



Missionar Eelsing mit Familie (Niederländisch-Indien).

Hendrik Eelsing with family

Photo courtesy of the Netherlands Union archive.

Eelsing, Hendrik (1896–1971)

REINDER BRUINSMA

Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D. (University of London), is a retired church administrator, scholar, and author. From September 2011 to early 2013 he served as the interim-president of the Adventist Church in Belgium and Luxembourg. Since then he has returned to his status as a retiree but remains active in preaching, lecturing, and writing.

Hendrik Eelsing was a pastor, missionary, and the first Dutch president of the Netherlands Union. Earlier, the union presidents had all been Germans, due to the fact that for most of the time the Church in the Netherlands

belonged administratively to the German Union. He succeeded Joseph Wintzen, his brother-in-law, who was originally from Germany and had remained a German national until late in life.

Little is known about the early ministry of Hendrik Eelsing, except that he pastored a number of churches in the Netherlands. In 1925 he departed with his family for the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), where he served as a missionary. His focus while in the mission field was on youth work. He founded several mission schools and, in 1929, founded a training college in Tjimindi (Java).¹ This institution is now known as the Indonesian Adventist University in West-Java.² Eelsing returned to the Netherlands in 1930.

For decades the Adventist Church in the Netherlands was organizationally linked to the church in Germany. Before 1938, when the Netherlands Union was formed (with two conferences), the Dutch church was part of the West-German Union. When it received union status it remained in the German sphere of influence as part of the Central European Division. Dutch Adventist pastors received their theological education in Germany and for a long time the church had German presidents and a number of German pastors. Eelsing strongly opposed what he saw as this “Germanization” of the Church in the Netherlands.³ While on educational leave in the United States in 1939, he pleaded with the General Conference leadership to revise the Dutch-German relationship and move the Netherlands Union from the Central European Division.⁴ The Netherlands Union became a part of the reorganized Northern European Division in 1946, after a period directly under the General Conference.⁵

Eelsing was elected president of the North-Netherlands Conference in 1938. In 1942 he was asked to be the interim union president, due to the illness of President Joseph Wintzen. He also served simultaneously as president of the South-Netherlands Conference. This situation continued until early 1946. Later in that year Eelsing was elected union president but was forced to resign in late September 1947 for moral reasons,⁶ and as a result lost his ministerial credentials. He was succeeded as union president by Frederik Johannes Voorthuis, who had been serving as union secretary.⁷

SOURCES

Letter of F. J. Voorthuis to J. Wibbens, September 22, 1947. Netherlands Union Archive kept in the Provincial Archive of the Province of Utrecht, Netherlands.

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“The Hague.” “The Occupation.” “The Royal Drama.” <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/f-j-voorthuis/>.

van Rijn, H. G. “100 Jaar Adventkerk in Nederland.” *Advent Exposé* (special edition of *Advent*), September 1987.

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NOTES

1. H. G. van Rijn, "100 Jaar Adventkerk in Nederland," *Advent Exposé* (special edition of *Advent*), September 1987, 75.
2. G. W. Frenk, "Missionaries in The Dutch East Indies," *Advent*, January 1998.
3. H. G. van Rijn, "Ons Duitse Erfgoed," *Advent*, November/December, 1986; *Ibid.*, January 1987.
4. "The Hague" and "The Occupation," <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/f-j-voorthuis/>.
5. "Netherlands Union Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 144; "Northern European Division", *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 133, 135
6. Letter of F. J. Voorthuis to J. Wibbens, September 22, 1947, Netherlands Union Archive kept in the Provincial Archive of the Province of Utrecht, Netherlands; see also "The Royal Drama," <http://shana.adventist.nl/biografieen-3/f-j-voorthuis/>.
7. H. G. van Rijn, "100 Jaar Adventkerk in Nederland," 65.

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