

Chapter 18: Conclusion to Part 3

Since the Reformation in the 16th century, in the Reformed Church in The Netherlands, attention is given to the need for missionary work. However, most of the discussions were theoretical and until the 19th century, hardly any missionary initiatives were taken. In practice, until the 18th century, the Reformed Church spread via Dutch trading stations which were established in several locations inside and outside Europe, especially along the coasts of the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, in Asia and in strategic ports, such as Cape Town. Unavoidably, at these trading posts, questions were raised about the relationship with the local population. In theory, it was commonly accepted that Christians from The Netherlands and from the local populations had to be treated equally. However, this principle clashed with ethnic and economic interests, for example in the slave-trade. Without convincing proof, it was assumed in the previous chapters that, in The Netherlands, the Reformed Church was seen as a national church and as such, not responsible for people belonging to other nations.

Already in the 16th century, some theologians urged the Reformed Church in The Netherlands to start missionary projects. Late 16th century Dutch writers tried to stimulate the Reformed Church to take its missionary duties seriously. Notable are the three motives for missionary work formulated by Gisbertus Voetius: conversion, church planting and the honour of God. Yet in practice, even during the 17th and 18th century, hardly any cross-cultural mission initiatives were taken by the Reformed Church.

The first Dutch missionary projects were started on the initiative of Pietistic Communities outside the Reformed Church, especially under the influence of the *Herrnhut* community in present day Germany. One of the missionary projects was the establishment, in 1735, of a *Herrnhut* community in the Dutch colony Suriname. The community tried to work among slave labourers but was met with severe opposition. Around the year 1800, under the influence of revival movements, several voluntary Missionary Societies were established in Europe and in North America. One of these societies was the *Nederlandsche Zendeling-Genootschap*, established in 1797. After the Napoleonic wars, the Society started missionary projects in the Dutch colonies, especially in present day Indonesia.

During the 19th century, in The Netherlands, several orthodox Reformed Churches were established which started their own Missionary Societies. In 1896, four years after the unification of the majority of the orthodox Reformed Churches, the decision was taken by their common Synod that missionary work was the responsibility of the Church and had to be initiated and carried out under the responsibility of the Church structures.

In 1944, through another church schism, the Free Reformed Churches were established. These orthodox Reformed Churches emphasized the independence of local Church Councils. In 1951, their Synod also decided that missionary work was the responsibility of local Church Councils. Accordingly, in 1954, the Church Council of the Free Reformed Church in Kampen decided to start its own missionary project, which around 1960 was established as the Reformed Mission in eNkumane, in present day KwaZulu-Natal. In theory, the project was envisaged as a Sender-orientated project undertaken in obedience to God's command to the local Church in Kampen to spread the Gospel in preaching and teaching people who had not yet heard about it. However in practice, almost from the start, the project was also strongly receiver-orientated and a symbiotic relationship between the Mission and the local community developed. The Mission introduced isiZulu-speaking preachers from outside the community and started to negotiate the educational and medical

needs of the people it served. On a spiritual level, the Mission took a strong stance against ancestor-veneration and against other church denominations but it made use of an existing pattern of prayer meetings and, as a result, became functionally involved in a context of healing.

During the 1960's, the Reformed Mission developed contacts, especially with families in the third social stratum of the eNkumane population, families which had recently migrated into the area. Most of them were involved in migrant labour. During the same period the missionary work was extended to farm labourers living on the surrounding commercial farms and via the migration patterns of these farm labourers the missionary project was extended in the areas west of Durban, south of the Richmond Village and west of Pietermaritzburg. In all its extensions, the project was dependent on the home church in Kampen and, from a South African perspective, is functioned in relative isolation. Newly established local churches became part of the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika*.

Throughout its existence the Reformed Mission partly shared the history of the eNkumane community. Specific points of contact are funerals, prayer meetings and church services, where through singing and testifying common hope and faith is shared. Moreover, in organizing training sessions and providing medical care, the Mission tries to equip the local community and create new opportunities to become involved in the lives of the inhabitants of the area. For several interviewees, these contacts were in the first place of a healing character. For many years, their wider South African context was a situation of deprivation and discrimination. In recent years, their living conditions improved by the development of the infrastructure of the area. However, the character of the population as a residue population has not changed. There is a continuous migration of especially young adults and men into industrial areas while some of them return, especially the retired, the sick and the unemployed. In this context, questions can be asked about a lasting task of the Reformed Mission, which will be the topic in the next chapters, in Part 4, dealing with the real and possible motives of this foreign missionary project, its relationship with local Reformed churches and its prospects.