

Brinkman, Jan (1920–2006)

GLENN O. PHILLIPS

Glenn O. Phillips, Ph.D. (Howard University, Washington, D.C.), although retired, is actively writing, researching, lecturing, and publishing. He was a professor at Morgan State University, Howard University, and the University of the Southern Caribbean. He has authored and published numerous articles, book reviews, and books, including "The African Diaspora Experience," "Singing in a Strange Land: The History of the Hanson Place Church," "African American Leaders of Maryland," and "The Caribbean Basin Initiative."

Jan Brinkman was a Dutch evangelist, pastor, and church administrator who served for over thirty years in Holland, as well in the two Dutch-speaking regions of the Inter-American Division: Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. He was president of both the Suriname Mission and the Netherlands Antilles Mission.¹

Early Life and Ministry

Jan Brinkman was born on December 31, 1920 in Hoogeveen, the Netherlands. After he became a Seventh-day Adventist during World War II, he quickly felt a call to serve in the ministry of his new faith. In order to prepare himself, he left Holland for the United Kingdom where he studied and completed his Theology degree in 1946.² He returned to Holland and served as pastor in the city of Amsterdam. After marrying Fenna Meijer, they both worked to strengthen the Adventist educational outreach among the Dutch Adventist youth. The Brinkmans had one son, Egbert. They also pastored churches, with outstanding success, in Arnhem and Groningen between 1947 and 1954.³ In 1954, Brinkman was elected



Jan Brinkman

Photo courtesy of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

president of the South Netherland Conference and served briefly before accepting a call to be the president of the Suriname Mission, arriving on August 17, 1955.⁴

Within months of his arrival in Suriname, he began “Geloof voor Vandag” (Faith for Today), which was the first daily radio religious program of the largest radio station in the Dutch colony. In addition, he and his wife conducted extensive evangelistic crusades in the southern region of the colony’s capital of Paramaribo and started a company in the Para district at Bijihout Weg.⁵

They went on to establish another company in the eastern region in the country’s vast interior. This subsequently led to the first Adventist congregation in that area, after a very successful crusade at Eurowarte on the Marowijne River. Elder Brinkman held annual evangelistic meetings. Another company of believers was established at Caillitoni in 1961. The Brinkmans next moved to the western region and after another successful crusade, began a church in Coronie. Wherever the Brinkmans visited they made it their duty to have a positive relationship with the government authorities, who seemed eager to engage them in helping to promote and establish church schools where possible. Elder Brinkman established two schools at Eurowarte in 1963, and a second in NW Weergevonden in Paramaribo.⁶ They also encouraged the youth to become involved in the active work of the church in Suriname and convinced many of them to attend Caribbean Union College (now University of the Southern Caribbean) in Trinidad, but to return and serve the church in Suriname.

During 1964, when the Suriname Mission had 440 baptized members across the country, it held its first official mission session and set a goal of baptizing one thousand souls within two years.⁷ While they fell short of this goal, the church continued to grow, and made significant strides each year under the Brinkmans. The daily radio program with Elder Brinkman as the speaker grew in popularity within Suriname and played a significant role in the church’s growth. Such exposure allowed for increased opportunities for Seventh-day Adventists in the wider community.

In 1967, Elder Brinkman accepted a call to be the president of the Netherland Antilles Mission, which included the Dutch speaking islands of Bonaire and Curacao. He and Mrs. Brinkman spent twelve years preaching and evangelizing this southernmost region of the Dutch colonies. When they arrived, the Brinkmans immediately began to develop similar evangelistic programs as they had done in Suriname. The church members and the greater community willingly received these new programs. Among their most significant achievements was the establishment of well-operated church schools in Curacao and Aruba, as well as the establishment of an Adventist hospital in Curacao.

In 1980, Elder and Mrs. Brinkman returned to the Suriname Mission and began to put in place additional programs and methods that improved the visibility of the Advent message across Suriname which had become an independent nation. One of his most significant actions was holding the first camp meeting. Elder Brinkman secured a government facility to conduct these meetings and in the following year bought the same property. His foresight to purchase this property is an example of how he continued to move the mission’s agenda

forward during his second stint as president.⁸

In 1985, Elder Brinkman introduced and promoted the establishment of the Pathfinders organization. This caught the attention of the growing number of Adventist youth and government officials. After two years of careful planning, a nationwide Pathfinder Jamboree was held in 1987 with a well-attended ceremony that included government officials. Over two hundred pathfinders were invested.⁹

In late 1987, Elder and Mrs. Brinkman returned from missionary service to their homeland of the Netherlands. Elder Brinkman continued to serve the church that he loved as pastor of several congregations until his retirement. The Brinkmans gave over thirty years of service to the church in leading the charge in the Dutch-speaking area of the Inter-American Division.

Death and Contribution

Elder Brinkman died on January 29, 2006 in Huis ter Heide, the Netherlands, having given—alongside his wife—over forty years of very careful and thoughtful service to the expansion of Seventh-day Adventism in the land of his birth as well as helping to build a lasting foundation to ensure the progress of the church that they loved and labored in, in the beautiful Dutch Caribbean regions of the Inter-American Division.

Elder and Mrs. Brinkman were the first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to these Dutch colonies (now nations) and sought an engaging relationship with the Dutch colonial leaders, including the governors. More importantly, he and his wife both worked diligently to have the Advent Message on the airways of the local popular radio stations that would reach thousands of new listeners. They also worked closely with the youth of the church and promoted Christian Adventist education at all levels, including sending students to regional Adventist colleges. On returning from the mission field, they continued to promote the growth of Adventism in their homeland.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 126; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970), 170.
2. Egbert Brinkman and Shurman Kook, "Biography of Elder and Mrs. Jan Brinkman," unpublished document.
3. Johannes Roseval, "A Profile of Pastor Jan Brinkman," *Caribbean Gleanings*, Third Quarter, 1993, 16.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Jan Brinkman, "The Suriname Mission," *Inter-American Division Messenger*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1, January 1964, 16.
7. Daniel A. Duffis, *Legacy of Faith: The History of Seventh-day Adventists on Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao*, (Nirgua, Estado Yaracuy, Venezuela: Litografia Instivoc, 2003), 127.
8. Roseval, 16.
9. Brinkman, 16.

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