

2. SHOULD EVANGELISM BE “INTENTIONAL” OR “UNINTENTIONAL”?

Some readers may frown at the terms of this second dilemma (N.B.: there is no logical order in the dozen dilemmas we plan to examine). A bit of background information may help. The two terms are the best translation we could find for the Dutch words, “opzettelijk” and “onopzettelijk.” The Netherlands have witnessed a hot debate concerning these terms. There was some confusion in the debate too, and there still may be, also among us, even though we might not use these terms.

At one time the dilemma was meant as an alternative between “organized” and “unorganized” evangelistic work. Some were, then, very much in favour of organizing literally everything (we will mention some); others were equally much against organization in this work: let every believer do it his own way, and on his own.

The latter position can, then, again be turned into a dilemma. Must the individual believer intentionally devote some of his time to evangelizing, or should he not rather live a Christian life, according to our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32, “that by our good works our neighbour may also be won for Christ”? You don’t have to say anything, just live a Christian life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and thus you are a readable letter of Jesus Christ. Did not the Lord Jesus Himself say, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may *see* (“see,” not “hear”!) your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)?

All we want to say about this is, that (and we quote Dr. K. Schilder) a very important part of our “walk” is “talk”! A Christian is supposed to be a living walkie-talkie. Our communication and conversation with other people is, mostly, done by the means of talking. There simply is no “walk” without “talk.” Faith is worked by the Word, preached and spoken.

But now back to this second dilemma as it has been a bone of contention. Not many arguments are needed to prove that it is a false dilemma, that it is not a matter of either/or.

In the first place, nearly all we do is intentional, even eating, drinking and sleeping.

As to being witnesses for Jesus Christ, it is our *intention* to speak about our Saviour and to reach the heart of a neighbour, so that he also may be won for Christ. At the same time it becomes unintentional in this sense that our heart urges us to give utterance to the joy we have found in Him. It comes, should come, as “naturally” as breathing. If not, there is something wrong with us. “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (Luke 2:20).

However, the above-mentioned terms in their historical sense speak about whether evangelism should be *organized* or not. Is this really a "dilemma," an either/or?

There are several forms of evangelism which demand some form of organization. If we plan to start a Vacation Bible School, we need localities, teaching-helpers, teachers, canvassing to get the children, and possibly transportation either by a bus or by private cars. Without these things which need to be prepared thoroughly, one cannot very well start a Vacation Bible School. Yes, we know how Sunday Schools started: parents would ask their children to invite some of their neighbourhood friends to the house, and then tell these children about the Gospel. Sometimes it grew, and not having basements or family-rooms like we have, one had to look for a locality, a school building or something, and thus "organization" started.

For broadcasting "The Voice of the Church" one needs quite some money in the first place; then men to speak; buy time on a station, prepare or have prepared tapes with musical framing of the spoken word. Organization! This is especially true for the production of good reading material. Notwithstanding radio and T.V., the written Word is still of great(est) power. This, again, needs organization, and thus committees, meetings of such committees, a chairman and clerk, minutes, and so on. The list is not complete.

Here could be inserted the discussion of another "dilemma": the pros and cons of: do such committees have to be "appointed" and "instructed" by the presbytery, i.e., the meeting of elders or overseers who govern the church? Opinions on that differ. The Dutch sister-churches, as mentioned before, have not hesitated to make evangelism a general synodical business, and given ("given"?) the consistories quite some influence in these matters. Yet, for us it still is an open question: whence does the consistory get the right, duty, mandate (take your pick of a term) to say to brother A., you are going to teach Vacation Bible School, to sister B., you become secretary of the committee for evangelistic reading material, and so on¹

Mind you, we wholeheartedly agree that as members of the church, also in our organized activities, we have submitted ourselves to the supervision of the overseers. But the point is: is it part of their Christ-given mandate to "appoint" members to specific tasks in evangelism? An "open" question indeed.

But — back to the need for some forms of organization, which cannot be denied.

There are, however, some *dangers* here which should be pointed out,

¹ See, however, also the "Conclusion" of this booklet.

if it were only for the reason that we should not repeat the “sins” of the past. A first danger is that appointing or organizing “committees” for various branches of the work of evangelism, easily leads to the conclusion on the part of the congregation, the membership, “well, so we have our ‘Voice of the Church’; now we can relax, after having footed the bill.” This reaction was easily noticeable when CING 108 Stereo, Burlington, started to broadcast the weekly 15-minute speeches. Everyone (of our membership, that is) listens. “That’s our church.” Now “we” are broadcasting! This (expected) reaction necessitated preaching on, “YOU are the Voice of the Church” because YOU are a holy nation, etc., to proclaim . . . (I Peter 2:9, 10). But the reader “sees” it: All that we as members now have to do, is to pay for the broadcast, and to hand out the printed speeches to our neighbours (in which task not everyone understands and does his share).

This first danger of committees, i.e., that we delegate our *own* personal calling of being a witness of Christ to an organization, could already have been mentioned with the first dilemma: “special or general office.” The congregation left it to the consistory, especially the minister, and the elders, said, “We are already so busy; thus you people do it.” And often nothing was done . . . That’s what you may expect from “dilemmas,” from wrong alternatives. This, then, is the first danger of having committees (although we need them!): “the committees do the work of evangelism for us . . .”

There is another danger, one which everyone who has ever been and still is engaged in committee-work, knows all about. The danger is that the committee, the organization becomes an *end in itself*. There seems to be a special breed of “organization-minded people.” Some you can’t even pull to a meeting with seven horses, others simply love it, especially when they get special tasks.

The present writer has been involved in evangelism in the big city. Arriving there, we found a very nicely organized structure of various committees, all represented in a “central committee” of which yours truly was “appointed” chairman. Don’t ask how many meetings were involved in keeping the structure running smoothly (if a structure can “run” . . .). Every committee had, as behoves committees, a chairman, a clerk, an “Algemeen adjunct,” in certain cases a librarian. Convocations had to be sent out, minutes to be written, etc.

You know what a committee-meeting is? Let’s say there are seven people and the meeting lasts two hours and thirty minutes. That makes for seventeen and a half hours! Time that could have been used for the actual work of visiting certain homes, talking to people. We have known people who were so busily engaged in this kind of organizational work, with additional clerk-responsibilities, that most of their free time was taken up by it, and yet — they possibly never talked directly to an unbeliever about the Saviour, never “brought a soul to Christ.”

Coming now to the conclusion of this second dilemma: it is not a dilemma at all! Certain things have to be organized, of course! But let's keep a low profile of any form of organization. Rather consider it as a "necessary evil" than as "an end in itself." And let's beware of the trap: once we have committees and even a broadcast, "we, our church, are engaged in evangelism; so, my soul, take rest: the work is being done," even if you and I personally never actually pass on the Gospel freely, because we have received it without charge and cost

Assuming that consistories have to "appoint" committees, let them never instruct those committees "to promote evangelism among the membership." That should never be the task of a committee which is only to give a helping hand to "God's own people"; the "promotion" has to be done by the office-bearers themselves who have to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and are not allowed to "delegate" this Christ-given mandate to others (cf. Ephesians 4:11ff.).