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Interview of Tom Schultz and Henk Kelfkins

Tom Schultz

Henk Kelfkins

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

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Tom Schulz who is working in Amsterdam and Henk Kelfkins who is a national of the Netherlands and now preached in Utrecht were interviewed by Joe Hacker on March 17, 1970.

Hacker: I would like to ask you brethren some questions if I may. I would appreciate your frank and candid responses. First, to Brother Schulz, could you give me a brief historical outline of the work in Holland from its beginning to the present time?

Schulz: The work in Holland was started right after the war in 1946 by Jacob Vandervis who had come to America about 25 years before this time as a Mormon. He was converted while in this country, attended Pepperdine and Abilene Christian College and then went back in 1946 with another American, Brother Buel Phillips. They began the work in the city of Haarlem and from Haarlem works were started in Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. The work was begun by these two men and has proceeded to the point that there are four churches in Holland.

Hacker: Brother Kelfkins, you are a native of the Netherlands. Perhaps you would be the one that could give us insight into the religious background, cultural and economic background of the people of your country.

Kelfkins: Holland is a very old country and about 35% of the population of Holland is Roman Catholic and about 20% is what you call denominationalism. You find what you call Dutch Reform Churches and also Lutheran Churches, but most of them have a Calvinistic background. You find all kinds of other religious people like Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and some Pentecostal groups.

Hacker: How strong is the Catholic Church and its influence over the people and the minds of the people?

Kelfkins: At the present moment there is a lot of unrest in the Roman Catholic Church with the subject of celibacy and birth control pills. The influence of the Roman Catholic Church is not very strong any more. Maybe in the future there will be a split between the Roman Catholic Church in Holland and the Roman Catholic Church of Rome. That's for the future. I think there is a wonderful possibility now for us to preach the gospel because a lot of people now don't have any place to go, they don't know what to believe any more and they would like to find the truth.

Hacker: What is the attitude of the Dutch about the Scripture? Do they still fundamentally believe the Bible?

Kelfkins: Fundamentally they believe the Bible, but scriptural authority is one of the biggest problems. People like to believe a certain part of the Bible and hate to believe in other parts of the Bible. When we can bring them so far that they will bow their heads under scriptural authority, we have a basis to start work with them. This is the biggest problem. A lot of people believe in the inspiration of the Bible and a lot of people don't.

Schulz: I would just like to add here that the Lutheran creeds and the Calvinistic creeds have been a powerful influence in Dutch life so the Bible is seen primarily through these creeds. When Dutch people discover conflict between the Bible and the creeds, then they have a conflict in their faith. This is sometimes a barrier to accepting what the Bible says.

Hacker: If a person were to prepare then to go to Holland, what do you think they should do culturally, economically and religiously to prepare to work among the Dutch people?

Kelfkins: First, try to learn something of the language of the people and also their customs and habits because we are what we call a conservative nation with a long background. Sometimes mistakes are made only by not knowing what the Dutch are like. This is one of the things people have to do when they come to Holland. Catholics study the history of our country. They also study the religious background. They have to study something of Calvin and Luther. This is one of the main things they have to do so they have at least some understanding of what is going on, why people believe the way they believe, and why they believe in creeds.

Hacker: What about the economic factors? Do you see the affluence of the Dutch people on the rise and this becoming a factor in your work? How should an American adjust himself economically?

Schulz: In the eight years that we have been in Holland, I have seen a drastic change in the Dutch way of life. They are economically better off than they ever were before. One has to understand too that Holland has a socialistic government.

Now, there are different kinds of socialistic governments in Europe. The one in Holland is set up in order to help those who are in the lower income brackets to at least live as comfortably as possible and to eat as comfortably as possible. This entire set up is difficult for an American because he comes into a crowded country with lots of restrictions where in many cases he is going to have to pay as much money in Holland to live as he does in this country if he wants to live as an American. I personally think it's better that he try to live as much like the Dutch people as possible, to eat in the same way, to adjust his way of life and his income, and so forth to the Dutch way of life. I don't think there is too much difference in the cost of living if one intends to live at a certain level.

Hacker: Dealing with the adjustment of the American, what particular problems have you encountered with the adjustment of your wife and children?

Schulz: There are many. I suppose the most frustrating thing is not being able to communicate with people and not knowing the customs of the people. If one goes shopping, he shops in a different way. For example, in most places, there are small shops that offer a limited selection of items, so most Dutch people go from one place to another and do their shopping. They shop every day. When we arrived, not many people had refrigerators, and, of course, we Americans are accustomed to shopping once or twice a week and putting it all in the refrigerator. The inability to communicate and to understand were the most frustrating.

Then, trying to get the children settled into the Dutch school system was also frustrating because they can't understand and they have conflicts with Dutch children

which is only natural. So problems arise with the children and you would like to step in and arbitrate, but you don't know how to communicate with the Dutch children. The first year was for us the most frustrating until we began to learn why things were done in the way they were done and then we were able to talk with people.

Hacker: How did you finally go about learning the language?

Schulz: We started preliminary language studies in this country through the linqi-phone methods. That's the records, the text, and the grammar. We were limited in our time which was unfortunate, but we did have a brief introduction to the Dutch language. Then, as soon as we arrived in Holland and got settled, we began taking private lessons with a recognized Dutch teacher and continued taking those lessons. In fact, I'm not taking Dutch lessons any longer, but when I prepare a manuscript or prepare a sermon, I do it with my Dutch teacher. He corrects and makes it better in the Dutch language. It takes two to three years to really be proficient in the Dutch language. This is frustrating until one reaches this level.

Hacker: I would like to ask you now what serious challenges have you had to overcome and what methods have you used that have been most effective in meeting these challenges?

Schulz: I think Henk and I would probably differ on the challenges because he sees it as a national, understanding his people, and I would see it as someone coming to a strange situation. One of the frustrating things for us was, and still is to some extent, indifference of the people, at least in Amsterdam--the indifference of the people toward the gospel.

Another thing that was frustrating to us and remains a challenge though we have reconsidered our viewpoints is that the Dutch are very slow and methodical about what they do. They are not about to take a step in any direction until they understand quite fully what it is about and what they are getting into. So, we expected when we came, responses much more rapidly than they came. We gauged the response time according to the work situations here in this country, and it just doesn't work that way. The indifference and the slowness are the things that bother us the most. They are challenges but at least we have learned how to work and to approach the people.

Hacker: What are some of the things you did to help overcome this?

Helkins: To handle the situation in my country and work with the Dutch people, you have to understand some of their background and also understand that when you wanted to work in Holland you have to think Dutch and try to live Dutch and understand them the way they live. We sit like a cat in a tree and watch. We are very conservative, but when we make a step you are sure we made them. You can count on them, and they are what you call mature then. I can understand because I have the same problem being a native that I don't sometimes have courage enough and patience enough to see it all happen.

What to do? I think there is only one thing to do. Pray, have patience, and love people. Try to understand why it takes them so long to make a certain step.

Schulz: We have had to learn patience and also, as Henk said, know the people-- know why they are reacting this way, understand it, appreciate it, and try to express our love and concern for them so we can get inside, beyond that reserve, because they are very conservative and reserved. Once you get through this outer shell of reserve and make a friend you have a real one. If you make a Christian, you have a real one. It just takes time and patience.

Hacker: What kind of methods are you using now and in some of the background in leading up to these methods you might want to mention some methods you've proven to be unusable and why you no longer use them.

Schulz: Let me say something first about this. When we arrived eight years ago in Amsterdam, there was already a small church existing there and there were methods already being used. When one comes as a prospective missionary to a country, I think he should take the time to watch, wait, look and prepare before he jumps in with all four feet because many mistakes are made. I've made mistakes that as I look back now were very foolish. We tried to be as cautious as possible and to learn as much about the situation. We worked with the brethren there, for example, in distributing cards and arranging for gospel meetings in small rented places and so on. Some of these were effective; some were not. We've had several campaigns. One has been more effective than the others.

The method that we are using now is the correspondence method. Personally I have determined to devote just as much time as possible to this and to concentrate on it because it is a method that is working, and it is one that we can rely on now. It helps remove some of the frustrations in trying to go into so many directions at one time and not being able to concentrate on one good positive method that will bring results. This method that we are now using I feel is more effective than anything we have done in the past.

Hacker: Brother Kelfkins, could you give us an idea of how the Dutch react to some of the more American type methods that maybe have been tried on you and your people?

Helfkins: Several American methods do not work in Holland, especially what Brother Tom mentioned: "to jump in with all four feet." When people make this mistake, I hope they make it just once because that is the biggest mistake you can make. Never jump into a European. I can speak this for the most part of Europe. Be careful, but, on the other hand, don't beat around the bush. I learned this expression here in America. People try to be very very friendly, and I like it; but, on the other hand, I am sometimes at the same place as when I started talking with them. I at least want to know where I am and where I stand at a certain moment. You can be sometimes what you call rude in Holland without being rude. People like to know what you think of them. You have to be polite, of course, but you just tell them because they will like it. Be honest and don't go in circles. It is better to let someone know than just give them the idea that it's not too bad at all.

About methods used in Holland, I can only speak as a native, of course. One thing we really need in Holland is Bible study, as much Bible study as we can have. People have been confronted with the Bible for centuries but they don't really know what is in the Bible. One of the things that really impressed me in America when I had a chance to speak to a very young gospel preacher is that he quoted the scriptures.

He even embarrassed me sometimes with his knowledge about the Bible. I think that is not all but it is a very wonderful part when you know so much about the scriptures, because it gives a sign that you have at least studied the Bible so you know them by heart. A lot of Dutch people like their Bible studies. I speak about it because they like to be in what we call home Bible studies. They attend home Bible studies even better than the Sunday morning worship because I think that a Bible study is even more effective than the Sunday morning preaching service because then people have to be silent. They can sing and pray, of course, but then they only have to listen. During the Bible study there is a possibility for them to speak with the one that leads the Bible study, ask questions and be in for the full 100% participation. I think it is really effective.

In methods to reach people, I think I have to go along with Brother Tom. We used Bible correspondence courses in the past, but you have to be very open for the situation at a certain moment. Sometime specific methods won't work at a certain time. I have already said about the unrest in Holland. This Bible correspondence course turned out to be very very effective, even more effective than we natives thought it would be. I think at this moment it is the best method used, but even when young people come to Holland, maybe ten years after my time, they better go to the preachers that are there already and wait and see and ask, but don't act too fast.

Hacker: What has been your experience, Brother Schulz, from an American viewpoint, of gaining support and keeping your support?

Schulz: After I finished graduate work at ACC, I had already contacted the East Side church in Phoenix who had invited us to come and work with them for a year with the understanding that if they felt we were the right persons, they would send us to Holland and support us there for at least five years. When the five years had gone by and the response didn't seem to be as great as the elders expected it to be, they suggested we come home. We felt we couldn't go home at that time, so we just got down and analyzed the situation in raw terms of a dollar-baptism ratio which I think is only one phase of preaching the gospel. At any rate, we brought it down to that point and we discovered that we were doing as well in Holland as they were doing at the home congregation. Having analyzed the situation from this point of view, they decided to carry on our support indefinitely. I am speaking at this point of March 17. We will be going out there in just a few days and as far as I understand they will continue supporting us for as long as we desire.

Hacker: How often have you found it necessary to return home and make reports in order to keep your support coming and keep the family happy?

Schulz: We have been back twice in the eight years that we have been over there. I don't know whether this is absolutely necessary to keep a family happy or not. It may be necessary for various reasons: wanting to see friends or getting a change from the situation because it becomes a pretty close grinding type of work after awhile. We have done a lot of traveling in that time which wasn't absolutely necessary. I think in the future, if we do come back, I would like to just come

back for a rest some time ⁵intead of traveling all over the United States. We have had resasonably good working relationships with the church that support us, and I think when we finally analyzed the work we were able to see it more objectively and see that it does have some promise and value.

Hacker: What about you, Brother Kelfkins? What have you encountered in gaining your support and keeping it?

Helkins: One of the things as a native preacher is that they hope once that the congregations in Holland are large and able they will support their native men. This is one of my biggest frustrations. I sometime think--and you don't mind that I say this--I feel like a beggar that holds up his hand to ask for help. This is a frustration because the Lord gave me enough talent and wisdom that I could do on my own, but the circumstances in Holland in the churches are not that big that they can support me. I think, to mention an example, that the Dutch people would like it to be that way. They supported for a period of time a brother who worked in The Hague, so the church in The Hague has already shown that they want to support their own men if possible. They are also paying for their building.

One of the things is keep up a good correspondence and the relationship between a native and the home congregation here in America. This is sometimes a problem. I think when an American congregation ever starts to work with a native preacher the first thing they have to do is bring him over and see what he looks like, how he is, the way he expresses himself, and the way he really acts and does the things he does. This will help.

I speak out of my own experience now because I started to work in Utrecht. I took it over from an American missionary, and the congregation at Macon Road in Memphis, Tennessee, supported me. They didn't know me. They only knew me by photograph. I think this is not enough. We had some trouble in the past in keeping up our relationship and a good correspondence. I didn't write them too much sometimes because I felt they didn't write me at all. Once I sent them a letter and maybe it wasn't the right method. Have you ever heard about the famous Earle Stanley Gardner? He always had expressions like "The Case of the Lonely Heiress." I took an empty envelope, put in a little sheet of paper and put down, "The Case of the Empty Envelope" and I mailed it to America. This was the first time I had a reaction from the eldership at Macon Road, to let them feel at least that I wanted to hear something. During the five years that I worked, I think I had about three or four letters. This is not enough. This was so frustrating to me and discouraging and I didn't bring out the courage to write them. I had a chance now to be here, and they brought me over, and even the congregation behind the eldership was reacting very warmly. Maybe they will think again about starting with me.

The first thing a congregation has to do in America when they work with a native preacher is to bring him over, talk to him, build up a stronger relationship and try to stay in close contact because he really needs it. You see, we don't have a chance--and I am very blessed with brethren like Tom--I don't have a home congregation behind me. I can't go back to America and say, "Brethren, I am out of a job. Please furnish me with something else," because I am not an American. I felt this really as a frustration. I am really blessed by the Lord that I have brethren that carry my load with me to America.

Hacker: Let's ask some other questions that may relate to the things that you have said here as a European national. What do you consider to be some of the greatest errors that we as Americans have made in the beginning of the work in Holland?

Helfkins: Tom is an American so let's let him talk about the errors he saw he made and then maybe I can add something to that.

Schulz: This is rather a difficult question because when we came to Holland eight years ago the work had already been begun. Some of them had existed for nearly ten years. I don't know what errors had been made then, but sometimes it is much easier for someone standing outside of our sphere to tell us what kind of errors we have made. Personally, I know I have spent money unwisely in advertising in papers and distributing cards for meetings that hadn't proven successful and yet we tried to continue this same type of thing.

I suppose we've made innumerable small errors in our relationship with the Dutch people until we finally learned why they think the way they do and why they act the way they do. If there is any way to bring these errors under one general heading it is simply lack of patience, lack of willingness to spend enough time to learn and understand the people and the situation and then try to distinguish. Let me say this. I think every missionary eventually on the mission field has to distinguish between what is Americanism and what is Biblical and then apply what the scriptures say in that situation in the way that it is most effective in reaching lost people.

Helfkins: I think Brother Tom is right on this. I've seen a couple of American missionaries go home very disappointed and unhappy. Sometimes they were even warned by their brethren before they came. They jump in with four feet and they say, "I'm here now. This is all I am and I will start working like a giant." They think about doing the job in terms of three or five years. They are not aware of the fact that they have to spend at least two to three years to study the language to become effective. When they know about that, they are a little bit more careful.

A lot of methods used according to the American people won't work in my country. I think you have to go to a mission field with a lot of patience and an open mind and see what it is all about and not using in the start the methods you always used at home and the methods which are effective because they might not be effective in that country because people are different. I think basically the people are the same but they differ because they have their backgrounds and their habits. I think this is one of the things.

Hacker: In some fields where we have national preachers working with American missionaries, sometimes frictions develop over support and how to plan the financial aid and so forth of the national. Have you had any experience like this in Holland which might be helpful in guiding us so we won't make some of the same mistakes again?

Helfkins: No one is ready to speak about this, but in many many cases the American preachers get along very well with the native preachers. A lot of American

preachers can't get along together in the mission field. This is really funny. Brother Tom is smiling, but he knows. There are not so many frustrations between the native preacher and the American preacher but sometimes between the American preachers themselves. This has its effect also on the native brethren. They can't understand because there are several missionaries from one country and they can't get along. Why? There was a big question mark. What is the trouble? Of course, there is jealousy sometimes because one American brother gets from his congregation \$200 or \$300 a month more and has less children. To me, it is not so important. I think every year a missionary, if he is a native or not, has to earn enough money not to worry about how to feed his wife and children and how to let them go to school. I think when he is really mature and honest, he never will be rich, but that's not the way we want to be. When you have to worry about your support and about the sword of Damocles hanging about your head if the home congregation cuts it off or not, this brings what we call active frustrations on your shoulders. I think when someone goes into the mission field he has already enough on his shoulders because he meets all of these differences--he has to learn the language, he has to adjust to other people, to whole nations--I think this is one of the things.

Schulz: I want to add something here. As far as I know, we--my family and myself --have had good relationships with the Dutch preachers. In Amsterdam, we have a young man who is now spending only part of his time in preaching, but he was supported full time. I went to bat several times for this young man in order to get him a decent support because somehow the brethren who were supporting him in the States thought he was off in the middle of Africa and he was getting less than the minimum wage in the country. I wrote to them and said brethren this just isn't right. This man has every right to give up this work and go into secular work. Brethren in the States waited too long and finally he just came to the point where he felt so insecure he had to seek his welfare some other place.

Hacker: A moment ago Brother Kelfkins mentioned a desire for financial independence. What can be done to help?

Helkins: Several brethren here in America suggested to go back to secular work. Now, we have two of my young colleagues that were in full time work for the church and they went out for several reasons. Sometimes one of these was for financial reasons because people like to be independent. I think there is no difference if you are an American or Dutch. What could be done? I think work as hard and as smart as we can. I hope the Lord will give us enough blessings that the church grows very fast as soon as possible so we can support our own people. When it is not this way yet, what can be done? I think we have to rely on our American brethren for quite some time.

Schulz: Henk can get a good secular job and he can earn more than the support he is getting here in the States, but this means he has to devote practically all of his time to that secular work and the little time that he has left over just is not enough and especially in this situation where we are having such a response with our correspondence course. If we lose him, we are with three Americans and each of us as Americans need one of our Dutch brethren to help with this correspondence and the preaching and the follow up.

Hacker: Let me ask you a general question as we must close this interview because of time limitations. How do you foresee the future of the work in Holland?

Schulz: Let me say very briefly that I am as optimistic about the work in Holland as I have been since we've been there which is eight years. The reason for that is because of the unrest within the established churches there and the fact that many people are seeking for some certainty in their lives and they are responding to our efforts to preach the gospel through correspondence courses and other methods. How long this feeling is going to last we don't know, but at least we have opportunities now that we have never had before.

Kelfkins: I am very happy by this correspondence course that we can reach as many people as possible. I think it is better to reach as many people as possible than to just preach to your local congregation because I feel that at least once in a lifetime the people in Holland need a chance to hear the full gospel. I mean really the full gospel because most churches have a gospel, but they don't have the full gospel. I think this method can be used that way.

Hacker: In other words, you are saying that in your judgment the people in Holland are receptive enough. The question is just getting the gospel to them in sufficient quantity to where enough of them will hear it and accept it.

We appreciate very much your taking the time to come to Searcy and to visit with us today. For the matter of historical record we will have a group of students working this summer with these brethren and Wil Goodheer in The Hague in an evangelistic campaign. We hope that this will be successful and that perhaps others will follow as well.