other. To this an end had to be made. Under the guidance of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt these merged with approval of the States-General on March 20, 1602, to constitute the United Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*; V.O.I.C.). Its two-fold purpose was to regulate and promote the

*mocht verkrijgen om de menschen aldaar in duisternis zittende in de ware Christelijke religie te onderrichten.**

¹³Decision quoted in *Zending*, 26. (from C.W. Th. van Boetzelaar van Dubbeldam, *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de Zending in de dagen der O. I. Compagnie* [Utrecht, 1906], 22f).

¹⁴In *Zending* I: 26.

trade already flourishing and to assist in prosecuting on land and sea the war for Dutch independence.

With details of its organization we need not concern ourselves. Yet mention of its rights are essential because of the Company's deep involvement in the life and work of Reformed pastors and missionaries who labored in the East Indies.

By decision of the States-General, the Company became for all practical purposes a quasi-independent state. All lands east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan, in so far as the Company could establish itself, were under its jurisdiction. It alone could appoint officials and agents, erect forts, raise troops, make contracts with native rulers, decide on war and peace, even mint its own currency. Non-Company ships sailing in those waters might legitimately be seized. Those desiring to go to the Indies were completely dependent on the Company's permission. During all the years this strict control worked to the distress and disadvantage of the Reformed mission enterprise.

Early the Dutch occupied Bantam. It secured a foothold on Java by 1610 and built Batavia to serve as headquarters on the ruins of Jacatra in 1619. For the sake of efficiency the Company appointed a Governor-General to be assisted by a Council for the Indies consisting of representatives of the major trading posts. Always its financial interests were paramount, even when served by governors like Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1614-1623, 1627-1629),¹⁵ who were sympathetic to the spread of the gospel. Already the first of these officials, Pieter Both (1609-1614), was assigned supervision of every preacher and schoolmaster required to serve both the growing European community and the non-Christians "so that the name of Christ may be proclaimed and the service of the Company properly advanced."

As the wealth of the Company and its stockholders increased, it comes as no surprise that interest in the spread of the gospel declined sharply. By 1669 the Company owned 150 trading ships and 40 ships of war with 10,000 soldiers. That year it also paid a handsome dividend of no less than 40%!

¹⁵Dutch historians of the 19th century, while recognizing Coen as the "founder of the Dutch mercantile empire in the East Indies," have not infrequently pilloried him as driven by personal cruelty and vindictiveness. For a far more balanced evaluation, cf. C. Gerritson, *Coen's Eereherstel* (Amsterdam: Van Kampen & Zoon, 1944).

In sketchy fashion we now rehearse the course of Reformed missions during this period. Basic to an understanding of its inherent weakness is the fact that all those sent out to the islands were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the European soldiers, merchants and families as well as for the Christianization of the native population. Soon it should have been clear that this was an impossible assignment. Hardly was there sufficient time to learn the Malay language, much less the indigenous languages and dialects.¹⁶ Nor were the ministers and schoolteachers, committed as many of them were to the spread of the gospel, able under such conditions to understand the people with their age-old customs and practices. That at times a rich harvest was reaped occurred in spite of the painful disadvantages under which they worked.

One of the first islands to fall under Dutch control was Amboina in 1605.

Immediately the task of teaching was assigned to a German, Johannes Stollenbecker, who had come as a comforter of the sick. For the Ambonese he did nothing. The first efforts to reach out to the islanders were made by Johannes Wogma. For a while he had studied medicine and then shipped out as a common soldier to the East Indies. His marriage to the daughter of a local ruler opened doors which otherwise would have remained closed. Faithfully he taught the children writing and arithmetic as well as the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.¹⁷

The first ordained minister to arrive in the East Indies was Mattheus van den Broek, ordained by Classis Walcheren in 1609. Three years later he arrived in Amboina. He also showed no concern for the people, refusing even to read materials translated by Governor Houtman into Malay for the children. Better days for the work dawned with the coming of Caspar Wiltens (1584-1619) in 1614. He preached

¹⁶Although the Reformation insisted on bringing the gospel always in the vernacular, the problems with this in the East Indies were quite insurmountable. On Celebes among the Minahasa there were four languages and eight dialects; on much smaller Ceram no less the sixteen, often with radically different intonations. Small wonder that Malay was adopted by the translators hoping to reach as many people as possible.

¹⁷The use of these three as fundamental to introducing and understanding of the gospel deserves more appreciation and approbation than it has usually received. Mere recital, of course, would be of little spiritual benefit. But with catechetical manuals prepared for the islanders at an early date, it is clear that Reformed teachers and preachers explained what was to be learned. These three constitute the chief substance of all early Reformation catechisms, culminating for the Dutch Reformed in the *Heidelberg Catechism* in which these three constitute no less than 35 of the 52 Lord's Days!

in the Malay language which he had learned while ministering on Batjan. Several of his sermons were preserved to be used for many years after he died early in 1619.

Far better known for his person and work was the zealous Sebastian Dankaerts. In 1618 he came to Amboina to assist Wiltens who was already suffering from a serious illness. Although he knew and used the Malay language imperfectly, he preached every Lord's day, instructed the children and youth, and even established a training school for Amboinese who could serve as catechists and teachers. By 1622 some 800 were enrolled in the elementary schools on that island. In 1621 he wrote his *Historisch en grondick verhael van den stand des Christendoms int quartier van Ambonia*. While none too flattering of the Ambonese, he had far less good to say of the Europeans whose lives were such a poor witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He expected better results among the Chinese. Education he saw as one of the most fruitful adjuncts to winning people for the Lord. Thus he prevailed on Coen to provide a measure of rice each day to those poor children who attended school faithfully. Another of his contributions to the work was undertaken when he returned for a season to the Netherlands. There he secured an officially endorsed Church Order for the congregations in process of organization.

The work on some of the other islands was undertaken with even greater difficulties. Often it was hard to win those who had received Roman Catholic baptism with no change in life-style to the Reformed faith. And always the encroachments of Islam through the witness of native traders from Java threatened the small Christian groups.

The former proved true after the Dutch captured Timor from the Portuguese in 1613. Two ordained missionaries were stationed there, one of them dying in 1616 and the other showing himself to be as unsuitable for the work there as he had been in Ambonia earlier. When the Portuguese returned a few years later with Dominican monks, nearly all the Christians returned to the Roman fold.

By 1607 the Company gained a foothold on Ternate. But the contract drawn up with the Sultan undermined any attempt to evangelize. If a Ternatese tried to embrace Christianity, he was to be delivered to the local authorities for punishment.

When the Company established itself on Java, first on Bantam and later at Batavia, the work for a time remained in the hands of the comforters of the sick. The first resident clergyman was Adriaan

Jacobszoon Hulsebos sent out by the consistory of Amsterdam.¹⁸ Each year he wrote lengthy reports on spiritual conditions in the East Indies to inform the churches back home. With Dankaerts he drew up a provisional Church Order. It was Hulsebos who forwarded questions on the sacraments with which the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) concerned itself. Under his leadership the Reformed church was organized at Batavia in 1621, allowing for the regular administration of the Lord's Supper. Scheduled to return to the Netherlands, he was assigned to visit missions on the outer islands. En route he lost his life when his ship went down.

Two years later one of the greatest of all the early Reformed missionaries, Justus Heurnius (1587-1652), arrived to take up the work in Batavia.¹⁹ His father was professor in medicine at the famous Leiden University. The son also became a physician. But so heavily did the call to the mission field weigh on his heart that he enrolled at the university of Groningen in the school of theology. After completing these studies, he still felt unprepared for the field and assumed a pastorate for three and a half years at Kalslagen. During this period he wrote his *De legatione evangelica ad Indos capessenda admonitio*.²⁰ With much passion he argued that the gospel should be brought in the language of the people themselves; that schools should be established everywhere; that a native leadership should be trained to make the work successful; that the gospel must be brought as soon as possible throughout the islands, lest either Islam or Roman Catholicism would lead the pagans farther astray.

After the departure of Hulsebos the church in Batavia had deteriorated badly. Now Heurnius, assisted by Dankaerts and two other pastors, engaged in reform. A consistory was reinstated. He stimulated the spread of the gospel among the Chinese by preparing a dictionary in that language as well as translating the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, together with a brief summary of the Christian faith into Chinese. Also a new and improved Church Order was introduced. But with the coming of another Governor-General, ready to subject consistory and

¹⁸Regrettably I have been unable to trace any biography of Hulsebos. Even *Christelijke Encyclopedia* has no entry in its main volumes or supplement.

¹⁹Cf. J.R. Callenbach, *Justus Heurnius* (1897). His 1618 appeal is entitled *De legatione Evangelica ad Indos capessenda admonitio*. The passion with which he penned this work shines through in part of the introduction quoted by J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2.

²⁰Heurnius' appeal was published at Leiden by Elzevier.

congregation entirely to Company control, the difficulties multiplied. Soon Heurnius was deposed and imprisoned for raising objections to such interference into the rights of the church. Although released after several weeks, he lost the battle for the freedom of Christ's church on the islands. From then on nearly every decision of the consistory, including the election of elders, was subject to Company approval. Heurnius was able to give several years of fruitful labor in the Spice Islands until poisoned by the Muslims in 1635.

In spite of these and other difficulties the work continued to advance. But always the number of preachers and teachers remained too small to meet the almost endless opportunities. Not a few died because of the inhospitable climate and lack of medical help. Some suffered martyrdom when natives rebelled against the cruel practices of the Company's agents. Always the threat of Islam, increasingly strong on Java, loomed on the horizon. But the work went on.

In spite of Company atrocities, especially on Ceram and Buru, Christian congregations and schools were organized. Although seldom visited by an ordained clergyman, the number of baptized on Ceram is listed at 1132 in 1708. Somewhat more successful was the work on the Banda islands. These enjoyed regular pastors. Alien to us was the way the Company, in its own interests, imposed regulations on the people of Batjan for church and school. Fines were levied against those who had not entered into a recognized marriage as well as those who did not attend church on the Lord's day. School attendance was rigidly enforced. Children who attended faithfully received four pounds of rice per week. Any Christian who apostatized to Islam was fined 300 reals, while those forsaking Islam for Christianity were rewarded with 12 reals.²¹

Always the work on Ternate, once the Portuguese stronghold and among the first to fall to the Dutch, was attended by unusual disappointments. Here Islam had won major gains. Far worse were the moral lapses which stained the lives of Company officials and soldiers. When the zealous Candidius²² protested against this, he was within six months sent back to Batavia under false charges by the local governor.

Far more fruitful were the efforts on the north coast of Celebes and the neighboring Sanghi and Talaud islands. Here large congregations

²¹*Reals* were common currency in the Spice Islands from the time of Portuguese and in use for years under the Dutch.

²²*Zending*, 61-62. Candidius' life and labors deserve a definitive treatment, possible when research in archives and a few published works is carried out in the Netherlands.

and schools were established. Much of the work, because of a paucity of Dutch clergy, was soon placed in the hands of native catechists. But Cornelius de Leeuw deserves special mention. He preached not only in Malay but also in the local tongue in which he wrote a brief but useful summary of the Christian faith in the form of questions and answers. By 1700 the number of Christians in those areas was estimated at between 25,000 and 26,000.

Until that year Reformed missions on the islands seemed to flourish. Most of the missionaries saw the need of laying stronger and more solid foundations for Christianity than had been done by Roman Catholic priests. Out of this determination sprang the erection of schools as well as a growing number of printed materials in Malay and several local dialects.

By the end of its first century the Reformed missions in the East Indies had registered some amazing gains.

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Throughout this period schools played a prominent role in the spread of the gospel. Only in this manner, so was it argued, could people learn to read and remember basic teachings of the faith. On a few islands these schools were taken over from earlier Roman Catholic efforts and reorganized; on many others they were established for the first time. Much of the supervision was left to the local missionary-pastors. Soon natives were trained to serve as teachers and catechists. Far too few teachers showed any willingness to leave their Dutch homeland.²³ Occasionally the Company engaged the services of soldiers who had received some education at home. But these were usually unfit for this service.

The beginning of training natives for this work was made by Dankaerts on Ambon, followed soon afterwards by Heurnius on the Oeliassers. These efforts were widely approved in the Netherlands. Classis Delft urged this as early as 1614 and Heurnius in his *Appeal* strongly argued for the same. But unaccustomed as the islanders were to a formal pattern of education, they neglected to send their children.

²³Why consistently so few teachers and pastors willing to leave the homeland? The question is intriguing in the light of what has been widely regarded as the "adventurous and courageous character" of the Dutch. Sharply in contrast with the English, their efforts at colonization were scanty. Possibly the rising standard of living and the social position accorded them, in the Netherlands accounts for the lack of interest among them, as much as indifference to the work.

Hence the Company applied stringent rules to make attendance compulsory. The policy of providing those who came faithfully with an allotment of rice gave rise to the name "rice Christians."²⁴

As early as 1624 regulations were adopted in Batavia for "the Office of Schoolmasters."

He shall instruct the youth in reading, writing and arithmetic, in singing of the Psalms, in piety and sound morals, and as soon as possible in basic teachings of the Christian religion with the common prayers.²⁵

In the regulations of 1684 mention is made specifically of the *Compendium* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. On Ambon, according to Valentijn, every day the teachers also read a sermon.

Most of the educational materials had been prepared in the Malay language used far to the west of the Spice Islands and understood therefore only with great difficulty. Although at times instruction in the Dutch language was prescribed, for the benefit of the Company always looking for people who could serve them well, this was never carried out.

Urgently needed for church and school were translations. Governor Houtman had already undertaken this for Ambon, including the *Compendium* and a few appropriate ecclesiastical Forms. Again these were in the Malay used in Atjeh. Albertus C. Ruijll, a merchant, made himself useful in translating the *Compendium* with forms for baptism and marriage in the common dialect. At this Houtman took umbrage and appealed through the Company to the consistory of Amsterdam which refused to make a judgment. Before 1616 he also translated the *Heidelberg Catechism* and several sermons, which were published at Enkhuizen. The sermons of Wiltens in Malay were reprinted in 1648 together with fifty Psalms translated by J. van Hazel. Forty sermons by Caron were published in 1678 together with a little book entitled *The*

²⁴This term was widely applied from India to China and Japan to those ready to embrace Christianity for the sake of worldly advantages: food, clothing, medicines and education. It is not known when and by whom the term was first used.

²⁵*Zending*, 46.

Way of Heaven.²⁶ Repeatedly simple catechetical manuals were prepared for young and old.

Far more important for laying the solid foundations in the Christian faith was the translation of Holy Scripture.

This work occupied several missionaries over a long period of time, not without painful difficulties and disagreements.

As early as 1629 Ruijll had translated some Scripture portions. *Mark* appeared in Malay in 1638 with *Luke* and *John* translated by van Hazel (revisions by Heurnius) in 1646. Five years later the four Gospels with *Acts* became available. *Genesis* was published in 1662, the entire New Testament by 1669.

But these earliest efforts left something to be desired. Soon tension broke out between two competent individuals whose views of what was necessary differed sharply. Melchior Leydecker, preacher in Batavia from 1678 to 1701 with a doctorate in both theology and medicine, showed exceptional competence in the Malay language for which he prepared a dictionary. On his own initiative he began a Bible translation in the purest form of Malay. Meanwhile Francois Valentijn, serving Amboina from 1686 to 1694 and again from 1705 to 1713, engaged in the same work. He employed the Moluccan-Malay of the Spice Islands. Although the consistory of Batavia defended the work of Leydecker, Valentijn on furlough in the Netherlands persuaded the combined committee on missions for North and South Holland of the superior value of his translation. But to no avail. The Company, urged by Batavia's consistory, published the work of Leydecker to the disadvantage of the missionary churches and schools.

Of interest here is the work undertaken in the Portuguese tongue. With the departure of Roman Catholic missionaries, a mixed race of Portuguese and islanders remained behind. At times this group was so large that it constituted in Batavia a majority of the inhabitants. The number of these "black Portugese" increased when slaves were shipped from India and Flores.

Already by 1633 a Portuguese-speaking congregation was organized in Batavia. In 1713 it numbered 4,000 members with 200 making public profession of faith every year. Three ministers served the congregation until a fourth was added in 1749. By 1670 Ferreira d'Almeida, a former

²⁶*Zending*, 47. In Dutch the title is *De weg des Hemels*. A careful study of this book and especially of sermons in the Malay language would be of inestimable value in ascertaining how well the islanders were being taught the gospel during this long period.

Roman Catholic priest who had embraced the Reformed faith, translated the Bible into the Portuguese understood in the East Indies. Only after great difficulties was the New Testament printed in 1693 and the Old Testament not until 1745.

Despite vicissitudes schools throughout the East Indies continued to grow.

Nowhere was this more in evidence than on Amboina with its adjacent islands of Saparoea and Haroekoe where extreme cruelties were inflicted at times by Company commanders. Statistics for 1700 mention 69 congregations with 52 church buildings and 54 schools. The number of Christians is listed at 17,544 with 5,190 children enrolled in the schools. Always the Ambonese, enslaved and impoverished as they were, remained among most faithful church-goers in the East Indies.

On the Banda islands the situation was even more precarious. For secretly aiding the English who tried to evict the Dutch, the islanders were conquered by Coen. Hundreds were slaughtered and the rest transported but Heurnius could write less than seven years later, "In Banda the congregation of God is in a desirable condition." By 1754, when the long period of decline had set in, on Banda there were still 1570 Christians. Of schools and school-children no statistics seem to be available.

Islands to the southeast and southwest of Amboina were faithfully served by many pastors and schoolmasters, although their number was never sufficient to meet the need. Far to the north were Minahasa and the Sanghi and Talaud islands. By 1700 Christians totalled more than 25,000 with many flourishing schools as well as congregations. Here, especially, foundations were laid on which missionaries arriving after 1815 could build. Whatever knowledge of Christianity remained there during the years without Dutch missionaries, was due to the faithfulness of schoolmasters who also conducted worship on the Lord's day.

Although after Coen's departure in 1630 the Company exercised greater control over the consistory and church of Batavia, education remained under its supervision. Here as early as 1636 we find three schools, including one for children of slaves of the Company.

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Although for two centuries missions was under firm Company control, the Reformed churches at home, as far as regulations permitted, insisted on their right to ordain and send out missionaries with Christ's authorization. This involved an ongoing and often painful struggle for ecclesiastical freedom with Company officials, since the

churches were convinced those paying the costs could also call the shots. Usually the most zealous missionaries, like Heurnius and Candidius, suffered at the hands of Governors-General and fort commanders. Against such tyranny the Dutch churches could do little. News of irresponsible and illegal actions reached the homeland late, so that little more than fruitless protests could be forwarded.

As best they could, however, consistories and classes did try to regulate ecclesiastical affairs for the East Indies.

Plancius deserves recognition as the father of early Reformed missions. Because of his prestige as Amsterdam's leading pastor as well as his influence with Company officials, he was able to champion the right of the church to direct and supervise the spread of the gospel on the fields. This he did with vigor until his death in 1622.

Soon problems began to multiply as the work on the islands grew. These were forwarded to those consistories and classes where the East India Company had its home offices. Thus only ecclesiastical assemblies in North Holland, South Holland and Zeeland could act on mission matters. Protests raised occasionally by other particular synods proved fruitless except for receiving assurance that reports on the work would be forwarded to them. Only at the National Synod of Dordt (1618-19) were delegates from those churches given opportunity to present their official "advices" on missions.

Shortly all the issues arising on the field were settled by the consistory of Amsterdam, by that time the leading commercial center in the country. Only when it felt this necessary did it seek synodical advice and decision. That comparatively little on missions appears in the records of particular synods throughout this period springs from the Church Order regulation that only such matters which could not be satisfactorily settled in minor assemblies were to be forwarded for ecclesiastical adjudication to the one next in order,²⁷ unless the welfare of all the churches was directly involved.

With what zeal and patience the Amsterdam consistory dealt with mission activities becomes clear from its Minutes. From 1602 through

²⁷Cf. Biesterveld and Kuyper, *Kerkelijk Handboekje* (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1905), 199; Article XXVIII, Church Order of the National Synod held in The Hague in 1586: "In meerdere verghaderinghe sal men niet handelen dan het gene in mindere niet en heeft kunnen afghehandelt worden, ofte dat tot de kerken der meerdere vergha(de)ringhe int ghemeene behoort."

1618 we find no less than 170 such entries.²⁸ Whatever decisions were reached the consistory communicated as soon as possible through the Company to the islands. Without such strong ties the work there would, without doubt, have lost much of its Reformed stamp.

Yet Amsterdam did not stand alone.

Already in 1614 Classis Delft and Delfland rendered its judgment "concerning the continuing of the Christian religion in the East Indies."²⁹ Missionaries, so it declared, were not to be commissioned by the Company but by the churches in cooperation with the state. Further, those sent out should not only be thoroughly versed in Holy Scripture, they should also be able to use the Malay language and be acquainted with Islam and the pagan religions. Only then would these men be able to present the gospel both to the ignorant and to the opponents. Classis also recommended that a special school be set up in Leiden to prepare young men for this ministry. Then could they "with God's gracious blessing not only organize glorious churches but also establish schools, so that from among the people living there pastors and teachers would be supplied."

Classis Amsterdam in 1618 appealed to its particular synod to forward mission questions to the forthcoming National Synod which at long last had been arranged. By that time conditions throughout the islands had sadly deteriorated. Irregularities in morals as well as in church administration called for rectification. Not only had some Company officials but even a missionary who surely knew better permitted persons without ecclesiastical authorization to administer the sacrament.

That same fall the Particular Synod of Zeeland discussed at length what could be done so that, hopefully, people in the East Indies would be converted, "since students and comforters of the sick who had been sent out were very poorly prepared."³⁰ It also asked the Company to

²⁸Copy of the Minutes of the Amsterdam consistory pertaining to the ministry of the Word on the ships and in the colonies can be found in F.L. Rutgers, *Het Kerkverband der Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Kerken gelijk dat gekend wordt uit de handelingen van den Amsterdamsche Kerkeraad in den aanvang der 17de eeuw* (Amsterdam: J.H. Kruyt, 1882), Bylage J, 172-190.

²⁹*Zending* 1:34-35.

³⁰*Zending* 1:35; The question, as presented and discussed at the Particular Synod of Zeeland, 1618 was: "hoe man best zal practiseren, dat de heijdenen in Oost Indie mochten worden bekeert tottet Christen geloove, dewijle de studenten ende sieckentroosters, derwaerts gaende, gemeynlyck zeer ongeoeffent zyn? Is verstaen, dattet beguaemste middel ware, dat de E. heeren Gecommitteerde Raiden beursen ordonneren om eenige jonge

set aside funds, so that several young men might be prepared for spiritual work on the Islands. As early as 1605 that body had decided to take such action.³¹ But nothing had been accomplished. Apparently stern reminders by the churches were needed.

Churches at home as well as missionaries on the field realized how essential it was to bring the gospel in the language of the people. This accounts for materials in Malay to be used in both schools and churches. At an early date a few tried their hand at translating portions of the Bible, although those efforts did not appear in print until decades later. Despite pressure from Dutch classes and particular synods, only a few missionaries had sufficient competence to be able to preach in Malay. Nor do the records speak of any improvement in later years. The Dutch churches continued to urge the use of the vernacular or at least of the trade language. But so long as time was not allotted and funds were not made available, little could be accomplished. Only a few remained long enough in Batavia to pick up more than rudimentary acquaintance with Malay before being shipped to the outer islands and immersed in the work which awaited them.

Of lasting significance for Reformed missions were the decisions reached by the synod of Dordt in 1618.

Hulsebos who had served some years as missionary-pastor at Batavia was well acquainted with problems which perplexed consistories on the islands. To the consistory of Amsterdam he sent a number of questions which required response. Two were deemed by that body of sufficient weight to be placed on the agenda of synod. The first inquired whether baptism administered by a merchant or other private party could be considered valid. The second asked whether children born of non-Christian parents, when living with or legally adopted by a Christian family, were entitled to the sacrament.³² Rolandus, elected as one of the functionaries of synod, was charged to present and explain the matter. Synod was also urged to deal with these as soon as possible,

studenten tot dien eynde op te voeden."

³¹Cf. also the appeal of the National Synod of Dordt (1618-19) to the States-General to stimulate and support missions "since all true Christians, for the love they should have to promote God's honor among men and for the salvation of their neighbors, are obligated to use every means serviceable to that end." *Zending*, I:36.

³²On the issue whether or not the question sent by Huldsebos and forwarded by Amsterdam's consistory was legally before the synod, cf. H. Kaajan, *De Pro-Acta der Dordsche Synode in 1618* (Rotterdam: T. De Vries, 1914), 223-225. The two questions involved can be found in the Dutch language in Kaajan, *Pro-Acta*, 224.

since a fleet was prepared to sail to the Far East. In this way undue delay could be avoided. To this request synod responded favorably.

On his own initiative Rolandus withdrew the first question. As a Reformed pastor he regarded it unworthy of synodical attention. Only a clear negative could be expected. Later he reported his action to the Amsterdam consistory which acquiesced without chiding him for what under ordinary circumstances would have been regarded as high-handed and illegitimate.

In an early session the mooted question was considered. For this synod deserves to be commended. Because of state interference no national synod had been convened for over thirty years. Consequently, besides the Remonstrant difficulties which had wreaked such havoc in many congregations of the land, the synodical agenda was already overloaded. But the question concerning baptism on the mission fields was not to be ignored.

All delegates, foreign and national as well as the theological professors, agreed that this sacrament was not to be administered lightly. Not only were responsibilities of those presenting for and those receiving baptism to be considered; even more this concerned the question of the extent to which the promises of God's covenant might rightly be applied. For this Holy Scripture alone would have to provide the answer.³³

Rolandus believed that this issue would soon be resolved. This proved not to be the case.

On several aspects of the question all the delegates were quite unanimous. No child born of non-Christian parents capable of receiving instruction in the Christian religion might be baptized until ready to make a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor might children who had been baptized be sold as slaves, lest they fall into the hands of non-Christians and so be estranged from the gospel of salvation. When unbaptized children desired at the proper time to be joined to Christ's church, the sacrament might not be withheld from them, even in the face of objections raised by their non-Christian parents. Wherever Islam exerted strong influence this was a real possibility.

³³Kaajan's evaluation of the basis for the final decision cannot be controverted. No personal or practical considerations swayed the body; it was "a pure exegetical-dogmatical decision" (*Pro-Acta*, 255).

But now differences of conviction were clearly and at times even sharply expressed.

What about children too young to receive instruction yet incorporated in one way or another into Christian households? Did the comforting promises of God's covenant with believers and their children apply to such because of this new relationship? Each delegation first discussed the matter in its own sessions and then in written form presented its "advice" to the full assembly.³⁴

Thus by group-decision this, as well as other issues, were resolved by synod.

After all the "advices" had been heard, synod ruled that the children in question were not to receive the holy sacrament.³⁵ Grounds for this action are recorded in the "Acta Contracta." Born as they were of non-Christians, they are to be regarded as "unclean (and) outside of the covenant." Not sharing in the special promises, they are first to be instructed and led to personal faith in Christ. This, synod believed, was in accordance with the mandate given by the Savior to his apostles. That it was followed, so the argumentation ran, was evident from the early rise of a catechumenate in the churches.

While acquiescing in the final decision, a surprisingly large number of delegations presented a contrary view. These argued largely from Genesis 17, where Abraham is said to have circumcised all the males among his servants and their children.³⁶ The majority insisted in response that surely Abraham as "the father of all believers" would not have tolerated "idolaters" in his extended household. Whether any of the other party were persuaded by this remains unrecorded.

Questions concerning the baptism of children born out of wedlock also engaged synodical attention. Strictly speaking, the issue arose out of situations in the Dutch churches. But the problem had to be faced also by consistories on the islands.

³⁴Since the official *Acta* first published present the "advices" of the delegations only briefly, it is of great value that in Kaajan, *Pro-Acta*, these are published in full (Bylage II, 352-368).

³⁵The final decision was taken already on December 3 at the 19th session of Synod and read and approved two days later at the 21st session. The basic ground for it reads in Latin: "Nam esse utroque parente impuros, extra foedus: sine promissionibus; Mandasse quoque Dominum Jesum, ut Apostoli tales docerent prius, postea baptizarent; cui mandato Apostoli, et prisca omnis Apostolica Ecclesia (quod vel Catechumenorum ordo evincit) semper paruerunt" (Kaajan, *Pro-Acta*, 249, 251).

³⁶Kaajan in serves his readers well by outlining and analyzing the "advices" (*Pro-Acta*, 225-246).

And here the matter was far more complicated. Not a few Dutch men had engaged in liaisons with native women. Of these were children born. What was to be done about such children? That such were ordinarily entitled to baptism was not in dispute. But would such a Dutch father openly acknowledge such a child as his, as responses to the baptismal questions clearly required, and so incur possible disciplinary action by the consistory? And how was the mistress, if a member of the congregation, to be dealt with, should she request baptism for the child? Consistories on the islands were expected to deal with such cases in accordance with Church Order regulations. Little is known whether or not such cases arose to plague consistories there.

As the decision on baptism was being finalized, members of the English delegation inquired: What about such children when lying at death's door? In no uncertain terms they were told, "We are not Romish and do not teach the necessity of baptism but believe that a lack of baptism will not be to their disadvantage with God."³⁷

That the captain of the fleet ready to sail took with him the synodical decision in his capacity as Company agent is not open to serious doubt. Yet for one reason or another this was not widely published throughout the East Indies. As late as 1623 and 1624 the Banda consistory addressed the respective classes of Amsterdam, Enkhuizen and Walcheren with the identical question. Irregular communications between islands at a far remove from each other, rather than deliberate neglect, may well account for this. But when decades later the same issue was raised, churches in the East Indies were ordered to comply with the decision of 1618.

The influential consistory and congregation of Batavia, however, took a dim view of the decision. Naturally it had to and would be obeyed. But when a "provisional" Church Order was adopted (the one endorsed by the synod not yet known on the islands), the consistory saw its opportunity to file away some of the sharpest edges. As an accommodating substitute for the baptism of children born to non-Christians, it introduced a ceremony called "the laying on of hands." Had not the compassionate Savior set the church of all ages an example by taking little children in his arms and blessing them? And had not the venerable Augustine, so highly acclaimed among the Reformed, recognized a practice of this kind?

³⁷On the question asked by the English delegates, who raised objections, cf. Kaajan, *Pro-Acta*, 247-248, with footnotes.

For it an appropriate formulary was drawn up.³⁸ At some length it discoursed on the tender mercies of God who did not desire the death of sinful man. The congregation, too, was instructed in its calling to pray for all people that God for Christ's sake would cleanse the hearts of the heathen and their young children by his Holy Spirit. Those presenting such children for the sacrament promised to instruct them in the ways of the Lord. Then the officiant pronounced a blessing on the child. But the consistory must have been aware of the anomaly in which it now involved itself. The concluding prayer, intended to be one of thanksgiving and praise, spoke of the baptized child as "this poor little one outside of the covenant, even now enmeshed in the blindness of heathendom."

News of this novelty in the Batavia church did not take long to reach the Netherlands. Soon the churches were up in arms. Here they saw a falling away into Roman Catholic superstition from which many in the East Indies were not yet completely freed. Not only the consistory and classis of Amsterdam, but in 1629 also the synod of North Holland, denounced the practice as neither biblical nor Christian. Even more, it would soon prove ruinous to the spiritual advancement of the church. Any appeal to Christ's example was ruled out as unjustified, since the children on whom He laid His hands were clearly members of God's covenant. Happily the Batavia consistory within a few years discontinued the practice.

Among the more hopeful signs for the advance of Christ's cause was the establishment of *Seminarium Indicum* in 1623. This was located in Leiden in close relationship with its prestigious university. Now specialized training could be given for those who would be sent out to the Far East.

Early the need for this had been urged by Heurnius as well as by several classes and particular synods. To these Governor-General Coen, well-versed in the spiritual needs of the churches which had sprung up, added his weight. To such a new venture the Company, which would have to supply the funds, now agreed.

The increased spiritual and ecclesiastical disarray throughout the East Indies could no longer be ignored. Far too many comforters of the sick together with catechists and readers had been commissioned

³⁸Brouwer (in *Zending* 1:50) informs us that the "Form for the laying on of hands" is to be found in J. Mooy, *Bouwstoffen voor de Geschied. der Prot. Kerk in Ned. Indie*, (1927) 1:186f.

without any preparation. Unordained candidates for the ministry had received permission to preach but not to administer the holy sacraments. Occasionally "comforters of the sick" had been permitted to baptize. Order could hardly be established, so the churches through their representatives argued, unless a large number of well-prepared and properly ordained men were made available for service.

To arrange for such a "college" the Company asked the advice of Leiden's theological faculty. Soon it was ready with its suggestions. The young men to be prepared were to live in the home of a competent "regent" who would over a period of some years advise and instruct them. He was to pay particular heed to their conduct. The faculty, when asked, agreed that none was as suitable for this position as their colleague Antonius Walaeus (1573-1639).³⁹ His spiritual, theological and educational credentials were impeccable. Like Plancius before him, he was a native of the southern Netherlands. At an age somewhat later than usual he felt strongly called to the gospel ministry. While serving the distressed church at The Hague, he attended sessions of the synod of Dordt and gained the confidence of many of its delegates. In 1619 he was appointed to a chair in theology at Leiden. Although hesitant at first to assume a post which might prove to be arduous, his colleagues soon persuaded him to accept.

How carefully he carried out this responsibility soon became apparent. For ten years he served fruitfully in this capacity. The students so enrolled now lived with him and his family. Each day at appropriate times devotions were held. Not only the use of wine, beer and spirits but also of tobacco, by this time so dear to Dutch conviviality, was prohibited.⁴⁰ Only with full consent of Walaeus might these

³⁹Cf. J.D. de Lind van Wyngaarden, *Antonius Walaeus* (Leiden, 1891), the only complete biography; also *Christlijke Encyclopedie* V:688. L.H. Wagenaar, in *Van Stryd en Overwinning: De Groote Synode van 1618 en '19* (Utrecht: G.J.A. Ruys, 1909) refers to him frequently in matters also pertaining to toleration of the more orthodox Remonstrants. Yet the synod bestowed several honors on him.

⁴⁰On the possible influence of Dutch pietism on missions, and also on Voetius, discussion has been carried on for years. W.J.M. Engelberts, in his *Willem Teellinck*, an early and ardent exponent of the "Nadere Reformatie" (Amsterdam: Scheffer & Co. 1898), devotes an entire chapter to "Teellinck met betrekking tot de zending," 179-194. His two most passionate pleas which also involved missions are *Ecco Homo* (Middelburg: Geeraart van de Vivere, 1622) and *Davids Danckbaerheit. . . uit psalm 116:12-14* (Amsterdam: Marten Hansz Brandt, 1624). On this influential movement in the Netherlands, cf. *De Nadere Reformatie*, T. Brienens et al. ('s Gravenhage: Boekencentrum B.V., 1960).

students apply for their examinations and exhort upon occasion in the village churches. At no time was such a young man allowed to court any of the young ladies, much less become engaged.

During those ten years Walaeus tasted the pleasure of seeing twelve of his students set out for the East Indies. Without question they were the best prepared as well as the most competent, zealous and exemplary among the missionary-pastors. By men like Molinaeus, Rogerius, Robertus Junius, Vertregt and Candidius, outstanding services were rendered. In 1633 the Company closed this school, judging that its fruits were far too few and its costs far too high. Later requests to engage in a similar project to meet the needs on the islands always fell on deaf ears.

Far more frequently was the issue of theological education to be given in the East Indies raised by the Dutch churches. On its propriety there was no unanimity.

Many urged such schools in the hope that without too much delay a growing number of converts might aspire to the gospel ministry and in time be ordained. Who better than they could reach the people and understand the pains and problems which many of the young Christians had to face? A humble beginning with this had been made by Danckaerts, when on his own initiative he trained some catechists and teachers. At that time Classis Delft and Delfland had proposed a suitable school for the ideal which also some of the missionaries cherished. The Synod of South Holland in 1621 proposed an even more ambitious program. If the Company proved unwilling to endorse and support this, synod itself was ready to solicit contributions from interested individuals. Church offerings seem not to have come into consideration. Nothing was accomplished at that time.

More hopeful seemed to be for a while the efforts of Batavia's consistory in 1629. Only the establishment of a seminary along the lines of that supervised by Walaeus in the homeland would, in its opinion, yield the rich harvest so eagerly desired.

A well-educated clergy from among the people would be able, as their numbers increased, to offer stronger resistance to Islam, challenge the islanders still steeped in animistic ideas, serve existing congregations with a more regular administration of the Word and sacraments, encourage and strengthen weaker church members, and bring the glorious gospel to islands where it had not yet been proclaimed. Enthusiastically Governor-General Coen, now serving for a second time in this capacity, endorsed the consistory's proposal. Since it was far less costly than sending and supporting men from the islands to the

Netherlands, Company officials were ready to consent. But by this time Plancius was dead. The Amsterdam consistory persuaded the Company not to agree. When Heurnius three years later brought up the subject by way of letter, his plea was summarily dismissed. Reformed ministers, so seemed to be the prevailing opinion at the time, had to be educated in the Netherlands. Only then would churches in the homeland have confidence in them and their work.

Decades later, when the urgency for trained leadership became even more pressing, other attempts to provide better education in the Indies were made. In each case this was preparatory for further training in the Netherlands. For a time Batavia had a Latin school which was discontinued for lack of support. Then between 1745 and 1755 a seminary somewhat after the pattern of the *Seminarium Indicum* was in existence in that city. It enjoyed not only the full approval but also the encouragement of the Governor General. During that period, however, it produced only one ordained minister.⁴¹

While reports were still being sent to the homeland with a surprising degree of regularity, the Dutch churches dealt with only one other issue. This concerned what was called the "separation" of the two sacraments.

According to sound Reformed practice everyone who had made a credible profession of faith was entitled and expected to partake of the Lord's Supper. But could this be justified, when those who had received baptism knew little more than the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer? Still living in a largely pagan environment, could they rightly examine themselves in preparation for partaking worthily? Several of the pastors along with missionaries on the outlying islands had serious scruples. Nor was it possible in many instances to "teach them to observe all that Christ had commanded," so that the lack of sufficient spiritual insight could be remedied.⁴²

Especially in Batavia the problem became pressing. Here were large numbers of Portuguese, Malay and Chinese-speaking adults who had received baptism and were enrolled as church members. But their knowledge of the Christian religion was scant. Often their lives left much to be desired. And not a few were irregular in attendance upon

⁴¹On several attempts to establish schools patterned after *Seminarium Indicum*, especially how one Governor-General after another put an end to the efforts of his predecessor cf. J. Kuiper, *Geschiedenis van het Godsdienstig en Kerkelyk leven van het Nederlandsche Volk* (Utrecht: Ten Bokkel-Huinink, 1900), 214.

⁴²Cf. *Zending* I:52-54, for examples of church discipline as exercised.

divine worship. Far too many perhaps, so some pastors suspected, might well have sought baptism for themselves and their children for the sake of social and economic advantage.⁴³

In that church's provisional Church Order of 1624 such "separation" was clearly disavowed. Baptized adults under all normal circumstances were expected also at the Lord's table. But less than twenty years later the Company officials imposed another Church Order on the consistory. Here a sharp distinction was made between two classes of adults in the congregation.

All the adults who upon repudiating any pagan religion and embracing the Christian faith had been baptized, were now required to be further instructed and then examined in doctrine and conduct. When this received consistorial approval, such persons could then and only then be given access to the Lord's table. More seems to have been at stake, however, than a desire to protect the sacredness of this ordinance. At that time the "natives" were in the eyes of most Company officials second-class also in the congregation.

As soon as the Dutch churches heard of this, they expressed strong disapproval. Within a few years the Batavia consistory rescinded its earlier decision and returned to the practice common in all Reformed congregations.

Many years later the issue was raised again. One of the ministers serving in Batavia, E.F. Le Boucq, reintroduced the practice which had been officially repudiated. For this the consistory took him to task and reaffirmed its position of 1648. But with this he, known as a "fierce disturber of the peace," disagreed. Several consistory members soon were won over by his arguments. Thereupon he appealed against the consistory to Classis Delft and Delfland. Heated discussions and debates, at times appearing in print, followed. After several years the particular synod directly involved reaffirmed the historic position. Then Company officials on Java interposed for the sake of restoring order and peace. Any such "separation" between baptism and the Lord's Supper was now forbidden in Batavia. On the islands, if spiritual conditions permitted, adult members were to be encouraged to come to the Holy Supper. But almost immediately after this the Governor-General decreed that also in Batavia the matter was best left to the discretion of individual ministers.

⁴³Cf. *Zending* I:57-66 for more details on the work throughout the East Indies.

This struggle, carried on often with more heat than light, explains why the number of communicants continued to dwindle in proportion to the total membership of the churches.⁴⁴ Why, so many adult members may well have surmised, go through the bother of an added interrogation into their faith and conduct? In the eyes of the Company, which provided the desired work, their status was already assured.

From that time Reformed consistories and classes did little more than receive reports and send out with proper ecclesiastical credentials men available for the gospel ministry in the Far East.

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Among the many contributions to Reformed missions from 1600 to 1800 the work of Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) is perhaps of greatest significance.

Soon after ordination he served as a delegate to the Synod of Dordt (1618-19). For its deliberation he prepared the mission materials which needed official resolution. By 1634 he began his long and fruitful career as theological professor at the university of Utrecht. In that capacity he served until his death.

Voetius is recognized even today as the first in a long line of Protestant missiologists. A twofold stimulus characterized his life and labors: boundless zeal for the Reformed faith and thorough acquaintance with writers and writings of every conviction.⁴⁵ As a Calvinist he urged that fruitful theological study demanded not only erudition and accuracy but fully as much a sincere piety. He was as much at home in the patristic and medieval theologians as in the works of every 16th century reformer. Painstakingly he researched especially the works of every Roman Catholic missiologist at his disposal.⁴⁶

⁴⁴How serious this deterioration was is, perhaps, best seen in the northern islands: of the 12,396 Christians listed for 1771, only 33 were communicants. J.G.F. Riedel, serving as missionary years later, is undoubtedly correct in saying: "I saw baptismal records, from which it was apparent that on a single day hundreds were baptized and that without instruction, without examination, and without the possibility of receiving future instruction." But this may also have been an extreme case towards the end of the period of these early missions.

⁴⁵For the life and labors of Voetius, also his relationship to the Dutch form of Puritanism, cf. W. Van't Spijker, "Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676)," in *Nadere Reformatie*, 49-84.

⁴⁶On forerunners and influences on Voetius' mission theory, cf. H.A. van Andel, *De Zendingsleer van Gijsbertus Voetius* (Kampen: Kok, 1912), 37-59. Johannes Hoornbeek (1617-1666) is dealt with at some length (57-59), because of his two influential works on missions. Although a contemporary of Voetius, he was actually a disciple of the great

His method was that of the schoolmen. Here he followed the pattern prevalent during the Middle Ages and which was used by Protestants in his day.⁴⁷ But as a faithful disciple of Calvin and Beza his positions were unabashedly Reformed.

For him one of the four major departments of theological inquiry was "elenctics," the defense of the true Christian religion according to Holy Writ. For this, intensive investigation into every non-Christian pattern of thought was indispensable. Rightly may he also be regarded as an early founder of the study of comparative religions. Not only did he describe and analyze these in depth; he evaluated them in the light of the Scriptures. The result of these studies he presented in his Saturday "Disputations" over many years.⁴⁸ How popular they became is evident from the crowds which are said to have attended. Only later did he develop his mission theory and practice in more systematic fashion. This, with which we concern ourselves, he did under the rubric of church polity and government.

Deeply involved in this is Voetius' conception of religious freedom.⁴⁹ This can be rightly understood and assessed only in the light of the position set forth in the *Belgic Confession* which he wholeheartedly endorsed.

Here a close relationship between state and church was embraced, quite foreign to the thinking of our day.

While each was established by divine appointment, neither might infringe on the proper responsibility and authority of the other. But the state was charged with the duty of defending the true religion, so that the realm of sin and Satan might be restrained. Although the Reformed church, strictly speaking, *was not a state church*, it did receive preferential treatment as promoting that form of the Christian faith which the state endorsed as sound and wholesome. Hence the issue of religious

missiologist.

⁴⁷For a rehabilitation of the scholastic method in Protestant theology, cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), esp. 9-40.

⁴⁸The "Disputationes" deserve more than the passing mention they receive here, even though they did not deal so directly with missions. Van Andel shows their influence as well as that of Voetius' *De Plantatoribus Ecclesiarum* on his definitive work (*Zendingleer*, 21-26).

⁴⁹Voetius presented the material under the title *De libertate conscientiae et permissione religionum in Republica*. He refers to it in the second part of *De Gentilismo et vocatione Gentium*, and expands on and incorporates it in *Politica Ecclesiastica*, I, iv, tr. 1.

freedom had to be addressed, also when missions began to engage the attention of the Dutch.

To this subject the professor addressed himself seriously. He took sharp issue with the Roman Catholic position which did not allow for other religious convictions and practices than its own. Hence the Inquisition with all its horrors in lands where it was in full control.

Neither did he champion that unbridled expression of opinion, conviction and worship to which our world has become so accustomed. What Voetius defended was liberty of conscience; no one might be compelled to adopt a faith or practice other than that which he cherished in his heart. Any public demonstration and defense other than that of the Reformed, however, was to be sharply restricted by the magistrates. During this period, then, Lutherans, Remonstrants and even Roman Catholics (in spite of ongoing wars with Spain and France) could worship together but only behind walls which did not advertise their presence too loudly. Of course, this principle was never carried out consistently either at home or abroad. But in view of the widespread and intense intolerance of his times, Voetius' position deserves a measure of appreciation.

Of paramount importance for understanding his work is the exceedingly broad view which he had of missions. Always this was to be assigned to the church or the churches to whom Christ had entrusted the gospel. Those sent out to teach and preach were to address not only Jews, Muslims and pagans of every kind; they were also with the Word to win for the true faith atheists, apostates and even such heretics as the Roman Catholics. Adopting the vocabulary of Jesus and his apostles, Voetius spoke again and again of *sending* and *being sent*.⁵⁰

Nowhere does the Reformed character of his mission theory and practice appear so clearly as in its thoroughly God-centered emphasis. He as the sovereign God in Jesus Christ has brought salvation for mankind. By his Word and Spirit he calls men out of darkness into his marvelous light. As the Christ, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given, He controls and challenges the nations everywhere as the gospel is proclaimed. The guarantee that missions will prosper roots in His abiding presence among His people. Never is Voetius' presentation of or approach to the work person- or church-centered,

⁵⁰*Zenden* and *zending* have in Dutch writings on "missions" always an official emphasis, stressing that it is Christ who sends (through His church) with His authority and promise.

even though both are accorded a prominent place. Happily an appreciation of this has been revived in recent times. This makes his work up-to-date and surely worthy of serious reflection.

For him the goal is threefold: the conversion of individuals, the establishment of churches and, above all, the glory of God who works all things according to His counsel. As the first two are increasingly realized, peoples and even nations will hopefully become at least outwardly Christianized to restrain the appeal, influence and evil effects of false religions.

One after another of the early "Disputations" laid solid foundations for understanding and approaching non-Christians. In 1653 he prepared his *De Plantatoribus Ecclesiarum*, incorporated three years later in *Disputationes selectae*. In far more depth and detail his missiology is found in *Politica ecclesiastica* (1663-1676). Its three major divisions appear in four "tomi" (volumes). Van Andel calls this a very rich source for the knowledge of his mission theory. Not only those sections which are directly related to missions, but also those only indirectly connected with missions. To whet the readers' appetite, a few of the questions and answers posited will be mentioned.

How consistently theocentric Voetius showed himself to be springs immediately to view in answering the question: What is the basis for Christian missions? Threefold again, according to him: God's decree or His will from all eternity, God's promise or His will concerning the future and God's command which is His will for the present. Some have suggested a quite radical difference between Voetius and Heurnius, who wrote some fifty years earlier, especially on the nature of the gospel call. This, however, appears to be no more than a matter of emphasis. Easily can any difference be explained from the purpose which each man had in mind. Heurnius sought to arouse enthusiasm among his readers for the high calling of gospel proclamation throughout the non-Christian world; Voetius aimed at presenting principles and practice for that work in an organized and coherent fashion. With full justification both could appeal equally to the Canons of Dort. One of the grounds for missions Voetius finds in many Old Testament promises concerning the calling and ingathering of the Gentiles. He differs from Calvin and agrees with Saravia in finding in Matthew 28:19-20 the command to the church of all ages to carry on this work.

Among whom must this be done? Among all peoples everywhere to whom God is pleased to send His message of salvation when and how He sovereignly pleases. For encouragement he appeals to those biblical passages which prophesy the knowledge of God covering the earth as

the waters cover the sea. Nor can this task be considered finished, until the gospel has been preached among all nations.

Voetius is deeply concerned with the individual and his salvation. It is the first goal mentioned. But this is bound up immediately with the glory of God. He stresses strongly the Spirit's work in sealing the gospel savingly to the heart, while not diminishing the significance of the "external call." In this way God's purposes of election are realized. Yet those saved are not left to live by and for themselves. God's will is that they shall be incorporated into the true church. Only so can they grow to full salvation to the praise of divine grace. Where such a church exists, converts are to unite with their fellow believers. Where such are not found, as throughout the non-Christian world of his day, congregations are to be organized in accordance with the pattern laid down in the Word. This accounts for his sustained emphasis on the goal of church planting. Now it becomes crystal-clear why Voetius presented his views on missions under the rubric of church polity and government.

Undeniably the Bible teaches that missions makes use of human agents. Such are to be sent. But whose is the privilege and responsibility for sending? Here his answer is unequivocal. Only the church instituted by Christ Himself!

No individual may take upon himself this work unless officially called and set aside to it by the church. Always, of course, he leaves room for personal testimony to others which God can and does bless. But missions, coming in the name and with the authority and the promises of Christ, is an assignment given only to the church as a corporate body. Nor may a group of individuals or even a society (corporation) arrogate to itself this task. Although the state and mercantile company should lend aid, they do not have the competence to send out missionaries. "The keys of the kingdom" are entrusted by Christ only to the church as a visible organization!

By church Voetius frequently indicates the local consistory and congregation. He was an ardent champion of its relative autonomy. Here rests the basic, original and most comprehensive authority given by Christ to provide leadership for His people. Yet this he taught without falling into congregationalism of which he was accused. Classes and synod may also engage in sending, but only when the delegates of the churches there assembled were authorized so to do. At no time may the activities of the latter restrict the privileges and responsibilities of the former.

Who, then, are the churches to commission for this high calling? Again his view is clear: only those lawfully called, examined and ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. They, upon adequate training and evidence of gifts needed for the work, are the official representatives of Christ and His church. Not as private persons but as "ambassadors" they in Christ's name beseech all men everywhere to be reconciled to God. For this not less but more education than that required for ministers in the homeland is necessary. Without knowledge of the language, the religion(s) and customs of the people to whom they were sent, they work largely in vain.

Voetius at the same time did leave room for assistants of several kinds such as comforters of the sick, exhorters and catechists. Schoolmasters, teachers and physicians he also regarded as valuable and at times quite indispensable for the spread of the gospel. But all these were "adjuncts" who, strictly speaking, were not missionaries in the proper sense of the word.

Far, far more could and perhaps should be included on the views set forth in such detail by Voetius. But these already demonstrate how earnestly he wrestled with basic principles and practice and what a rich storehouse he bequeathed in his missiology to the Reformed churches. Although writing in and for his own times, few who are Reformed would care to challenge or contradict his basic positions. These, despite whatever concessions he made to state and Company involvement, were too clearly drawn from Holy Scripture. No one before and too few afterward have provided these churches with such a compact, comprehensive and well-systematized missiology. For this he deserves admiration as well as our lasting appreciation.

— 9 —

The decline and final demise of early Reformed missions makes for sad reading. With enthusiasm the Reformed religion had been embraced by many during and immediately after the Dutch war for independence. Soon it became the recognized religion which liberals, Lutherans and many remaining Roman Catholics tolerated. The bitter Remonstrant controversies contributed to a deepening understanding of and loyalty to the accepted doctrine on the part of many of the common people. Churches and schools throughout the land flourished. A new

translation of Holy Scripture poured from the presses and soon found its way into nearly every Reformed home.⁵¹

The golden age of the Dutch Republic from 1600 to 1675⁵² was also, despite glaring weaknesses, soon recognized as the best and brightest period for missions in the Far East.

But by 1650 early signs of a spiritual malaise began to appear.⁵³ The war had been won. Commercial ventures became ever more profitable. The Dutch took their place with pride among the other European nations. But change was in the wind. Ideas promoted by Descartes and Spinoza won popularity among the educated, including some of the clergy.

With a rapidly rising standard of living the upper classes indulged themselves in ostentatious display of their new wealth. All the fulminations of professors and pastors against what they deemed a repudiation of the principles and practices for which their grandparents had suffered met with cynicism. The attitudes and life-style of many who still claimed to be Reformed were being radically reshaped. From 1650 to 1672 the republic was without a "stadholder." During this period the reins of government were in the hands of "regents" who did little if anything to promote the Reformed religion. Soon Governors-General were also appointed to serve in the East Indies whose sole interest was Company profits to the disadvantage of missions, the growing congregations and the missionaries there.

Occasionally proposals were made for reactivating the *Seminarium Indicum* in the homeland and training schools for teachers, catechists and clergy in the Indies. These requests usually fell on deaf ears.

After 1700 the situation worsened rapidly. Missionaries, to be sure, were still being sent out at Company expense. But many of them soon demonstrated their unfitness for the work. Large numbers contented themselves with a shallow ministry to the Dutch planters while ignoring

⁵¹The influence of the official Dutch translation of 1637, called *Statenbijbel*, for homes, churches and society in general, paralleling that of the English KJV, can hardly be overrated. Cf. C.W. Monnich and M. van der Plas, *Het Woord in Beeld*, (Baarn: Ten Have, 1977).

⁵²On the "golden age" cf. C.V. Wedgewood, *The Golden Age of the Dutch Republic in Horizon I*, 1 (Sept. 1958) for a concise survey by a brilliant English historian.

⁵³On the decline and deterioration of the Reformed faith throughout much of the land, cf. D.H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition from the Reformation to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1943), 41-72. Concerning the growing complaints of influential preachers and writers, see *Nadere Reformatie*, 219-313.

the spiritual needs of the islanders who had been won for the gospel. Serious moral lapses, not only among the members but even among some of the clergy, are recorded in the minutes of the consistory of Batavia. And when that body attempted to apply what discipline it could, such action when involving a pastor was deemed illegal by the churches in the Netherlands. The most glaring example of this was the case of a certain Wachter deposed by the Batavia consistory for gross immorality. Soon afterward he returned to the homeland. There without any compunction a congregation called and installed him as pastor with classical approval.

But how could anything else be expected on the field when Reformed doctrine and godliness were suffering severe reverses back home? In classrooms and on many a pulpit Scriptural teachings concerning God, man and salvation were first muted, then openly questioned and at last rejected.⁵⁴ Respectability had to large extent, especially in the larger cities, become the hallmark of much church membership.

Conditions, however, may not be etched solely in dark colors.

Even when the Company and its officials did their best to restrict the work, faithful missionaries together with their assistants worked valiantly. Often they were in danger of their lives as they travelled from island to island. Not only were the seas often stormy; the number of pirates increased despite Company vigilance. And when rioting broke out because of cruelties inflicted by Company officials on the population, those who brought the Christian message were at times the first to be attacked. Still the number of the baptized grew despite a growing lack of teachers and pastors. So did the number of catechetical and devotional writings as well as translations of Holy Scripture. These contributed not a little to preserving among the people some acquaintance with the gospel when, except at Batavia, the last of the missionaries were compelled for a variety of reasons to leave.

In the Netherlands a new effort was made to revive interest in the work throughout the East Indies, when in 1770 a society was organized under the name *De Propaganda Fide*. Although the majority of its members belonged the Reformed church, its spirit was a far cry from that which had inspired pastors, consistories and classes in earlier days. A plan was adopted to establish a fund of 40,000 florins to train six men of "good culture and education" as missionaries. Each year two would

⁵⁴*Zending* I:68.

be sent and two others added to the remaining four. But when these efforts failed, the society decided to give prizes for "essays" on how Christianizing the islands could be promoted in a more effective manner. Three prizes were awarded, one to the man of avowed Remonstrant persuasion. Several helpful suggestions for the work were mentioned in each. Little influence of earlier Reformed writers, especially of Voetius, was evident. By this time toleration was the order of the day. When the Netherlands Missionary Society was organized in 1797, under the stimulus of Johannes van der Kemp, every Reformed distinctive concerning missions was conspicuous by its absence.

Meanwhile revolutionary ideas spread far and wide throughout the Netherlands. The masses were eager for radical changes in the new social and political orders. Those who sought to stem the tide, also from the pulpit, were ridiculed and at times vilified. The strange mixture of rationalism and romanticism which characterized the so-called "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century had done its work well. The churches together with those still faithful to the Reformed teachings were paralyzed.

For some decades, Company profits had been steadily declining. Fewer missionaries were being sent out. Those serving on the islands often failed to receive financial support. Some were reduced to wearing rags; of one it was reported that he went naked, wearing what little clothes he had only when he conducted worship.

French armies invaded the Netherlands to be welcomed by people of all classes. The "stadholder" with his family and others fled. The government was reorganized. Now the Company, already on the verge of bankruptcy, was dissolved. With the rupture of ties between the homeland and the East Indies, the period of early Reformed missions was over.

— 10 —

To draw up the balance sheet of credits and debits for this enterprise which spanned two centuries is quite impossible. As with newscasters in our day, the problems and pains receive far more attention in the records than the successes. But these, too, were present as the gospel spread throughout much of the East Indies. The lasting fruits, however, are known only to the sovereign God. For us remains the responsibility to learn and remember some much-needed lessons.

The seventeenth century was the season of greatest advance. From island to island the gospel spread to take some root by way of churches and schools. Much depended on the heroism which many of the early

missionaries displayed. Here were almost insurmountable obstacles to be overcome. Islam was on the march; animism continued to dominate the lives of the people. Patiently the missionaries, at times with far too little understanding how these false religions controlled the patterns of daily life, taught not only the basics of Christian doctrine but also how these were to be applied in everyday conduct at home and at work. Also those who had earlier received Roman Catholic baptism received more thorough instruction. Here a large number of catechetical manuals, together with translations of Scripture portions, did much to alleviate the ignorance and superstition in which many had lived so long. Baptism may well upon many an occasion have been administered too soon,⁵⁵ but preparation for receiving the sacrament was a marked improvement over the practice of the earlier Roman Catholic priests.

Many of the Governors-General were sincere professors of the Reformed faith. These, especially Coen, did what they could to promote the work of the missionaries, also by checking as far as possible the excesses of soldiers, planters and other Company officials.

When the Company proved unwilling to establish and maintain training schools for catechists and teachers, it is to the credit of several early missionaries that in spite of the already heavy burden of responsibility laid upon them, they willingly took up this work too.

Nor were the churches in the Netherlands ignorant of and indifferent to the work. Several consistories and classes, notably those of Amsterdam, showed an eagerness to promote the work, even though at times in patronizing fashion. Scrupulously were entries made into their official records, demonstrating their willingness to urge the Company to assist the work more faithfully in accordance with the charters which had been given. Hence their growing concern that those sent out would be better prepared for the difficult task which awaited them.

While records seem to have been carefully kept until at least 1750 or 1760, little is known of the actual situation which obtained by the last decade of that century. In 1794 a complaint was sent by the consistory of Batavia to be read at a session of the Synod of North Holland. Mirroring to an amazing degree the situations then common in the homeland, it bewailed "the deterioration of religion and morals, occasioned by the progressive increase of unbelief, mockery and careless indifference." No accurate record seems to remain of the number of congregations and church members at that time. All we know is that

⁵⁵Cf. note 44 on Riedel's criticism.

when the Company was dissolved there were no more than seven missionary-pastors left in the East Indies, of which one was very old and another unfit for service.

If we may speak with justification of the failure of this early Reformed enterprise, the list of causes is long. But almost without exception they spring from that strange state-church-Company relationship which obtained throughout those long years. While a similar pattern was pursued in Roman Catholic missions—Spain and Portugal supporting such work lavishly from the royal treasuries—its flaws were demonstrable from the outset. Only the most salient will now be mentioned.

The Company from the beginning had a strangle-hold on the church and its representatives in the East Indies. And for this the charters given it by the States-General are greatly responsible. None might enter the islands without Company permission and by means of Company ships. Far too little freedom was allowed the churches and consistories there, even when these were properly organized. Again and again some of the Governors-General did not hesitate to dictate terms under which these could continue to function. Missionaries and others who had aroused their displeasure were often reassigned to islands where they could do less harm and even repatriated.

What greatly hampered the expansion of missions was the demand that anyone sent out from the Netherlands would have to serve the Dutch community as well as the islanders. And this inevitably worked havoc. Many of the Dutch were not amenable to the teaching and care of the missionary-pastors. They were interested only in pleasure or profits. Others shamefully mistreated their household servants. And then there were some guilty of gross misconduct, living with one native mistress after another. Too few set a good Christian example for those who might have been attracted to and influenced by the gospel. When consistories did attempt to apply disciplinary measures, these were at times overruled and nullified by Company officials.

All this left little time for those arriving from the homeland to acquaint themselves in depth with the language and customs of the people. Only in Batavia, which usually could be served by a sizeable number of pastors, did the labors among the Malay-, Portuguese-, and Chinese-speaking peoples prosper tolerably well. Apart from this center the missionaries were charged with the spiritual needs on three, four or more islands at a considerable remove from each other. Under such heavy burdens several fell seriously ill and died at an early age.

But could not the churches have become more directly involved in the work? Aside from consistories and classes little if any of this was ever accomplished. That some writings were published and widely disseminated throughout the country seems to have been the case. But all mission matters in so far as the Reformed churches were concerned remained exclusively for discussion and decision in the hands of those where the Company had established its mercantile Chambers. Against this policy particular synods, notably those of Gelderland, Utrecht and Friesland, did protest in the hope of becoming more directly involved, but without any success. Especially the Amsterdam consistory and classis jealously guarded what it regarded as its peculiar prerogative. Reports, it was promised, would be forwarded at stated times. But how faithfully this was done is open to serious question. And the membership of the churches in those times, let this be remembered to their shame, never learned to give even of their growing wealth for the cause of missions. After all, expenses for the local congregations were paid by the government either from its funds directly or from the profits of those large properties which had been put at church disposal at the time of the Reformation. All that the people were asked to do was pray for the spread of the gospel, not too challenging a duty when they knew so little about the struggles and successes of the work far away.

By 1795 the ties between the Netherlands and the East Indies were broken for twenty years.

When contacts could be made after 1815 some gleanings of the long years of sowing and reaping remained.⁵⁶ There were churches where every Sunday, services had been conducted. Even a few elementary village schools were still in operation. But for all this a dwindling number of catechists, teachers and church elders were responsible. On those quite unstable foundations the new arrivals did build and that hopefully more strongly and solidly.

⁵⁶Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* III:306, acknowledges more openly than many earlier writers in the history of mission that the work accomplished in the East Indies was by no means in vain.

Superficial though much of the Christianity of these thousands was, here in A.D. 1800 were the largest groups of Protestant Christians east of India and Ceylon and some of the largest bodies of Christians of any kind in the Far East. Here, too, was a substantial nucleus in preparation for the large expansion in the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The balance sheet does not end in the red!