

NL & CZ: They are on their way to becoming the first Western countries with an atheist/agnostic majority:

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 16,485 square miles and its population is approximately 16 million. Approximately 30 percent of the population consider themselves to be Roman Catholic, 15 percent Dutch Reformed, 7 percent Calvinist Reformist, 8 percent non-Christian (Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist), and 40 percent atheist or agnostic.

Dutch society has become increasingly secular. According to the Government's Social Cultural Planning Bureau, church membership has declined steadily from 76 percent in 1958 to 41 percent in 1995 and still is decreasing, although at a slower pace. The breakdown within this 41 percent is 20 percent Roman Catholic, 9 percent Dutch Reformed, 6 percent Calvinist Reformist, 2 percent Muslim, and 4 percent other. Membership is decreasing among all denominations, except Islam, which is expected to become the second largest religion in the country by 2010.

The Low Country Sinks Lower

by Tom Neven [originally published in the magazine "Focus on the Family" in or around 1999.]

A common picture of Holland is one of windmills, wooden shoes, tulips and a brave people who stood up to the Nazis in World War II. And while you can still find a lot of windmills and such, the moral fortitude that distinguished the Dutch Resistance is sadly lacking in 21st century Holland.

Consider that full nudity is common on Dutch television after 9 p.m., and that one can find pornographic movies on television during weekends. Consider that homosexual marriage is legal in Holland. Consider that Holland also recently made euthanasia legal; it has been tacitly accepted for at least the past 20 years. Supermarket racks are full of magazine covers featuring photos of nude women—all in open view. And hard drugs are consumed openly in so-called "coffee houses." (If you're ever in Holland, don't wander into a coffee house assuming you'll find the Dutch version of a double frothé.) And abortion is yawned at.

Even the Christian church in Holland is not immune from the evidence of moral decay, with professing Christians engaging in immoral activities in almost the same percentages as the surrounding culture. For example, divorce is accepted as normal by 60 percent of the Dutch, and that percentage is the same within Christian homes, says Rob Hondsmerk, director of Focus on the Family Netherlands.

"Family life here is not family life anymore," he says. "There were more social structures 10 years ago and larger extended families." Families are more isolated today, and parents need information on some very basic questions such as disciplining children. "Some parents believe a temper tantrum requires psychological counseling," Hondsmerk says. "And how do they teach sexual abstinence in a society with free sex?"

The movement toward free sex began in the 1960s, as in many other places. "The children of those years are parents now," Hondsmerk says. "Add in a declining belief in God and it has an impact not just on society, but the church. Our children are the first generation where we have to explain God's plan for marriage."

And perhaps most shocking of all is the incidence of incest in Dutch culture, even within Christian homes. In 1989 a national survey found that 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 20 boys were victims of incest. In 1999, a repeat survey found those figures to be 1 in 5 and 1 in 10, respectively.

"We deal with one new incest case a day from Christian homes," Hondsmerk says. "It's not even a big news story anymore. In 10 years the penalties for incest went from, for example, 15 years in prison to 240 hours of community service."

Many children already think incest is normal because their parents tell them so and they don't know any better, he adds, and while the current age of consent is 14, some are trying to lower that to age 12.

A crying need

Hondsmerk gave up a military career in 1990 to start a family outreach ministry called Chris. (In a culture where Christian terms might as well be in Chinese, he thought teens calling a hotline for Chris would make more sense than calling for Christ.) He was motivated by a book named *Weid Mijn Lammeren—Feed My Sheep*—by Else Vlug in which she argues that it

is the church's responsibility to look out for the emotional and spiritual care of children.

The Chris hotline took 400 calls its first year from young people with problems at home and school ranging from bullying to incest. (Its equivalent for parents is called Center for Pastoral Counseling.) Last year the hotline took 5,000 calls, 90 percent from kids with a Christian background.

"By 1997 we realized we needed to help prevent problems, and that's where Focus on the Family came in." In 1998, Focus came alongside Chris to provide assistance with professional counseling for teens and parents, support for childrearing classes and marriage seminars.

Focus on the Family Netherlands now distributes two Dutch-language magazines, including Plugged In, Focus' magazine on youth culture.

It also distributes newsletters, books, including Dutch versions of Dr. Dobson's, and is in the process of translating Focus on the Family videos such as No Apologies (about sexual abstinence) and the Adventures in Odyssey series.

Hondsmerk, who has a doctorate in child psychology, writes a newspaper column every two weeks with plans to compile them into a book similar to Dr. Dobson's Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide.

And the Life on the Edge conferences for parents and teens have been well received in Holland. "Some parents want to go the way of the Lord, but they don't know how," Hondsmerk says. "It's not just with sexual abstinence, but what it means to be a mother and a father."

The average age for a mother in Holland to give birth to a first child is 32. "The culture says get everything you want first," Hondsmerk says—nice home, stereo, television, vacations and so forth.

God's faithfulness

"When I read the Bible, I see it's about families," Hondsmerk says. "When Satan wants to destroy the church, he starts with families. The culture is asleep, and I'm expecting a collapse."

But, he adds, "People pray when they're in need."

The existence and continued success of both Chris and Focus Netherlands, Hondsmerk says, is a story of God's faithfulness. "It's hard to exist and grow in a post-Christian society. Whenever we needed money or help, He provided."