



# GEREFORMEERDE BIJBELSTICHTING (GBS):

our sister society in the  
Netherlands

Leerdam

by **Natalie A. Hanks**, *Lead Editor*

In 1961 a man named H. Kooistra visited the biggest bookshop in the city of Zwolle, Netherlands, to buy his daughter a pocket Bible for her eighteenth birthday. He wanted to buy the Statenvertaling, the famous Reformation-era Dutch Bible and equivalent of the English Authorised (King James) Version. However, when he looked in this shop, he was advised that they no longer sold this version, but only sold the Nieuwe Vertaling (the 'New Translation' published in 1951 by the Netherlands Bible Society). The shop staff even tried to put him off, saying that young people wanted to keep up with the times. Eventually, after ringing around various places, the shop finally managed

to track down a copy for Mr Kooistra from Royal Jongbloed, the Dutch Bible printers.<sup>1</sup>

A century and a half before in Wales Mary Jones's longing for a Bible had led to the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society (and eventually to the Trinitarian Bible Society). Likewise Mr Kooistra's search for a copy of the Statenvertaling led to the birth of a new Dutch society: Gereformeerde Bijbelstichting (GBS), the Reformed Bible Society, an organisation which has worked closely with the TBS for many years.

## Bible societies in the Netherlands

The first Bible societies in the Netherlands developed from the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), which was formed in 1804. The BFBS aimed to encourage the wider circulation of Scriptures

*Leerdam and the River Linge*

following Mary Jones's twenty-six mile walk to Thomas Charles in Bala to find a Welsh Bible. Following the formation of the BFBS, Bible societies were set up in many European countries to publish and distribute the Scriptures in their languages.

It was in 1814 that a Bible society was first set up in the Netherlands—this was only made possible after the end of the Napoleonic wars and the withdrawal of the French occupation army from the Netherlands after several years of domination. Further local Bible societies were set up in various provinces across the country and were eventually united by the Netherlands Bible Society (NBG). In 1847 the NBG decided to publish their own Bibles—primarily the 1637 Statenvertaling. Two colporteurs were appointed in 1890 to distribute the Scriptures around the Netherlands to areas in the countryside where it was difficult to obtain Bibles. This was first done by push-cart and later by horse drawn vehicles.

The NBG sponsored many Bible translation projects in the Dutch East Indies. This was a Dutch colony consisting of what is now Indonesia and was formed by nationalising trading posts of the Dutch East India Company. The NBG initially reprinted and published the 1733 Leydekker Bible in Malay, and by 1823 was working on their own Bible translation projects into languages such as Javanese. However, sadly the standards of the NBG, like those of the BFBS, wavered due to their ecumenical policies, and while within a few years in the United Kingdom the Trinitarian Bible Society was formed, there was no equivalent in the Netherlands.

Over time scholars decided that the Statenvertaling needed updating; and

after some more drastic attempts to modernise it were not successful, in 1911 it was decided to start a new translation of the Bible into Dutch from the Critical Greek Text.<sup>2</sup> The NBG became involved in this project in 1927, and in 1951 the Nieuwe Vertaling (New Translation) was published—this was the edition that the shop assistant tried so hard to sell to Mr Kooistra in 1961.



*Mr H. Kooistra and the farm at Broeksterwoude*

### **A new society in the twentieth century**

Mr Kooistra was disturbed by the lack of availability of good Dutch Bibles, combined with the proliferation of the Critical Text-based Nieuwe Vertaling which was widely accepted in churches, families, and schools across the Netherlands. In 1963 Mr Kooistra addressed a meeting on these issues at a farmhouse in Broeksterwoude, a small village located in Friesland, the most northerly part of the Netherlands. Following the meeting a committee of five Frisians (locals from the area), including Mr Kooistra, formed to campaign against the effects of the New Translation and push for the reprinting of the Statenvertaling. This committee was named 'The national committee for the



upholding of the Statenvertaling and the condemnation of the Nieuwe Vertaling’.

### A national movement

Gradually, through letters and advertisements, the work of this new committee began to be known outside Friesland. This led to a meeting in November 1965 with contacts from different churches and denominations across the Netherlands at a parsonage in Zwijndrecht where it was decided that something more national was needed. On 15 December 1965 the first official meeting took place at the restaurant and meeting centre De Oude Tram in Amersfoort. A board of fourteen members was formed, with Mr Kooistra as the first treasurer. Pastors from various denominations pledged their cooperation, and on 14 January 1966 the ‘Society for the maintenance of the Statenvertaling’ was formally established, with the first edition of their magazine, *StandVastig* (meaning ‘steadfast’ and also containing some letters from the word Statenvertaling), published in August 1966.

### Early days of the new society

On 20 August 1966 the first *Toogdag* (annual meeting) took place in the church building of the Reformed Congregation (Gereformeerde Gemeente) in South

*The first edition of StandVastig*



Rotterdam, with more than two thousand people from all over the country attending. These yearly conferences would become annual meeting points for the board, staff, local committee volunteers, donors, and other interested parties. The GBS also organised regional and local meetings from the start. These meetings focussed on the value of God’s Word as translated in the Statenvertaling, and the dangers of modern Bible translations, along with updates on the work of GBS.

The first chairman of GBS was Dr C. Steenblok, though sadly he had to withdraw after six months for health reasons. The Rev. J. van Haaren was elected as the next chairman in June 1966, and he became the driving force behind the development of GBS, leading it with a steady hand for seventeen years. After he passed away in 1983 the Rev. F. Mallan became chairman, resigning in 1990 due to his busy workload. He was succeeded by the Rev. P. Blok, and then the Rev. A. C. Rijken, who remains chairman until this day. Generally, the board



*The Rev. P. Blok*



*Mrs Kooistra receiving the first copy of the GBS edition of the Statenvertaling*

and executive board meet four times a year, and the composition of the board, like that of TBS, was interdenominational from the beginning.

### **Preserving and publishing the Statenvertaling**

From the very start GBS was primarily concerned with the preservation and publication of the Statenvertaling Bible. The Statenvertaling Bible was a product of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), which requested a Dutch Bible carefully translated from the Biblical languages. This Reformation-era Bible was finally published in 1637, when it received an

excellent reception among Dutch speaking people. Like the Authorised (King James) Version, many inferior modern, Critical Text-based versions have tried to replace it.

Over time many language, printing, and typesetting errors had crept into the Statenvertaling. Therefore, in 1967 GBS decided to address the problem and produce an accurate edition that they could publish as their own. They found out that a nineteenth-century Jongbloed edition (called Dessendiaan) was the most accurate of that time, and this edition was checked and improved in conformity with the 1657 Van Ravesteyn standard edition.

The GBS edition of the Statenvertaling was published in 1973, and the first copy presented on 18 August 1973 by the then chairman Rev. J. van Haaren to the widow of Mr H. Kooistra, the man who had set this train in motion more than ten years previously.

In 1976 the pocket sized ‘School Bible’ was printed. In 1978 it was reported that the GBS could now supply Bibles and Psalm books in no less than nineteen different types and versions, and by the middle of 1980 more than 35,000 Bibles had been sold. In 1982 a basic version especially intended for evangelism was published. By 1987 the number sold was 100,000.

### **Statenvertaling with marginal notes**

In 1978 the board discussed publishing an edition of the Statenvertaling with the famous marginal notes (*Kanttekeningen*), announcing their plan in the 1980 *Toogdag*. The first meeting of the special ‘Text Committee’ commissioned by the board took place in October 1989, meeting more than 150 times during which over 59,000 marginal notes were meticulously edited. After years of work, in 2004 the first GBS *Kanttekeningenbijbel* rolled off the

*The Statenvertaling*





presses; the one volume edition was made possible by modern labour and printing techniques of thin paper printers. The Bible was presented during an official gathering on 27 November 2004, where copies were handed to representatives of various reformed churches in the Netherlands. Copies were also given to members of the

## A network across the Netherlands

As the work of GBS grew, in 1966 they began establishing local committees and appointing correspondents across the country in order to make the work of GBS more widely known and to raise funds for the organisation. Nine geographical districts were established, each headed

by a district board with a commissioner to lead it. The commissioner's task is to develop the work of the committees and correspondents in their area, and stimulate interest in the work of GBS. Every two years a general meeting of board members, committees, and staff is held, where matters concerning the day-to-day running of the society are discussed in the morning meeting, and an introduction is given in the afternoon about the authority of Scripture and Bible translation. The number of committee members (volunteers) is currently about 500; these

are spread over 72 local or regional committees, and 52 correspondents. Since 2014, a committee has also been active for the GBS in South Africa.

## The GBS office in Leerdam

The growing distribution during the 1980s meant that GBS needed a purpose-built space for the storage and distribution of Scriptures. It was decided to build a new building in an industrial estate in Leerdam, a town in the western Netherlands province of Utrecht. This new building contained space for a warehouse, shipping and sales areas, and office space, along with a meeting room for the board which meant they no longer had to meet in De Oude Tram in Amersfoort. The office was opened on 17 September 1987, exactly three hundred and fifty years after the first



*Presenting the Bible to the Queen's private secretary*

Dutch Senate and House of Representatives and the cabinet (ministers and state secretaries). Queen Beatrix as well as Prince Willem-Alexander and his wife were sent copies. Queen Beatrix's secretary wrote to GBS, 'Her Majesty Queen Beatrix asked me to convey her special thanks to you for the beautiful edition of the reprint of the Statenvertaling.'

Various other formats of this Bible have since been published—in 2006 an edition was especially produced for students, and later a pulpit Bible, along with a family size Bible which is often given by churches to newly married couples. GBS also produces other publications about the Statenvertaling, problems with other Bible versions, and resources for children, along with Psalm books.



*The Rev. P. Blok driving in the first pile for the GBS expansion*



*Displays in the GBS exhibition room*

Statenvertaling Bible was presented to the States General.

In 2006 the board decided to renovate and expand the existing building, and the Rev. P. Blok drove the first pile for the expansion on 22 September 2010. This expansion contained a new warehouse section, library, and presentation room. There are also two exhibition rooms, containing three permanent exhibitions on the history of the Statenvertaling, GBS, and Bible distribution. Schools and churches regularly visit GBS and go on tours around the building and view the exhibitions.

### **Distribution of Scriptures in other languages**

Over time, the GBS wanted to expand their aims to the spreading of reliable

Bibles in languages other than just Dutch. In September 1966 the board considered and discussed whether they should work with the Netherlands Bible Society in regard to the distribution of reliable Bibles in other languages for other countries. However, as mentioned previously the NBG pursued an ecumenical policy and allowed modern theological insights in its work, so GBS decided that it was wisest not to work with them.

This led to GBS approaching TBS to work with them, and a relationship issued that has lasted over fifty years and is still very strong today. Both organisations were founded on similar principles, and stand for the Divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, and both desire to produce and circulate accurate versions of the Bible throughout the world.



*GBS warehouse in use for the 2023 Open Day*







*The GBS library*



*Seating and displays in the GBS exhibition room*

On 13 October 1969 it was decided to formally expand the name and purpose of the society to reflect the wider distribution of Scriptures across the world, and it became known as 'The Reformed Bible Society for maintaining the Statenvertaling and for the distribution of Protestant and uncorrupted Bible publications.'

### **Working with the Trinitarian Bible Society**

Today, TBS and GBS have a very close relationship, sharing the same goals and principles. The generous support from GBS has helped TBS pursue projects that might not otherwise have been possible. In turn, TBS has been able to supply GBS with hundreds of thousands of Bibles for distribution.

There are several projects where GBS has worked particularly closely with the TBS. For example, the GBS supports the Chinese Bible translation project. It was with great joy that the Chinese New Testament was published early this year, and work is now ongoing on the Old Testament translation.

The GBS has also supported the revision of the Spanish Bible, and the printing of 30,000 copies to be distributed across Spanish speaking Latin America. In 2020 the GBS also generously donated funds for the printing and distribution of 100,000 Spanish New Testaments with Psalms and Proverbs.

In addition, the GBS has been working with the TBS on the revision of the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament,



*TBS stand at the 2023 GBS Open Day*



*The Rev. Rijken, Mr Lodder, and the Rev. van Heteren of GBS with the TBS General Secretary and Editorial Director*



***Distribution of Shona Bibles***



alongside the Board for Israel and the da Costa Foundation, so that it is more faithful to the Greek Received Text and in a more understandable form of modern Hebrew.

Another instance of cooperation between the GBS and the TBS was in the printing of the Shona Bible when 10,000 copies were printed and distributed for Zimbabwe.

Representatives of GBS often attend the TBS Annual General Meeting, and the TBS General Secretary usually attends the GBS Toogdag. The GBS also holds an annual Open Day at their Leerdam office, with TBS representatives manning a display about the work of the

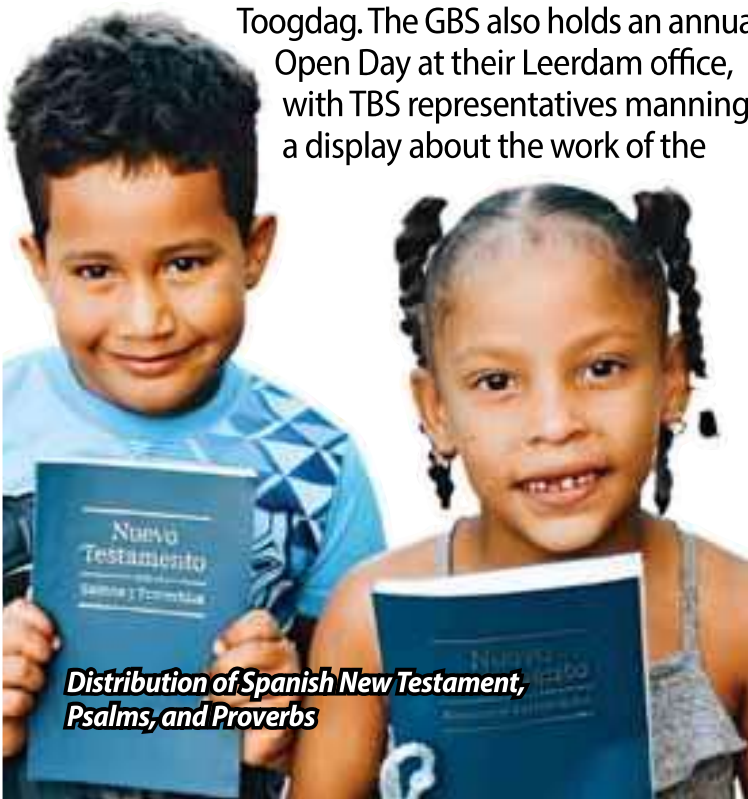
Society. Earlier this year I was able to attend this and see the exhibition rooms in person.

### **Conclusion**

TBS is very grateful for the harmonious and productive relationship it has enjoyed with GBS over many years. The GBS plays a vital role in the preservation and publication of the Statenvertaling across the Netherlands. It is also instrumental in the translation and distribution of Scriptures in many other languages across the world, acting as a sister society to the TBS, for which we would thank the Lord.

### **Endnotes:**

1. Royal Jongbloed is one of the world's leading thin paper Bible printers, and for many years has printed a large number of Bibles for TBS.
2. Not all the nineteenth century updates of the Statenvertaling were as drastic as the revisions done by the NBG. There were also minor revisions (such as the 1834 edition of H. Cats and W. A. van Hengel) that were limited to an update of orthography, grammar, and sometimes word choice. The GBS edition published today itself relies on some of these nineteenth century updates of the Statenvertaling text, but always checked against the original edition of 1657.



***Distribution of Spanish New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs***