

## CHAPTER II

# Objections

### *Introduction*

This booklet is supposed to deal with the topic “Evangelism.” The reader may become impatient. A whole chapter has already been “wasted” on our own problems without telling people, “Get out and win souls for Jesus.” Now it seems as though we are getting another chapter of the same kind!

We hope, however, that — if these pages are used as a starting point for discussion — the first chapter has already proved its usefulness.

What is, namely, our purpose? That a few among us who are very much evangelism-conscious, run away with their primary concern and leave the whole flock behind? Or is it our endeavour to get that whole flock along?

Some soul-searching and self-examination is not only worthwhile but a necessity. If we confess that by our godly walk the neighbour also must be won for Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32), then our first concern is that our neighbours in the church are won for Christ and His work and kingdom!

Who are more dear to us, the lost sinners around us or those who already, by the grace of God, have been saved from damnation? It would not be the first time that those who have understood the call to “get out” became so impatient with their fellow believers that they despised and abandoned them. Talking about “gathering the church . . . .” If we are willing to have some patience with outsiders, how much more should we then not also show a little bit of the image of Jesus Christ and His apostles and have some more patience with those who are inside!

But, you say, Jesus Christ left the 99 behind to find the one that was lost. Yes, indeed, He did that and gave us an example. But what did He really do? It was His interest not only in that one lost sheep but in the completeness of the flock (“100”). He did not abandon His flock. Imagine! He left it behind within the confines of the sheepfold, so that they might not go astray. And when He had found the one lost sheep, He brought it back to the flock! Thus the flock was complete again.

In addition, we are of the opinion that it is not only beneficial but absolutely necessary for the believers to listen to each other.

It cannot be denied that among our number there are divergent

opinions about “evangelism.” This chapter will illustrate that. Some are very much for it; others, if not against, have their qualms. It would be a deplorable lack of love if we were unwilling to listen patiently to each other, to be prepared to understand each other. And — maybe — in the process learn from each other.

Wherever Christians become active in evangelistic endeavours, dangers lurk around the corner. There is some reason for the objections which will be mentioned below. Lessons have to be learned from the past. Pitfalls have to be avoided. If we are after *Reformed* evangelism, we should not lose Reformed doctrine and backbone in the process.

The subtitle of this booklet speaks not only about Reformed but also of “congregational” evangelism. The whole congregation, each according to his and her gifts, has to be activated and to become active if we are really to be and to become a church with open doors. This is the main reason for dedicating a whole chapter to some objections, voiced by good, Reformed Christians. Everyone should be willing to listen and to learn.

This discussion will, by the same token, bring us into contact with the *history* of Reformed evangelism for the simple reason that the objections to be mentioned are not new: they have accompanied that history from the very start.

*1. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, “Go ye therefore . . .” is meant for Mission, Foreign Mission that is. This should be our primary concern because Jesus Christ cannot return unless and until the Good Tidings are brought to all nations. BUT — once the Church is planted or gathered at a certain place, the (only) calling is “to be Church,” i.e., a city on a mountain; visible not so much in having a building of its own but in the daily life of its living members. That’s all there is to it. Then the doors are open and the Lord will bring others in. The simple fact of the Church being there may also be a judgment for that city and town. On the day of judgment the Lord will say, “You could have known; I had my Church there, but you never took the trouble to go.”*

*Overagainst the complaint (once heard in a congregational meeting) that there is such a little amount, if any, on the yearly budget for evangelism, it was stated by others that the whole budget, including that of the school, was indirectly a budget for evangelism. Keeping up a building, looking after the minister financially, and everything else is aimed at preserving the Church so that it be there, ready to receive others if they come.*

*People know that there is a Church and what’s going on there. Let them come on their own initiative. Does not Scripture say that the LORD added unto the Church? WE cannot do that.*

*Our only task is to live according to what we hear on Sunday; to do so*

*in the street where we live, on the job. That's our (only) evangelistic task. If we are faithful in these respects, we may expect God's blessing. Such a true Church will work like a magnet. And, in addition, it is in harmony with our Reformed Creed which speaks of "our godly walk" by which "our neighbour may be won" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32).*

We have given ample room to this first objection, not only because it is in fact a whole cluster of objections but especially because the elements of truth in it deserve the full attention of every Reformed Christian.

Be it kept in mind that this objection is not directed against any witness of a believer in his contact with unbelievers; on the contrary, this is part of our "godly walk." The greatest part of "walk" understood as our conversation (in older English, our "intercourse") is *talk* anyway. Not only the life of Christians but that of each human being is a living "walkie-talkie . . ." But the objection is directed against the demand that there be, in addition to our regular church life, some or much organized action to win the whole world around us for Christ. The objection is against the accusation of "evangelistic Christians" that, unless a church pays as much for the "buitendienst" as it does for the "binnendienst," it is incomplete and disobedient to its mandate-as-Church.

What is our answer to this objection?

In the first place, we must recognize the truth-elements in it.

It is not a new objection, as we said already. In the *Handboek voor Gereformeerde Evangelisatie*, to which volume we plan to return, one can read much about it. It was there right from the start when in the nineteenth century evangelism became an organized endeavour.

We may even say that in bygone days this objection had more weight than it has today. First there weren't that many "churches" around. Then, the church stood in the centre of town and was the centre of the life of the community. Nearly everyone was, in some way, related to it and was daily confronted with it.

This situation has changed radically. The brethren who parade with this objection, should ask themselves whether they are not living in the past. Today one cannot say that everyone "sees" the church and knows what it is all about. It may even be true that the modern unbeliever, exactly because he sees so many "churches," doesn't see the church at all anymore.

But truth-elements there are in this objection!

When the rich man asked that special messengers be sent to his relatives the answer was, "They have the prophets!" We would say today, "They can buy a Bible for one or two dollars." They can and must know. But they do not want to. The Lord isn't going to add anything special to what is already present in the world.

In Romans 1:18-23 we read that even the gentiles are without excuse.

They “see” the power of God and His divinity all around but they have changed His glory into shame. That is inexcusable . . . .

How much more, then, are those people inexcusable who have grown up in a nation where there are churches galore, Book and Bible Houses, a Canadian Bible Society and a Canadian Home Bible League. They have had Christian neighbours, colleagues, and that was more than enough. They were born in the shadow of the Church and for that reason are without excuse.

Yet — and this in the second place — this is not the whole truth.

Those gentiles of Romans 1 were without excuse, but the grace of God is always more abundant than man’s sin (chapter 5). God sent messengers of the wonderful Tidings to those gentiles. His love is always stronger.

Furthermore, we hear in this above-mentioned objection, be it voiced with all good intention, an un-Reformed note. Does it not boil down to: “leave it up to them to come on their own initiative . . .”? People who adhere to the Canons of Dort should think twice before they say a thing like that! No one comes to the Lord “on his own initiative.” In the same letter Paul writes (Romans 10), “How are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?” The conclusion must be that Christians have to go out to unbelievers and not the other way around.

It is simply not true that the whole calling of the church is to be there and wait till others come. We have a beautiful illustration of the contrary in I Thessalonians 1:8 and following. The apostle had been in their midst only a very short time. He was chased away, so to speak, by his enemies. But what did the Thessalonian Christians do? “The word of the Lord sounded forth from you.” And, “your faith has gone forth everywhere.” There you have the two together. Not only their “faith” (their being believers, their renewed lives), their hope and love went forth so that people heard and saw. Also the Word of the Lord sounded forth. They got out and passed it on. It is not true that, once the apostles had planted the Church, they left with the message: now be church. The already-gathered believers kept on gathering others.

In the third place, here we touch upon the main thesis of this booklet to which we hope to return in greater detail. Allow us to put it in the form of a question. What is the Biblical image of the church? Is it the picture of a passive, only listening flock, leaving the work of the kingdom to their elected executives? Or is it the picture of Ephesians 4, where we must read in verse 11 and 12 that Christ gave apostles, pastors, etc., “for the equipment of the saints (and then no comma please! vD) for the work of ministry (*diakonia*), for building up the body of Christ.” The “work of the ministry” has to be done by the “saints.” They are (says Peter) “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people of God, that they may proclaim . . . .”

The first objection which we are dealing with is in danger to lose sight of this central New Testamentic theme and thus to dishonour the Church of the new dispensation.

When the Catechism asks, "Why are you called a Christian?" (Lord's Day 12), the answer is in the first place, "That I may confess His Name." From the reference texts provided by the Catechism (Romans 10:10[!] and Matthew 10:32) we learn that something more is meant here than only doing profession of faith within the four walls of the church building. "Everyone who acknowledges me *before men*" (Matthew 10). Be it agreed that the context speaks of being brought to court, but isn't it true that we are all and always standing "before the court" of the world? The world even expects from us that we speak up.

Finally, we must not forget that we live in the days after Pentecost; the prayer of Moses that all the people might be prophets, is heard by Jesus Christ, Who sent the Spirit Whom He had received from His Father.

In conclusion — notwithstanding the elements of truth in this first objection — the Biblical testimony is clear:

*Go forth in His service,  
Be strong in His might  
To conquer all evil  
And stand for the right. (Psalm 149)*

True, that is not only meant for what we call "evangelism," but this isn't excluded either!

*2. Becoming active in (organized) evangelism always holds a danger, as experience illustrates beyond doubt. People who want to win others for Christ (and His Church?!) are in constant danger and temptation to water down the full message of the Scriptures to a Salvation Army type of message. Instead of God-centred Evangelism they turn the Good Tidings into a man-centred, pietistic and individualistic plea to let your "soul be saved for heaven." Their everlasting smile reveals nothing of the wrath of God against an apostate generation. Nor do they tell their audience that the Gospel has a message not only for the soul but also for the body: total commitment. That was an important element of truth in a recent publication, "OUT OF CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH."*

When analysing this objection we will have, first, to admit the truth it contains and we had better take heed to the sound warning it conveys.

If we are going to undertake "Reformed Evangelism," we should never sacrifice the former word to the latter. Our message, then, has to be more than a revivalistic invitation to put up your hand and choose Jesus Christ. The "full Gospel" implies that we put the stress on the sovereignty

and holiness of the Lord of hosts. It means to respect His Covenant-demands. It also means that the truth be told about what, according to the Bible and the Reformed Creeds, makes for a true church.

When we see the long list of "churches" united for *Key '73* and find among them many sects we wonder what kind of message that is going to be . . . .

Furthermore, it cannot be denied (the past is a proof) that there were in the church of Reformed style on the one hand people who were engaged in all kinds of church-work, in Christian organizations and the like. On the other hand, you found people interested (only?) in winning souls. This brought about much friction, numerous reproaches. The former accused the latter that they were no longer truly Reformed since they underestimated and despised Christian organizations. The latter accused the former that they did not love their fellow men. And so on . . . . Some churches are right now in commotion because of this friction. We would be fools to deny that among "us" the same friction is found, maybe only in principle as yet. Home Mission workers are (as was clearly felt when the substance of this booklet was discussed in a summer course) annoyed by those who always and again stress the word "Reformed." Why in the world always talking about it . . . ?" "We are doing nothing!"

Such people deserve the criticism in this first objection.

Yet, the objection is only partly justified.

In a next chapter we will discuss *Motives* for Evangelism. The greatest and strongest motive is to be the glory of God, the greatness of Jesus Christ Whose glory is in the number of His subjects. This always comes first. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and strength. And then, you shall love your neighbour as yourselves. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 the Lord added, "teaching them to keep *all* that I have commanded you."

We must indeed admit that Reformed believers have to be very careful. The great dividing line on our continent is the one between Arminianism and Calvinism. This comes especially to the fore in evangelistic work. We do not have to mention names in order to realize that much evangelistic preaching shows an Arminian tendency. We will have to speak an absolute NO to this kind of evangelizing. There is no better, no stronger Biblical, no more promising approach than that described and confessed in the first chapter of the Canons of Dort. Their main contents are, indeed, the confession of divine predestination.

For how many evangelists of today is this doctrine the centre of their thought? They may think that predestination robs you of the motive for witnessing, whereas we believe it is the strongest motive as well as promise for evangelism.

It lies outside the scope of this chapter to paraphrase chapter one of the Canons. Let it, however, be a topic in our discussion on evangelism.

Discover how beautifully everything is put in its proper place and how strongly the call for witnessing is stressed.

Recently I received a letter from a member who wrote, "The Bible is not a book on 'How to live in this world,' its only contents are how I can be saved. I am convinced that we must "hate" such a man-centred approach."

*3. Workers in the field of Home Mission or Evangelism often seem to lose (much of) their Reformed backbone. They are tempted to play down the specific Reformed doctrines and are more interested in cooperation with people from various backgrounds instead of finding their interest in the preservation of the Reformed truth and church.*

We hope that our remarks about the second objection have already, for the greater part, counter-acted this danger (in theory, at least). The only thing to be added is that no one should become annoyed by the repeated stress on being and remaining truly Reformed. This would be proof of a tragic misunderstanding.

"Reformed" is not just one of the many "traditions" of the Christian Church. The reformers of the sixteenth century simply re-formed, i.e., returned to the Scriptures and to the faith of the early Church. The Reformed doctrine is nothing but "the true and complete doctrine of salvation." Annoyance with the frequent use of this word may therefore already be legitimate ground for suspicion and betray some degree of confessional (or better: un- and anti-confessional) indifference. What is left to be passed on to others, if it is not that "full and complete doctrine"?

*4. New converts seem to remain STRANGERS in the church. As a result they do not usually strengthen the church. It happens more often than one wants to admit that, after shorter or longer time, they become dissatisfied and fall back to their former ways.*

We have quite a few things to say about this objection.

The first thing to be said is that the partial truth of this statement cannot be denied. Although one should right away add the question, "Who is to blame for such a disappointing development if it occurs?"

When the objections described in this chapter were discussed for the first time in our congregation, we all were reminded of some "cases" where people who had joined the church at a certain time past, had left again. They could maybe not be properly called "products of evangelism." But they had come from the "outside," were properly taught and trained for membership, made public profession of their faith, saying that it was a great day in their life, but alas, some of them are "gone. . . ."

Talking about “who is to blame” we are convinced that we as Reformed community must take the first blame. It would prove lack of honesty and self-knowledge if we were not prepared to do so. Not only may we find in ourselves a lack of true hospitality, of opening our hearts to others. The worst thing is in this respect that we have often not paid sufficient attention to what we call “after-care.” The reader will find sufficient information in the attached bibliography about the meaning and set-up of this after-care. We believe (and again we must say: more on this later) that we must squarely face the question whether or not the whole set-up of the life of the Reformed congregation shows sufficient similarity to a harmonious system of continued training for service. The present writer has published several articles in *Canadian Reformed Magazine* which cannot all be reprinted here. Two things, however, should be agreed upon without any further discussion.

First, the picture of the New Testament congregation is one of “continuing in the doctrine of the apostles” (which is more than just claiming that our written creeds are the best in the world); it is “being equipped for service” (see also Paul’s Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus).

Second, this teaching and equipping must be adapted to the needs of the congregation in the twentieth century — the needs especially with regard to its calling towards the surrounding world.

Let’s not forget that we are talking about who is to blame for the fact that there is a resemblance to fact in the objection under discussion.

Usually, teaching and training stop when the young member is admitted to the Holy Supper. The age has gone down considerably in comparison with some three, four or five generations ago. That means, a shorter time for training the young. Then it stops. They are now left to themselves. Can one say, with a good conscience, that the Reformed congregation is “organized for action?”

With the present system we have also left new converts to themselves. We assumed that they, after having been admitted to public profession of faith, could look after themselves. We did not, as a rule, introduce them into the congregational life; we did not claim their talents for some specific service in church and kingdom. At the same time we made life a bit hard for them by our mixture of biblical attitude and traditional customs. Thus we must criticize ourselves if people, recently won for Christ, do not become completely integrated.

Something has to be added yet in order to rectify a certain aspect in the objection under discussion.

The Reformed community had been plagued by the strange doctrine of presupposed or presumptive regeneration. For the “outsider” the following explanation: Some churches have, at a certain time in history, demanded from their preachers that they should teach the doctrine that



children of believing parents are to be baptized on the presumption that they are (already) re-born at the time of their baptism. Later on this statement was somewhat modified. It was enough to presume that these children were elected and consequently at a certain age were to be regenerated, be it before, during, or after baptism. Hidden in this strange, unbiblical doctrine was the idea that children of believers are essentially different from children of unbelievers. In their blood seems to have been mixed some measure of grace from their birth.

Well, that's enough for our purpose.

The strange thing, however, is that every now and then one meets among people who have rejected this doctrine, a tendency to let it in through the back door again. People who were born "in the church" seem to be considered as essentially different from those who at a later age are added to the church. We have mentioned this already in the previous chapter. As a result the latter seem never to be taken quite seriously. The result is that people who consider themselves as having been born Reformed, can hardly believe that those who become Reformed Christians at a later date will ever become what they themselves are. This unchristian attitude has to be pulled out by the roots.

Finally, we are saying nothing new when we state that new converts, whose hearts have been changed by Word and Spirit, want to be radical. They are perfectly willing to learn more, to learn everything and to start a completely new life. The whole church is to blame if we do not help them in this respect and "lead them safely onward."

##### 5. *"It is impossible . . ."*

*Workers in evangelism seem, in their enthusiasm, to forget the difference between Foreign Mission and Home Mission. As a result they are in danger of overlooking teachings of the Scriptures, like Hebrews 6:4-6, Titus 3:10, Revelation 2, 3, and — not to forget — the very same words of the Saviour. Evangelism is directed towards "apostates" and the Scriptures do not give much hope for them. Usually, as a judgment from the LORD, the only result is a further hardening of their hearts.*

This objection is worth close attention, if it were only for the fact that the Scriptures are quoted.

In Matthew 10 we read how the Lord sent His disciples, two by two, throughout the country. "Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (verses 5, 6). So, this is real "Home Mission," one would say. But now read verse 14. "If any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

Paul seems to have had these words in mind when he wrote to Titus, "As for a man who is factious (KJV, a heretic; others, a sectarian), after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him."

In evangelizing, people want to be "patient"; they do not stop talking and talking and trying and hoping. Why not listen to the words of Jesus and His apostle? Shake off the dust! Having warned a person once or twice, have nothing to do with him anymore!

Hebrews 6 is even stronger. "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, . . . if they then commit apostasy" (verses 4-6). We try, in evangelism, to renew such people to repentance, but the Holy Spirit says, "It is impossible." We seem to want to be wiser than God.

The same message is found in Revelation. Read the letters to the seven chapters, chapters 2 and 3. If they forsake their first love, if they do not repent, Christ Himself will come and take away the lampstand. The "white horse" of the Gospel runs all over the world, but it does not run in circles. Once the church has been somewhere and apostasy has set in, the light is taken away; only darkness is left.

Thus far this fifth objection to evangelism.

We must start with recognizing the truth in this way of reasoning, not only because the Scriptures are quoted here but experience tells the same story.

It cannot be denied that it is much "easier" (if it is ever easy) to speak to people who, till now, have been absolute strangers to the kingdom of God, than to those who have rejected it, after having known it and after having been "children of the kingdom" for a period of time.

There is, indeed, a judgment in it. The second commandment teaches us that the LORD will even visit the iniquity of the fathers upon their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Thus it will be hard, not only to reach these covenant-breaking fathers (and mothers) but also to reach their children. The Word of God works in two directions. It breaks hearts and softens them (Canons of Dort); it also hardens them so that repentance never comes.

Consequently one should not be too "optimistic" with regard to an apostate generation and society. Post-Christian heathendom is worse than pre-Christian paganism.

We could even introduce here the teaching of Scripture about "sinning against the Holy Spirit." We do not intend to discuss this in full. But it cannot be denied that there is a close connection between the words of the Saviour about this unforgiveable sin and the words in Hebrews 6. One may also agree with some who believe that "sin against the Holy Spirit" is not necessarily some mysterious and outrageous sin but the rejection of the Good Tidings in the days after Pentecost, the dispensation of the Spirit. All sins will be forgiven if one only brings them to the foot of

the Cross, but the sin of unbelief, if one persists in it, will, as a matter of course, not be forgiven.

One may say that with God all things are possible. Who would deny it! But that does not mean that we should neglect the seriousness of the above-mentioned teaching of Scripture.

It is the honest truth that, after and by rejection of the saving hand of God in Jesus Christ, hearts are hardened. The word "impossible" looms in the back of our minds.

Yet, this fifth objection is only partly true.

We must start here with a warning! The temptation seems to be great for some people to turn the above-givens of Scripture into a nice, streamlined *theory* which we put together nicely on a sheet of paper and then turn it into a soft pillow on which our heads can rest. Because — let's be honest — if the words "it is impossible" are all the words that can be spoken in this context, we can forget about our fellow-men who live in sin; we can escape from the mandate to be living witnesses and readable letters of Jesus Christ. We can "sit" on the Gospel as though it were only for us and not for others.

In the second place, Matthew 10 was mentioned. But it is exactly this chapter which gives us motivation and hope, yes, even a clear mandate for "evangelism." The disciples were not sent to the gentiles (Foreign Mission), nor to the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Covenant children who, in the course of longer or shorter history had drifted away from the LORD and His wonderful Covenant. Call them apostates if you wish. In addition, the Lord Jesus did not only say what to do if they would not listen; He started with those who would listen and find peace. Going out among the lost sheep may always expect that double reaction. Some will listen, others will not.

In the third place, the history of the church belies such a "nice" theory built upon a few texts. The Romanist Church as such was, one would say, as dead as a doornail. Indeed, we confess (Confession of Faith, Art. 27) that even in the dark Middle Ages there were always "the seven thousand." But as church it seemed a hopeless case. Then the Spirit started to blow over the skeleton. The Good News was discovered and proclaimed and tens of thousands heard it and clung to it even if it cost them their lives. The LORD gave reformation and revival. The desert became a green valley. The same may be said about the nineteenth century.

Moreover, do we not live in the midst of paganism? Even if one distinguishes (as we did) between pre-Christian and post-Christian paganism, is not the world around us filled with heathens? Hebrews 6 is 100% true but we are surrounded by those who never have really heard the real truth! One should, therefore, not over-emphasize nor absolutize the distinction between Foreign Mission and Home Mission. The gentiles, as has been noted before, are also covenant breakers. They broke away from the

Covenant made with Adam after the fall and renewed with Noah. Yet, Paul said in Athens that God, after centuries of longsuffering, now comes back to them with the Name of Jesus. For that reason it is not so strange that some have suggested sending a missionary to downtown Toronto instead of, or rather, together with, sending one to Irian Barat or Brazil. In the latter country the distinction between Foreign Mission and Home Mission does not seem to work at all.

Let us beware that we, with our smooth theories, do not enter into conflict with the patience, the longsuffering and lovingkindness of the LORD! He is most certainly willing to give a new chance to the lost children and grandchildren of apostates; even to these apostates themselves, as we express it in our Forms for Excommunication and Re-admission. We are told to pray for excommunicated persons and to admonish them with kindness. Herein we follow the example of our Saviour, Who pleaded with apostate Jerusalem that had killed the prophets.

It seems to be customary to call Pentecost the festival of Foreign Mission, but the first chapters of the Book of Acts clearly show us that God directed His apostles to preach the Gospel first to those who had crucified the Lord. The apostate Jews were the first addressees in Jerusalem and throughout the whole Roman Empire.

The conclusion must be that, although a reference to the above-mentioned Scripture passages is legitimate and warns us against unfounded optimism, these passages certainly do not give us the right to forget about the surrounding world of apostasy. The contrary is true.

#### *6. Evangelism easily leads to (false) ecumenism.*

*Not only experience shows this but also the usual approach to evangelism promotes such a development.*

The reasoning in this sixth and last objection mentioned here (there are more) is clear. Those who bring it forward whenever evangelism is the topic, are uneasy about the distinction made so often. The distinction, namely, between "bringing to Christ" and "bringing to Christ's Church." The two are not only distinguished, they are even separated. The only interest and aim seems to be to move people to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The next step is then to say to those who do just that, "Go now to the church of your choice." What church that is, is not very important. Crusades are held, hundreds of people come forward and commit themselves to Jesus Christ. These crusades are, as a rule, organized by the cooperation of all the churches in the region. The clergymen (or whatever they call themselves) of these churches sit in the background and are ready and prepared to "divide among themselves" the fruits of the crusade.

One should not overlook or underrate the truth in this objection. In following pages we plan to say something about the history of *Gereformeerde Evangelisatie* in The Netherlands. Some of the readers may remember the clouds of dust caused by what happened in Deventer, where ministers of the Gereformeerde Kerk entered the cooperation of the "Deventer Kwartet" for the purpose of evangelizing.

*Key '73* is underway, a movement to reach this whole continent with Gospel in 1973. There is also a Canadian branch. The list of cooperating churches is imposingly long and includes, among well-known liberal churches, also The Salvation Army and Pentecostals. The former has never shown much interest in the Church-according-to-the-Scriptures although in recent times it has attempted to be accepted as another church; the latter accuses all "established" churches of having only half of the gospel if they do not display the gift of tongues. Every week a minister finds among his mail an invitation to join some grand project in the field of evangelism.

On Sunday every one sticks to his own church; but in evangelism they all of a sudden find themselves together as though there were no church walls.

Many people think this is just beautiful. Church distinctions are obsolete anyway. They belong to a previous century. We should all become one because we are one already. Are we not all Christians, believing in the same God? The World Council of Churches is only a beginning yet. The goal is one world church.

Everyone who loves the Reformed Creeds must indeed shy away from such a development and temptation — not to mention that it is unwarranted and unbiblical to distinguish so sharply between "bringing to Christ" and "bringing to the Church." If we are interested in bringing a person to Christ, would we then be indifferent as to what church he is going to join? Maybe a church where Bible criticism is the order of the day?

Again we say, the reader must not expect from us a treatise about the church, nor a discussion about the question whether the so-called "pluriformity of the Church" is a thing to be loved or to be hated. We believe that at one place, city, town or village, there should be only one church as the true and faithful body of believers, which is the body of Christ.

In addition we are convinced that sound and solid evangelism needs a firm footing and backing. It should be in agreement with our creeds which are called Reformed because they are fully biblical. Those creeds confess that Jesus Christ is not only saving souls but "gathering, preserving and defending His Church" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). They insist that everyone should join the true Church (Confession of Faith, Art. 27, 28, 29). Every worker in evangelism who neglects or even despises this biblical truth, loses our confidence.

Thus there is truth in this objection, as far as it serves as a legitimate warning.

As an objection, however, against evangelism-as-such it is most certainly not legitimate.

History proves that (as we called it) “*solid*” preaching and teaching has the greatest, because lasting, results. “The Gospel is masculine,” virile and solid. A man like Gordon Sinclair would not talk about it the way he does, if he knew it as masculine. We cannot blame him or others who hate the ever-smiling, sweet-talking piety of some representatives of evangelism. The Gospel is not soft soap. It does not defend criminals or promote permissiveness. It contains a message for repentance, but also a life- and world-view. It has answers to political as well as social problems. If it is God-centred it is not only interested in “winning souls for heaven” but it aims at the submission of the whole of life to the Prince of Peace.

The Reformers were “evangelists” *pur sang*. A whole continent was renewed. Yet they were not kind to sects but radical in their rejection of sectarian doctrine. They spent days on end on what today’s Christians perhaps consider to be hair-splitting. But they knew that the truth is one, “our undoubted Christian faith,” “the complete doctrine of salvation.” Neglecting or betraying a “small detail” would endanger the whole building of truth, resulting finally in its crumbling down. How did history prove them right!

If “cooperative evangelism” indeed means a watering-down of that “complete doctrine,” a presentation of the “lowest common denominator,” it has condemned itself.

There is no future in such an approach.

We are not allowed to separate Christ and His (true) Church. Article 28 of the Confession is, indeed, fundamental for Home Mission. One should hear this article against its historical background. Many believers had left the Romanist Church already. Others, however, stayed behind for whatever reason. They felt the Reformers were right and justified in their criticisms. But what about your safety, your family, your business? Does one have to risk everything for the sake of joining the true Church? There were “the magistrates, the edicts of princes against it” (i.e., against joining the true Church). But the heading of this article says, “Every one is bound to join himself to the true Church.” “All men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ.” And it concludes, “Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.”

Any evangelistic endeavour that neglects this truth acts contrary to the ordinance of God and is condemned for it. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. This Article should, therefore, also be maintained and used in any contact

with believers who still belong to churches that do not bear the marks of the true Church. Instead of cooperating with them, we should admonish them "to separate themselves, according to the Word of God, from all those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wherever God has established it." Instead of joining them in one, concerted evangelistic effort, *our* evangelistic effort should include winning them for the true Church. Evangelism that does not result in church-growth (we are speaking of the true Church of course) is not what it should be. Our cooperation in evangelism is to be cooperation with Jesus Christ, Who is gathering and preserving *His* Church.

The overall conclusion of this chapter, which listened to certain objections against evangelism and what is commonly understood by it, must be that Reformed Evangelism does well to heed the legitimate warnings voiced in them.

The material of this chapter should, therefore, be seriously considered and discussed by all who are eager to evangelize. Instead of losing each other in the dilemma (a false one!) between "preserving" and "increasing" the Church, we should all together strive for a solidly Reformed approach which does justice to both preservation and increase. Anything less will not do. We refuse any cooperation in evangelism which shoves the doctrine concerning the church under the table.