

## 23. The congregation that loves with the intellect

*Faith is not just a jump in into the unknown*

**Many people would like to be challenged to think about faith, life, and meaning. They are not frightened of a challenging presentation or a good debate. They have questions and look for answers. ‘That is something you just have to accept’ is not enough for them. This does not only apply to adults but also to many young people who would like to see that their questions are taken seriously. What can you offer them?**

We love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind. (Matthew 22: 37). Faith is more than emotion, more than an experience. You can think about faith and you can get people to think about it. On the Areopagus Paul entered into a debate with the philosophers of those days (Acts 17). He showed them that he was familiar with their way of thinking and at the same time he was clear about the message of the Gospel.

Congregations that follow this precept are often congregations that have leaders who are well educated, or they are congregations in a university town. But it can also be a congregation in a wealthy commuter town with many intellectuals.

‘Apologetics’, ‘defending the Christian faith with reasonable arguments’ has since long been a subject at the theological institutes. Faith is not exclusively a jump into the unknown; you can think about it, it has a degree of reasonableness about it. There are congregations that respond to this. Take for example the book by Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism*<sup>1</sup> or that of the Rev. Henri Veldhuis, *Understanding the faith, the Christian faith explained*<sup>2</sup>, or, older, C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*<sup>3</sup>. There is a wide choice of literature from different angles that can help to draw up a programme. Other theologians like Erik Borgman also appeal to many people, including to those who do not belong to a church.

### **A number of suggestions**

- A church ‘pub’ on a Friday evening, a thesis, somebody to introduce it and discussion afterwards
- Presentations about current affairs subjects, but also about theological questions
- A debate between proponents and opponents around a thesis or an ethical question

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<sup>1</sup> In alle redelijkheid, christelijk geloof voor welwillende sceptici

<sup>2</sup> Kijk op geloof, christelijk geloof uitgelegd

<sup>3</sup> Onversneden Christendom

- A series of lectures about ‘difficult questions’ (from a list drawn up by outsiders)
- A book review
- A service for young people which deals with questions from young people.

*In Houten a monthly service is held called ‘Deepening’ by and for young people, but older people are very welcome. The subjects are chosen by the young people themselves. They formulate the questions to be put to a speaker. During the service itself there is an opportunity for discussion and questions.*

*In Monnickendam there is a programme called ‘Areopagus’, an initiative by the Rev. Rieks Hoogenkamp. See [www.areopagus.nl](http://www.areopagus.nl); see also ‘De Engel van Hoorn’<sup>1</sup> [www.engelvanhoorn.nl](http://www.engelvanhoorn.nl).*

*‘Veritas’ (Latin for Truth) is a movement among Christian students who are eager to have intellectual debates with people from other persuasions. See also [www.veritasforum.nl](http://www.veritasforum.nl)*

*In Delft Churches Together organised ‘Hot Potatoes’<sup>2</sup>, a series of lectures for church people, seekers and skeptics. See [www.hetehangijzers.nl](http://www.hetehangijzers.nl). During 2009 a book with lectures will be published.*

### **Possible approach for the church council**

- Decide as church council if this approach would be suitable for your church.
- Get a number of people together who could draw up a plan for this. Think of people with a network of possible speakers; those who are speakers themselves or are able to lead a debate, but also people who are good organisers and can make sure that there is a good atmosphere. Also involve people ‘from outside’ in these plans.
- Good PR is essential. (See model 4)
- Make a programme for the whole year.
- Stimulate the congregation to invite their acquaintances in a targeted manner. ‘This is something you are bound to find appealing, this subject will interest you.’
- Make sure there is a hospitable atmosphere and follow-up opportunities: courses or discussion groups.

From the website of Veritas Nederland:

*The aim of VERITAS-Nederland is twofold.*

*In the first place as students and teachers in institutions of higher education in the Netherlands they want home in on and answer the big questions about life.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Angel of Hoorn

<sup>2</sup> Hete Hangijzers

*VERITAS-Nederland hopes to achieve this by means of discussions, debate or encounters, which appeal to the head as well as to the heart. (...)*  
*Secondly, to promote the Christian view on life and the world, including the claim that Jesus Christ is the truth as a serious option and to question it critically. This means that the Christian faith as philosophy will be present at VERITAS-Nederland meetings and that the person of Jesus Christ who says that he is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) will be the object of the discussions.*