

Lesslie Newbigin's *Missional Ecclesiology* Explored:
A Christo-Centric Proposal For Ecumenism in Today's Global Context of Spirituality

Awe came upon everyone... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together with one accord in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And day by day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

Acts 2:43-47

Such is the vision we get of the ascended ministry of Christ in the present redemptive age at Pentecost. It is the description of a Christo-centric, sacramental, confessional, multi-cultural and organic kind of unity that was in, not of, *and* for the world to the “praise of God” *and* in “favor with all the people.” It was, in summary, the description of a *missional ecclesiology*! And according to Lesslie Newbigin, it was an ecclesiology that had been tragically lost needing to be rediscovered in today's global city.

The truth is... that the unity of the Church is something given to it at its inception, and given by its Lord. That unity had its outward form, first in the fact that the first disciples were visibly grouped around one Lord, and then in the close-knit fellowship of the days immediately following Pentecost, in the sharing in a common baptism, a common tradition of teaching, a common Supper, and a common acknowledgment of the leadership of the Apostles.¹

And does anyone doubt for a moment that *if* today's global Christian *ecclesia* looked more like Acts 2, then large numbers of people in every place and culture would *know* that Jesus is *real* and that Christianity is *true*?

that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (John. 17:21)

And is there any doubt that the sum effect of such a phenomena would be that *God is glorified in all things through Jesus Christ*, even as Christ is present by the Holy Spirit in, with and through the “missionary church?”²

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you. (John 17:1)

And yet, one could lamentably fill pages documenting the rationalistic somersaults in sermons and Biblical comments that in effect say: “this really can't” or perhaps even “shouldn't” be expected of the

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, “The Nature of the Unity that We Seek”: 1. From the Church of South India (1957) *Religion in Life*, 26, 2 (1957): 181-190. p. 5. (This and many subsequent papers designated “NA” for “Online Newbigin Archives” will specify the page number that corresponds to “pdf” format. All “NA” references are located in the Newbigin archives, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, visit: <http://calm.bham.ac.uk/DServeA>.)

² 1 Peter 1:4:11, For a Christo-centric focus in the doxology of God, c.f. John 13:1, 14:13, 17:1, 4. For a sacramental and multi-cultural focus in *missional ecclesiology*, c.f. Eph. 1:22, 2:11-22.

church today.” Such a visibly expressed ecclesial unity that inhabited the nations at Pentecost is even rejected for fear of theological compromise, and from *both* the ecclesial left and right! Indeed, the description of an ecclesial vs. individual kind of ethical practice, a sacramental vs. rationalistic kind of piety in the context of a cross-cultural and organic kind of ecumenism depicted in Acts 2 has often eluded Christendom, and especially the post-enlightenment western church in decline. But then, there was Lesslie Newbigin’s early missionary encounter with South India and the united “Church of South India,” and his later missionary vision for the West concerning an “ecclesial hermeneutic” by means of a united Christian church that is still dedicated to the “conversion” of all nations to Christ-- what Michael Goheen has recently described as Newbigin’s advocacy for a “missionary ecclesiology.”³

The purpose then of this paper is to explore Lesslie Newbigin’s “missionary ecclesiology,” especially to explore both its Biblical validation as to anticipate its practical relevance concerning what Newbigin described as “The Gospel in Today’s Global City.”⁴ In so doing, we will be introduced to a kind of epistemology of communal presence in relation to the missionary church—one that is uniquely developed out of a sacramental theology leading to both a multi-traditional (as to preserve the confessional aspects of the church) and organic vision for visible church unity for the sake of the apostolic gospel. Such a vision for ecumenism, contrary to common perceptions of one or the other side of contemporary Christendom, will espouse *neither* a movement of confessional compromise (the evangelical critique of mainline denominational unions) or missional pragmatism (the mainline critique of non-denominational styled evangelical cooperatives). Quite the contrary, a Christo-centric vision for a multi-traditional and sacramental based movement for organic union will view ecumenism as nothing short of essential for *both* a true confessional and missional ecclesiology! In the words of Lesslie Newbigin:

I believe that true ecumenism is not something which is evading the question of truth. It is something which is facing, at a deeper level, the question “What is the truth?” Is the truth ultimately in the Name of Jesus and there alone, or is the truth only to be known by adding something else in the Name of Jesus? The real issue which this missionary encounter raises is the question, “What is the true confession?” What does it mean to confess Jesus today?”⁵

A Christo-Centric Missionary Ecclesiology and a HIGH GOSPEL Impetus for Unity

As early as 1977, Jurgen Moltmann observed that “one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission.”⁶ And as further noted by Michael Goheen, “few people have been as insistent in both writing and practice that the church is

³ Michael W. Goheen, ‘As The Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You’: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology. *International Review of Mission* 91, 362 (2002): 345-369. “NA”

⁴ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in Today’s Global City*, Selly Oak Occasional Paper No. 16 (1997) “NA”

⁵ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective* 1962 p. 9 “NA”

⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 7. Quoted in Goheen, p. 345. “NA”

missionary by its very nature as Bishop J. E. Lesslie Newbigin.⁷ For to Newbigin, consistent with the formative days of the WCC, to be missionary was most essentially to “Christianize the world” consistent with the Christian claim of Christ’s universal and salvific relevance for all peoples.⁸

What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question...there is no neutrality. The answer has to be given not only in the words of the Church, but in a life which follows the way Christ went, and so - in Paul's words - bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, manifesting to the world his risen life, the life which is life indeed.⁹

Scot Sherman has recognized the curious providence that Newbigin was born in December 8, 1909, “within a year and less than a hundred miles from the Edinburgh 1910 world missionary conference, where the modern ecumenical movement was born.”¹⁰ Later in Newbigin’s life, it would become one of Newbigin’s most vocal refrains to call the ecumenical vision back to her missional roots consistent with the 1910 “Ecumenical Missionary Conference.” In 1994 for instance, Newbigin favorably recalled how the “modern ecumenical vision was born out of the vision of a whole world brought to Christ as Lord.” This observation was made out of his concern with the recent WCC history of expanding the “ecumenical perspective universally to all humanity.” According to Newbigin, the WCC had formally adopted a revised platform in the Uppsala Assembly of 1968 that veered away from its original Christo-centric vision in Edinburgh. Instead, Newbigin advocated for the continuation of the famous “watchword that fired the ardor of the first pioneers” in Edinburgh, namely, “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” It was “a vision for all humanity or it was nothing” such that to negate this missionary impetus of the ecumenical movement was paramount to being afflicted with an “ecumenical amnesia.”¹¹

By evangelization, Newbigin did not mean “colonization,” as when one culture seeks to convert another culture to itself” (e.g. 19th century westernization vis-à-vis missionary ventures from Europe and the United States to the eastern and southern hemispheres for instance). But rather, by evangelization Newbigin *did* mean converting all peoples to Christ vis-à-vis a call to repentance—which for Newbigin was not merely a moralistic exhortation to “turn away from your sins” but a call to whole life discipleship

⁷ Goheen, p. 345. “NA”

⁸ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Ecumenical Amnesia” (From the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 1994) in *The Best of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin*, (Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, CT, 1998) p. 28.

⁹ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Witnesses to the World” (1987) *Christian (U.K.)*, no. 1 (May/June): 5-8. This is an edited version of a paper originally given at a conference on ‘His Mission, Our Task’, organized by the Parfor Mission and Unity in October 1986. “NA”

¹⁰ Scot Sherman, “The Quest for the Visible Unity: The Ecclesiology of Lesslie Newbigin,” ed. John Vance, *The Assembling of Ourselves Together, Ecclesiology in the Twenty-First Century* (Westminster Church, 2005) p. 132-148. p. 133.

¹¹ “Amnesia” p. 25 and 28 respectively. “NA”

as a believer and follower of Christ-- “to see things in a wholly new way, to a radical paradigm shift” in relation to Christ.¹²

In contrast then to an ecumenism of “reunion without repentance” (what he further described as merely the union of voluntary “association[s] constituted by the agreement of it’s members on a number of points of belief and practice”), Newbigin described true ecumenism as “humanity reconstituted by its redemption and regeneration in Christ, this new relationship with God effected by the atonement wrought by Christ on the Cross.” To be sure, Newbigin’s vision was confessional in so far as “creedal and dogmatic statements are for the purpose of protecting” the centrality of Christ’s atonement and true Christian conversion. And yet, “the fact itself” (Christ himself, his atoning work and conversion) “is something of the utmost simplicity” says Newbigin, as serves as the basis of true ecumenism in Christ.¹³ Thus, the necessity of a Christo-centric ecumenism as to preserve a cross-centered ecclesiology wherein the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone was crucial.

Newbigin was therefore concerned for what he described as the “ecumenical amnesia” of the WCC movement after 1968 related to a profound “paradigm shift” from “Christo-centric universalism” to the “Trinitarian model.” Notwithstanding his general endorsement that a “full Trinitarian theology was needed for an adequate missiology” (c.f. his *Trinitarian Faith for Today’s Mission*, 1963), Newbigin sought to qualify the Trinitarian model in that “the Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christo-centric one, and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history.”¹⁴ In other words, the “literally crucial matter” concerning the missionary nature of the church according to Newbigin was “the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross, that work by which he has won lordship over the church and the world.”¹⁵

Newbigin often bemoaned how the Christo-centric basis of missional ecumenism had been supplanted wherein the “task of the church [was] no longer to Christianize the world but to change it.” By this, he meant an agenda that had supplanted the evangelistic nature of mission in the world with a more humanitarian mission as pertaining to the general work of the Spirit throughout the world. Accordingly, the Trinitarian model of Uppsala “interprets all situation in terms of the oppressor and the oppressed and that tends to interpret the struggles of the oppressed as the instrument of redemption.” Again, Newbigin complained how the recent trend sought to interpret the Christo-centric paradigm as giving “rise to a model

¹² J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Conversion, Colonies, and Culture, Lecture II of the Henry Martyn Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge (1986)” and published in *Lesslie Newbigin, Signs Amid the Rubble, The Purpose of God in Human History*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) p. 93.

¹³ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme*, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 16.

¹⁴ “Amnesia,” p.26.

¹⁵ “Amnesia,” p. 28.

of unity that is hierarchical and potentially oppressive” whereas the “model of the Trinity sought a wholly different kind of unity, one not accomplished by the conversion of the nations under the Lordship of Christ, but one which sought “the ecclesiastical form of “conciliar government” by means of “the method of dialogue—not dialogue as a means to an end, but as a way of life—in fact “the sharing of life.”¹⁶

The post-Uppsala reinterpretation of Christian mission that Newbigin resisted has been further explained by Michael Goheen as a “new view of mission” that featured a “shift in focus from God’s work through Christ in the church to His providential and salvific work by His Spirit in the world. The goal of mission was the humanization or shalom of society through the efforts of the laity in co-operation with other social institutions that aimed at the transformation of oppressive political, social, and economic structures.”¹⁷ For instance, in the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (1966), it the goal of the so called Trinitarian model for missions was stated as follows :

We start with the basic assumption that the triune God is the Lord of his world and at work within it, and that the Church’s task is to point to his acts, to respond to his demands, and to call mankind to this faith and obedience. . . . In this document, ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ are used as shorthand for the responsibilities of the Church in the world.”¹⁸

Again, Newbigin would have none of this reinterpretation of the meaning of mission. The necessary corrective, argued Newbigin, was to reaffirm “one of the most important documents produced by the WCC in the past three decades” entitled “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation.” Developed during the years 1976-81 and approved by the Central Committee in 1982, the document was said to have reaffirmed “Christ-centered universalism” which again, according to Newbigin, “insists not only that the lordship of Christ must relativize all denominational divisions and challenge the domestication of the church within Western society, but also that it must challenge the church as such to accept its worldwide missionary obligation and not to leave that task to other bodies.” He further warned, “to allow the worldwide missionary and evangelistic calling of the church to disappear from the agenda of the WCC... is much more than a paradigm shift.”¹⁹

By these words, Newbigin was clearly *not* endorsing what throughout his writings he lamented as the colonizing tendencies of western Christendom. Rather, Newbigin was warning that to loose the eschatological *telos* in relation to Christ and his atoning work of the cross in the church’s missionary focus was to loose the church altogether. For Newbigin, the church is missionary by its nature, even that mission

¹⁶ “Amnesia,”p. 26. These quotes are in response to Konrad Raiser’s *Ecumenism in Transition* (Geneva: WCC 1991).

¹⁷ Goheen, p. 350.

¹⁸ Quoted in Goheen, p. 350. *World Conference on Church and Society: Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time*. Geneva, July 12-16, 1966. The Official Report with a Description of the Conference by M. M. Thomas and Paul Albrecht. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), 179f.

¹⁹ “Amnesia,” p. 28.

that is Christo-centrally determined: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you*’ defines the very being of the Church as mission argued Newbigin. As such, Goheen affirms that for Newbigin, “mission is not one (even the most important) of the many tasks of the church. Mission is not secondary to its being nor does mission simply belong to the *bene esse* of the church. Rather, mission is essential to the church’s being and of the *esse* of its nature.” Accordingly, “without mission,” Newbigin could say that “the Church simply falls to the ground. We must say bluntly that when the Church ceases to be a mission, then she ceases to have any right to the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament.”²⁰

Herein we begin to uncover what was arguably the greatest contribution to both mission and ecumenism by Newbigin—namely, how they are both mutually interdependent as then to characterize his “missionary ecclesiology.” That is to say that the unity in mission that existed between God the father and God the Son is now the same unity in mission that is between the Son and the Holy Spirit as mediated in, with and through the church. The true Trinitarian theology of co-participation in the gospel as realized in the *telos* of Christ and him crucified, risen and ascended into heaven for *all* humanity was extended to the church, vis-à-vis the incarnational, or even sacramental theology of the church in relation to Christ ascended ministry today. The church as such, in so far as it is a participation in the Spirit of Christ, is a participation in the mission of Christ. *Newbigin’s vision was nothing short of an eschatologically informed “High Gospel” conception of the church’s identity in mission!* This participation in Christ “relativizes” all denominational distinctions in service to a Christo-centric mission according to Newbigin. The efficacy of Christo-centric mission is most inherently experienced sacramentally, even as a sacramental theology of John 17 functioned as the theological basis for a missional ecumenism according to Newbigin, which then needs exploring next!

A Sacramental Basis for A Missional Ecclesiology and a HIGH CHURCH Impetus for Unity

During his childhood, Lesslie Newbigin was nurtured within a Presbyterian context. And yet having fallen away from the faith during his boarding school years, he later rediscovered the gospel as a student at Queens College Cambridge, mostly through the witness of the evangelical oriented “Student Christian Movement” that was there at the time. It was during a summer break especially, while on a student mission trip to miners in Wales, that Lesslie Newbigin encountered his Christo-centric “vision of the cross.” In his words, it was “a vision of the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world” which in turn not only moved Lesslie Newbigin to profess his faith and be confirmed at St. Columbia’s Presbyterian Church in

²⁰ Goheen, p. 349 quote from Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God*, p. 163.

Cambridge, but would also in the following year result in a calling to missions in 1930. This in turn led Newbigin to study theology at Westminster College, Cambridge leading to being ordained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh in 1936 and being commissioned by the Church of Scotland for missionary service in India.²¹

By this brief summation of a spiritual biography, one can readily discern the early formation of both Newbigin's characteristic Christo-centric, or *conversions*, orientation from an evangelical context (a high gospel orientation), and his confessional and sacramental, or shall we say "high church," ecclesial orientation from his Scottish Presbyterian context. That the two "high church" and "high gospel" must be kept together became the essential mark of Newbigin's missional ecclesiology. He would later state unequivocally for instance, how

*Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church.*²²

It was however not until his thirty plus years as missionary to South India that the two orientations explicitly welded together to become Newbigin's characteristic "missionary ecclesiology." As noted by biographer Geoffrey Wainwright, "there [was] very little explicit ecclesiology" in Newbigin's writings and lectures in or before the 1941 Bangalore lectures. Rather, "Newbigin's doctrine of the church would develop under the stimulus of his tasks as a negotiator in the final approach to the union of Anglicans, Methodists, and Reformed in the Church of South India (1947) and then as a bishop with the "care of all the churches."²³ First springing from Newbigin's defense of the South Indian model of union for the sake of missions (*The Reunion of the Church*, 1948), Wainwright notes how "Newbigin's treatise, *The Household of God* (1953) quickly became an ecumenical classic."²⁴ But the important emphasis to note here is that the whole ecclesial scheme was driven by the missional impetus! For instance, when asked to state the essential basis of a true ecumenical ecclesiology, Newbigin once responded:

For me, that basis when I am pressed to define it always lies in the actual experience of the missionary encounter, the encounter with the man, for instance, in the streets of an Indian city who challenges, you the foreigner, to say what right you have to bring the name of a foreign God, of a foreign religion into the land of India. One replies to such a challenge by trying to show him how the name of Jesus is not the name of the leader of one religion, is not the name that we in the west give to God but is the name of the one decisive and final revelation of God the man, the One who

²¹ Sherman, p.133-134, c.f. Geoffrey Wainwright, "J. E. Lesslie Newbigin," in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larson et al. (Downers Grove, : InterVarsity Press, 2003). P. 472. Also, J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993)

²² *Household of God*, p. 147.

²³ Geoffrey Wainwright, "Editors Introduction" in *Lesslie Newbigin, Sings Amid the Rubble...* p.vii.

²⁴ Geoffrey Wainwright, "Editors Introduction" p. x.

*alone has brought reconciliation between man and God and thereby created the possibility of reconciliation between man and man. But when one replies that way, the answer always comes back: content with the Name of Jesus? You do not believe that the Name of Jesus is the all sufficient Name because all of you have to add something else to that Name before you are satisfied. We have to conclude that what you are bringing to us is not the one Name of which you speak; it is in... a whole series of names – the fragments of western European culture which have been projected into our world by the colonial expansion of the 19th century.*²⁵

To be sure, out of Newbigin's theologizing from the context of South India, one can readily discern both an eschatological understanding of the church vis-à-vis her missional calling in relation to the gospel, and her mediatorial understanding of the church vis-à-vis her calling to be the actual and universal (or ecumenical) presence of Christ (the "body of Christ") in the world by the Holy Spirit in, with and through the visible church.

Perhaps influenced by his spiritual biography, but clearly theologically argued during and after his experience as a missionary ecclesiologist in South India, the two-- missional and *ecclesial*-- are inseparable for Newbigin.²⁶ As observed by Scot Sherman, "Newbigin gives equal ultimacy to the callings of the church to be the body of Christ and the mission of Christ, being a spirit-filled fellowship and a spirit-empowered instrument of salvation."²⁷ Throughout his *The Household of God*, for instance, he argued from Ephesians that in and through the church, "God brings 'all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.(Eph.1:10). The missional calling is predicated upon the ecclesial reality of Christ being in the world vis-à-vis the church in history. There is, in other words, a clear sacramental understanding of the church for Newbigin. As Sherman has noticed, "Newbigin's reading of St. Paul is that this divine reality of foretaste and first fruit is the key to understanding the church's power and relevance. The church is the new community that exists because of Jesus' saving work and the Holy Spirit's eschatological presence... She (the church) not only testifies... she is the living reality."²⁸ Newbigin, for instance could speak of the church in the New Testament as "one visible society, the new Israel, the holy temple in the Lord, in whom Christians are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" after the pattern of Ephesians 2:19ff.²⁹

For Lesslie Newbigin, the biblical-theological justification for a missional ecclesiology (and the inter-relationship of missions to a sacramental theology of the church) is nowhere more profoundly expressed than in the last prayer of Christ of John 17 which concludes: *that the world may believe that You*

²⁵ Recounted in J.E. Lesslie Newbigin "Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective," (1962) P. 9. "NA"

²⁶ c.f. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme*, and *The Household of God* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

²⁷ Sherman, p. 144.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 144.

²⁹ *The Reunion of the Church*, p. 25.

sent Me. Drafted out of the pressing need to defend visible unity for the sake of missions in the South India context, Newbigin drafted his “The Nature of the Unity that We Seek (1957) in order to justify the formation of the South India United Church (SIUC), a union church of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, that later led to the *reunion* with Methodists and Anglicans in South India as to form the Church of South India (CSI) inaugurated in Madras on September 27, 1947. He argued that “the unity which Christians seek must necessarily be that for which our Lord prayed, and which it is his will to give us. That unity is most succinctly described in the great prayer of St. John 17.”³⁰

From John 17, Newbigin argued that Christian unity is theologically based upon the a-priori *spiritual* union that already exists between all true believers. Given that “the name of God and the glory of God” have been given to believers, this in itself constitutes an act of “God’s holy love in Jesus Christ by which his inner nature is revealed” such that “as God is one, so those who bear his name and the impress of his character must necessarily be one.” Newbigin further stressed how “the language of our Lord’s prayer points to a unity which is not merely analogous to the unity of the divine nature (“as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee”) but actually a participation in the being of the triune God (“I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one”). As perhaps reminiscent of a thoroughly Calvinistic idea of a sacramental theology of a real, albeit spiritual participation in Christ vis-à-vis the Eucharist, Newbigin further explained:

The unity which we must seek is thus a unity which arises from Christ from their being in him. It is not simply a unity of organization, nor is it simply an agreement about doctrine. It is a total mutual interchange of being-Christ wholly given to us, we wholly given to him. This is a unity involving the whole being of all concerned in it.

In essence then, according to the last prayer of Christ, an agenda for unity can never be viewed as a non-essential aspect of ecclesial mission. Christian unity that is based upon Christ’s prayer in John 17 is an agenda that is predicated upon the essential nature of the church that is already participating spiritually in Christ in mission. It was believed that John 17 anticipates Christ final comments to the disciples concerning his ascended ministry, *As the father sent me, so I send you...* and when He had said this, He breathed on them and said *Receive the Holy Spirit* such as then to mediate Christ power to even “forgive the sins of any” in relation to the Holy Spirit that would mediate Christ’s exclusive power vis-à-vis Christ in, with and through the ecclesia of God in the new age!

Understood then as originating theologically in the spiritual nature of the church itself, ecumenism, as such, was considered by Newbigin to be an essential act of true repentance, or ecumenical “union” is really a “re-union.” In other words, all “disunity” is a sin against our already present spiritual unity in

³⁰ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Nature of the Unity We Seek”: I. From the Church of South India (1957), *Religion in Life* 26, 2(1957): 181-190.

Christ, and even as sin against the gift of unity that God have the first New Covenant church at Pentecost. Whatever disunion has resulted in the world was therefore considered to be an act of sin against what Christ is actually doing spirituality and has done historically—thus Newbigin’s preferred term for ecumenism was “reunion.” Accordingly,

All disunity among Christians is a contradiction of that upon which their being Christians rests. It has the character of sin, being a repudiation of the God-given nature of the Church. The quest for unity must therefore be regarded not as an enterprise of men aimed at constructing something new, but as a penitent return to that which was originally given but subsequently denied.³¹

And,

For this reason I think that the term sometimes objected to on the ground that the churches concerned were never parts of one ecclesiastical structure. Behind this objection there seems to lie a desire to assure ourselves that we are not repairing something broken but creating something new. I believe that this is a misunderstanding of our task, and that both on historical grounds and on theological we must dispute it: historical, because every division among Christians today stems ultimately from some point in history where a failure in truth, or charity, or both, led to a breach of fellowship among those who had previously regarded themselves as members of one family; theological, because the healing of such breaches of fellowship is simply a return (in however small a measure) to the true nature of the Church as grounded in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.³²

For Newbigin therefore, Christ’s prayer in John 17 set up an agenda for ecclesial unity that was necessarily missional as it was visible: “The unity we seek is a visible unity—visible to the world, a sign by which the world may be brought to faith in Christ as the Apostle of God and the Mediator of his love” (John 17:21)!³³ The model of unity that was espoused by Newbigin and enacted in South India was first and foremost for the sake of mission and sacramentally initiated therefore. It was no surprise then in recalling the inaugural service of union in Madras on September 27, 1947 (wherein Newbigin ate of 37 was consecrated as one of the first bishops), that Newbigin later remembers how “the climax of the service was, of course, the communion.”

That was the other moment when I found it hard, and I’m sure others did, to keep back tears. I believe about 2500 people took the communion. A great company of ministers of all three uniting Churches serving them. As one saw them moving about, men who yesterday could not have shared communion together, but now all fellow-members of one Church; and as one saw the great multitude of people, so absolutely rapt and intent, and their faces so full of joy; and the servers moving about to see that all were served; the thought uppermost in my mind was: Never again will I say that a thing which I believe is God’s will is impossible!³⁴

³¹ “The Nature,” p. 3.

³² “The Nature,” p. 2.

³³ “The Nature,” p. 5.

³⁴ Scot Sherman, p. 135. Quoted from J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme*, rev. ed (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 24-25.

A sacramental based and missionally driven vision for ecclesial ecumenism remained Newbigin's great passion throughout his ministry. He, for instance, returned to this same point in his later responses to a post-Uppsala "ecumenical amnesia." For in response to Konrad Raiser's *Ecumenism in Transition* (1991) which espoused the unqualified Trinitarian model and a more humanitarian mandate for missions, Newbigin would note how "at the heart of the church's life is the Eucharist. And what does it mean to share in the Eucharist" if not to function as both "a memorial of Christ's passion and as his action in making me a participant in that passion so that I may be a participant in his victory." He further observed that Raiser "speaks often of the incarnation but not about atonement." As again regulated by the sacramental basis of ecumenism, Newbigin further lamented how in the post-Uppsala vision for ecumenism, "I miss this deep sense of that absolute sovereignty over my heart that Jesus has won, which makes it intolerable that I should be unable to share the Eucharist with everyone from whom Christ died. This is how I understand Christo-centric universalism."³⁵ Here again, for Newbigin, to Christianize the world is to share in Christ as then to form the basis for visible ecumenism. There is in short an integral relationship between ecumenism and mission—between "high church" and "high gospel" as pertained to the church's visible unity at Christ's table as the very means of doing evangelism, wherein *the Son is glorified so that the Son may glorify the Father and that the world may know* (John 17).

According then to the priestly prayer of Christ in John 17, the form of unity that transpired in South India was first and foremost a sacramentally derived unity for the sake of missions and the glory of God. Participation together in the sacraments was the first order of unity based on the spiritual reality of being in Christ. So the question that this often raised concerned the question of confessionalism in relation to a *missional ecclesiology*. And to be sure, Lesslie Newbigin himself acknowledged sympathetically that "when one makes these proposals one immediately raises the very profound and difficult issues of confessional loyalty, and confessional responsibility."³⁶

A Multi-Traditional Missional Ecclesiology Explored:

In describing the *reunion* of the church in South India, Newbigin was quick to boast even of a form of union that was visibly organic such as to allow for the differing traditions to remain devoted to their respective confessional and historical identities, albeit not to eclipse the great Christo-centric identity being realized under a single episcopate styled conciliar organization. Newbigin described it this way:

For the perfecting of the life of the whole body, the Church of South India needs the heritage of each of the uniting Churches, and each of those Churches will, it is hoped, not lose the continuity of its

³⁵ "Amnesia," p. 26.

³⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, "Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective," (1962) P. 9. "NA"

own life, but preserve that life enriched by the union with itself of the other two Churches. The Church of South India is thus formed by a combination of different elements each bringing its contribution to the whole, and not by the absorption of any one by any other. It is, therefore, also a comprehensive Church; and its members, firmly holding the fundamentals of the faith and order of the Church Universal, are allowed wide freedom of opinion in all other matters, and wide freedom of action in such differences of practice as are consistent with the general framework of the Church as one organized body.³⁷

The crucial observation here is the way that confessionalism is preserved by a multi-traditional expression within an otherwise visible union of the single church of South India. It is even affirmed that for the sake of a continued confessional growth, that the multiplicity of confessional expressions is to the advantage of real confessional rigor and biblical study even. But more to the point even, no single congregation would be asked to “compromise” its faith and practice based on its long history of forming a confessional consensus. And yet, as a mark of true confessionalism, it was likewise acknowledged that the “confession” of the “one holy catholic church” (small “c” catholic), or in the words of Paul, the “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” in so far as it gets to the very essential nature of the church and the universality of Christ itself, cannot then be subverted by the multiple confessional histories. As a matter of confessional integrity, the church is called to visibly express what it believes about Christ and *itself in Christ* (see above) by means of a visible unity on earth.

There is, in truth, a first order of doctrine (Christo-centric universalism vis-à-vis the church in history) that ought never to be denied (in essence or in witness) by second order doctrines (which in no way should be misconstrued as minimalizing, or even marginalizing the importance of these “second order” doctrines). It is rather that to actually be confessional, the second order doctrines are rendered null in themselves apart from the first order doctrine of Christ in, with and through the one holy catholic church in the world and for the world in missions. Here is for instance, the way Newbigin explains this relation between first and second order confessions as per Christ’s statement, “that they may all be one; even as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they might be in us so that the world may believe...” (John 17:20ff)

This means that the question of agreement in doctrine is not the only, or even the central question involved in discussions of church union. There is a basic agreement upon a doctrine which is essential to unity. Our participation in Christ depends on our hearing, believing, and accepting in common the message of God's saving act in Christ. Without this basic consensus of belief there can be no unity. But (if we understand Paul and Jesus right) this unity in question is not in essence an intellectual agreement about doctrine: it is a total mutual reconciliation which is the result of being born anew by the Spirit. It is a unity of mutual love given by God. This unity is compatible with a wide variety of force and emphasis in the statement of doctrine.³⁸

³⁷ “The Nature,” p. 2.

³⁸ “The Nature,” p. 4.

Here again, the second order doctrines are understood rightly in so far as they are understood in a way that preserved, vs. eclipses, the first order of doctrines! In so far as the second order of doctrines are concerned, there *was* allowed a wide range of differing emphasis (*forte*) and strength of conviction even (e.g. multiple traditions), but as expressed in such a way as not either in *essence* or in *witness* deny or subvert the first order doctrine “thou in me.. I in them, that they may be one as we are one...” as per Christ’s universality and the churches ultimate identity! According to Newbigin, “it is of the essence of the matter that this brotherhood is *in Christ* and is in some recognizable sense one with the whole company of Christ’s people of all places and generations.”³⁹

And so of course, the crucial question remains, what confessionally is the basis of visible union? The answer was that while each local congregation would subscribe to a particular historic creed (or consensus) as pertaining to what the scriptures principally teach about God and God’s salvation for the world, it would at the very least need to share a consensus about three areas of beliefs, as interestingly corresponding to the three historical “marks” of the church. In other words, if the historic idea of the church is that she is the mediatorial body of Christ as to mediate Christ “prophetic, priestly and kingly” ministry in the world by the Holy Spirit in with and through the church, then a basis for ecclesial unity would need to have a common understanding of the prophetic authority of the scripture in relation to the Christo-centric doctrines especially, the efficacy and presence of Christ in sacramental worship, and a recognition of Christ’s presence via the succession (or ordination) of an apostolic ministry in the pastorate. Newbigin, said it this way:

“the acceptance of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme and decisive standard of faith, of the ecumenical creeds as witnessing to and safeguarding the Scriptural revelation, and of the dominical sacraments as providing the visible signs, means and seals of our incorporation in Christ. They must also include a ministry which—in the measure which is possible—carries the authority of the whole Christian fellowship.”⁴⁰

In the South India context, Scot Sherman has summarized the arrangement as being “Episcopal in structure but none of the ministers of the uniting non-Episcopal denominations were re-ordained by bishop.”⁴¹ Many years later, Newbigin would describe the South India vision for a missional ecclesiology as standing between a “full organic union” (The WCC vision by virtue of theological compromise) and “reconciled diversity” (the evangelical vision through pragmatic cooperatives without sacramental unity). He once explained, for instance,

³⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

⁴¹ Sherman, p. 135.

There is need for fresh thinking in the field of structure. In this matter we are polarized between the advocates of full 'organic union' and the advocates of 'reconciled diversity'. The latter slogan often seems to be a polite way of agreeing to do nothing. The former arouses understandable fears of 'monolithic structures'. This fear is understandable when one contemplates the structures to which we have become accustomed. I think that there is room for more vigorous exploration of the middle ground between these extremes, looking to visible forms of ecclesial life which would combine the variety of different forms of discipleship and spirituality manifest in our divided churches with a degree of mutual commitment and shared ecclesial life much greater than is provided in our existing councils of churches.⁴²

In total, Newbigin was deeply concerned to avoid that kind of unity that neither diminished the “High gospel” aspect (missional) nor the “high church” aspect (confessional)—thus his multi-traditional, missional ecclesiology. For neither an “undenominational” (Newbigin’s term) expression of unity, even though often described as “inter-denominational” (again Newbigin’s term) are confessional according to Newbigin. By “undenominational,” Newbigin meant a kind of Christianity which is not interested in the particular witness which the individual confessions have sought to bare.⁴³ As per the recent history of the WCC movement, Newbigin apposed that kind of visible unity that was the result of making confessional compromises at the expense of confessional histories, the effect of which was to dilute and compromise the nature of belief. And yet perhaps ironically to some, this kind of “undenominationalism” relative to the WCC was clearly considered no different than the kind of “undenominationalism” under the guise of inter-denominationalism relative to the evangelical context. Newbigin was likewise very concerned about the various evangelical cooperatives that were non-ecclesial in nature. He explained how, for instance, “a great many bodies which call themselves interdenominational have no right to that name because they are not seriously interested in the particular witness of the separate confessions; they are in truth undenominational.”⁴⁴ About the spirituality of these sorts of evangelical bodies, Newbigin once complained how

Much-called spirituality is really an attempt to escape from [God’s] method of dealing with us into a mystical and private type of experience which, being purely private, is wholly self-centered. The Gospel does not come to each of us in isolation. It comes to us through a particular book and through a particular fellowship... and that fellowship.. has maintained its existence in history as a visible organization with visible tests of membership, with officers, rules and ceremonies. It is a false spirituality, divorced from the teaching of the Bible, which regards this visible and continuing Church as of subordinate importance for the life in Christ.⁴⁵

⁴² J.E. Lesslie Newbigin on “What is the Ecumenical Agenda” (1986 Unpublished) (A Two-page response to a letter from Thaddeus Horgan, Managing Editor of “Ecumenical Trends”, asking Newbigin to write on the topic of an Ecumenical Agenda for Today’s Global City.) “NA”

⁴³ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Missions in an Ecumenical Perspective,” P. 9. “NA”

⁴⁴ “Missions in an Ecumenical Perspective,” p. 9.

⁴⁵ *The Reunion of the Church* p. 29. c.f. in *Household of God*, Newbigin also states unequivocally how, “Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church.” P. 147.

Newbigin was therefore concerned for what he perceived as the theological compromises in both the WCC movement, if for the sake of organic union, and the evangelical movement, if for the sake of missions. He argued, “There is a kind of activity which is sometimes referred to as ecumenical in which the real concern for truth out of which our confessional differences have arisen is simply sidestepped, in which there is a concern rather for large numbers or for efficiency in a worldly sense but the real issue concerning the truth as it is in Jesus is ignored. With that kind of pseudo-ecumenism we can obviously have nothing to do.”⁴⁶

The genius of Newbigin’s system was to maintain that Christ centered “missions” and a ecumenical “ecclesiology” must necessarily be kept together lest either one be severely compromised—again, a “high gospel” and “high church” vision. He adamantly argued that “the separation of these two things [missions and church] which God has joined together must be judged one of the great calamities of missionary history, and the healing of this division one of the greatest tasks of our time.”⁴⁷

Apart from the theological vision of Christ’s final prayer, one of Newbigin’s favorite sources of Biblical justification for his multi-traditional, missional ecclesiology was in the Pauline epistles, most especially Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians. According to Newbigin, Paul’s concern against the “carnal” in Corinth (1 Cor.3:1-4) was a reference to those who had denied the life of Christ in the Church due to allowing “lesser things” to obscure, if not deny the greater things in Christian faith and practice. He wrote, “when St. Paul calls the Corinthians carnal his meaning is that they have fallen away from dependence solely on God and His grace... dependence upon the one Holy Spirit would have produced the visible unity of the one Body. Their divisions were outward signs of an inward carnality.”⁴⁸

Upon closer review of Paul’s first letter to Corinth, clearly, there was a division in Corinth that warranted Paul’s rebuke, even a kind of division that was directly impacting their organic union by means of sharing in a common sacramental based unity. For in 1Cor. 1:10, Paul writes:

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Not surprisingly, in the verse immediately preceding this statement, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that they were “called into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The word for “fellowship” is of course the work *koinonia* as later applied to a sacramental participation with Christ and one another at the Lord’s Supper in 1Cor. 10:16-17

⁴⁶ “Missions in an Ecumenical Context.” p. 9.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Goheen, p.12, c.f. Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today*. (London and New York: International Missionary Council, 1958), p. 26.

⁴⁸ *The Reunion of the Church* pp. 49-50.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Moreover, the same word translated above "divisions" according to Paul's rebuke is the same word for "schism" or the condition of being splintered apart and is again directly related to an *improper* participation in the Lord's Supper in 1Cor. 10

For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it.

Here again, whatever else was wrong in the Corinthian church, of the utmost concern for Paul was that there had been a "schism" whereby there was a visible split in the church of God in Corinth that had impacted the *koinonia* of the Lord's Table, and therefore the essential, first order, belief in the universality of Christ and the church's essential identity together in Christ after the Trinitarian pattern of unity itself. But then, relative to the issue of confessionalism especially, the question could be raised, what, then was Paul's answer to the Corinth problem?

In chapter 1 vs. 11-13, we read:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Evidently then, the church had splintered into factions that were distinguished by the teachings of Paul vs. the teachings of Apollos. There were "quarrels" such that the body of Christ was visibly rent asunder as to compromise even their sharing together in a common sacramental meal. We even know something about the theological nature of these disputes from 1Corinthians 10 as pertaining to the question of meats offered to idols. The interesting thing however is that Paul's method was *not* to demand a consensus concerning the issue of meats in order to receive one another in sacramental *koinonia*! E.g. In order to have visual unity, Paul didn't call a conference to resolve the theological dispute per se! Rather, he admonishes them *not* to demand absolute unanimity in theological conscience in order to share in the *koinonia* of visible union around Christ's table! He says for instance, that "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the others." (10:23).

In the context of Corinth then, and *for the sake of true confessionalism*, Paul first of all concedes that some teachings are arguably more or less orthodox as per a more mature theological conviction than

others. He in effect shows his hand when he argues that “all things are lawful” when evidently this was the point of contention (we can notice as well that in Romans 14 about the same issue, Paul clearly distinguishes one view as “strong” in comparison to the “weaker” view). And yet, Paul argues that for the sake of a higher confession, namely, the unity of the church sacramentally *in* Christ, He privileges some teachings over others for the sake of mutual edification. In other words, while all confessions are either true or false and worth debating, not all confessions are of equal value relative to the grand scheme of redemption and the sharing of Christ’s table together. And clearly for Paul, there is no higher order of confession than that proclaimed at the Lord’s Table vis-à-vis the unity of the church in Christ. There was, in short, a way to maintain freedom of conscience (confessionalism) while also maintaining visible unity(ecumensim), assuming that one distinguished between those confessions that are inherent to the essential identity of the church vs. other doctrines, while still important and worth debating, are preserved by allowing for a full expression of the liberty of conscience albeit in visible and sacramental fellowship with those who differ. As such, there was to be a kind of theological tolerance, and even deference, on those matters that are not inherently Christo-centric relative to the terms of communion, if for the sake of a visible unity that *is* inherent to the essence of the churches identity in Christ at the sacramental table. Paul says it this way:

*If someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?
(1Cor.10:28-30)*

Paul’s point in Corinth is *not* to concede the theological point as unimportant. Nor should we read Corinthians as a statement of personal ethics!⁴⁹ His point is to make room for the church in the tradition of “Apollos” and the church in the tradition of “Paul” to join together visibly under a common conciliar authority (the Jerusalem counsel) in order to participate *together* in Christ’s table. It is to allow matters of secondary importance in comparison to serve, rather than deny, the first order teachings concerning the universality of Christ and the essential identity of the church in Christ! His answer is to avoid establishing terms of communion (unity) that go beyond those terms that are intrinsic to the spiritual union that *is* had relative to participation in Christ as being transacted in the Lord’s Table.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ C.f. Richard Hayes, *Ecclesiology and Ethics- In 1 Corinthians.. (Ex Auditu, Journal of the North Park Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture, (www.northpark.edu/sem/exauditul/papers/hays.html)*

⁵⁰ The 1Corinthians situation is further clarified in Romans, where some of the exact same language is expanded upon in the Romans context In Romans 14, Paul exhorts the different factions to “receive one another” (14:1)—which in the greater context was most likely related to receiving one another in Christian koinonia or membership in the visible church of Christ. And this “receiving” is clearly not be means of reaching a theological consensus on everything. As pertaining to the different teachings concerning the “eating of meats” and the practice of various holy days, Paul will say “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore,... 3 Let not him who eats

Herein, in Newbigin's missional ecclesiology, one can discern perhaps a theological fusion (missional with ecumenical) which providentially coincides with his spiritual formation relative to a "high church" Scottish Presbyterianism, together with a "high gospel" evangelicalism. Newbigin, as such, often spoke of the church as both on earth a "foretaste of heaven" relative to the mediated presence of Christ now, even while being God's eschatological plan to accomplish God's mission in the world. But for both of these to hold true, the church as "foretaste" and "mission", Newbigin argued that there must be an organic unity that incorporates differing traditions within the otherwise Christo-centric church. Curiously, one could also argue that Newbigin's idea is not so far from his Presbyterian notion of "presbytery," albeit as was practiced in the South India context in the form of an episcopate organization. Edmund Clowney has described the organic principle of Presbyterian polity in relation to the church of Corinth this way, for instance:

The scriptural model in view is the "city-church"... these are seen as unified churches under one presbyterial government but including a number of congregations... They are members of the church of the city... "the church (singular) of God which is at Corinth." Corinth is one place of the heavenly church manifest on earth. For God has "many people" in that city, but the church is not the church of Stephanas (16:15), or of Paul, Peter, or Apollos (1:12) or of Corinth. It is the church of God; therefore it includes those who are called to be saints and they are addressed with "all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus in every place..."

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.⁵¹

Missional Ecclesiology for Today's Global City

After Lesslie Newbigin's retirement from India in 1974, he began a new stage of life most noted for targeting his missionary ecclesiology toward the West. After South India, Lesslie Newbigin began a five-year professorship at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. In 1979, he accepted the call to a pastorate in an inner-city, interracial congregation in Winson Green, Birmingham. It was in this context and for the rest

despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats" and " 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." In brief, Paul was advocating for a multi-traditional type of visible unity! And why? Because while all doctrines are important, not all doctrines are as important as other doctrines relative to the witness of Christ and the inherent identity of the church in union with Christ at the Lord's Table. He therefore speaks of his concern that these differing "traditions" not cause believers to "put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our fellow believers way." Contrary to a popular privatized reading of "stumbling"—it is clearly in this context a reference to Paul's concern in vs. 20 that they not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. (vs. 20). And the "work of God" that Paul is referencing is defined in vs. 18-19 as a concern for "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... and the things by which one may edify another."

⁵¹ Edmund Clowney, "Distinctive Emphasis in Presbyterian Church Polity," *Pressing Toward The Mark* (1986)

of his life that he encountered what he described as “a paganism born out of the rejection of Christianity.” He further noted how this post-Christian “paganism” was “far tougher and more resistant to the Gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which foreign missionaries have been in contact during the past 200 years.”⁵² This notwithstanding, Newbigin sought to apply his cross-cultural expertise that had been gained in the East to the missionary challenges of the West. Concerning then his missionary analysis of Western culture, Newbigin said it this way in 1987.

*If one were to look on the worlds scene from a missionary point of view, surely the most striking fact is that, while in great areas of Asia and Africa the church is growing, often growing rabidly, in the lands which were once called “Christendom” it is in decline, and moreover, wherever the culture of the West under the name of “modernization” penetrates, it carries with it what Lippmann called “the acids of modernity” dissolving the most enduring of religious beliefs of Christians.*⁵³

It would far exceed the present purpose to say much by way of Newbigin’s critique of post-enlightenment culture. But at the core of Newbigin’s concern was to challenge the modern, and then post-modern ideology that privatized religious belief, which cuts directly against the Christian belief in the universality of Christ. For according to Newbigin, the great “acid” of modernity, was in the perceived separation between public “facts” and private “values,” wherein religion was being domesticated as a private opinion. Under modernity, the only public facts are those that can be known by autonomous reason and the modern scientific method, which then excludes as “facts” all truth claims about the *telos* or purpose of life, even those truths that are known by revelation according to historical “witness.” He argued, for instance

*That human beings exist to glorify God and enjoy him forever is not a fact, according to this system... IT is an opinion held by some people. It belongs to the private sector, not the public. Those who hold it are free to communicate it to their children in home and church (private spheres) but it has no place in the curriculum of the public schools and universities. And since the publicly accepted definition of a human being excludes any statement of the purpose for which human beings exist, it follows necessarily that in the ordinary meaning of the word fact, no factual statement can be made about what kinds of behavior are good or bad. These can only be private opinions. Pluralism reigns!*⁵⁴

In other words, disputed Newbigin, “if there is a purpose to which in fact all human life ought to be directed, this purpose cannot be discovered by the methods of science. The scientist has his own purposes, but they have no basis in the world of “facts.” They are his personal choice. Science acknowledges no objective world of values in the light of which his purpose could be judged right or wrong... He is left

⁵² Quoted in “A Presbyterian Bishop in India, The Missionary Career of J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, in *The Best of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin from the International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1987), 1998, p. 3.

⁵³ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Can the West Be Converted?” in *The Best of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin from the International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1987), 1998, p. 11.

⁵⁴ “Can the West Be Converted?” p.15.

under the control of whichever is the strongest impulse of his nature. He becomes, in fact, an agent of nature. Man's mastery of nature turns out in the end to be nature's mastery of man."⁵⁵

Newbigin's point was certainly not to undermine the enlightenment agenda for a 'civil society' over against the religious wars of the 17th centuries. In so far as civil rights and privileges were concerned, Newbigin would have nothing of the pre-Enlightenment era. There ought certainly be a place for religious plurality under the protection of civil laws according to Newbigin's system. But again, the fact of plurality as to allow people of all faiths and none to enjoy civil privileges is one thing, but to then shift to an enlightenment worldview which redefines true knowledge as nothing but that which can be verified by autonomous human reason based upon the scientific method, and as the sole arbiter of truth and the primary instrument of social progress—this is an entirely different thing for Newbigin.

Furthermore, Newbigin notes how the modern acclaim to only one kind of truth is further eroded wherein under the "slippery term" of post-modernism, there is "the abandonment of any claim to know the truth in any absolute sense at all. Ultimate reality is not single but diverse and chaotic. Truth-claims are really concealed claims to power, and this applies as much to the claims of science as to those of religion."⁵⁶ And again, for Newbigin the great concern was that Christian faith is relegated to a mere private opinion of value such as to be "one among the possible private option available within the parameters of this culture" such that he further added "it will no longer do to confuse the fact of plurality with the ideology of pluralism—the view that since no one can really know the truth we must be content with the multiplicity of opinions." The fear for Newbigin concerning the post-enlightenment system was that "Christians in the modern world are "expected to accept a lower place for the name of Jesus than that of supreme Lord of all things."⁵⁷

As a result, "the kind of western thought which has described itself as "modern" is rapidly sinking into a kind of pluralism which is indistinguishable from nihilism-- a pluralism which denies the possibility of making any universally justifiable truth-claims on any matter, whether religious or otherwise."⁵⁸ Here again, Newbigin was deeply committed to "a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ."⁵⁹ As summarized by Geoffrey Wainwright, Newbigin's response was to make the case that "there is no knowledge without a basis in some kind of belief... and every judgment is made within a particular worldview. The original gospel was preached as a proclamation of facts—of the incarnation of the divine

⁵⁵ "Can the West Be Converted?" p. 16.

⁵⁶ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, "Religious Pluralism: A Missiological Approach"(1993) and published in *Theology of Religions: Christianity and Other Religions* (Roma: Pontifical Gregorian University), p. 227-244.

⁵⁷ "Can the West Be Converted?" p. 16.

⁵⁸ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, "Theology of Religions: Christianity and Other Religions, *Roma: Pontifical Gregorian University*, 227-244.

⁵⁹ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, "Witnesses to the World (1987) *Christian* (U.K.), no. 1 (May/June): 5-8. This is an edited version of a paper originally given at a conference on 'His Mission, Our Task', organized by the Parfor Mission and Unity in October 1986.

Word as Jesus Christ, and of his ministry, death, and resurrection—which challenge every mundane value and set a final standard of truth. Without a recovery of nerve to preach the gospel, the church is failing in the mission with which it has been uniquely entrusted.”⁶⁰

What I am pleading for is a genuinely missionary encounter with post-Enlightenment culture. We have too long accepted the position of a privileged option for the private sector. We have been tempted either to withdraw into an intellectual ghetto, seeking to preserve a kind of piety in church and home while leaving the public world to be governed by another ideology. Or we have been tempted to regard the “modern scientific world-view” as though it were simply a transcript of reality which we must—willy-nilly—accept as true. We then try to adjust our Christian beliefs to the requirements of “modern thought” and to find some room for ideas, sentiments and policies which are suggested to us by the Christian tradition – but always within the framework of the “modern scientific world-view”. A truly missionary approach would reject both of these strategies; would recognize frankly the fact that the Christian dogma offers a “fiduciary framework” quite different from and (in some respects) incompatible with the framework within which modern European culture has developed; and would be quite bold and uncompromising in setting forth the Christian “dogma”, but also very humble and teachable in engaging in dialogue with those who live by other fundamental beliefs⁶¹.

However different of a context from South India, what is perhaps most astonishing is to rediscover how in response to Western “modernism/post-modernism” Newbigin again will emphasize the importance of rediscovering a *missional ecclesiology* as God’s instrument for the redemption of post-Christendom! Very clearly, and much like his early ecumenical commitments while a missionary in India, Newbigin will call forth a movement for both church evangelization and ecumenism.

On the first count, he recognized that “evangelism,” in the context of modern privatization of Christian faith is often confused with “proselytism,” noting that if Christian beliefs “can only be held as a private notion”, then all evangelism is “shunned” as “proselytism... as imposing my view on another as a power encounter.”⁶² And yet because of the uniqueness of Christ, and especially the cross of Christ as an “event in history, the mighty act of God by which at infinite cost he reconciled the fallen world to himself and rescued it from perdition,” Newbigin taught that “the Church must tell the story which has been entrusted to her.” He continues, “there is no substitute for this story. It is necessary to say this because it is sometimes said that “Christian presence” rather than “evangelization” is the proper form of Christian response to religious pluralism.” Newbigin concludes, “this is” at best “a confusing half truth.”⁶³

His point was that the church, while continuing to be the healing presence of Christ in the world, as to necessitate a ministry of “word” through works of mercy and justice, it must also be a ministry of “word” wherein the church remains active in telling the story and doctrines of the gospel as witness to the

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Editor’s Introduction...” p. xi.

⁶¹ *The Other Side of 1984* quoted by Newbigin in “Missions In An Ecumenical Perspective” p. 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Religious Pluralism: A Missiological Approach,” “NA”

universality of Christ. And this verbal “telling” is incomplete apart from its being embodied in, with and through the church wherein Christ is present, albeit as mediated by the Holy Spirit, in the world. The importance of the local congregation was for Newbigin the ultimate “sign” or “hermeneutic” of the truth and validity of the gospel for today’s global city. He explains: “If I am pressed to give reasons for being a Christian, I can only reply by speaking of the calling of Jesus Christ which has come to me through his Church and is authenticated by the working of the Holy Spirit as mediated to me through the word and sacraments of the Gospel and the life of the believing community.”⁶⁴ And of course, if the church is to signify the universality of Christ for the world, it cannot then “balkanize” into as many denominations as there are sect in the post-modern world!

Conclusion: Newbigin’s *Missional Ecclesiology* Proposed

In today’s global city, the consensus seems to be that spirituality is in, even if religious organization is out.⁶⁵ By spirituality, we of course mean broadly a way of life that recognizes the spiritual nature of existence. And yet, there are of course all kinds of emerging spiritualities and descriptions of deity. There are *eastern* and *western* spiritualities, and then there is one or another eastern or western *sectarian* spirituality, and then again there is one or another *tradition* within a given sect of western or eastern spirituality -- and on and on it goes! And yet, by all accounts within the Biblical witness, is this so different from the first century context of the first Christians? As Newbigin acknowledged, “the apostolic Church was launched into a religiously plural world, a world where as St. Paul puts it there were many gods and Lords (1Cor.8:5).” And to be sure, “this pluralism was tolerated [in society] only on one condition, that the supreme lordship was ascribed to the emperor!”⁶⁶ And here is the point of course, this was profoundly problematic to early Christians.

⁶⁴ “Religious Pluralism: A Missiological Approach,” “NA”

⁶⁵ The social sciences portray spirituality in North America as being in a state of extreme flux—all of which are reacting to the post-enlightenment church by a revival of spirituality expressed in both low-church and high-church directions. Admittedly, the spiritual flux is a subset of an even greater upheaval that is often described as post-modernity, both measured in social and philosophical ways. For instance, David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, estimates that there are already 112 million *out-of-church Christians* around the world. He expects this number to double by 2025. (From “Growing numbers of Christians leaders leaving church” at www.churchcentral.com, June 10, 2004.) The Barna Research Group has observed a marked *increase in spirituality* over the past two-years measured in terms of Bible reading, participation in weekly small group Bible studies and personal prayer. But not surprisingly, church attendance and involvement has remained relatively flat. (Reference by Allie and Jenni Parker, “Research Reveals Ambiguous Religious Involvement” in *PCANews* (www.christianity.com)) And at a time when the so-called *twentysomethings* are increasingly “absent from Christian churches,” 80% say that their religious faith is important in their life. (Only 31% of *twentysomethings* attend church in a typical week, compared to 42% of those in their 30’s and 49% of those in their 40’s. See The Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, “Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches,” *The Barna Report* September 24, 2003. www.barna.org.) And whereas the “number of unchurched adults has nearly doubled” since 1991, rising from 39 million to 75 million (a 92% increase!), spirituality in America is relatively high, where 80% of Americans not only believe in God, but believe that God still works miracles today. (The Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, “Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991,” *The Barna Report* May 4, 2004 located at www.barna.org.)

⁶⁶ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin “Religious Pluralism: A Missiological Approach” (1993) *Theology of Religions: Christianity and Other Religions* (Roma:

The problem was not in the *fact* of there being an emperor—but in placing ones ultimate *faith* in the doctrine of “emperor” wherein the emperor is given the ultimate religious authority or “lordship” over life! Newbigin’s point was to remind the Christian church that fundamental to the nature of Christian faith is the universality of Christ-- the notion that the name of Jesus is not the name of the leader of one region or religion among many, the name Jesus is not the name that we in the west give to God but is the name of the One decisive and final revelation of God to all of humanity, the One who alone has brought reconciliation between humanity and God and thereby has created the possibility of ultimate reconciliation between humanity to humanity. In other words, Christian spirituality will speak of the universality of Christ, of a “spirituality” in so far as there is “but one God only, and one mediator even Jesus Christ” wherein there is neither east nor west, etc. etc. And to the present point, this universality aspect makes it equally problematic for the church today to relinquish the ultimate Lordship of Christ to an imperial philosophy (e.g. today’s religious *privatization* and its corresponding notion of absolute religious *pluralism*)! And to be clear, it is not the *fact* of religious pluralism under the protection of civil laws that is problematic, nor is it that Christians don’t have much that could be learned from the other religions even. Rather, the problem for Biblical Christianity is the *doctrine* of pluralism, or perhaps even *belief in* religious pluralism, as to radically change the mission of the church, that is problematic according Newbigin! ⁶⁷

The purpose then of this essay has been to explore Newbigin’s solution of a *missional ecclesiology*, as much a solution to religious pluralism today as in the first century context.

Relative to the first century, it was shown that Paul’s answer to religious pluralism in Corinth was in advocating for a multi-traditional (*ecclesial*) and *Christo-centric (missional)* kind of ecumenism that preserved both the *eschatological (telos)* aspects of the church and the mediated *presence (instrumental)* aspect of God’s saving activity in with and through the ascended ministry of Christ in the visible church. For according to Lesslie Newbigin, no less than for Paul, the absolute crucial connection relative to preserving the universality of Christ was/is the connection between “mission” (Christ-centric evangelization) and “ecumenism” (visible, organic/multi-traditional union). This *missional ecclesiology* has been presented as the same vision that was envisioned by Christ’s final prayer in John 17, and was

Pontifical Gregorian University): 227-244.

⁶⁷ This is not to disparage the common voice of God in creation, or in other religions even, in so far as Christian faith acknowledges not one, but two books of revelation—one common to all people of all faiths and none, the other uniquely revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the Old and New Testament scriptures. Whereas the former is such as to demonstrate the gravity of God, and even to provide a kind of common grace in order to preserve much by way of the dignity of humanity and the possibility of global justice and love, there is much room for dialogue between the spiritualities and for mutual learning and corrective. As for the latter, special, sort of revelation, the Christian scriptures portrays this as uniquely salvific as to make way for human reconciliation to God and the covenantal promise of the resurrected life into all of eternity. It is a revelation, to be sure, that is exclusively revealed in a unique story in, with and through a peculiar ecclesia of God, but always inclusive of every nation relative to its promise! And herein lies the great tension of redemptive history— how it is that God is uniquely and savingly revealed in, with and through a peculiar story that climaxes in Christ, and yet for the whole world universally!

gifted to the world at Pentecost in Acts 2, wherein the people of every nation were literally “filled with awe” such that “the Lord added to their number day by day,” as many as called upon the name of the one universal Lordship of Christ. It was an *ecclesia* born out of the multiplicity of the nations, all clothed in their unique cultures and languages, but one church united by *one Lord, one faith, one baptism...* (Eph.4:5).

Moreover, this response to today’s post-modern/post-Christian global city has been recommended, albeit against the temptation to make Christian faith yet another sectarian religion among many—a church of Jews vs. Gentiles, even of “Paul” vs. “Apollos,” or of “x” tradition” vs. “y” tradition... Paul would have nothing of it based on his Christology. And of course, neither should we in our post-modern/post-Christian context either! Thankfully, not only was this vision rediscovered and argued by Lesslie Newbigin, but it comes with his testimony as well of the South Indian *reunion* church, about which he once proclaimed, ““Never again will I say that a thing which I believe is God’s will is impossible!”⁶⁸

We have, in sum, explored the *Missional Ecclesiology of Lesslie Newbigin* with a particular eye toward duplicating the South Indian reunion in the post-modern context of a typical western global city (by city, I mean civilization, but especially where it is distinctively “post-Christian/post-modern as for Newbigin’s European ministry). Indeed, Newbigin viewed denominationalism itself as the product of modern and post-modern privatization of religion against the universality doctrine of Christ. For in so far as denominationalism by its nature was sectarian as to identify with one or another sect of Christians rather than the worldwide Christian church, it was a capitulation to the Western idol of religious privatization. Newbigin, for instance, once noted how “sociologist have rightly pointed out that the denomination (essentially the product of North American religious experience in the past 200 years) is simply the institutional form of a privatized religion.” He further confessed, “the denomination is the outward and visible form of an inward and spiritual surrender to the ideology of our culture. Neither separately nor together can the denominations become the base for a genuinely missionary encounter with our culture.” And so not surprisingly, Newbigin called for a “radical break with that form of Christianity that is “called the denomination.”⁶⁹

We have likewise observed how this call to “break” from the denomination ought *not* merely to result in a return to Rome (16th century) or Constantinople (5th century even)—as this would only capitulate to yet another imperial model for ecumenism, as to force unity to be exclude either “Apollos” or “Paul”—as to disallow genuine confessional debate *within* the church about those pen-ultimate beliefs relative to terms of communion. Nor is the call to “break” from denominationalism merely a call to denounce the visible church as defined by its confession, sacraments and pastoral government (modern

⁶⁸ “The unfinished Agenda,” p. 97.

⁶⁹ “Can the West Be Converted?” p.17.

evangelicalism). This “undenominationalism,” albeit driven by a missional pragmatism is “no ecumenism at all” according to Newbigin, and doesn’t directly address the issue of Christ’s universality as visibly signified in, with and through the *ecclesia* of God’s presence in the world. And finally, this “break” from denominationalism is not then to form a “super-denomination” formed out of compromise to either the missional or confessional authenticity of the church—as to merely absorb all traditions into one compromising tradition (WCC). For this would be to create yet another imperial denomination, albeit of a compromise tradition, or to become yet another pragmatic driven assembly, even if pragmatically driven by the goal of ecumenism. The vision here recommended is for a “high-gospel” and “high-church” kind of spirituality that results in a “high-gospel” and “high-church” type of visible ecumenism.

Baring then the solution of an imperial church, a compromise church, or a pragmatic church— we have in our exploration of Lesslie Newbigin’s missional ecclesiology sought to recommend a multi-traditional, missional church. It is the church that is visibly one under a common conciliar government as to participate in one common sacramental meal under even one name for the whole world (John 17, 1Cor. 10). This one, multi-denominational, sacramental based and organically united missional church would be in the world, not of the world, but for the world as a “sign and seal” to the “one Lord (Christ as King), one faith (Christ as prophet) and one Baptism (Christ as priest) of Christ’s ascended ministry in today’s global city! A Christo-centric missional ecclesiology is the ultimate answer to the missionary encounter with today’s global city and its inherent challenge to the universality of Christ where it is still said today, *what right you have to bring the name of a foreign God, of a foreign religion into the [city].... You do not believe that the Name of Jesus is the all sufficient Name because all of you have to add something else to that Name before you are satisfied!*

The following, by way of conclusion, is a suggested “typology” intended to help distinguish a high-gospel/high-church *missional ecclesiology* from the other typical options that exist today. Like all typologies, they are predicated upon principles relative to generalities that will surely fail almost every particular situation. And, yet, as per the value of such typologies, it is offered if per chance it might help to clarify Newbigin’s vision for a missionary encounter with the world vis-à-vis the *missionary church!* The typology highlights the kind of multi-traditional, *organic* and missional ecumenism that Newbigin espoused wherein “each of the different confessions are invited to participate, bringing the full truth of that confession as the people understand it without compromise or dilution.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ “Missions in an Ecumenical Perspective,” p. 9.

Paradigms in Ecumenism

<p>Low Church, Low Gospel</p> <p><i>Compromise</i></p> <p>(WCC)</p> <p>Mono-Traditional/Blended Ecumenical</p>	<p>Low Church, High Gospel</p> <p><i>Pragmatic</i></p> <p>(Modern Evangelical)</p> <p>Non-Traditional/Non-Ecumenical Cooperatives/Networks</p>
<p>High Church, Low Gospel</p> <p><i>Imperial</i></p> <p>(RC)</p> <p>Mono-Traditional/Schismatic</p>	<p>High Church, High Gospel</p> <p><i>Classical Evangelical</i></p> <p>(Newbigin)</p> <p>Multi-Traditional/Missional</p>

Brief explanations:

Imperial Option: (High Church, Low Gospel—Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox).

This option seeks to express visible unity by limiting the church to what is in reality *only one* denomination or “tradition” based on one interpretation of the meaning of apostolic order/succession such as to exclude all dissenting views of apostolic order/succession. The sum effect of this option is to seek after visible unity by means of schism! In other words, this method doesn’t resolve the problem of schism—it merely settles the problem of visible unity by reducing the visible church to only one branch of the visible church—such then to in reality pronounce those who are possibly members of the church as God sees it to be outside the church vs. how this imperial church wants the world to see it. In other words, dissent is suppressed by declaring all dissenters to be outside of the visible church altogether (excommunication) even if the dissent pertains to scruples that are not essential to those confessions of faith that are necessary in order to participate in the gospel and a true spiritual union with Christ at the Lord’s Table. To be sure, however simplistic and even schismatic even-- the allure to seek unity simply by joining up with that tradition that boasts of the longest unbroken jurisdiction as determined by one interpretation of “order” is enticing.. It is to choose history over unity. And yet, the effect is to promote visible unity by reducing the extent of the visible church to something far less than the church really is.

The Compromise option: (Low Church/Low Gospel—Modern WCC (post Uppsala)

This option-- while admirably committed to visible unity that is expressed vis-a vie the visible church as defined by faith, order and sacrament-- seeks to accomplish this unity by establishing a single church within a single tradition formed out of compromise. In other words, this method will seek not to suppress dissent, but by subordinating what some might consider very important confessions under a single, compromise confession for the sake of unity. The result is often a kind of “low gospel-tradition” kind of spirituality for the sake of being one church. This method will, inadvertently perhaps, suppress a vibrant search for and participation in “the full counsel of God’s word” relative to Christian faith and practice. The gospel as such, is reduced, if not altogether lost in some instances, for the sake of “Christian unity.” Here again, in contrast to the Pauline model of visible unity—unity is predicated upon reducing “faith” to that “faith” that everyone can agree with—even if this means

reducing the gospel to something that is far less satisfying and even “full” as is promoted in scripture. In other words, inclusively wins, vibrant particularity loses—even if some aspects of particularity that are lost is viewed by some as to lose the gospel all together! (It should be observed that there are many “evangelical” versions of this option for visible unity that have participated in the WCC movement. And yet, the perception, and perhaps even the reality within the American context is that the WCC is mostly a “mainline liberal” movement such as to be associated with the promotion of a non-Christo-centric understanding of mission (e.g. Newbigin’s critique of the post-Uppsala WCC movement).

The Pragmatic option: (Low Church/High gospel—Modern evangelical)

For the sake of evangelical or “missional” pragmatism, this option seeks after a kind of visible unity that is more or less “low-church”, if not “no-church” and low-tradition/confession in favor of forming voluntary associations of individuals or even churches that are loosely connected by a shared set of core evangelical beliefs and a pragmatic (relative to evangelism/missions) oriented set of core values. The “presence” theology of the gospel relative to Christ’s mediated ascended ministry in the confessional, sacramental and pastoral means of grace via the church is lost altogether. To be sure, this option is responding to the various high church that are low gospel. It is understandably held that in contending for the secondary things of “faith” (as related to the various high church issues and beliefs) that the first things concerning the gospel and its relevance to missions especially has been compromised, if not all together been lost. And yet in preserving the eschatological aspects of redemptive history, it could be argued that this evangelical movement lost the presence aspects of the gospel and therefore the “Full” gospel itself. Confessionalism as such is viewed as potentially being narrow minded as to reduce Christian unity to “special interest theological topics” that are non-essential relative to the core set of beliefs necessary to partake of the redemption purchased by Christ and received by faith alone. Ecclesiology as such, is likewise viewed as potentially contentious in a way that will sabotage a missional spirituality and vision. As such, and notwithstanding that some within this option recognize the value of the church relative to the apostolic gospel, the church as such, and the kind of spirituality that pertains to it, is not an essential element of the gospel.

Newbigin’s Option: A Missional Ecclesiology For Today, After the Model of South India

*For the perfecting of the life of the whole body, the Church of South India needs the heritage of each of the uniting Churches, and each of those Churches will, it is hoped, **not** lose the continuity of its own life, but preserve that life enriched by the union with itself of the other two Churches. The Church of South India is thus formed by a combination of different elements each bringing its contribution to the whole, and **not** by the absorption of any one by any other. It is, therefore, also a comprehensive Church; and its members, while firmly holding the fundamentals of the faith and order of the Church Universal, are allowed wide freedom of opinion in all other matters, and wide freedom of action in such differences of practice as are consistent with the general framework of the Church as one organized body.*

Lesslie Newbigin *The Unity that We Seek*,

- Organic/Councilar (Visibly Communal) vs. Invisible
- Multi-Traditional (Confessional) vs. compromise
- Sacramental Jurisdiction (Sacramental) vs. pragmatic
- Missional Gospel vs. socio-political gospel