

Evangelism Thrust

"Every congregation and agency of the Christian Reformed Church shall be encouraged to and assisted in the establishing of evangelism ' as a priority and of specific evangelism goals." Acts of Synod, 1970.

On October 12, 13, and 14 a delegate from each classis of the Christian Reformed Church will be studying at the Thrust Training Institute. They will be led into a thorough study of a proposed evangelism program.

Is evangelism imperative in our age? Is it necessary to study again the Biblical mandate to go out into all the world to bring the good news? On the surface it may not seem necessary. There are so many churches in North America. Everyone has the opportunity to go to church and hear the gospel message. The technological achievements have turned North America into one large city. You can turn on the radio and hear gospel messages. Religion is becoming quite popular again. This does not mean that the Christian faith is becoming popular, but that "religion" is "in" again! Yet, in this time of unlimited opportunity for human advancement men are gripped by unrest. The uncertain money markets are causing anxiety and fear. Will we be heading into another depression? Racial and "religious" hatreds scar many nations. Hunger is a reality for millions. Just recently I received a letter from a Philippino Christian, It speaks about the hardships of life, the extreme poverty, disease and lack of proper food. Mental illness is taking its toll in our frustrated society. The breakdown of family life has become common rather than an unusual factor in society. Wilbert E. Moore, authority on social change at the Russell Sage Foundation, states "By any crude measurement, the contemporary world appears to be changing more rapidly than at any time in human history." And he added that the rate of change seems to be accelerating. The Dean of Students at Hope College suggested that "our society is giving up the Judaic-Christian tradition as a basis for law and morality without replacing it with any consistent rationale for morality." Vance Packard claims "The discoveries of astronomers, geologists, and space explorers have undermined the faith of all but the most devout that there is a physical Heaven or Hell. And among believers, God is more likely to be seen as a force or spirit than as an all-seeing watcher over human behavior above."

Must the church evangelize?

Yes!! The church must evangelize fervently, as there has never been such a spiritual need as today! What is evangelism? Evangelism "is to relate the saving truths of God to a sinner." It is to bring the message of hope to lost sinners. The evangelical church is convinced that it possesses the only hope for mankind, the hope revealed dynamically in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian does not participate in the work of evangelism as a hobby or because he wants to present one solution among the many for the solving of world problems. A Christian is not a politician but an ambassador for Jesus Christ. He has the duty to tell men what God's message is for today, and not what men like to hear. The message of the Scripture claims to be the only Word for men today. There is no other word of God to men.

First, the message of the evangelist is that men need to know their sinful condition, that they are under God's wrath as long as they remain in rebellion to God.

Second, men need to know that Jesus is able to save the whole of men. Jesus Christ has come to save men from themselves and the consequences of sin-hell.

Third, Jesus Christ lays claim upon the saved sinners. They are no longer their own but Christ's. Their outlook on life ought to be Biblically formed.

. Evangelism is not only the Christian's duty, but also his privilege. Many people today are whistling in the dark, hoping against hope for a better and a new world under the leadership of "enlightened" men. The Christian's hope is founded upon the fact of Christ's resurrection and the promises of new life which this fact contains.

The church ought to be engaged in evangelistic outreach. And it is hoped that Thrust '73 will help our denomination to realize its responsibility. Thrust '73 is a part of the Key '73 program. Key '73 grew from the "Key Bridge Consultation" of 1967, when some forty leaders met to discuss the possibilities of an evangelism thrust for North America. As a result, we have nearly one hundred churches, organizations and institutions planning "to share Christ with every person in North America." Each denomination works out its own evangelism program, developing new resources and to help congregations and organizations to become more "effective redemptive centers and more aggressive witness to God's redeeming power in the world."

The emphasis of the program will be on the local church. It also wants the whole involvement of every congregation member. Evangelism is not a hobby of a few people. It is not something to be done by the minister with an evangelism committee. EVERY church member ought to seek to lead people to Christ and to His church. Thrust '73 will help local churches to develop their own programs and set their own goals. On the "job" training will be provided. People ask "I know that I have to witness, but how do I do it?" Thrust '73 will try to help such Christians.

Whom do we want to reach? Every person who does not know Christ as Saviour and Lord. Will the program be concerned only with the soul? No. It stresses the needs of the whole man. It is the prayer of all who will be attending the Thrust '73 Institute that this will be the beginning of a real evangelism fervour in our churches across North America. Why evangelize? "We have the high privilege of telling others that they, too, may share in this hope if they will agree with God's judgment on their revolt against Him, yield completely to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and offer their lives to Him in grateful obedience."

Jahan D. Tangelder
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