

Organized (for) Action

The Leading Principle

It is about time that something be said about the organization of evangelizing activities in the local church. The reader has been waiting for that and we let him wait till the final chapter . . .

He may have thought, even repeatedly, "That is all nice and dandy, about principles and so forth, but let's do something, let's get into action."

He is right, if he only keeps in mind that the things discussed in the preceding chapters are an absolute necessity! We want to stick to the grass-roots idea, whatever others may say about lack of action.

The grass-roots, however, must and will produce action, and some of that action has to be organized.

We agree with *Merkins* that "IMPRESSION without EXPRESSION leads to REPRESSION." If we only receive, and do not give, the talents and gifts which the Lord has given in our midst according to His promise (I Corinthians 12, etc.), will wither through disuse and disappear in the end.

But let us not put things upside down. Let us refrain from setting up an intricate, well-oiled and smooth-running machinery first and then try to blow life into it and getting people enthusiastic about it.

Better a local congregation with no evangelistic organization whatsoever but fully alive "in the Lord" than a place with much noise of committees and sub-committees and all the works, but no life of the Spirit and no love for the neighbour.

The leading principle and the most important thing is to be church as the New Testament describes it. No Evangelism without Reformation.

Intentional/Unintentional

A few words should be said about a distinction which became popular in the history of Evangelism in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. We think of the distinction between "*opzettelijke en onopzettelijke Evangelisatie*." "*Onopzettelijk*" or *unintentional* was then used for what we have called personal evangelism. The testimony of a Christian life, a Christian family in the neighbourhood — in short, our being believers in the midst of unbelievers — is an "unintentional" thing. Light on a stand, a city on a mountain *cannot* remain hidden. It just has to be there and it is seen by others.

“Opzettelijk” or “intentional” evangelism was then used for organized action. Believers joining in some kind of activity for which you need some form, be it ever so modest, in order to keep the work going; they do this intentionally. They announce a meeting for Tuesday evening, rent a meeting hall, appoint a secretary, make up an agenda, and so on and so forth.

Although I am not happy with the two expressions as such (“opzettelijk” sounds a bit artificial), the distinction as such deserves acceptance. In this final chapter I will briefly describe some of these “intentional” activities. I do, however, repeat that “intentional” has to grow, spontaneously, from “unintentional.”

“The Worst Unemployment Problem”

Before we discuss possibilities of organized action, I think we should — once more — stress the necessity that every local church be *organized for action*. If not, the work of evangelism will always remain a stepchild and never bloom into full strength.

Merkins may be right in saying that “the worst unemployment problem is the one in the church.” Politicians wrestle with their unemployment problems; their promised solutions are foremost among their planks for re-election. It is a terrible thing that society is thus organized that there is not a place for every able-bodied person to work.

Worse, however, is the unemployment problem in the church. A Christian without a “job” in the kingdom of heaven might as well be a dead member. By this I do not mean that everyone who is not active in evangelistic endeavours, is a dead member. “Evangelism” is only part of a Christian’s calling, in a way maybe even a modest part.

But it is a fact that in every local congregation many resources and energies remain untapped. This is not only detrimental for the persons involved (because they are not involved) but it is detrimental for the church as a whole, let alone for our witnessing to the outside world.

In the previous chapter I have, in some detail, recommended the forming of neighbourhood groups. This could already, in addition to existing societies and the like, mean a big step forward to get everyone involved and thus solve the unemployment problem.

There is, however, more.

Merkins wrote, *Organized For Action*, with a supplement, *Training for Lay Leadership*.

For many a person with a Reformed background most of *Merkins’* ideas will seem strange. They have never heard about such things, thus . . . they are not acceptable.

In mentioning these books I do not mean to say that I agree with everything he suggests. But we should agree with the main idea, especially when he puts at the top of his long list:

1. "a faithful use of the means of grace by all members";
2. "securing of proportionate pledges."

From the many details of his program I quote, "a vigorous promotion of Bible classes." However one conceives of Bible classes, be it as societies for Bible study on weekdays, or — as many churches have them — classes before the public worship services, a congregation that limits its church-activity to only attending the (one) Sunday worship service, has not much to offer to anyone. We, Christians should follow the example of the believers in Berea who were daily searching the Scriptures. We must more and more become "the people of the one Book."

Next Merkins mentions "a thorough Talent Enlistment." Especially in a larger congregation the danger is imminent that beautiful talents remain hidden; talents that must be put to work, be it within the congregation itself, or for witnessing to the outside world. If it is true (and it is) that Jesus Christ, through His Holy Spirit, has given gifts to each and every member of the body, there must be an awful lot of gifts in every congregation! They must be put to work! (read I Corinthians 12:4-11).

This is, first of all, necessary and beneficial to the believers themselves. By giving they will receive. By becoming involved in some special task next to their "normal" Christian calling in life, they will be blessed. Recently I heard of a conversation between two young men. The one had quite something on his sleeve; lots of criticism against the consistory in general and the minister in particular; several members of the church were "no good"; things were done that should not be done, and the reverse. The other listened silently. Then the first interrupted himself in his flood of criticism, saying, "Do you never criticize anything?" Whereupon the other answered, "I guess I am too involved in all kinds of things, to criticize." There is a tremendous truth in this simple remark.

Gifts must be employed. People must be challenged to give some of their time and energy (money is most of the time not needed) for some special task in Church and Kingdom. There is no lack of labourers. "All are inspired by one and the same Spirit, Who apportions to each one individually as He wills" (I Corinthians 12:11). But the problem is to put these labourers to work. This will succeed only if and when the congregation is "organized *for* action."

Training

The fact of many gifts and talents being present in the Church because of the presence of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12), does not exclude or render superfluous the *training* of those gifts. On the contrary. Everyone knows that no person will ever become a musician if he has the gift of music but does not train it to the utmost. This goes even for your muscles; if you do not exercise them they will lose their strength.

It is exactly because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and because

He “apportions to each one individually as He wills” (verse 11) that ours is the holy duty to exercise and train these gifts.

Be it far from me to deny that the Reformed community is well-known for its readiness to do more than go to church on Sunday. Our evenings and our meeting rooms are occupied nearly all evenings. We have all kinds of societies for all ages.

Yet, one sometimes wonders if from the fruits we learn a lot about these trees. We realize, of course, that we do not by far see all fruits that grow from this work of Bible study, discussion of Confession, and so on. There must be some fruits, beautiful fruits.

But we are talking within the concept of this booklet. We are thinking of what all this studying and research amounts to; how it is realized in actual and active witnessing for our Saviour and Lord.

It has been said that our tendency and attention, in all these things, is too much “institution-ward”; not much of it is seen in a movement from inside to outside.

It would go beyond the scope of this booklet to go into greater detail of what we would call an integrated system of training the membership of the church for the work in the Kingdom. We do, however, believe that the Reformed congregation would do well to ask itself whether there are gaps to be filled. Should not the “equipping of the saints” (Ephesians 4) continue after the young member has done profession of faith? Should there not be established a “*talent-bank*” from which the consistory, the minister, the committee for evangelism, could draw the necessary talents for work inside and outside the congregation?

We do have a training for the ministry, but that is about all. We do not even have any form of training of brethren for elders and deacons. They are called and have to start their work, without the benefit of a special training. No industry, no civil service or business would think of putting people to work who are not qualified and trained for the job. The demands for such training increase by the year in our complicated civil service.

One wonders whether service in the Kingdom does not deserve more training than working for the Government. Stott writes in one of his books about evangelism that it is a most difficult, even impossible task. “Impossible” because only the Holy Spirit can change hearts; but that does not exclude our endeavours to become the best-possible instruments in His hand.

In the hope that the reader is still with me, I suggest that wherever people join forces to walk the road of organized evangelism, their first concern be to establish some kind of training of promising (young) talents. “Organized action” presupposes “organized for action.” Courses should be given for those who willingly offer themselves for some specific task in the work of evangelism. The main contents of such a course will have to be knowledge of the Scriptures to such an extent that the person is trained

to quote God's own Word in whatever discussion he finds himself with strangers to the Gospel. He should have information available about various sects with which our present world is filled. He must study the history of evangelism as well as the history of the church. And, to mention one more, he should know quite a bit about the laws of communications as far as they may be subservient to communicating the Gospel.

With these remarks we have entered the region of "intentional" or "organized" evangelism.

Possibilities and Opportunities

In the concluding paragraphs some remarks will be made about possibilities and opportunities for organized evangelism.

The reader is kindly urged to keep in mind the "leading principle" as outlined before.

In addition, he must not expect a large-scale programme, a nation-wide action. The warnings of history should not be forgotten. The following suggestions are very modest, although I believe that they are minimal; i.e., without them no organized evangelistic activity will come off the ground. It is my hope and prayer that these suggestions will be considered, discussed, and will result in some action. They are given in order to start and promote thinking about possibilities.

A. Concerted Organization for the Production of Materials

We remember the lesson from the history of Reformed Evangelism in The Netherlands. We remember the names *Jachin* and *Philippus*. At that time there were some "general Christian" organizations for the same purpose but our forefathers deemed it necessary to produce tracts, outlines, helps, etc., on the basis of the Reformed Confession.

Who wants to say that this need has disappeared? This booklet has been stressing the "*Reformed*" throughout. We keep it up especially under the heading of this section.

That does not mean that nothing in this field can be used that is written and published by others. But the condition must be that all material be checked and screened thoroughly. This would call for a committee of informed and "expert" people.

Next to that, new reading-matter must be produced, available for every active believer to be used in his contacts with others. I remember how we tried to start something in that direction some ten or fifteen years ago. Obviously it was "too early." We did not have the men (women) for it. That has now changed.

It stands to reason that such an immense task can hardly be done by one local congregation, by one local committee for Home Mission.

The first step, therefore, is that representatives of all churches

establish contact, the sooner the better, to make plans and to realize them!

Some central address will have to be chosen, but contributions (we do not in the first place think of financial contributions) must come from the churches together. We leave it to experts to decide in what form this has to be done. A Committee, a Publishing House, a Secretariat? *But it must be done!*

A beginning has already been made. Very soon a booklet containing the Reformed Confessions will be made available to local committees. Experience tells that the need for having such a booklet handy is often felt. People want to know what you stand for, what your Church believes.

The second step would be to screen existing material of which there is a "flood." We do not think of Methodistic, pietistic brochures. There is also a considerable amount of good, biblical, and therefore Reformed, material in the form of tracts and so forth. It should not be too difficult to establish an advisory Committee to help local committees in this respect.

Stress should also be put on the need for apologetic materials. The existence of many sects is already mentioned. Our church members should be able to avail themselves of information on a sound, biblical basis.

We think also of the need for guidelines, outlines for Bible study for "beginners" which help them to discover the treasures of Holy Scripture. Information about the churches to help people find their way to the church is another necessity. Bibles must always be in stock in sufficient numbers. And finally, such an organization should see it as its task to provide guidance, in the form of courses, for those who want to prepare themselves for more intensive evangelizing.

B. Library

In every congregation there are societies who have their own libraries. Money is often wasted because these libraries contain, partly, the same books. Our ideal must be a "congregational library" with various sections. One would have to be specific study-material for elders and deacons for the purpose of self-training. Another one, the most important one, a well-stocked section of sound Bible commentaries, for the use of not only the societies but everyone who feels the need. We can even envisage a section with books for the Christian home as an antidote against un-Christian novels. But we must certainly make room in such a congregational library for books, materials fit for the study of evangelism (see Bibliography).

All agree that a church needs a caretaker, to mention one "official."

We believe that a congregational *librarian* is even more important. It may take the reader a few minutes to get accustomed to the idea but he will soon discover that such a librarian with such a library is not a luxury in our time.

As long as there is not (yet) such a congregational library, the Home Mission Committee should consider it one of its tasks to establish and furnish their own. This library should then of course, always contain enough Bibles, which can be obtained very easily for the purpose of Evangelism (from the Home Bible League or Canadian Bible Society).

Collections should be held for this purpose, donations invited. The mere existence of such a library will continually remind us of our calling to "give away our faith."

C. Sunday Schools and Vacation Bible Schools

The survey of the history of Reformed Evangelism has taught us that this form of evangelizing was among the first endeavours ever undertaken. It was, obviously, felt that there, among young children, God provided special opportunities.

First a few remarks about *Vacation Bible Schools*.

These have been held already in several places and it is not hard to discover why. This form of evangelizing seems to be one of the "easiest" ones. Let's be honest, mothers do not mind if their children are safely tucked away for some weeks under good supervision and for "a good purpose." This should not be understood as a derogatory remark. If this is easy, let us then, by all means, begin with what seems to be easy. By these words we have only suggested that it is easy to get the children; not that the teaching of these children is easy!

This leads to a second remark about the material to be used and the method to be followed. Indeed, many of these children are very young, and have to be kept busy also with stories, games, drawing, etc. But the stress must always remain on the Bible. It is a *Bible School*. When these children leave after some weeks, they must take along some substantial knowledge about what the Bible says; its main contents, its call for believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Another remark is that this work can be expanded considerably if it is *de-centralized*. Transportation is always one of the big problems. This is solved for the greater part if we ask (and certainly will receive) permission to use one or two rooms of existing school buildings, in various sections of the town or city. This suggestion does not imply the wish to separate the V.B.S. from the church and its building. But there are important practical reasons (less transportation, more children, better facilities).

There is, in the fourth place, also a reason of principle. We are not entitled to expect too many results from the V.B.S. if this work in such a short period is not *followed up* by contacts with the families where the children come from. In previous chapters the need for de-centralization has been stressed. The church should become *visible* in the neighbourhood. We have reason to fear that this necessary follow-up work has not always received sufficient attention in the case of V.B.S.

One form of follow-up could be a regular Sunday School throughout the greater part of the year. This organized evangelism demands some more attention. There are pros and cons.

Jachin, in The Netherlands, organized these Sunday Schools for children not belonging to the church. The Reformed fathers did not see the need for such Sunday Schools for the children of the Covenant. One of their reasons was, "Let us not overdo it." There is, in the first place, the Christian home where the children are nurtured in the Christian faith. Next, they took their children along to church, as belonging to the congregation, and according to the biblical example. When the prophets called Israel together, they expected also the children, the little ones, to be taken along. Children pick up more from a church service than many adults think. Sometimes they pick up more than adults Then, our fathers established Christian or Reformed Schools where the whole curriculum was built upon a Scriptural foundation. At the age of 12, sometimes 10, they sent them, according to their promise, to the catechism classes.

Should we then add to all this nurture in the Christian faith a special and separate Sunday School for our children?

Should such a Sunday School then see as its specific task "bring our children to Jesus"?

The question remains, "Can we not and should we not establish regular Sunday Schools for 'outside' children?"

There is, in the first place, the problem of facilities. We fear that many churches have been planned and built without taking this possibility into consideration.

But again, we should stick to our main principle, as developed in the previous chapters: start "at the grass-roots." The whole Sunday School Movement has started that way.

Which way?

Simply the way that you reserve an hour of your Sunday for telling your children from the Bible. You would tell them that other boys and girls from the neighbourhood would be welcome. Their parents should be asked for permission. The preaching of the Gospel should never be done in an underhanded way! By this simple method many children would be reached and the church would, again, become "visible" in the neighbourhood. It stands to reason that only those church members can start such a Sunday School whose "walk" in the neighbourhood is blameless (see previous chapters). It may be easier to teach in a Sunday School at the other end of town, where people do not know you, than in your own neighbourhood. Yet, this is the "natural" way.

If you have a neighbourhood Bible group where you have regular contact with your own brothers and sisters, the setting-up of such small Sunday "Schools" might easily become a topic that you discuss together, in order to give each other a hand. In case the attendance grows, the same

group might consider the possibility of looking for a larger room, although de-centralization also here remains the watchword. This would be real "congregational evangelism," wouldn't it?

If we would only get moving in this direction, this would really grow into a local "Sunday School Movement" without much organization and without any financial problems. You would, of course, need some literature, tracts, illustrations, maybe colouring books, etc., but the local library, as we outlined above, would look after that.

Such a contact with the children of your neighbours might also, with the blessing of the Lord, pave the way to their parents. For that matter, any kind of Sunday School should move into that direction: from the children to the families where they come from.

If only the love of Christ compels us

D. Centres for Teenagers?

From experience and discussions of the contents of this booklet I know that quite a few people are concerned about the teenagers that roam our streets, get into mischief, are exposed to the danger of drugs and so on. These brethren feel that, if we pay attention to younger children, we should be even more concerned about the many uprooted young lives.

The reader will understand that I cannot go into details about what is going on among the young generation today. For the causes, the excesses, and the attempts to "pull from the fire" (Jude) as many as we can, we refer to the available literature. Nor can we go into a description and appraisal of what is being done in this field by Campus Crusades, Youth for Christ, Jesus People, and so forth. The brethren who approached me about possibilities in this respect, were told that, if they feel a calling here, they should by all means follow it.

One realizes, however, that this would be much more complicated than the set-up of Sunday Schools as discussed in the previous paragraph.

Apart from personal contacts by which the LORD may have put someone on our way, some organized and concerted effort might demand renting a room, house or building "downtown." As the Good Shepherd went after the lost sheep, so we must go where those teenagers are. We cannot expect them to come to us; we must go to them.

Clubs for teenagers as such would not be anything new. To refer once more to the history and experience in The Netherlands, in the past the workers in evangelism have always felt that one cannot teach young children in Sunday Schools up to the age of twelve and then let them go. The teenage years offer much greater temptation than the preceding ones. The seed sown in younger years might easily become suffocated among the thistles. That's why follow-up classes for teenage boys and girls have been organized for a long time already.

Our time may be different, but the need is the same because man is still the old sinner he has always been.

From recent experiences some lessons must be learned, some warnings heeded.

In the first place, since this is the most difficult form of evangelism, only "the best" should go into it. All too often well-meaning people are led by the nose and become the laughing-stock of youngsters who are experts in evildoing. Teenagers' Centres have not only started to give free coffee and whatever else was offered, but even began to lend money that was asked under false pretences. This would make matters even worse than they are already.

Next, we should not try to become "popular" by adopting a modest measure of hippie style, not only in appearance but also in talk. This seems to serve a good purpose (one might even want to quote Paul, "becoming everything to everyone"), but the hippie style is part of the protest attitude and can never be a first step on the way to Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we want those concerned brethren to start hammering away at the length of the hair and the width of the trouser-leg. By no means! From the heart are the ways of life. Outward appearance is secondary, tertiary. We should try to get behind the closed door of a poor and lonesome and, let's hope, hungry heart.

In the third place, also in our contact with such teenagers the primary calling remains, preaching the good tidings of redemption by Christ's blood and renewal by His Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32). This can never be replaced by discussions and "dialogue." Again, we do not say that there should not be discussion, but it should never take us long to speak about Him Who is the way, the truth and the life. Dr. Billy Graham (whatever objections we may have against his position in various respects) does not hesitate to tell young people that they are sinners, under the power of the devil, and on their way to hell. We must not hesitate to thrust through to the heart with that sword of the Spirit which is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Another warning might necessarily be not to have that eternal sweet smile on your face. The Gospel is masculine, robust and vigorous, exactly what derailed youngsters need if they have been brought up in permissiveness and from there on in slums.

Moreover, although "the church" first comes to them, these teenagers, if they (start to) respond to that call that can give meaning to their ship-wrecked lives, will have to be led to the church as soon as possible.

Our own young people, as we have noticed, have already started on their own by bringing others along to their Young People's Societies. That

is just wonderful, on the condition that a certain number of "strangers" does not alter the character of the society. It puts a great stress and a high demand upon our own young people who, in such a case, have to show what a Reformed study society is all about. But young confessing members, who have willingly committed their lives to their Lord, might be our best "material" for this type of evangelism, be it that they cannot and should not do without the wisdom and advice of their older fellow-believers.

Finally, we realize that we have only very superficially touched this opportunity to reach young people for Christ. Much love and prayer, wisdom and prudence will be needed for even the first careful and modest steps in this direction. But we hope that there will be enough motivation for taking these first steps.

E. "Street Preaching"

Everyone knows that "street-preaching" (straatprediking) has always been a branch in evangelism enjoying much popularity. This was the case not only in the history of Reformed Evangelism, but in all revivals that the world has seen.

In our day the streets downtown, let alone the highways, are monsters killing more people than any revolt or terrorist act of violence. That has not always been the case. I remember the street of my youth as a playground where, every now and then, a horse and buggy passed, and only once or twice a day a roaring truck crept slowly through the narrow streets. In the past the street was the market place, the meeting place. In biblical times that was even more true. In Israel the "street," especially the "gate" where the street widened to a square, was the place where the elders of the city held court; where the news of the day was discussed, where people listened to itinerant preachers and speakers. The ministry of our Lord and Saviour was for the greater part street-ministry. The same was the case with the apostles and the Reformers. The street was the ideal place to meet people and to speak to people. Wesley and others reasoned, "If people no longer come to church, then the church will go to the people," and thus they preached under the blue sky.

This has changed quite a bit!

It is, for that reason, not easy to answer the question whether street preaching still should be one of the preferred means of evangelizing. We know that "open air ministry" is, in our day, performed at Fairs, Exhibitions, in Summer Camps, and even at the Olympic Games. Although the police department will understandably hesitate to give permission for "street preaching" as it was done in our student days, there are undoubtedly opportunities in addition to the ones just mentioned. The love of Jesus Christ will help us to find them and to use them.

But we must right away add that we must have the men and the

talents for it! This kind of preaching demands special talents. We do not downgrade the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit when we state that the minimum requirements for this kind of preaching are, among others, that one should:

- first, be able to speak the language of the people-in-the-street;
- second, present the Gospel in a simple, straightforward manner;
- third, be able to react instantaneously to interruptions.

Some of the readers may remember the name of *Mr. N. Baas* in Amsterdam, next to Rev. *Lukas Lindeboom*. He had these special gifts and did not hesitate to enter into a discussion of socialism in the light of the Gospel. People need to discover that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to the problems of their lives.

Once more, this method can only be used if the Lord provides such special gifts. But He will do this in His good pleasure, when they are needed.

Two more remarks under this heading.

The first is that we should certainly make use of opportunities offered during a Fair, an Exhibition, or something of the kind, to set up a booth with literature fitting for the occasion. Although this kind of distribution of tracts and so on must be accompanied by the willingness and readiness to talk to people, such talk would not demand the special talents that have just been mentioned.

The second remark is that we must be well aware of the fact that in our materialistic age the hearts of people are not very hungry. When one walks through a busy Mall and considers the crowds who are on a shopping spree in our affluent society, one must not expect people to have much interest in the message of the Gospel which is also the message of doom for this God-forsaking world.

We have heard about places in our country where there seems to be a general awakening among the citizenry. Such an awakening is accompanied by a measure of guilt-consciousness and fear of the coming judgment. If it would please the Lord to bring about such a consciousness among our people, street preaching would not be a problem anymore. Nor would there be any lack of gifts, the gifts of the Spirit.

One must, however, keep in mind that the world will not end in a great revival. Apostasy will increase. It is striking that the Scriptures inform us how in the last days the dead bodies of the last witnesses will lie *in the streets* of the megalopolis Babylon. Obviously it is there that the Lord wants us to be, apart from whether people will listen or not. "Get out!" will be the watchword till the very end.

F. Radio and (Cable) Television

Some fifteen years ago the new immigrants from The Netherlands

organized a Canadian Evangelical Broadcasting Association (C.E.B.A.). This early attempt, in which I had a modest share, was undertaken in the desire to copy the Dutch example of the N.C.R.V. However, the bud never bloomed, although we did do some broadcasting. There were practical reasons. The main one was not of a financial nature but the vastness of our country in which only a few people can be reached by regional stations. The costs would have become forbidding if the broadcasting was expanded throughout the whole country.

This example should teach us a lesson. Although we do not deny the possibility — better, the necessity — of a type of broadcasting that will be in antithesis to what we have now, the start should be made *locally*. We are not in The Netherlands, where more Reformed people live in a small country and where the whole nation can be reached by one station. In our love for de-centralization we again applaud this fact.

The obvious opportunity for making use of this modern means for communication is to buy time from a local (or regional) station. The “voice of the church” should be heard in our own community. We have evidence that this can be done. In British Columbia our brothers have done a tremendous job in setting up the proper equipment for broadcasting and thus *The Voice of the Church* is heard. Complete worship services are being broadcast. In a town in Ontario the local Cable Television visits the church service every now and then and tapes the whole service without any costs involved. This service is offered by that company. In another town the local Cable T.V. has offered the church a Sunday evening hour. A Committee is busy preparing for the first appearance on T.V.¹

Money does not seem to be the biggest problem. Even if time has to be bought, we know that many people are gladly willing to share the costs when they see (and hear) that now finally something is being “done.”

We know of the *Back to God Hour* and several other similar broadcasts. The question then arises whether we should not combine forces and establish something similar. Our number is small; but the LORD has already given us great things. We should strive and pray for our own Radio Ministry. The qualifications required for such a Ministry are certainly high. I had the privilege to hear the late Dr. Elderveld talk about all that is involved in preparing one half-hour broadcast. But there are talents that need to be cultivated and called into action. The start has been made in the West. The production needs to be central. We do certainly not suggest that every local committee starts setting up equipment on its own. That would be an irresponsible waste of money and energy. But, if under the

¹ Since this was written, radio broadcast of “The Voice of the Church” has become a regular feature in South-Ontario.

blessing of the King of the Church this is there already and can be improved wherever necessary, it would then be up to local committees (or regional cooperation) to buy time and broadcast the programmes that have been prepared centrally. In this branch of evangelism not only ministers would become involved but other available talents, not to forget the technicians among us. They are said to make good money. Why not give part of their time and money for Kingdom service?

The same goes for (cable) television. We stress the word *cable* here because the companies involved are usually local. Thus we stay at home. We realize that television makes even higher demands than radio. It is most certainly not easy to prepare a good program. Not only technicians (who are, as a rule, provided by the Cable T.V. Company) but the best talents available are called for.

Knowing what is being done in our own town, I would speak a word of warning.

The Cable T.V. Company offered time to "the churches" in town. Meetings were held with representatives of all "the churches." The hope was expressed that this opportunity would be used for a community effort. By this was meant, as could be expected, an "ecumenical" effort in which all the churches would not only share but unite. At the same time the opinion was voiced that the program should not in any way be "offensive" or "sectarian." It stands to reason that no cooperation whatsoever could be given to this betrayal of the Gospel, which is an offence and a stumbling-block. Yet, our representatives, although they finally stood alone, kept on insisting that our share would be given on the condition that we would be absolutely free to bring the message that a sinner needs, and that therefore preaching the Word of God is to remain in the centre.

This illustration is mentioned here to show that the way of "getting out" is full of pitfalls. Even when we get it our own way, we should take heed not to fall into the trap of modernistic approaches. We have no promises for pep-talks, for becoming "popular," for salesman's methods or an imitation of Rock 'n Roll. We have a promise for preaching the Word of God undiluted.

If there is a danger of losing our "Reformed identity" we had better forget about it.

But we have a Word for the world and should keep trying to find ways and means to proclaim it.

G. How to Multiply the Sermon

A. *Bustanoby* wrote an article for *Christianity Today*, September 1972, under the heading "Getting More Mileage Out of Sermons." He started as follows:

"At about twelve noon every Sunday thousands of sermons pass into oblivion with an amen and a closing hymn. Their demise, in

some cases is most fortunate. Yet others are good enough to be shared with a larger audience."

He then proceeds with "some suggestions for getting more mileage out of your sermons."

Before I mention them I would express my hope that Bustanoby is too pessimistic. Is it indeed that bad? We remember Roxburgh saying that the minister preaches within the walls of the church building and that the congregation has to bring the sermon outside those walls.

Does not the true church member take along the message he heard, "ruminating it," as my grandfather called it.

Do we not take the sermon home, to discuss it with our children, so that they may understand it better?

And, most of all, can we keep silent about it when we meet "others"?

Years ago a Reformed minister in Amsterdam had to make use of the streetcar on Monday morning. It struck him that everyone was still speaking about the soccer game they had watched on Sunday. And they, so he heard, kept talking about it till Wednesday. From there on they would already be looking forward to the upcoming game, next Sunday. The minister then started wondering how many church members would, in the streetcar and in the office talk to others about what they had heard on Sunday "from the mouth of the Lord."

Is a soccer game more important than a sermon?

Some readers may answer, "but the sermon usually is not that exciting that you just have to speak about it to others."

Why not agree that they should be better! They will become better, they will indeed be "living preaching" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35), if the study is surrounded by a praying congregation, and if the pulpit is surrounded by a hungry congregation. Preaching is a two-way business.

From the suggestions mentioned by Bustanoby, I mention:

A Tape Ministry. This method is being used more and more. Instead of cumbersome sets of yesterday, light cassette players can be bought for a low price. Both cassettes and tapes should be provided by the church, and then lent to those interested to "multiply the sermon."

Printed Sermons. "The printed page has the distinct advantage of being easily carried and used." If there is a church office, the sermons can be put on a stencil there and produced for distribution. This, in addition to what we have already available in printed sermons.

Newspaper Digest. What Rev. Bustanoby wrote about this possibility to get more mileage out of a sermon, is of special importance. It would be wonderful if we had the talent of a good writer or journalist, able and willing to write a Digest of what, in his opinion, would be of special interest for people outside the church. Several local newspapers would be willing to print such a weekly column. Such a column would be of more importance than many other columns in that newspaper. If several

members of the local church write to the editor of that paper that they would appreciate such a column, one may be sure that the editor will comply. It goes without saying that not the whole sermon be published, but a short, "catchy," summary of the message as it was heard by an intelligent Christian. Such a column might easily result in other people coming to a church where such messages are proclaimed. A wonderful method of evangelism. We should be a bit more convinced that the Reformed pulpit is one of the most important, and also interesting, places in town.

Newspaper Ad. Local newspapers carry announcements of church services. If our services are announced, the minister should provide the "committee for public relations" with the theme of his forthcoming sermons. Let's once more, listen to Rev. Bustanoby. "I comb my sermon for the item that seems to have the most popular interest, perhaps the conclusion of the sermon or an application of one of the points."

Once more, what is proclaimed in church makes for the most interesting news in town, if the preaching is indeed "living preaching" brought in the language of today.

H. Organized Canvassing

This item is mentioned here because it pops up in the history of evangelism. By this is meant, first a saturation of a section of town with evangelistic reading-matter and then, as a follow-up, going from the one house to the next, from the one street to the other, calling on people and trying to get a foot between the door. More or less the method of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, based on a (misinterpreted) word from the Old Testament.

As the reader will expect, we are not too enthusiastic about such a method. We are not prepared to condemn it as wrong but we would prefer (because we believe that the LORD prefers it) that we, again, start "at the grass-roots." That means, in this context, that we do not speak as stranger to stranger, but as neighbour to neighbour, to a colleague, a business-relation. This is, indeed, harder, because these people know us in our weaknesses and failures; yet it is the providential hand of God which causes us to meet these people, thus creating an opportunity for witnessing.

I. A Special Office of "Evangelist"?

In closing, permit me to say a few words in answer to this question. The question is not meant to start a discussion whether, next to the three special offices in the church, there should be a fourth one, that of missionary, be it Foreign or Home Missionary. Some believe that the New Testament term "evangelist" points in the direction of such a special office.

Again, I do not want to start a technical discussion with, in the back of our mind, some articles of the Church Order.

In the first part of this chapter some things have been said about the possibilities and desirability for training workers in evangelism. Be this stressed again as a need.

Now the question arises whether it would not be a good thing to have, next to a minister for "*de binnendienst*," one for "*de buitendienst*"? Article 38 of the Church Order seems to open a way for it. "In places where the consistory is to be instituted for the first time or anew, this shall not take place except with the advice of Classis." Although this article must first be understood against its historical background (written during the progress of the Reformation), it could also mean that the churches of a Classis come together to consider the possibility of gathering the church at a place in its territory where "the Consistory is to be instituted." Such a Classis could, then, also consider the desirability to send a "Home Missionary" to that region.

One may question this interpretation of Article 38 and that would be fine with me. The Church Order does not provide for all possible situations. Even without a Church Order article such an organized endeavour could be started. We have even the idea that in the future this possibility will receive more attention than it receives at the present time. If more candidates for the ministry become available than are needed for vacant churches, we should not start talking about "too many candidates." There are never too many. There are always too few.