

CPC Shepherd Leader
Spring, 2016

Analysis of Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, chs: 10. "The Logic of Mission"; 11. "Mission: Word, Deed, and New Being"; 18. "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel"

Chapter 10, "The Logic of Mission"

Key Question: How is the mission of the Church rooted in the gospel itself?

- *How did it start?* Rather than a burden, "mission begins with a kind of **explosion of joy**. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. It must be told. Who could be silent about such a fact? The mission . . . is more like the fallout from a vast explosion, a radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life-giving" (116).
 - Paul nowhere commands anyone to be on mission!
 - "What is going on?!" In Acts, proclamations of the gospel are "in response to questions asked by those outside the Church. In every case there is something present, a **new reality, which calls for explanation** or prompts the question to which the preaching of the gospel is the answer" (117).
- *What is the mission?*
 - *God's, not ours, mission.* "It is not that they must speak and act, asking the help of the Spirit to do so. It is rather that in their faithfulness to Jesus they become the place where the Spirit speaks and acts.
 - *Trinitarian presence and foretaste.* "The presence of the reign of God in foretaste. . . the sign of the inbreaking of the kingdom. The Church is not so much the agent of the mission as the locus of the mission" (118-9).
- *What is the criterion for a missionary?*
 - Church growth and individuals? No. Humanization and alleviation of social ills? No.
 - Creation of believing communities! Paul can somehow say his job is done when he has "left behind communities of men and women who believe the gospel and live by it" (121) in each region.
 - "Mission is an acted out doxology" (127), where we witness to the gospel as we praise and give thanks to Christ, whose victory "cannot be private opinion" (125).

Bottom line: God's mission upends all of history, and now we - the Church - become the presence of God, a foretaste of God's full reign, a place where the Spirit leads us all into new ways to live, act, and think.

Practically, remember the explosion of joy! Being faithful to the God who has won in Christ means a whole new way of life in relationships, time, priorities, and expectations. Also, the mission is not "out there", it's "right here"! We're always on a mission field, and we should always act like the "whole world" is present.

Chapter 11, "Mission: Word, Deed, and New Being"

Key Question: What is the relationship between preaching and "doing" and how does that change the church's mission?

Theological framework: Our time in history now is "between Christ's ascension and his coming again, the time when his reign at the right of God is a hidden reality, that time in which signs are granted of that hidden reign but in which the full revelation of its power and glory is held back in order that all the nations - all the human communities - may have the opportunity to repent and believe in freedom" (128).

Twofold mission: Proclaiming and Propelling

- *Proclaiming:* witnessing to the one Person whose work defines and transcends all history
- *Propelling:* The gospel "presses events towards their true end", produces a "revolution of expectations", performing the end of history even as it is hidden ("already/not yet")
- *False Dichotomy* - it's not an either/or between preaching and deeds. "Preaching is an explanation of the healings".
 - *Deeds do not explain themselves* and can be misinterpreted or understood in terms of this world. "Healings, even the most wonderful, do not call the present world radically into question; the gospel does, and this has to be made explicit" (132).
 - *Preaching without deeds is meaningless* - "If nothing is happening no explanation is called for and the words are empty words" (132). "It is impossible to give faithful witness to the gospel while being indifferent to the situation of the hungry, the sick, the victims of human inhumanity" (136).
- *What did Jesus do?* He didn't write a book! "What he did was to prepare a community chosen to be the bearer of the secret of the kingdom. . . . Through his total consecration to the Father in his passion there should be created a community which would continue that which he came from the Father to be and to do" (133-4).
- Paul didn't "urge his readers to be active in evangelism but does find it necessary to warn them against any compromise with the rulers of this age. That is why it was not superiority of the Church's preaching which finally disarmed the Roman imperial power, but the faithfulness of its martyrs" (137).
- *Total life of the community* - words and deeds "mutually reinforce and interpret one another" (137).

Bottom line: Rather than pitting preaching and teaching against acts of justice and mercy, they should mutually inform the other. Our communal lives ought to be so radical and different that they demand an explanation, which only the gospel can answer!

Practically, we need to be involved in the full life of the church, its community, and its acts of mercy as well as teaching.

Ch. 18, "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel"

- *True Servant* - not merely at the disposal of others
- See Jn. 6 - "Jesus is both totally compassionate and yet totally uncompromising about what is involved in coming to the fullness of life."
 - "If the sign is confused with that which it signifies, the gift of life is forfeited. In serving human need, Jesus remains master" (226).
- ***Only option for an impact on public life - the local Christian congregation***, "the only hermeneutic of the gospel." Anything else is secondary and must be "rooted in and lead back to a believing community" (227).
 - "A human society [that is] both the servant of all people in all their needs, and yet at the same time responsible only to God in his awesome and holy sovereignty" (226).
 - Jesus formed a community, and the center of that community is His life.
 - *With six characteristics:*
 1. Community of praise - something totally absent from 'modern' society with its 'disenchantment' in contrast to all reverence - a community "with gratitude to spare"
 2. Community of truth - challenging the reigning plausibility structure by a community living it out
 3. Community of its neighborhood - "God's embassy in a specific place" (229)
 4. Priesthood in the world - standing between God and the world, mediating in all different ways to all different people
 5. Community of mutual responsibility - "must itself be a new social order . . . the **foretaste of a different social order**. Its members will be advocates for human liberation by being themselves liberated" (231).
 6. Community of hope - in a hopeless and disillusioned world, we must be "'indwelling' the gospel story . . . able steadily and confidently to live in this attitude of eager hope. . . . as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society" (232-3).

Bottom line: The local congregation has the unique calling and command to witness and show forth the gospel of Christ in the world. This is the primary way God will impact public life and evangelize the world, as opposed to political parties, evangelistic programs, niche-driven outreach, and isolated scholarly pursuits.

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What does it mean to be "Missional" - More than a source of mission, the carefully designed, apostolically-organized, church is the locus of mission and the very life-giving and mediated presence of Christ. Just the church being the church with the whole world present is God's missionary strategy to the world (John 1:14, 20:21)! This makes our approach to evangelism and discipleship participatory and not simply declarative.

What to look for:

- An emphasis upon participational apologetics vs. just declarative apologetics.
- Non-Christians participating in the life of the church and worship.
- Worship that both, and at the same time, is a participation in the mystery of Christ's transcendent otherness yet is accessed through the incarnate presence of Christ with local mannerisms.
- A willingness to suffer all things for the sake of the "elect" – both unchurched and churched– no false dichotomies.
- A confidence in the outward means of grace as a missionary strategy to our world (preaching, sacraments, community, prayers)
- A church that assumes a missionary mentality both locally and globally.