

EVANGELISM AND THE EVANGELIST

Evangelism has been discussed so often and we already know that there is considerable division amongst us about this subject. Yet, there are aspects about evangelism in scripture that we don't see at work in the Church today. This must give us reason to review this subject. If we want to give one another direction and leadership using the Word of God we ought not to be afraid to raise certain matters even if we don't have all the answers.

How is the mandate of Matt. 28: 18-20 to be worked out? We read 'And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'

The Holy Spirit amplifies about this when He inspires Paul to say, in his letter to the Romans,(Chap.10:14-21) 'But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach, unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. But I ask, Have they not heard? Indeed they have; for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; and with a foolish nation I will make you angry.' Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, I have been found by those who did not seek me; I shown myself to those who did not ask for me. But of Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

From these directions of the Holy Spirit it must be concluded that evangelism is the task of the Church and that it must send preachers to do it. When we compare this to present day reality there does not appear to be any consistency. The Church sends ministers with a special calling to mission fields to call unbelievers to repentance and to join the church gathering work of Jesus Christ. However, at home, in our own land, we appoint a number of members to an evangelism committee to spread the gospel, to call unbelievers to repentance and to join the church gathering work of Jesus Christ.

At the same time it becomes increasingly plain that mission work and evangelism are two different terms for the same thing. It is interesting to note that we search Scriptures in vain for the term missionary, but three times we can read about an evangelist. The first time is in Acts 21:8 where we can read, 'And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.' Also in Eph.4:11 Paul, in speaking about the offices given as gifts to the church says, 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;' and finally, in 2Tim.4:5 he exhorts Timothy when he says, 'But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.'

How does the task of an evangelist compare with the mandate of God's word that instructs the Church to 'teach all nations...' and that they can not 'hear without a preacher'? It leads us to consider the evangelist as possibly being given to the Church to preach repentance to unbelievers and to gather the sheep into the fold of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, this is not the first time someone has recognized this possibility. The Bible Almanac explains that 'Some ministers called evangelists seemed to have traveled from one congregation to another, as the apostles did. Their title means 'men who handle the gospel.' Some have thought they were all personal deputies of the apostles, as Timothy was of Paul; others suppose that they gained their name through manifesting a special gift of evangelism. 'The elders assume the normal pastoral duties between the visits of these evangelists' (The Bible Almanac, Packer, Tenney, White. pg. 539). John Calvin addressed this matter when he discussed the offices as gifts to the Church in his Institutes. He said, 'By Evangelists, I mean those who, while inferior in rank to the apostles, were next [to] them in office, and even acted as their substitutes. Such were Luke, Timothy, Titus, and the like; perhaps, also, the seventy disciples whom our Saviour appointed in the second place to the apostles (Luke 10:1). According to this interpretation, which appears to me consonant both to the words and the meaning of Paul, those three functions were not instituted in the Church to be perpetual, but only to endure so long as churches were to be formed where none previously existed, or at least where churches were to be transferred from Moses to Christ; although I deny not, that afterward God occasionally raised up apostles, or at least evangelists, in their stead, as has been done in our time. For such were needed to bring back the church from the revolt of antichrist. The office I never the less call extra-ordinary because it has no place in churches duly constituted.' John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion Book V, chap.III.4

The NIV study Bible explains Eph.4:11 regarding evangelists by stating: 'While the other gifted people helped the church grow through edification, the evangelists helped the church grow by augmentation. Since the objective mentioned in v.12 is 'to prepare God's people for works of service,' we may assume that evangelists, among their various ministries, helped other Christians in their testimony...'

In his recent book *With Common Consent*, Rev. van Oene gives the following observation on the evangelist, 'Not too long ago the question was raised whether not the office evangelist should be recognized as a still existing, separate office. This office of evangelist is then thought to be the office of a missionary, of the man charged especially of proclaiming the gospel outside, whether they are living around us or far away, but particularly the latter. It was argued that a missionary has a specific charge, namely to proclaim the gospel and to 'plant the church among the heathen and to lead it towards existing as an autonomous body under its own office bearers.' His office is therefore, so it is argued, different from, though in no way inferior to, that of a minister of the Word.

The churches have not followed this line of thought, although they did adopt a separate form for the ordination (or installation) of missionaries. By adopting such a separate form they did not express that the office of a missionary is different from that of a minister in our midst. They only recognize thereby that a missionary has an - only partly - different task. However, from the fact that the task is partly different one must not draw the conclusion that therefore the office is different.

The general consensus is that the office of evangelist ceased to exist as a separate office when those who are called by this name in the New Testament had passed away. Only three offices are recognized by and in the churches. (With Common Consent, Rev. W. W. J. van Oene, pg 10.)

Rev. van Oene wrote an article in *Clarion* of April 9, 1977 where he deals extensively with the matter of the Evangelist. In it he interchanges the terms missionary and evangelist. He considers them to be the same. He argues against a special office of the evangelist because 'Scripture is too inconclusive to come to the conviction that it is an office in the Church.' He notes in this article that Synod Amersfoort, 1948, in the Netherlands formed a committee to study this matter. Apparently this committee came with a majority and a minority report. The majority advised to recognize the office of evangelist as a separate, distinct office in its own right. Rev. van Oene's reading of this report leads him to the conclusion that the majority put too much emphasis on the fact that an evangelist or missionary worked among different people, had different tasks, and used different methods than a minister. He argues that the evangelist is merely a minister with a special task.

But how, then, is a minister with a special task different than an evangelist? An evangelist or a missionary is indeed a man who must have the same academic and spiritual qualities that a pastor and teacher must have. Yet, such a person must also have additional abilities to communicate and relate to those in the area he is being sent. Foreign language studies may become necessary to master; cultural comprehension may also become a required asset, etc.

Is there a difference between evangelism and mission. If so, what is it. If not, why do we send only ministers to do mission work but have not restricted evangelism in the same way. I believe we would do well to address this matter more precisely. We send ministers with a special task to Brazil, Irian Jaya, and Smithers, BC (among the Indians who live in and around the city and church), while we appoint evangelism committees to do similar work in and around other local churches. Should not our local evangelism be done by an evangelist?

The evangelist should preach the Word, call sinners to repentance, to faith, to membership in the Body of Jesus Christ. Of course the members of the congregation should assist wherever their talents and abilities can be put to good use. Young people can drive, social activities can be arranged, administrative matters can be looked after, etc., etc.

Even though the task of evangelism should be done by evangelists this does not reduce the witness or confession that all Christians must display every day of his life. While living in obedience to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we must let the light that He has shone in our lives reflect on those around us, our neighbours. But this is not the same as evangelism. It is confessing, that is, to say the same. We must say the same as He does in His Word. And we may not be afraid to do so. Our witness, our confession may indeed lead our neighbour to Christ. Such a leading to Christ would mean an introduction to the Church and the involvement of the evangelist who would prepare such a person for membership in it.

This approach to evangelism appears to be more in line with what Scripture mandates the church in Matthew 28.

PdB

YOU REALLY DO BELONG!

Look, the minister has a new tie on. Well, it's about time, that old one was sure ugly. Mr. Van Dijk sure sits funny in his chair... When Dad was an elder he always sat straight up, very proper. What's the minister talking about now; something about school? Yeah, probably! 'Mom, can I have another peppermint?' As soon as we get home I'm going upstairs to ...

Do You Really Belong?

How do you actually sit in Church on Sundays? Do you also have such a tough time to listen to the minister? Are you often bored? Or are you able to keep your mind to it? Do you actually understand anything of the sermon, or the psalms and hymns that the minister announces? Do you know the people he mentions in his prayer? Do you enjoy going to Church or don't you like it at all? Do you actually really belong?

Why Do You Actually Go?

Have you ever thought about why you actually go along to Church? Yeah, I hear you say, my father and mother make me come along. But why do your parents want you to come along? When you're still young you don't even understand most of what the minister is saying. You have to be somewhat older for that, sixteen, seventeen. You could even think - if I can't understand it all why should I be there. I could just as easily stay home. It looks like only the adults belong there. - And still your father and mother make you come along, twice even!

Nicer

Don't you find that things could be done far nicer? Let's say that the minister would have shorter sermons, much shorter. Maybe he should use the storytelling method more, just like the elementary school teacher does. Then a person could at least understand things. How about some more singing, and not only psalms, but some of those songs we learned at school? They're so much nicer to sing. Maybe all the kids could sing some of them together - sort of like a choir -, while the adults are quiet. And maybe a person could do something, like help the caretaker, or the deacons. Wouldn't that make you feel more like you belonged? Some people think so.

Covenant

The church service is a gathering of God's people, God's covenant people. God has also included you in His covenant. When you were baptized you received the sign that goes along with that. And our Lord God is faithful. When He says: 'you're my child', then you are His child. Then you are included in the covenant, and then you belong to His people.

God's Word

That covenant people gathers together twice every Sunday to listen to God's Word. Yes, that's in the first place, to listen together to a part of the Bible, to listen together to the explanation of the minister. That minister, who makes clear to us exactly what God is saying to us in that part

of the Bible. That minister, who tells us, every Sunday again, what the Lord has done for us. How, through the death of God's Son, we have been saved. How we must show that we are saved by the way we live. In that explanation by the minister the Word of the Lord Himself rings out. That's why that sermon is so important.

It's About Him

Furthermore, the people of the Covenant come together to pray, to give thanks and to sing. They also give to the Lord some of the riches He has given to His people first. In all this the whole purpose is for us all together to honour the Lord.

From the Bible we know that the Lord likes that. He says so Himself, e.g. in Isaiah 42:8-12, but also in many other parts of the Bible. In the church service it isn't about us, about what we, children of the Covenant are doing. But, in the first place, it is about Him, our Lord in heaven. We should never forget that!

Good

The Lord thinks it is good that you come to church. He thinks it's good when the children try to listen - and to sing - and to quietly pray along. You do pray along don't you? The Lord wants to be honoured by all of His people - young and old. He has even said that the children belong there. Just read Psalm 8:3 or Matthew 19:13-15. He would like it that the children of the Covenant learn lots about Him. Then later, when they are adults, they can honour Him even better.

Learning

Right, for that honouring of the Lord has to be learned. No one can do that from themselves. Everyone has to learn it. To learn to listen to the Lord, to pray and to sing together; to learn what it means to all be God's people together; to learn that it's all about God in the first place. There's a real nice Bible segment that speaks about that in the beginning of Psalm 78. And if you want to read more in the Bible have a look at what it says in Deuteronomy 31:9-14. Just imagine that you would never go along to church, and that you would only go for the first time when, say, you're fifteen. That's when you would likely be able to understand much more of the sermon. Or not? Wouldn't it be new and strange for you exactly then? Wouldn't it be so that a lot of the words the minister uses would be words you had never heard before? Wouldn't you feel like a stranger then? Wouldn't it seem to you then, that you didn't really belong?

More and More

When you attend church from your youth on you will notice that you will slowly begin to understand more and more what it's all about. You follow more and more of the sermon. You can listen more and more attentively to the longer prayer. The psalms and hymns become more and more familiar to you.

Unnoticed, you participate more and more. No, not at once, but that isn't necessary either. In school you don't learn everything at once either. There you don't immediately go to grade seven when you first arrive at age five or six, do you? There, too, you slowly learn more and more. And you can always ask your parents. Isn't that what you have parents for?

Necessary?

Now we're just going to slip back to the beginning. Is it really going to be necessary to change the worship service? Would things go better then? If you would be allowed to do things, or if you could understand everything right away? Would you like that better? Or should you be allowed to stay home a lot more? Not really, eh? You must have understood by now: it isn't so important that you get your way in the worship service, but, (just to say it this way for once) that the Lord 'gets His way'.

You Really Do Belong!

Let's put it all together once more! The Lord likes it when you come along to the church service. He wants to be honoured by all His people. You belong to that too. Even if you can't understand everything He likes it that you keep coming to learn more and more about Him. And that's what you're doing when you come along to church. Do you understand now why your father and mother make you come along to church? Wouldn't it even be better to say why you're allowed to come to church?

Just try not to become bored.
Just try to learn more and more
Then you're already participating
You really do belong!

By: T. L. Bruinus in Reformanda (translated by PdB)

AS I SEE IT

By H. Ludwig

News of Interest

CRC's Classis Muskegon Approves Women's Ordination

The Christian Reformed debate over women in office has consumed over 25 years of the denomination's time and energy at the synodical level, but it took less than 25 minutes for Classis Muskegon's March 7 meeting to solidly decide in favor of women's ordination. At the classis meeting, Ferrysburg CRC presented a brief overture asking Classis Muskegon to exercise an option given them by Synod 1995, which allowed each classis to declare the word "male" inoperative in the church order article specifying qualifications for elders, ministers, and evangelists. The overture passed by a wide margin of 25 to 9 in a classis with a long history of support for women's ordination.

Christian Reformed Decline Reaches 9.2% of Denomination; Fourth Consecutive Year of Decline Costs CRC Over 24,600 Members, Drops Denomination Back to 1979 Levels

According to the 1996 CRC yearbook, the denominational decline has now reached 9.2% of the CRC's high-water mark of 316,415 members in the 1992 denominational yearbook - a statistic representing denominational membership six months before Synod 1992's decision to allow women to do most work of the ministry without ordination.

