

Outline

Chapter 2 - 3

Evangelism

Introduction

1. Scripture
 - 1.1. The Word
 - 1.2. The Word is for all
 - 1.3. Preaching
 - 1.4. The Word and the Believer
2. Confession / Church Order / Liturgical Forms
 - 2.1. Belgic Confession
 - 2.2. Heidelberg Catechism
 - 2.3. Canons of Dort
 - 2.4. Church Order
 - 2.5. Forms
3. Purpose
4. History
5. "Confess Me Before Men"
 - 5.1. The Word of God
 - 5.2. The Task of the Church
 - 5.3. The task of the Believers
 - 5.4. Organized Evangelism?
6. Home Mission Committee
7. Evaluation
8. Literature

"SO EVERY ONE WHO CONFESSES ME BEFORE MEN ..."

Introduction

The words of the title for this chapter come from Matthew 10:32. The Lord Jesus sent the twelve apostles into Israel and gave them the mandate to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. In fulfilling this mandate they will face opposition. This should not make them afraid, much less cause them to stop their work. For, says Christ, whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess before My Father. The Lord Jesus spoke these words in the context of a specific mission. Yet we do not go wrong when we apply these words to the task of the church which is built on the foundation of the apostles. The church has to confess the Name of God in all of life. When the church faces opposition because of it, the church should not shrink back, for whoever confesses Christ's name before men, Christ will confess his name before the Father. The call to confess applies to the congregation as a whole as well as to the individual members in their daily lives.

1. Scripture

1.1. The Word

God reveals Himself by His Word. We know God as a speaking God. (See Deut.4) His Word is the good news concerning man's redemption. After man fell into sin the LORD God did not abandon this world but came with His Word. He promised redemption from sin. Christ obtained this redemption by His death. The gospel of Christ must be proclaimed, with the demand to repent and believe.

Isa 52:7-10

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Luke 4:17-21

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

1.2. The Word is for all

The Word of God is a power of God for salvation to every one who has faith (Rom.1:16). The Word is not for a select few, but for all. Although in the Old Testament the LORD revealed His Word to only one nation (Ps.147) He certainly did not abandon the other nations. When the LORD God called Abraham He said, "by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gen.12:3). The prophets of the Old Testament addressed the nations as well as Israel. The prophet Jonah had to go to Nineveh. We come across several examples in the O.T. of outsiders who received a place in Israel by confessing their faith in the God of Israel, e.g. Rahab and Ruth.

Isa 49:6

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Acts 2:11

Cretans and Arabs, we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Rom 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

We learn from the Bible that the good news has to go to God's people Israel, the wayward, and the unbelievers. For the first, the good news going to Israel, see the section about preaching (1 - 6). In the second place, the LORD by His Word calls back those who have known His Word but refuse to obey.

Jer.4:1-2

"If you will return, O Israel, return to me," declares the LORD. "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory."

Mat 15:24

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Rev.2:5

Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Thirdly, the Word is also for those who do not know God. It is through the preaching of the Word that they come to know Him and His salvation.

1 Tim. 2:1,4

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Pet 1:23-25

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Pet 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1.3. Preaching

The Word of the Lord is to be proclaimed with authority. The Lord Jesus entrusts His apostles with this mandate prior to His ascension. It is by the preaching that Christ will gather His people. When the Bible speaks about preaching it refers to the official proclamation by those who have been called for this task.

Mat. 28: 18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Rom.10:14-17

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

1 Thess. 2:13

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Acts 11: 13-14

'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

1.4. The Word and the believer

The Word of God is a power in the lives of the believers(1 Peter 1:23). The word has to dwell richly in the believers. Whatever they do, whether in word or deed, they have to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col.3:15-17). We are called to be prophets that is to confess the name of Christ in all of life. Our duty is to apply the Word of God to today's situation. Our lives must reflect the obedience to the Word. We have to live worthy of the gospel so that outsiders may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

Ps. 40:9

I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD.

Ps.22:22

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

- Joel 2:28 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.
- Col.4:5,6 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
- 1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,
- Mat. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
- 2 Cor.3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts
- 1 Pet 2:9-12 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- 1 Pet 3:1-2 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
- Titus 2:5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.
- Titus 2:8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.
- Titus 2:10 and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

2. Confession / Church Order / Liturgical Forms

2.1. Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession does not directly address the calling of the church in regard to those who have become estranged from the gospel or have never heard about the Lord. The Confession does speak about the rescue of fallen man, the calling of the church to preach the gospel, and everyone's duty to join the church.

Art. 17

We believe that, when He saw that man had thus plunged himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable, our gracious God in His marvellous wisdom and goodness set out to seek man when he trembling fled from Him. He comforted him with the promise that He would give him His Son, born of woman, *to bruise the head of the serpent* and to make man blessed.

Art. 28

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his state or quality may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the Church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow.

All therefore who draw away from the Church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Article 29

The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. ... Those who are of the Church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

2.2. Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism stresses both the importance of preaching and the calling of each believer to show thankfulness in obeying the Lord in all of life.

Q/A 32. Why are you called a Christian?

Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in His anointing, so that I may as prophet confess His Name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and as king fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter reign with Him eternally over all creatures.

Q/A 65. Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, where does this faith come from?

From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.

Q/A 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel?

According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest upon them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come.

Q/A 86. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own, why must we yet do good works?

Because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit to be His image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits, and He may be praised by us. Further, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.

Q/A 122. What is the first petition?

Hallowed be Thy Name. That is: Grant us first of all that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life -- our thoughts, words, and actions -- that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised.

Q/A 123. What is the second petition?

Thy kingdom come. That is: So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee. Preserve and increase Thy church. Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee, and every conspiracy against Thy holy Word. Do all this until the fullness of Thy kingdom comes, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.

2.3. Canons of Dort

The Canons of Dort highlight the character and importance of the preaching.

Chapter 1, Article 3 The Preaching Of The Gospel

So that men may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends heralds of this most joyful message to whom He will and when He wills. By their ministry men are called to repentance and to faith in Christ crucified. For *how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?*

Chapter 2, Article 5 The Universal Proclamation Of The Gospel

The promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe.

Chapter 3/4, Article 8 The Earnest Call By The Gospel

But as many as are called by the gospel are earnestly called, for God earnestly and most sincerely reveals in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He also earnestly promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe.

Chapter 3/4, Article 6 The Need For The Gospel

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God performs by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the gospel of the Messiah, by which it has pleased God to save men who believe, both under the old and new dispensation.

2.4. Church Order

Our current Church Order has no article that deals with this topic. The older version listed as part of the elders' duty "to exhort others in respect to the Christian Religion." (Old Art. 23) The Churches in the Netherlands have the following in their Church Order: "The aim of evangelism shall be to call those who do not know the Lord or who have become estranged from Him and His service, to join the congregation of Christ by making public profession of their faith according to the Reformed doctrine. The consistories shall see to it that the work is done in accordance with this aim."

2.5 Forms

In the Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word we find that the duties of the minister includes to "teach the Word of God to the youth of the church and to others whom God calls." In the Form for the ordination (or Installation) of Missionaries we read:

He [i.e. the Lord] calls His sheep not only from Israel but also from all the nations, and leads them to His fold, that there may be one flock, and Shepherd. ... It is the calling of the church ... to move people to believe in Christ crucified. From the time of the apostles, the Holy Spirit has commanded the church to set men apart for the work to which He has called them.

In Prayer # 2, we pray "May everyone by word and deed magnify Thy holy Name. To this end send faithful servants into Thy harvest."

3. Purpose

In reflecting on the purpose we can concentrate on three areas:

- a. To spread the knowledge of God and His Word.
- b. To call those who do not know God or who have become estranged from the Lord and his service to join the congregation of Christ by making public profession of their faith according to the Reformed doctrine.
- c. To equip the members of the congregation to confess the Name of Christ in all of life and be able to give account of the hope that lives in them.

4. History

We know very little about the manner in which the members of the congregations of the first centuries after Pentecost were involved in what we today call evangelism. What we do know is that the gospel spread. In spite of persecution the church grew. The blood of the martyrs was often the seed of the church. It is true that this is the work of the Lord, at the same time it involves people. We do not find in the early church a defined system of how to approach unbelievers. There were the apologists, men who defended the truth of the gospel in writing, but one gets the impression that the gospel spread in a natural way. It was part and parcel of the lives of these believers to live according to the gospel and to speak about the gospel to others.

In the Middle Ages and the time of the Reformation we do not find a systematic reflection on evangelism either. There was perhaps no need for it, because in spite of all the struggles connected to the Reformation, Europe was generally a Christian society. There were struggles about crucial points of doctrine, but there was no struggle about the question whether God exists or whether the Bible is the Word of God.

This changes in the 18th and 19th centuries on account of the growing industrialization and secularization. Because of the industrialization many existing structures in society fell away. People, for example, moved to the city, away from their ancestral places. The social upheaval that followed this process of industrialization caused many to wander away from the church. In addition, these centuries witnessed a growing secularization. Modern man was of the opinion that he did not need God. The Bible was not accepted as the Word of God. The miracles were looked down upon as fairy tales. The birth and resurrection of the Lord Jesus were considered inconsistent with the findings of science. Many wanted no part of the church or the Christian faith, others were members only in name. To make matters worse, there was a terrible lack of church discipline in many churches.

This called for a reaction. There were those who felt that people who had turned their back to the church or were members in name only needed to be reached and called to repentance. Since discipline was not administered properly, they decided on their own initiative to reach these delinquent members with the gospel. This was called "home mission." It referred to the effort by members of the church or by a private organization to reach out to those who had been baptised but had turned their backs to the Lord and His service.

This "home mission" started in Germany, but was taken over in many other countries. In England this led to the rise of Methodism. The Methodist movement also wanted to reach those who were member only in name. What is distinct with Methodism is its stress on mass events, instant change, a strict method of conversion and the lack of directing people to the church. Methodism gained a tremendous influence in North America. Many of today's approaches to evangelism have their roots in this movement. This shows e.g. in the use of mass events and mass media, the stress on regeneration, on personal experiences, the free will of man and the lack of church consciousness.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have opposed the Methodist movement from the start. At the same time as these Methodist revivals came about, the Lord had given two Reformations (1834, 1886) within the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. In returning to the Word and the Confession the churches also returned to the proper use of discipline. If one is a member but does not live as a member he has to be called to repentance and if there is not repentance, discipline has to be exercised. This return to scriptural discipline took away one of the main reasons for birth of home mission and Methodism. At the same time the Reformed churches did not lose sight of those who once belonged to the church, who carried the sign of the covenant but had become estranged from the service of the Lord. The Reformed churches were convinced that this work of calling them to repentance should be done under the leadership of the church. This was stressed to ward off the Methodist influence. Not the personal experience should be in the centre, but the call to obey the Lord of the covenant in being joined to His church. This work of evangelism flourished in the years 1860 - 1890. After this the work slowed down because of a difference of opinion on who must do the work and how the work should be done.

Moving on now to the 20th century, in 1923 Rev. K.J.Kapteyn published a brochure in which he concluded:

1. The New Testament does not speak about a command to the church to practise organized evangelism, neither can this command be deduced from biblical facts.
2. The New Testament, however, clearly indicates, that the Christian has the task to show that he is a child of God in every day life and in the contacts he has with the world.
3. This attitude and walk of life must be accompanied by speaking about the Gospel when the opportunity arises. In this way Christians give account of the hope which lives in them. This is the natural way of evangelism.
4. Sunday school work, the spreading of the Bible and evangelistic literature should or could be linked together more naturally. Societies and organizations must be an aid to Christians so that they do what they are called to do. (From Diakonia, I, 4, page 8)

The churches discussed the matter of evangelization also at the broadest level. The General Synod Utrecht of 1923 decided that:

1. Evangelism has as purpose to call to the Lord and also to His church those who are estranged from God's Word and the service of the Lord
2. According to Scripture this work of calling straying people belongs to the task of the church of Christ.
3. This means that evangelism is bringing the Word of God, and this must be done in agreement with the confessions of the reformed churches in the Netherlands.
4. The intentional (i.e. organized) evangelism should be done by, or at least be under the guidance of the consistory. For the work of evangelism the consistory should make use of the God-given gifts and powers within the congregation, which are particularly suited to this kind of work. (From Diakonia, I, 4, p.2,3)

In answer to this decision many churches appointed local evangelism committees. Some saw this as a proper development, others maintain that because of this the active involvement of the congregation herself was taken away.

After the Liberation of 1944 the Reformed Churches dealt with the matter of evangelism as well. It was questioned whether it was indeed the task of office bearers to be involved in organized evangelism. Many felt that it is the task of the office bearers to equip and encourage the congregation to live according to gospel. In this way the whole congregation is the salt of the earth (Matthew 5). To organize certain projects was up to the members. In the same way as members work together in matters of education and politics, so they can and may work together in evangelism. In addition there was a growing interest on part of the youth to be involved in the work of evangelism.

Since this was not in line with the direction of Synod 1923, the churches took another look at the whole matter. In 1975 General Synod Kampen formulated the following guidelines:

1. It belongs to the nature of the church of Christ, by means of the gospel entrusted to it, to seek those who are strange to, or are estranged from, God and His service. According to the apostolic command the church prays to God, its Saviour, for all mankind, because He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim.2:1,3,4). The church desires to reach people with the Word of God and to call them to communion with Christ and His people (Canons of Dordt II,5)
2. The office-bearers shall make the members of the congregation aware of this calling and shall equip them for this calling by means of the preaching, the catechism instruction and home visits.
3. The consistories shall continue to oversee the work of the congregation members with their supervision and instruction.
4. Public activities may not be undertaken without consultation and approval of the consistory.
(From *Diakonia*, I, 4, page 3)

Synod Kampen of 1975 saw the calling to evangelize as applying to the whole congregation. It used as proof texts: 1 Cor.1:5; Eph.6:15; Phil.1:27; 2:15,16; Col.4:5,6; 1 Pet 2:9 3:15 and 4:16.

This approach to evangelism also founds its way also into the Church Order of the Dutch churches: "The aim of evangelism shall be to call those who do not know the Lord or who have become estranged from Him and His service, to join the congregation of Christ by making public profession of their faith according to the Reformed doctrine. The consistories shall see to it that the work is done in accordance with this aim."

This whole discussion has not bypassed the Canadian Reformed Churches either. Rev.G.vanDooren published a booklet (Get Out!) that stressed the need to become more involved in evangelism. Others cautioned for such an approach (See e.g. P.K.A.DeBoer, in *Clarion* 32, 1, Jan.14, 1983). There is an Evangelism Taskforce which publishes a bi-annual magazine Outreach, and Evangel which appears four times per year and is meant to be distributed to outsiders. We also notice in our churches an increased interest in reaching out to others, and, and relief work in other countries.

A few comments yet on the century in which we live. Whereas in the previous century the churches were dealing with those who once were a member or who had been baptised, but were estranged from the church and the gospel, today we deal more with outright unbelievers. The secularization that started in previous centuries has continued at an alarming rate. No longer can we address our nation as a wayward covenant people, but rather, as outright unbelievers. We can notice an increase in opposition and even hatred against what is Christian and the values of Christianity. We live in a society that once knew God but now defies Him. The Lord is preparing it for the day of judgment. The church should then not be afraid to speak of this coming judgment as well. There is a difference in dealing with a society that has not heard of the Lord and a society that has rejected the Lord.

In addition to being confronted with growing unbelief in our society, we also witness a growth in other religions, such as Muslims and Hindus. This is due to immigration but also to unbelievers trying to find meaning and purpose to life. The question has to be asked what duty we have towards them.

In reaction to the secularization of our society we witness an evangelical movement which is very vocal. It places much stress on action and personal conversion. Much work is done by private enterprises, which carry the name of 'ministry' but are not at connected to the church. The term "ministry" is disconnected from the church and its offices and applied to different duties, such as, for example, relief work or Bible translation. These organization do much wonderful work at the same time we should not forget that their basis is often not in line with the Reformed confessions. The materials produced by many of these so-called 'ministries' reflect this as well. There is the real danger is that as we use this material, we also take over ideas, or methods that are not in agreement with the Reformed faith. We need to discern.

5. "Confess Me before Men"

What is now the task of the church and of the members? What direction do we have to give as office-bearers?

5.1. Word of God

The Word of God is a power unto salvation. This Word is not for a select few, but must be proclaimed to all men without discrimination. If God desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and so be saved then this means that the Word has to go out. The church is not allowed to keep this Word to herself, but as the pillar and bulwark of the truth, has to hold it up in this world. The promise that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life, ought to be proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men, to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe (C.o.D. II,5) This proclamation of the church will also prepare the world for the final judgment. There is as such no difference between doing this close by or far away. The Word has to go to far away countries, but must also be held up in our own area.

The church has received the Word of God. When we speak of "the church" we can think of the office bearers, appointed by Christ to give leadership and direction. But we can also think of the congregation, the members. As Reformed churches we do not maintain a clergy-laity distinction. True, we distinguish between their respective tasks, but at the same time maintain the underlying unity. The Word is not the sole possession of the office-bearers, they have to administer it. Neither is it up to each member to do with the Word whatever he wants (See e.g. 1 Peter 1:23-25 and 2 Peter 1: 20-21). He receives, reads and speaks about the Bible as a member of the Body of the Lord. The special offices are not in opposition to the office of all believers, nor does the office of all believers do away with the need for the special offices. Rather they must work together, with their own tasks and responsibilities. The question whether evangelism is to be done by the church or by the members has to be answered in this light.

5.2. Task of Church

What is the task of the church? The Church has to preach the Word. The keys of the Kingdom of heaven have been entrusted to the church. The office-bearers speak as ambassadors of Christ. They receive their authority from Christ. Isaiah 52 and Romans 10 teach us that this preaching is the official proclamation by the servants of Christ ordained for this purpose. We should use the term "preaching" in connection with the official work. This is supported by what we read in Matthew 28. The task to preach is connected to the task to baptize, which indicates that we are dealing with the official task of the church. The confessions use the word preaching then also in this sense (See L.D. 25 and 31). It is not the task of the members to preach. C.o.D. II,5 connect the proclamation also to the sending of the gospel by God. In Prayer #2, we pray that every one by word and deed may magnify the holy Name of God. But then we add: "To this end send faithful servants into Thy harvest and equip them to discharge diligently the duties of their office." The official call to repent and believe is to be announced by those who have been ordained to this task. We

maintain that faith is worked by the preaching of the Gospel. For this reason the church can call a missionary to work in this area.

5.3. Task of the Believers

What is then the task of the members? Do they have a calling? Yes, they certainly do. Their calling is to live according to the Word, to confess the Name of Christ in all of life. The believers have to witness and speak about the good news in Christ. They are to do this in the environment and surroundings that they live and work. This witnessing includes words as well as deeds. In fact, it is not right to separate these two. Words have no meaning if they are not supported by deeds. This is exactly why within one's own surroundings these deeds and words can have effect. Outsiders not only hear but also see that God's Word rules our lives. This is also why evangelism in the community we live and work in is so important. The people we talk to can see how we live with the Word in our daily lives. We can also invite them to come along to church to hear the proclamation of the Word.

The Lord Jesus uses the word "confess" in Matthew 10. To confess means literally, to repeat the Word of God. This is an important element in our confrontation with evangelicalism. The focus is not in the first place on our personal experiences, we speak about the reality God's work in the Lord Jesus Christ. To witness is to state the facts, in this case the facts of salvation and to do so in a way that shows we have been personally changed by them. Yes, God sent His Son. Yes, He died on the cross for sinners like us. Yes, He rose and is now seated at God's right hand for our benefit. Yes, He will come to judge the living and the dead. Yes, I believe in Him, for there is no other way to salvation. Witnessing is to speak of the facts of salvation and to state that they are true. Therefore this witness is to be in harmony with the Reformed Confessions. In the Reformed Confessions we summarize God's work of redemption. This means that evangelism must be done according to the Reformed faith. What we want to show and teach others is the Reformed faith. As in all other areas of life, so also here we are bound to what we confess.

All this means that the emphasis is on the daily lives of the members. We are not opposed to organized projects as such, but the strength of evangelism lies in showing your faith and speaking about it in our daily lives. When outsiders see and hear who we are and how we live and work then they can be won for Christ. This is what we have to stress as overseers. The harmony between the special offices and the office of all believers is that the elders encourage and equip the members for this service, and that, from their side, the members direct those whom they speak with to the church.

5.4. Organized Evangelism?

What about organized projects? Are members allowed to organize evangelism projects? Synod Utrecht 1923 said it was not right. Synod Kampen 1975 said it was right on the condition that it is done in consultation with and approval of the consistory. The texts used by Synod Kampen to show the task of the congregation, are not clear in this regard. They point to the task of the believers to live and speak according to the gospel, but do not deal with organized projects. At best one can say that they do not forbid organized projects. There is no direct scriptural command which demand organized projects. Nor do we find any example of such a project in the Bible. The other side is, of course, there is no scriptural command that forbids such projects. All this should make us careful to conclude that one has to be involved in such projects or that one may not be involved in them. Each project should be evaluated on its own merit. The consistory has to see to it that what is done is indeed in harmony with the doctrine of the Word of God. Are members then allowed to organize a project? Yes, provided it is in line with what we confess. We need to keep in mind that the members of the congregation have different talents and gifts. Not all the members need to be involved in evangelism, those who have gifts in this regard can do this, others may have gifts to work within the congregation. In order to reach out, it is important that the congregation itself is strong and vibrant. Each member has his own place and talents within the function of the church.

5.5. The task of the Elders

General Synod Kampen 1975 stated that the office-bearers shall make the members of the congregation aware of this calling and shall equip them for this calling by means of the preaching, the catechism instruction and home visits. Synod added that the consistories shall continue to oversee the work of the congregation members with their supervision and instruction. The elders have a task with regard to guests that attend our worship services. They can welcome them and make sure they are aware of the way a worship service takes place. When regular guests want to receive further instruction, often the minister takes care of this, but there is no reason why elders cannot be involved in this.

6. Home Mission Committee

The elders are called to encourage and equip the members in their calling to confess the Name of Christ in all of life. This must be addressed in preaching, catechism instruction and home visits. Most churches have an evangelism committee. Having a committee can be helpful, but should not take the initiative of the congregation away. It is important to have a clear mandate for the Committee and a open line of communication with the Council.

The mandate of the Committee is found in the section **Mandates and Regulations**.

7. Evaluation

1. Do we have questions about the Scriptural and Confessional material?
2. Do we agree on the purpose?
3. How are we fulfilling our task to be a pillar and bulwark of the truth?
4. How can we make people aware of this?
5. What initiative is directed to those who have left the church?
6. Do we agree on the task of the church and the congregation?
7. How can we help the congregation?
8. Do we agree on the task of the elders?
9. Review the mandate for the Evangelism Committee. Are changes necessary?
Is the mandate maintained? Does the Committee function as it should?
10. Are there matters that need our attention? Why? How will we deal with them?

8. Literature

- S.Cnossen, Organized Evangelism: a controversial matter, in Diakonia, 1,4
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