

Foreword by N. T. Wright



The Church and Its Vocation

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN'S
MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY

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The Missionary Church and Its Vocation in the World

The end of universal history has been revealed and accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ. What must inevitably follow historically is the mission of the church: this good news must be made known to all peoples and to the ends of the earth. “The Church . . . is set by God in the midst of the world as the sign of that to which all creation and all world history moves.”¹ This chapter is concerned with the question of how Newbigin understood the missionary vocation of the church in the midst of the world. In what ways was the church a sign set in the midst of the world to make known the goal of universal history? We begin this chapter with some foundational distinctions about the nature of mission that are important for Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology. Then we turn to five forms of witness that Newbigin especially emphasized.²

The Nature of Mission

Three helpful distinctions undergird Newbigin's understanding of the vocation of the church in the midst of the world: (1) God's mission and the church's mission, (2) missionary dimension and missionary intention, and (3) mission and missions.

God's Mission and the Church's Mission

The first important distinction is between God's mission and the church's mission. We begin with Newbigin's affirmation that "the Church's mission to all the nations is a participation in the work of the triune God."³ This statement was made in the early 1960s, about a decade after the emergence of the language of the *missio Dei*. Already there had been a major divergence between two major interpretations, and Newbigin was in the middle of these debates.

To understand the emergence of the *missio Dei*, it is important to understand the background of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: mission was considered to be primarily a work of the church. The optimism and anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment infected the missionary movement. This human-centered confidence was dealt a number of blows in the twentieth century that called for a new understanding of mission. It is in this context that the language of the mission of the Triune God emerged. This language makes clear in the strongest possible way four things: the church's mission must be distinguished from God's mission; God's mission has priority; it is the mission of the *Triune* God; and God's mission determines exactly the *what* and *how* of the church's mission. All this is true for Newbigin.

The theological framework of the *missio Dei* remains firmly in place today. There continues to be much reflection on a trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* as the framework for the missional church. Some of it appeals to Newbigin. And while there is much variety, some of it bears little resemblance to Newbigin's own understanding. So we

must carefully articulate what Newbigin meant when he spoke of mission as participation in the mission of the Triune God.

Characteristics of Newbigin's Understanding of the *Missio Dei*

The first characteristic to note in Newbigin's understanding of the *missio Dei* is its strong Christocentrism. The starting point for thinking about the missionary nature of the church is Jesus Christ. He gathers and commissions the church, and mission is participation in and continuation of his mission. Newbigin penned the following words for the Willingen report and then quotes them to begin his own articulation of a theology of mission: "There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission. 'As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.'"⁴ A trinitarian understanding of God and his mission begins with Jesus. Two questions—Who is Jesus? and What was his mission?—lead to reflection on the triune nature of God.⁵

If our mission is to continue the mission of Jesus, then what is his mission? This was the question faced by the early church, and they responded by expounding the explicit trinitarian context of Jesus's mission. "The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early Church was only the making explicit of that which is from the beginning the presupposition and the context, the source and the goal of the mission of Jesus. It is in Trinitarian terms that we have to understand the nature and authority of the mission in which we are called to share."⁶

This is important. Trinitarian reflection is Christocentric and tied closely to the mission of Jesus—that is, it arises from the confession that Jesus is Lord and from the mission of the early church to express that confession in the pagan-classical world. And further, it develops

as the church struggles to understand what it means to follow Jesus in mission. How are they to carry out their mission? Their answer is, in the way of Jesus. What is that way? This question gives rise to trinitarian reflection. The starting point is the sending of Jesus into the world.

In a skirmish with Konrad Raiser over a trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* within the ecumenical tradition, Newbigin again makes clear his starting point in Christ.⁷ Raiser believes Newbigin's Christocentrism blurs a trinitarian understanding of God. Newbigin responds that "a 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."⁸ This Christocentric starting point is fundamentally historical; it begins with Jesus of Nazareth—who he is and the nature of his mission.

A second characteristic of Newbigin's understanding of the mission of the Triune God is the immense space he gives to the work of the Spirit. Raiser and others may believe that Newbigin's Christocentrism has obscured the work of the Spirit, but such a judgment can be made only if one is not familiar with Newbigin's body of writing. Newbigin gives enormous space to the work of the Spirit because the Spirit is the primary actor in the mission of the church (as we have already seen in the preceding chapters).

The third point to note about Newbigin's understanding of God's mission is the clear narrative shape. The way Newbigin relates the various persons of the Trinity is in terms of the story of Scripture. It is impossible to read very far into Newbigin's work without recognizing that the overriding framework for everything is the biblical story. The work and mission of God narrated in the biblical story is fundamentally historical. The Triune God reveals himself in the context of his

work in history to unfold his purpose to renew the creation. The strong historical feel of Newbigin contrasts with other trinitarian formulations that have a much more static, doctrinal, or metaphysical sense. It also contrasts with any kind of formulaic articulation of the *missio Dei*. For example, the statement that the Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit, and the Father and Son send the church in the power of the Spirit certainly captures the Bible's teaching. However, if we unhinge that statement from the full narrative of Scripture, it becomes a wax nose that can be, and in fact has been, shaped in many ways. If that formulation is utilized, it must be as shorthand for the actual content of the biblical narrative. Any trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* that does not make redemptive history the primary context for the word "participation" or "sending" is not in line with Newbigin's understanding.

Finally—and closely related to the former point—Newbigin's understanding of the *missio Dei* is eschatological. The whole biblical story is moving toward the goal of salvation for all nations. The gospel announces that the end-time salvation has broken into the middle of history in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The consummation of the End is held off so that in these last days the gospel may go to the ends of the earth. The Spirit is given as an end-time gift that witnesses to the kingdom revealed and accomplished in Jesus. This brief statement again makes clear that the goal of the Father's work is the kingdom as the climax of history. In Jesus and by the work of the Spirit, that kingdom is now present. Newbigin's understanding of the *missio Dei* gives a prominent place to eschatology.

Mission in Christ's Way

"It seems to me to be of great importance to insist that mission is not first of all an action of ours. It is an action of God, the triune God. . . .

This is the primal reality in missions; the rest is derivative.”⁹ How do we articulate the mission of the church as participation in the mission of the Triune God? We will expound it here in terms of mission in Christ’s way, mission in the kingdom of the Father, and mission as bearing the witness of the Spirit.

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” With these words from John 20:21—a favorite verse for Newbigin—Jesus sends the church into the world to continue his mission. “This must determine the way we think about and carry out mission; it must be founded and modelled upon his. We are not authorized to do it in any other way.”¹⁰ How is the mission of the church modeled and founded on Jesus? Newbigin’s answer is rich and can only be summarized briefly.

Mission in Christ’s way is, first, to continue the ministry of the incarnate Jesus. This means we are to make known the kingdom of God. And we do it in the way that Christ did: by way of life, word, and deed. As Jesus formed and taught a community to bear witness to him, so that is essential to our own mission. Prayer and suffering marked the ministry of Jesus, and so it should characterize ours. And finally, Jesus carries out his mission in total dependence on the Father and in the power of the Spirit, so the church must follow in his way. This provides the impetus for the development of a trinitarian shape of mission; Jesus made known the kingdom of the Father in the power of the Spirit. This defines the church’s mission: if we follow in the way of Jesus, our life will be fully trinitarian.

Continuing the mission of Jesus, second, is in the way of the cross and resurrection. The cross is a sign of the kingdom: it pictures the victory of God in seeming defeat, signifies the way of conflict and suffering, and shows us the way God identifies himself fully with the world and at the same time rejects the sin that distorts the world. Again and

again Newbigin returns to the cross of Jesus to show that our mission is also in the way of the cross.

The mission of the church is also in the way of the resurrection. The resurrection is the dawning and inauguration of the new creation. We begin to share in the resurrection life of the Son. This means the renewing power of God is at work in the church bringing the new creation into the midst of history. Sharing in the resurrection life means also that we follow in the way of the cross, not only as a model for our mission but also in its power as a historical event that gained the victory of God over sin and evil.

Mission in Christ's way, third, is in relationship and submission to the living and exalted Lord. The church is "connected with Christ in two distinguishable ways." It is connected to the historical Jesus as the founder of the church who gathers the church and entrusts his mission to them. But the church is also "connected with him as the living and ascended Lord" who is our Eternal Contemporary.¹¹ This means that the church is not simply a historically continuous institution founded two thousand years ago to continue the historical mission of Jesus. It has also been incorporated into the kingdom of God, and Christ continues to rule his church as he lives among them. The character of the church is not just historical but also eschatological. He continues to nourish the life of the kingdom with his own life in the Word and sacraments of the gospel, and he works in and through them to carry out his mission in the world. Mission means ongoing and intimate communion with the living Lord, and submission to and proclamation of the Lord of history.

Mission in Christ's way, finally, is in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit whose proper nature is eschatological is poured out on Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus carries out his mission in total and

complete dependence on the work of the Spirit. That same Spirit is then poured out on the church to equip it for its mission in the world.

Mission in the Kingdom of the Father

In the 1960s Newbigin believed that reflection on mission had “perhaps been too exclusively founded upon the person and work of Christ” and therefore needed to “make a large place for the work of the Holy Spirit.” At the same time, he observed that “it is equally true that a true doctrine of missions will have much to say about God the Father. The opinion may be ventured that recent ecumenical thinking about the mission and unity of the Church has been defective at both these points.”¹² He himself sought to make the necessary corrections. But it may be said fairly of Newbigin’s thought that while his development of the work of the Spirit is full and rich, his reflection on the Father is less so. Yet what he does say is significant.

Newbigin’s own starting point is to note that according to the New Testament witness, Jesus carries out his mission in a relationship of the Son to the Father. Jesus’s mission unfolds in relation to the Father as the sovereign ruler of history who is directing all things to accomplish his purpose. Jesus steps into the story of the Old Testament, which is the long narrative of God’s mighty deeds directed toward the goal of reestablishing his sovereign rule over creation. While the focus of his redemptive work recorded in the Old Testament has been Israel, his sovereign rule extends over all nations, even world powers, as well as over all creation and history. Thus Jesus rests in God’s sovereign rule to work out his purposes for the world in Jesus’s own work.

Moreover, Jesus carries out his mission in relation to God as a caring Father. The rule of God narrated in the Old Testament is one not of an arbitrary despot but of a gracious and loving Father. “God’s fatherly rule of all things is at the very heart of [Jesus’s] teaching.”¹³ He is the

beloved Son who carries out his mission in intimate communion with the Father. He can trust the Father's wisdom in his sovereign rule. And so mission in Christ's way is in the way of trust, love, and the obedience of a son to a father.

God who created all things also sustains them and directs them according to his will. Even the great pagan political powers are in his hands to be used for his fatherly purposes. . . . God rules and uses them all. . . . [Jesus] submits himself wholly to the Father's ordering of events. He does not seek to take control himself of world history. He rejects every temptation to become himself a ruler and director of events. . . . He appears as the Son who lovingly submits himself to the will of him who rules all things.¹⁴

Newbigin's strong sense of God working out his purpose in history as narrated in the Old Testament forms the backdrop. But this portrayal of God as sovereign ruler is tied to an intimate portrait of God as Father. This leads Jesus, and us, to a joyful and unanxious witness and participation in God's mission, trusting him to work out his sovereign purpose in fatherly wisdom. This is a terribly needed reminder for a church that plans, strategizes, and manages, while trusting its own efforts to fulfill God's mission. And it is also a necessary perspective for the church in the midst of anxiety over the future. If we understand our mission in light of God's sovereign rule, "we shall be delivered from much of the anxiety which we find around us. . . . We do not need to waste our time being anxious about whether God's Kingdom will come; what we have to be concerned about is whether or not we are being faithful witnesses to it now, whether when the Lord comes we will be found awake and alert."¹⁵

But I would register one plea to move beyond Newbigin: the Father's work in creation needs to be developed much more fully as a context for the mission of the church today. While this is far from absent in

Newbigin's work, today it needs to be much more explicit and developed.

Mission as Bearing the Witness of the Spirit

When we turn to the work of the Spirit, we find rich reflection. Mission is "bearing the witness of the Spirit."¹⁶ The Spirit belongs first to the age to come: in the last days the Spirit will be poured out. With the coming of the Spirit, the End has arrived. The Spirit is an advance installment of the kingdom in the world (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14). The Spirit's work begins in Jesus, in whose life, words, and deeds the Spirit acts in power to make the kingdom present in the midst of the world. It continues as Jesus pours out the Spirit on his gathered community at Pentecost. As Luke's Gospel begins with the anointing of the Spirit on Jesus for his mission, the sequel, the book of Acts, begins with the outpouring of the Spirit on his community for their mission. Now the Spirit works in this community through their life, words, and deeds as a witness to the kingdom to the ends of the earth. And so by an outpouring of the Spirit, the church is launched on its mission¹⁷ and throughout Acts is the "active agent of mission." The Spirit "is a power that rules, guides, and goes before the church: the free, sovereign, living power of the Spirit of God. Mission is not something the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness."¹⁸ It is the Spirit who witnesses to Jesus creating signs of the new age. "The Church is not so much the agent of mission as the locus of mission. It is God who acts in the power of the Spirit."¹⁹

This needs to be kept clearly front and center if the church is to avoid turning its mission into a military operation or a sales campaign carried out simply as a human project. "It is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power."²⁰

Forgetting this important reality, the church is tempted to view its own strategies and plans and efforts as the way the kingdom comes.

Newbigin tells a couple of stories to illustrate this truth. On one occasion, in an industrial area of Madras there were forty adult baptisms in a short period of time. He invited all the new converts to tell their stories. Each of their stories was different, and in each case their coming to Christ was a series of events over a period of time. It might have been a talk on the factory floor with a friend, a visit from a Christian during an illness, the reading of a tract or Scripture, an act of kindness, a sermon, a prayer, a dream, or a vision. Newbigin concludes that it must be the work of the Spirit: "No one could have programmed all this. The strategy (if that is the right word) was not in any human hands."²¹

On another occasion, as the bishop of Madurai he received a letter from a village requesting baptism for twenty-five families. There had been no evangelistic initiatives organized by the church in that area, and so he tried to piece together how these families had come to Christ. He says it was a story in four acts. Act 1: A Christian engineer from a mainline church comes to town to help install an electric pump for clean water. He tells them he is a Christian but says no more. They saw he was a good man who worked hard. Act 2: A villager purchases a copy of the Gospel of Mark in a nearby village from a colporteur (a religious bookseller) and a few folks begin to read it together. Act 3: An evangelist visits the village, preaches a fiery sermon, and leaves behind a tract asking, "If you die tonight, where will you go?" These villagers decide this is a more serious matter than they had realized, and so they ask a Christian congregation five miles away to send them someone to tell them more. Act 4: The congregation sends an injured and unemployed laborer, or "coolie," to spend a month with them answering their questions. The result: twenty-five families ready and eager for baptism. Newbigin concludes: "The point of the story is obvious. If you

had assembled the engineer, the colporteur, the evangelist, and the coolie for a seminar on missionary methods, they would probably have disagreed with each other—perhaps violently. Unknown to each other, each had done faithfully the work for which the Holy Spirit had given equipment. The strategy was not in any human hands. . . . It is the Holy Spirit who is the primary missionary; our role is secondary.”²²

Missionary Dimension and Missionary Intention

A second distinction important for Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology is between missionary dimension and missionary intention. During the middle of the twentieth century, the scope of mission broadened to include everything the church was doing. Newbigin was concerned that the more specific evangelistic and cross-cultural missionary tasks of the church might be lost in this widening mission. On the one hand, Newbigin affirmed the comprehensive scope of mission that was emerging. This was undoubtedly biblical. On the other hand, the expansion of mission had the potential to marginalize if not eclipse intentional activities that had as their deliberate aim a witness to Christ to those who did not yet know him.

To preserve both concerns, Newbigin makes the helpful distinction between missional dimension and missional intention. This distinguishes “between mission as a *dimension* of the Church's whole life, and mission as the primary *intention* of certain activities. Because the Church *is* the mission there is a missionary dimension of everything that the Church does. But not everything the Church does has a missionary intention.” Certain activities can be considered to have a missional intention when they are “an action of the Church in going out beyond the frontiers of its own life to bear witness to Christ as Lord among those who do not know Him, and when the overall *intention* of that action is that they should be brought from unbelief to faith.”²³

Since the whole life of the church—both as a gathered community and when it is scattered throughout the world—is the place where the Holy Spirit witnesses to God’s renewing work, the whole life of the church partakes of the character of witness. If Christ is Lord of all human life, then the whole of our lives will be part of God’s mission as it directs others to his sovereign rule and renewing power. All Christian life has a missional dimension.

There are certain activities, however, that are undertaken specifically with the deliberate intention of bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Flowing out of a church that is aware of the missionary dimension of its whole existence will be words and deeds whose conscious goal is to point to Jesus Christ and invite others to follow him. For example, evangelism and cross-cultural missions will be deliberate and intentional activities that aim to witness to the gospel and invite the response of faith.

Newbigin believes that both of these aspects of mission are essential. One without the other will cripple the mission of the church. “Unless there is in the life of the Church a point of concentration for the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost.”²⁴ A church that reduces mission to only intentional activities narrows the scope of the gospel and removes the full context in which witnessing words should take their place. Each needs the other.

Mission and Missions

A third crucial distinction is helpful for understanding Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology. The broadening view of mission was threatening all intentional efforts at witnessing to Christ. However, cross-cultural missions was perhaps most threatened. This was because, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mission had

been reduced to cross-cultural missions. But cross-cultural missions came to be viewed as oppressive in the postcolonialist period, even as “theological racism”²⁵ by some. Moreover, with the growth of the church in the non-Western world, it seemed to no longer be needed. To the degree that Western churches participated in the cross-cultural enterprise, it would be more through social and economic development than through evangelism and church planting. A broader vision of mission threatened the cross-cultural missionary task of the church. Again, while Newbigin sees the importance of broadening mission in light of the church’s role in the biblical story, he also sees that it is essential “to identify and distinguish the specific foreign missionary task within the total Mission of the Church.”²⁶

Newbigin distinguishes between mission and missions (with an s). While mission is the total calling of the church to make known the gospel as it participates in God’s mission, missions consists of particular enterprises within the total mission of the church that “have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective.”²⁷ Thus, missions remains an essential part of the ongoing mission of the church.

Indeed, missions is important for maintaining the missional dimension in all of life. While “the church is mission, we still need ‘missions’ in order that it may be truly so. . . . This is not in order to relieve the rest of the church of missionary responsibility but to ensure that its whole life is missionary.”²⁸ Missions must be to the ends of the earth and is a test of whether one really believes the gospel. It is still important to identify need throughout the world and to commission gifted and called individuals to take the gospel to those places in evangelism and church planting. We will return to the subject of missions toward the end of the chapter.

Forms of Witness

God's end-time renewing power has broken into history. And now "God's saving power known and experienced in the life of the redeemed community has to issue in all kinds of witness and service to the world."²⁹ What kinds of witness and service did Newbigin focus his attention on? There are five points of special emphasis: the distinctive life of the community, the calling of the laity, deeds of mercy and justice, evangelism, and missions to places where the gospel was not known.

New Being and Communal Life

For Newbigin, mission is first of all about being—being the new humanity, being a distinctive community. The doing and the going flow from this. But to be a sign of the kingdom is first of all a matter of being a people that embody the new life of the kingdom, a picture of true humanity.

Newbigin makes this point repeatedly throughout his writings. We can note three places where this is made clear. First, his little book *Truth to Tell* records three lectures on the mission of the church in modernity. In the first he argues for the public truth of the gospel, and in the second he shows how this has been undermined as the evangelical and liberal wings of the church have each in their own way compromised the gospel. In the final lecture he is concerned with the mission of the church in the public square. He points to the calling of God's people in their vocations in the not-so-naked public square in a way that would have a shaping impact on society.³⁰ He concludes with these words: "The most important contribution which the Church can make to a new social order is to be itself a new social order."³¹ If the local congregation "understands its true character as a holy priesthood for the sake of the world . . . then there is a point of growth for a new

social order.”³² It is in local congregations that the first shoots of new creation life can be nourished so as to subvert the principalities and powers of culture, especially the growing economic, financial, and technical forces of globalization. The church must be visible and recognizable as a community that lives out the Father’s love in every city. And so, “the chief contribution of the Church to the renewing of social order is to be itself a new social order.”³³

A second place where Newbigin makes new being the primary form of witness is in his discussion of mission as word, deed, and new being.³⁴ He notes the long tradition that has isolated evangelism as the first priority in mission. And today in the missionary movement, he says, there is an ongoing battle between those who affirm the priority of words and those who believe that deeds of justice and peace must take precedence.

When we turn to the Gospels, we see the inextricable connection between deeds and words. The powerful deeds call forth explanatory words. But beneath both is a powerful new reality. And what is this new reality? The answer of the gospel is the arrival of the kingdom of God in the presence of Jesus himself. In him the kingdom of God has come in power. And so in the mission of Jesus, the mighty works and the preaching point to the new reality of the kingdom in the life of Jesus.

But that presence does not come to an end with the close of Jesus’s earthly ministry; it continues in the new life of the community. “What he did was to prepare a community chosen to be the bearer of the secret of the kingdom. . . . The intention of Jesus was not to leave behind a disembodied teaching. It was that . . . there should be created a community which would continue that which he came from the Father to be and do—namely to embody and announce the presence of the reign of God.”³⁵

The new reality is, first, the coming of the kingdom in the person of Jesus by the power of the Spirit, but second, it is in the power of the Spirit creating new life in the church. The church is incorporated into the mission of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Like him, their deeds and words testify to a new reality: the coming of the kingdom in Jesus. To pit one against the other “is profoundly weakening the Church’s witness.” But “both parties have hold of an important truth.” Both words and deeds are an important part of the witness to the kingdom. However, “both parties to this dispute need to recover a fuller sense of the prior reality, the givenness, the ontological priority of the new reality which the work of Christ has brought into being.”³⁶ That new reality is a community whose whole life is rooted in Christ as Lord and Savior, who is indwelt by the Spirit, and who challenges the idolatrous cultural powers. And so, Newbigin concludes, “It is clear that to set word and deed, preaching and action, against each other is absurd. The central reality is neither word nor act, but *the total life of a community* enabled by the Spirit to live in Christ, sharing his passion and the power of the resurrection.”³⁷ The “new being” created by the work of Christ and the Spirit has primacy in the mission of the church. The total life of the people of God as the new humankind restored to their true humanity is the foundational witness of the church. Words and deeds flow from this restored community. “The mission of the church, following that of Jesus, has to be both word and deed and the life of a community which already embodies a foretaste of God’s kingdom.”³⁸ Note the word “embodies.” It is a common word in Newbigin’s vocabulary for mission and captures the point of this section: the new being of the church’s life is central to mission.

There is an important point to be made here in both arguments we have sketched thus far. Neither the church as new being nor the church as a new social order is limited to the church *as a gathered community*.

This is the mistake made by some interpreters of Newbigin. In both places I have referenced, this new being or new social order is expressed not only in the life of the church gathered as a community but in the life of the church scattered in their various callings. In his discussion of the church as “the first shoots of a new creation,” Newbigin explicitly says that the “true character as a holy priesthood for the sake of the world” involves “its members . . . equipped for the exercise of that priesthood in their secular employments.”³⁹ And, even more clearly, when he speaks of the “total life of a community” enabled by the Spirit to live out the new reality of Christ’s life, he notes that “members have different gifts and are involved in the secular life of the society in which they share.”⁴⁰ This new being is the new humankind, whether gathered together in community or scattered in their various callings.

The final place that illustrates how Newbigin makes new being the primary form of witness is his discussion of the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel. Newbigin has established that “the gospel cannot be accommodated as one element in a society which has pluralism as its reigning ideology. . . . To be faithful to a message which concerns the kingdom of God, his rule over all things and all peoples, the Church has to claim the high ground of public truth.”⁴¹ What would it mean for the church to live out this public and comprehensive vision of the gospel? It will not be by a return to the coercive power of earlier Christendom. Rather, it will be by local congregations who believe the gospel and shape their lives by it. “The primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? . . . The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”⁴²

There are many activities that witness to the public truth of the gospel and challenge the public doctrine shaping culture. However, “these are all secondary, and they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to the believing congregation.”⁴³ Newbigin goes on to offer six characteristics of such a community that is a hermeneutic of the gospel. It will be a community of praise in a world of doubt and skepticism. It will be a community of truth in a pluralistic society that overwhelms and produces relativism. It will be a selfless community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood in a selfish world. It will be a community prepared to live out the gospel in public life in a world that privatizes all religious claims. It will be a community of mutual responsibility in a world of individualism. It will be a community of hope in a world of pessimism and despair about the future.

A community that lives like this will be a “foretaste of a different social order.” They will be congregations that renounce an introverted concern for their own lives and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members. This self-giving and outward-oriented life will be a “sign, instrument, and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society.”⁴⁴

It is quite instructive to note the origin of these various aspects of a distinctive community. At the time, Newbigin was in “retirement” but pastoring a church in Winson Green, a poor area in the inner city of Birmingham, United Kingdom. He delivered an address in a conference called to discuss the church’s social calling in a cultural context divided by the “selfish society” created by Margaret Thatcher. The situation was urgent: market forces were gaining final sovereignty over Britain’s life. This was an era of ideology and idolatry. “We were coming into a confessional situation.”⁴⁵ He critiques both the right-wing economics of Thatcher that were creating this idolatrous situation and the re-

sponse of the left, calling both “a product of the Enlightenment’s exaltation of the autonomous individual with his autonomous reason and conscience as the centrepiece of our thinking.” Both have consequently separated rights from duties, freedom from responsibilities, and have drawn different conclusions. In this context he says that it is “not the primary business of the Church to advocate a new social order; it is our primary business to *be* a new social order.”⁴⁶ He offers four characteristics of such a community: praise and self-giving love amid selfishness, mutual acceptance amid autonomous individualism, mutual responsibility amid a demand for rights, and hope amid despair and consumer satiation. “When that hermeneutic is available, people find it possible to have a new vision for society and to know that the vision is more than a dream.”⁴⁷

Note in these examples four important observations about Newbigin’s vision for the church as a new social order. First, the church is called to live its life in a way that is distinctive from the lives of its contemporaries as they are captive to cultural idolatry. There is an alternative or contrasting way of living. Second, the scope of this new being is comprehensive: it is all of life under the lordship of Christ. Third, one must understand well the idols of culture. If one reads Newbigin’s contextual address, “Vision for the City,” and his analysis of the powerful idols at work in Thatcherite Britain—both on the right and on the left—one can see why he discusses the characteristics he does. He is calling the church to be distinctive in a very particular kind of cultural setting in contrast to specific idols. And finally, this new life involves both a communal embodiment and a life lived out in the context of culture. The new being is the church both gathered as a community and scattered as the new humankind to live out their lives in a different story.

Vocations of Believers in Culture

The business of the church in the biblical story is to bear witness to the comprehensive salvation that is coming at the end of cosmic history. The new life that is given to the church is as wide as human life: all of life is being restored—cultural, social, economic, political, artistic, academic, familial, and more. The church's first witness is by way of new being—a renewal that covers all of life.

One of the areas of the church's witness that is of primary importance to Newbigin and occupies a good deal of space is his concern to see believers live out this new being in the context of their particular vocations.⁴⁸ It is in the various callings of each member that “the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given,”⁴⁹ because the “enormous preponderance of the Church's witness is the witness of the thousands of its members who work in field, home, office, mill, or law court.”⁵⁰

He is not referring to the obligation to evangelize one's coworkers or even to manifest the gospel in microethical categories within one's vocational setting, although these are not excluded.⁵¹ It is much deeper than that: it is the obedience in their vocations that is faithful to God's creational intent. Christ is Lord by virtue of being Creator and Redeemer. The believer who lives under Christ's lordship in the various spheres of public life witnesses “to the true purpose for which God created [those structures].”⁵² When Christians believe that their work from Monday to Friday is not the “Lord's work” and thus leave those areas to the powers of cultural idolatry without challenge, they “deny Christ's cosmic Lordship.”⁵³ Thus, “the entire membership of the Church in their secular occupations are called to be signs of his lordship in every area of life.”⁵⁴ For example, Newbigin writes, “A farmer who farms his land well but neglects to say his prayers will be certainly condemned by Christians as failing in his duty. But a farmer who says

his prayers, and allows weeds, bad drainage, or soil erosion to spoil his land is failing in his primary duty as a churchman. His primary ministry in the total life of the Body of Christ is to care rightly for the land entrusted to him. If he fails there, he fails in his primary Christian task.”⁵⁵

Sadly, many Christians working in secular areas of culture don’t understand this. When it comes to the various cultural spheres, they “behave as though they were completely outside the area of Christ’s rule.”⁵⁶ The reductionist vision that limits ministry to the church and defines witness as evangelism leads to the “deep-seated and persistent failure of the churches to recognize that the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given, and can only be given, in the ordinary secular work of lay men and women in business, in politics, in professional work, as farmers, factory workers, and so on.”⁵⁷

On occasion Newbigin speaks of the goal of Christian vocational engagement in the public square as shaping society with the gospel or of creating a Christian society.⁵⁸ But that is not his primary emphasis. Rather, he stresses that suffering will normally be the result of our engagement in the public square because we are put on the front lines of a battle. “The ‘secular’ society is not a neutral area into which we can project the Christian message. It is an area already occupied by other gods. We have a battle on our hands. We are dealing with principalities and powers.”⁵⁹ Thus, suffering is integral to the vocational witness of the church. “The closeness of our missionary thinking to the New Testament may perhaps be in part judged by the place which we accord to suffering in our understanding of the calling of the Church.”⁶⁰

This encounter with the religious beliefs of culture is especially acute in the public square. In a series of Bible studies on 1 Peter, Newbigin uses as one example a contrast between the gospel and the world of business, driven by the profit motive. He poses a series of questions to

illustrate this antithesis: Does a Christian employee in a store persuade his customers to buy worthless products on orders from his employer or challenge the firm and risk his livelihood? Does a businessman challenge the whole standard of business ethics if it is wrong and risk status and livelihood? And so on. He then comments that “if we take seriously our duty as servants of God within the institutions of human society, we shall find plenty of opportunity to learn what it means to suffer for righteousness’ sake, and we shall learn that to suffer for righteousness’ sake is really a blessed thing.”⁶¹

Newbigin’s emphasis on the work of the church as it is dispersed does not diminish the importance of the church gathered as a community. One can feel the passion of his concern in the following questions, which he poses to pastors early in his first bishopric: “Are we taking seriously our duty to support them [believers in their callings] in their warfare? Do we seriously regard them as the front-line troops? . . . What about the scores of Christians working in offices and shops in that part of the city? Have we ever done anything seriously to strengthen their Christian witness, to help them in facing the very difficult ethical problems which they have to meet every day, to give them the assurance that the whole fellowship is behind them in their daily spiritual warfare?”⁶²

In his writings on the calling of individual believers, we find at least four different ways that the local congregation can support and strengthen believers for their task in the world. The first is through a *fellowship that nourishes* the life of Christ through the means of grace. In one address to church leaders he speaks of “the only source of the church’s life—the gospel.” If the church is to fulfill its missionary calling, they must first experience the saving presence and power of God himself through the Word, sacraments, and prayer. He asks, “Are we placing these in the very centre of our church life? . . . Do we

understand, do our congregations understand, that when the Word is truly preached and the sacraments duly administered, Christ Himself is present in the midst with all His saving power?"⁶³ When God's saving power is known and experienced in the life of the congregation, it will issue in the faithful witness of the thousands of its members who work in field, home, office, mill, or law court.⁶⁴ But the good news proclaimed and signified in the sacrament must be an all-embracing gospel of the kingdom that calls men and women to submit their whole lives to the lordship of Christ.

The second way a congregation can strengthen believers is through a *fellowship that supports*. How does the congregation support those who face difficulty as they oppose cultural idolatry?

There are existential decisions which must be taken from time to time in the midst of the battle by those who are actually engaged in the battle and who will pay the price of the decision. But they are not decisions which ought to be taken in solitude. We ought not to ask each Christian in solitude to bear the burden of the real front line warfare. . . . The Church must find ways of expressing its solidarity with those who stand in these frontier situations, who have to make decisions that may cost not only their own livelihood but also that of their families.⁶⁵

The congregation might express solidarity through encouragement, prayer, financial support, and insight.

The third form of support is *structures that equip*. Throughout his life Newbigin suggests many bold experiments in ecclesial structures to form God's people for their vocations. Perhaps one of the more important and enduring of his suggestions is "frontier groups."⁶⁶ "I am thinking of groups of men and women in—say—a particular profession, or a particular sector of commerce or industry or in one of the sectors of education or politics, who can wrestle on the basis of direct

personal involvement with the claims of Christian obedience in particular situations, who can share experiences.”⁶⁷

The fourth way of strengthening and supporting is through a *leadership that enables*.⁶⁸ A leadership that equips believers in their tasks in the world is a frequent theme in Newbigin’s writings, one to which we will return. The following comes from a sermon he preached as a bishop to pastors in his diocese: “At the most sophisticated level we have to think of our task in a city like Madras to train our lay members who are playing key roles in life of government, business, and the professions to become ministers of Christ in these secular situations. All of this is involved in our calling and ordination.”⁶⁹ Newbigin believes that church leadership must take on the responsibility to equip and nourish believers for callings in the public life of culture.

Deeds of Justice, Peace, and Mercy

Newbigin regularly points to a threefold witness to the kingdom: “By its witness—in word and deed and common life—to the centrality of the work of Jesus in his ministry, death, and resurrection it offers to all peoples the possibility of understanding . . . the meaning and goal of history.”⁷⁰ There is a consistency in the way he relates the three: the presence of the new reality of the Spirit is present in the total life of the community and is attested by mighty deeds, which in turn call for an explanation—that is, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.⁷¹ This gives us the logic of Newbigin’s view of mission. Out of the presence of the Spirit in the total life of the community—gathered and scattered—comes deeds, which in turn call for words of the gospel, which explain the new reality. And so in the first place we turn to the witness of the church in its deeds.

Jesus challenged the powers that ruled the world by deeds of justice and mercy. These were not marginal but central to his ministry. There-

fore, since the church's mission is in Christ's way, "it is clear that action for justice and peace in the world is not something which is secondary, marginal to the central task of evangelism. It belongs to the heart of the matter."⁷²

This seems clear enough. But Newbigin spent so much time defending deeds of mercy and justice because he carried out his own ministry in a context in which there was a dispute between the evangelical and ecumenical traditions. It led, on the evangelical side, to a position that emphasized evangelism and neglected—and even sometimes rejected—issues of mercy and justice. On the ecumenical side, there was a diminished commitment to evangelism—to be addressed in the next section—but also a mistaken understanding of the nature of deeds of mercy, justice, and peace.

Newbigin sets the discussion in the context of the nature of salvation. First, salvation is restorative and comprehensive. It is not the escape of individuals into another world but the restoration of all of human life as part of the nonhuman creation. When those in the evangelical tradition misunderstand this, they "shall be little interested in programs for its improvement, and much interested in what happens to the individual human person as he prepares or does not prepare for his eternal destiny."⁷³ Second, salvation is concerned with both communion with God and commitment to justice and peace. On the one hand, "in the Bible salvation concerns the whole man and the totality of his relationships. It includes . . . the political, and social and economic." On the other hand, this vision of salvation "is never merely a secular vision. It is never just a vision of political liberation or economic progress or social peace and justice." The "true kernel of salvation" is "fellowship with the Living Lord."⁷⁴ When churches pursue social action apart from a relationship with God, they depart from Scripture. But so do those who emphasize knowing God yet neglect

political and social issues. Finally, salvation is an eschatological reality; the future has entered history. The kingdom is present but future, already but not yet, hidden but someday yet to be unveiled. Rightly determining the relationship of the kingdom to history is essential if we are to correctly understand the true nature of our social action.

The kingdom does not come as a smooth, incremental process in history. Thus, our actions of justice and peace do not build the kingdom. The kingdom will only come fully by an act of judgment and the coming of Jesus. Until that time, there will be conflict and suffering. If this perspective is lost, then an uncritical triumphalism wherein the church is an auxiliary to the social and political programs of the day will characterize the church's mission. But the kingdom is present in history and not just in the future. There will be evidence of God's renewing power at work by the Spirit. If this is lost, then a selfish withdrawal that separates salvation from culture and avoids costly engagement in society will epitomize the church's mission. So, on the one hand, there is discontinuity between the kingdom and history; this is what the ecumenical tradition needed to recover. On the other hand, there is continuity between the kingdom and history; this is what the evangelical tradition needed to recover.

The Bible offers no hope that the kingdom will be realized within history this side of the return of Christ. And further, the Bible gives us a picture of deepening conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers that produce crisis and suffering. If we cannot build God's kingdom with our political, social, and economic action, then why do we do it? What is the nature of our deeds of mercy, peace, and justice? Newbigin offers a fivefold answer.

First, our deeds are not optional, secondary, or marginal to the mission of the church; rather, they are *essential to the very nature of salvation and the church*. They belong to the nature of salvation and of

the church as an instrument of the kingdom. "It is a disastrous misunderstanding to think that we can enjoy salvation through Jesus Christ and at the same time regard action for justice in the world as a sort of optional extra—or even an inferior substitute for the work of passing on the good news of salvation. Action for social justice *is* salvation in action."⁷⁵ Anyone who thinks of salvation apart from seeking "deliverance from sickness or hunger or oppression or alienation" is "very remote from the biblical use of the word."⁷⁶

Our deeds also belong to the nature of the church. "If we are faithful to the New Testament we shall recognise that care of the poor belongs . . . to the fundamental bases of the Church's life."⁷⁷ We are not dealing with one aspect of the church's life that can be left aside; it belongs to the "integrity of the church itself, its fundamental character as Church."⁷⁸ There is a terrible distortion in our understanding of the church when it becomes "no more than a self-centred community only faintly interested in justice and mercy for this earth's exploited masses but passionately devoted to our own protection and advancement as a community and, if we are piously inclined, to assuring that after a comfortable passage through this life we can look forward to a guaranteed place in the foam-rubber-padded seats of heaven."⁷⁹ In short, the "piety which can comfortably co-exist with flagrant social injustice is an abomination to God."⁸⁰

Second, our deeds have the *character of witness* to the coming of the kingdom in Jesus. We must not believe that somehow through our deeds we are going to usher in God's kingdom. Deeds of justice and mercy are "signs of the new reality."⁸¹ They are a "necessary part of the Church's witness to the presence and power of God's Kingdom." Yet we do not establish the kingdom through our deeds. We are to "reject the idea that Christian action is to be conceived of as 'building the Kingdom of God.'"⁸² Our activities on behalf of justice and peace "are not the

means by which God establishes his Kingdom. They are witnesses to its present reality." They are "signs rather than instruments."⁸³ They are hope in action, an acted prayer for the coming of the kingdom.⁸⁴

Our deeds, third, are an *expression of the love and compassion* of the kingdom in Jesus. "The first outward mark of the presence of the new reality in the world will certainly be a multitude of loving service to men in their need." This is "not a conscious missionary strategy, though it is part of the Church's total mission." Rather, these are "Christian works of love" and "should be as Christ's were, a spontaneous outflowing of the love of God for men, not a means to something else."⁸⁵ The church's solidarity with those who are suffering and all attempts to relieve that suffering in acts of justice and mercy are not done "with an eye on possible conversions, but because these are the things that love must do."⁸⁶ For Jesus, his deeds "were the overflowing of the love which filled his whole being. Just so, the Church's deeds of love ought to be—not contrived signs but natural and spontaneous signs of the new reality in which we have been made sharers through Christ. Those who have received so much cannot keep it to themselves. It must overflow in love to others."⁸⁷

Fourth, our deeds are *aimed at conversion* to Jesus. This might seem surprising in light of what was just said. Yet Newbigin does speak of a concern for conversion, though he carefully qualifies it. It is not "to create a situation in which people will listen to the Gospel." There may be some truth in this, but it is "utterly repellant" to use our social work primarily as "bait to make people swallow our preaching." This is a subtle form of selfishness that earns contempt. However, if we are asked, "Have you come here to convert us?" then quite rightly the answer would be yes, because "if our social work does not change *people* . . . it has failed. . . . We are out to convert people not just to feed them." When

he asks “what kind of conversion,” he answers with words and deeds that point to Jesus and the kingdom and that invite people into it.⁸⁸

Finally, our deeds may have a *transforming effect on culture*. This is certainly not a primary point for Newbigin. He speaks of our actions as a drop in the bucket or as producing only a little more justice in the world. He does affirm that we seek change, but this is not the primary goal of social concern; it is witness. We see less and less emphasis on transformation as he grows older. Yet if we love people, we will try to influence society and transform the unjust structures of society. The service of the church involves “political actions which may be necessary to break structures of injustice, which dehumanise him [my neighbor], and to create new structures wherein a genuinely human social existence is possible.”⁸⁹ Yet one may become involved in proximate goals of justice but may never offer full commitment to any social or political program. This leads to cynical despair and disillusionment when the transformation does not take place. Transformation is not our primary goal but may be the spillover effect, the salting of society, when a community points to the kingdom in deeds of justice and love.⁹⁰

We see here that for Newbigin both justice and mercy are important to the social deeds of the church. Mercy does not get to the root of the problem; to attack a disease one must not simply treat the symptom but the root cause. “It is not enough to deploy Good Samaritans around the place; we must also guard the road.”⁹¹ Yet at the same time one cannot leave a person dying at the side of the road and go organize a police force. Both justice and mercy are important, but mercy will always maintain first priority. “To work for the reformation of structures, to expose and attack unjust structures . . . is as much a part of the mission of the church as to care for the sick and to feed the hungry. . . . If the

legitimate call to political action is allowed to replace the call to compassionate service, then the church has betrayed the gospel.”⁹²

If deeds of mercy, justice, and peace are to maintain the character of witness, it must be clear that those deeds are connected to the local congregation. One way this has been obscured is when parachurch organizations or denominational arms take over the task of mercy and justice. When the church hands over this task to bodies outside the local congregation, at least two problems develop. First, the church loses its missionary consciousness and allows the expert bodies to be responsible for mission. Second, deeds of justice and mercy are not seen to flow from the body of Christ, and they lose their proper character as signs and witnesses to the kingdom. They appear to be part of a moral crusade or agency for political action. Yet these denominational and parachurch agencies can play an important role if they enable and coordinate the witness of the churches.

As Newbigin struggles with the nature of social action, he introduces a new image of the church to which he returns often: the church as a servant community. The “fundamental form”⁹³ and “authentic nature”⁹⁴ of the church will be as a servant community. With this image he characterizes the church as a community who follows in the way of Jesus by serving the needs of others out of a heart of sacrificial love. He points to the well-known story of Jesus stripping, taking a towel, and stooping to wash his disciples’ feet. “The church will prove its faithfulness to the Lord when it is seen in the same posture.”⁹⁵ Being a servant church means loving solidarity with the poor and deeds of justice and mercy that flow on their behalf.⁹⁶ A servant church must be “recognisably a body which is on the side of the oppressed” and that reaches out its hand “to victims of [the unjust established] order.”⁹⁷

Newbigin does not forget the eschatological nature of the church when he speaks of the servant nature of the church. The church “is

intended by God to be a first-fruit and sign and instrument of his new creation.” How does the church fulfill this role? “The congregation is to be a humble servant of Jesus for the sake of its neighbours.”⁹⁸ Precisely as a sign and foretaste of the self-giving love of the kingdom, the servant church must take the stooping and kneeling posture of its Lord. As an instrument, it must be ready to help meet the needs of its neighbors.

If the church is to become a faithful servant church that follows Jesus in the pursuit of justice and mercy, there must be structures that enable this kind of service to take place,⁹⁹ worship that nourishes a comprehensive mission and social vision,¹⁰⁰ members of the congregation equipped for their callings in the public life of culture,¹⁰¹ and leadership that equips and leads the church in justice and mercy.¹⁰² On the last, Newbigin points by way of example to the way the office of the diaconate functioned in the early church.¹⁰³ The deacon was responsible throughout the week to show compassion to the poor, to widows, to the sick, and to the marginalized. This brought care for the poor to the heart of leadership. Moreover, care for the poor penetrated the liturgy when, at the Lord’s Supper, these deacons collected gifts for the poor, and at the time of intercession they stood up and shared urgent concerns for prayer for the poor. Diaconal leadership moved the early church to solidarity of the whole church with the poor.

Evangelism

The witness of the church to the cosmic salvation at the end of universal history happens in three characteristic ways: “in the existence of a new community based upon a common sharing in the life of the Holy Spirit; in activities which reveal in action the presence of the new reality; in words which bear witness to the new reality.”¹⁰⁴ We turn now to the last of these. God has entrusted this story to the church, and

“there is no other body that will tell it.”¹⁰⁵ And so there is a duty and obligation to announce the good news.¹⁰⁶

For Newbigin, evangelism is “communication—by written or spoken word—of the good news about Jesus. In this definition there will be no evangelism unless the name of Jesus is named.”¹⁰⁷ He is concerned for definition not simply to be systematic in his thinking but because “it confuses certain issues to extend this word beyond its proper meaning.” This is precisely what has happened when evangelism or evangelization is redefined in the ecumenical tradition primarily in terms of programs of service. Then there is no confidence in the power of the gospel to bring forth fruit, and the church is guilty of depending on human endeavor rather than the Spirit. “That has often happened, and a loose use of the word ‘evangelism’ has been used to cover real betrayal. There is not and there cannot be any substitute for telling the story of Jesus.”¹⁰⁸

In this verbal communication of the message of the gospel, one must preach Jesus *and* the kingdom. To preach Jesus without the kingdom or to preach the kingdom without Jesus “distorts salvation.” One turns the gospel into a political program apart from an invitation to know Christ, and the other is the pedaling of “cheap grace” that invites one only to personal salvation.¹⁰⁹ The danger of the first is what the ecumenical tradition succumbed to, which led to an eclipse of evangelism. The danger of the second—preaching Jesus without the kingdom—is what the evangelical tradition had fallen prey to. And so Newbigin stressed the importance of the kingdom with the evangelical tradition in view. “If I am not mistaken, our current evangelism hardly ever uses the category of the Kingdom of God. And yet the original preaching of the Gospel on the lips of Jesus was—precisely—the announcement of the coming of that Kingdom. I believe that we may recover a true evangelism for our day if we return to that original language (translated

into the idiom of our own time and place) as the basic category for our proclamation of the Gospel.”¹¹⁰

To those in the ecumenical camp, Newbigin used strong language to remind them that the church has an obligation to make known the good news in words. He believed we need to “denounce sharply”¹¹¹ the tendency to support social concern but marginalize evangelism. “There is a gospel to be proclaimed and we are not allowed to be silent about it. However much we may wish we could, we are not allowed to deceive ourselves into imagining that anything we are, or anything we do, can take the place of the name of Jesus. We are not allowed to be silent.”¹¹² Silence is nothing other than a betrayal of the gospel! If our presence or deeds become “a substitute for the explicit proclamation of the name of Jesus and his saving work, then we have to reject it as a betrayal of the gospel. There can be no substitute for the name of Jesus. Men must have opportunity to know him.”¹¹³

Much of Newbigin’s discussion of evangelism is in the context of affirming an indissoluble nexus between word and deed: the presence of the reign of God by the Spirit is attested by both words and deeds together. Deeds demonstrate that the new eschatological reality of the Spirit is present, and words point to Jesus as the origin. But “if nothing is happening no explanation is called for and the words are empty words. . . . They can be brushed aside as mere talk. They are only meaningful in the context of the mighty works. They presuppose that something is happening which calls for explanation.”¹¹⁴ The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty. To set these over against each other is absurd. And the conflict between evangelical and ecumenical traditions, which separates the two, is profoundly weakening the church’s witness. Both are essential because both are the means by which the Spirit witnesses to the presence of the kingdom. “The all-inclusive word, corresponding to the new reality of

the Spirit's presence, is *witness*. Within that total reality, both evangelism and service, both word and action have their place. Both of them can be used by the Holy Spirit for the total work of witness to Christ when they belong to and spring out of the life of the new community which the Spirit creates."¹¹⁵

In light of this, Newbigin expands further.¹¹⁶ Not every word needs a deed attached to it, and not every deed needs a word. It is the combination of the two that arises out of the total witnessing life of the church in the midst of the world. And further, there are different gifts—some in evangelism, others in showing mercy, and still others in pursuing justice. All the gifts are needed. But the Spirit, who is the primary witness, uses both words and deeds to witness to Jesus and the coming kingdom. Therefore, the church may not be silent nor absolve itself from deeds of mercy and justice.

But, again, Newbigin stresses that both word and deed arise out of a congregation where the Spirit is at work creating new life. Evangelism would lose its power apart from "the life of a new kind of community [where] the saving power of the Gospel is known and tasted." He explains further: "The purely verbal preaching of the story of Jesus crucified and risen would lose its power if those who heard it could not trace it back to some kind of community in which the message was being validated in a common way of life which is recognizable as embodying at least a hint and a foretaste of the blessedness for which all men long and which the Gospel promises."¹¹⁷

So it is evident how closely Newbigin ties evangelistic words to the embodiment of the gospel in the total life of the community and the demonstration of the gospel in deeds. Evangelistic words answer questions as to the new reality created by the Spirit in life and deed. Words that have nothing to explain lose their power: "If the Church which preaches [the gospel] is not living corporately a life which corresponds

with it, is living in comfortable cohabitation with the powers of the age, is failing to challenge the powers of darkness and to manifest in its life the power of the living Lord to help and heal, then by its life it closes the doors which its preaching would open.” Thankfully, he adds, “That does not mean that the preaching is void, because there is no limit to the power of the word of God.”¹¹⁸

Our evangelistic words aim at conversion. The gospel is not simply announced as historical facts that can be received for information. The announcement is about the arrival of the new creation, and such is the enormity and momentous significance of this “world news” that it “requires an immediate response in action.”¹¹⁹ There is no room for neutrality or indecision. “A note of crisis, with the implied demand for immediate decision, runs through this as through all proclamations of the Gospel. . . . *There* is God’s salvation! Stand there, and accept or reject it!”¹²⁰ Thus, in our evangelism we “have the clear duty to bring to every man this call for radical decision.”¹²¹ This call for a response follows Jesus’s example of calling for radical repentance, conversion, and the forsaking of all to follow him. And so we call for a response of faith and repentance that leads to conversion.

What is conversion? This is a critical question if our evangelism is to produce a healthy church. We noted earlier that for Newbigin conversion involves three things: personal relationship to Jesus, entry into a visible community taking up its mission, and commitment to a pattern of behavior.¹²² True evangelism is “concerned with the radical conversion that leads men to explicit allegiance to Jesus Christ.”¹²³ The call to a personal relationship is with Jesus, who has ushered in his kingdom. Thus, it demands radical loyalty and commitment. But it also calls for entry into a community chosen to participate in God’s mission to the world. And finally, it summons men and women to a lifestyle of obedience that is costly and comprehensive.

When evangelism makes this kind of invitation, it makes clear what is at stake in following Jesus. But if evangelism weakens the call, it produces from the outset a compromised and domesticated church. A weak form of evangelism may produce “baptized, communicant, Bible-reading, and zealous Christians who are committed to church growth but uncommitted to radical obedience to the plain teaching of the Bible on the issues of human dignity and social justice.” There may be the appearance of successful evangelism with growing numbers, but alas the church remains “marked by flagrant evils such as racism, militant sectarianism, and blind support of oppressive economic and political systems.” There may be mass conversions, but following Christ is reduced to “personal and domestic behavior” and sadly “has nothing to say about the big issues of public righteousness.”¹²⁴ Numbers accompanied by shallow conversions do not constitute successful evangelism.

Moreover, if evangelism is selfish—that is, inviting people to enjoy the benefits of salvation—it also creates a church that is not ready to take up its mission in the world. The mission of the church is to invite people into the kingdom. That means participation in the mission of Jesus: “The ministry of the Church as a whole should be manifestly and explicitly . . . a ministry of proclamation and enlistment—the proclamation of the coming of the reign of God in Jesus, and the enlistment of men for the service of that reign.”¹²⁵ Proclamation calls listeners to enlist in Jesus’s kingdom mission. This kind of evangelism makes clear from the outset that there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission.

Missions

We have been primarily concerned up to this point with Newbigin’s understanding of the missionary vocation of each local congregation

in their particular context. God makes known the good news of the kingdom to the world through the total life of the community gathered and scattered, through deeds and through words. But what about places where there is no missionary community like that? That is the task of missions: intentional activities undertaken by the church to create a Christian presence in places where there is no such presence or no effective presence. As noted earlier in this chapter, Newbigin distinguishes this task of the church from the more comprehensive mission of the church by using the word “missions” (with an s).

Newbigin struggled with a new paradigm of mission throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when it was clear that the colonialist paradigm of missions was breaking down. The church in the West was in trouble, and the churches throughout the Southern Hemisphere were growing. If one could no longer call the West the “home base” and the non-West the “mission field,” then what was mission? Was there still a place for cross-cultural missions? The problem was that the ecumenical tradition was fleeing the whole business; development and social action replaced making the gospel known. The evangelical tradition was reacting and simply affirming much in the old paradigm. Newbigin’s desire was to move beyond this stalemate to a new vision for what mission could be in the time of a global church.

His starting point is that the church is missionary by its very nature. Mission isn’t simply one more task but defines the church’s very nature: “Mission is not a detachable part of the Church’s being, but is the central meaning of the Church’s being.”¹²⁶ This means, first and foremost, that each local congregation has a responsibility to make the good news known in its particular location. They are put there in that place to witness to God’s ultimate purpose in history revealed in Christ in life, deed, and word. But that congregation also has a responsibility to lift up its head and look to see where there are places and peoples

without a witnessing community. Each church is responsible for the establishment of a witness in those places. Missions “is not the whole of the Church’s mission, but it is an essential part of it.”¹²⁷

The specific task of missions is concerned with intentional activities to take the gospel to places where the gospel is not known, erecting a witness and ultimately a witnessing community in places where there is none. Missions is concerned with initial evangelism and church planting. “Missions must concentrate on the specifically missionary intention of bringing the Gospel to those who have not heard it and this must be directed to all six continents.”¹²⁸ “Missions are particular enterprises within the total mission of the church that have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective.”¹²⁹ Thus, when a witnessing community has been established, missions is finished and mission begins.¹³⁰

Newbigin finds support for this understanding of missions in the church in Antioch (Acts 11, 13). He calls this “the central New Testament paradigm for missions.”¹³¹ The church in Antioch is a witnessing community that is growing as it faithfully points to Christ in word and deed (Acts 11:19–30). However, the Spirit moves the church to set aside some men for the specific purpose of taking the gospel to places where it is not known. The purpose of those sent is to establish a witnessing community where there is none. When such a body is established there then they take up the mission in that place. Paul is one of those men sent from Antioch to do just this. When he establishes a witnessing community in the various cities, he would move on and say, as it were, “You are now the mission in this place.” This is something Newbigin himself did as he followed Paul’s model. After establishing a church in a village, he would say, “Now you are the Body of Christ in this village. You are God’s apostles here. Through you they are to be saved. I will be

in touch with you. I will pray for you. I will visit you. If you want my help I will try to help you. But you are now the Mission.”¹³²

Missions is necessary not simply because there are many places where there is no faithful witnessing community. It is also bound closely to the very theological nature of the gospel itself and thus the extent of mission. The gospel is about the sovereignty of God in Christ over all nations and all of life. It is public truth for all, and therefore missions must be to the ends of the earth. The ends of the earth is the ultimate horizon of God’s mission and the church’s mission. Since Christ is Lord of all, his authority must be acknowledged by all, to the ends of the earth. Mission begins in the neighborhood of the local congregation, but by the very nature of the gospel the missionary task must move to the ends of the earth. Mission without missions to all nations is an emaciated and distorted concept. “The Church’s mission is concerned with the ends of the earth. When that dimension is forgotten, the heart goes out of the whole business.”¹³³ Missions is mission carried out faithfully toward its ultimate horizon—the ends of the earth.

Foreign missions is the true test of whether one really believes the scope of the gospel. If one believes that what Jesus has accomplished has universal validity, one will be committed to seeing that message reach all peoples.

[The] Gospel is the truth, and therefore it is true for all men. It is the unveiling of the face of Him who makes all things, from whom every man comes, and to whom every man goes. It is the revealing of the meaning of human history, of the origin and destiny of mankind. Jesus is not only my Saviour, He is the Lord of all things, the cause and cornerstone of the universe. If I believe that, then to bear witness to that is the very stuff of existence. If I think I can keep it to myself, then I do not in any real sense believe it. Foreign missions are not an extra; they are the acid test of whether or not the Church believes the Gospel.¹³⁴

If missions is creating a witness in places where there is none so as to reach all peoples, then it excludes much of what is done by mission boards and called “missions.”¹³⁵ The leftover mental habits of colonialist missions label everything that happens overseas “missions.” Specifically, various enterprises of interchurch aid in which Western missionaries were engaged overseas are all called “missions”—teaching, pastoral work, administration, and many other activities. Newbigin affirms the importance of these “fraternal workers.” But they are not missionaries, and they are not doing missions. While both may “be working in a common field . . . each would have a distinct focus of concern.”¹³⁶ And it is that distinct focus of concern of missions that is Newbigin’s concern.

Mission and missions—the difference might appear to be simply semantics. But to assume that would be a mistake. Newbigin saw the notion of missions—that is, establishing a witness in order to found a witnessing community—being lost amid all the other tasks. This particular aspect of the church’s mission was not being clearly distinguished. The majority of monetary and personnel resources were being used for interchurch aid, and the most needy places were not being reached with the gospel. Newbigin believed it was important to distinguish between other cross-cultural tasks and the work of intentional missions to establish a witnessing community. That dimension of the church’s mission must never be surrendered.

Missions is the task of the church and specifically the responsibility of every local congregation. Every congregation anywhere in the world is at the same time a mission to that place and part of God’s mission to the ends of the earth. Newbigin writes,

Every church, however small and weak, ought to have some share in the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Every church ought to be engaged in foreign missions. This is part of the integrity of the gospel.

We do not adequately confess Christ as Lord of all men if we seek to be his witnesses only among our neighbours. We must seek at the same time to confess him to the ends of the earth. The foreign missionary enterprise belongs to the integrity of our confession.¹³⁷

Not only does each church everywhere have the “duty and privilege” to be involved in the worldwide task, but also every Christian has the same duty and privilege to take up their role in mission to the ends of the earth.

If it is the duty of the church to be involved in missions to the ends of the earth, this raises large questions about the validity of mission boards and organizations. These are the bodies that have been the primary agents of missions for several centuries. What are we to make of these missionary bodies? Newbigin called the creation of these mission agencies, which had separated mission from the church, “one of the great calamities of missionary history.”¹³⁸ And indeed there were fatal consequences for both bodies. For the congregation, the consequence was a loss of its missionary identity, which led to its becoming an introverted body that caters to its own members and is not concerned with mission to the world. For the mission board, its witness is not seen to arise out of a community centered in the gospel. That did not mean, however, that Newbigin believed these bodies could play no positive role. On the contrary, he believed that, if those agencies coordinated the efforts of local bodies to carry out their mission at home and abroad, they would play an important role in God’s mission. They must not replace that mission but enable and facilitate local cooperation.

But missions is not only the responsibility of the local congregation; it is also the obligation of the global church together. There is a need for ecumenical partnership and sharing the task together that acknowledges the vocation of the church in each given area. The problem is that the financial and organizational structures of missions remain caught

in a colonialist framework and need to be totally revamped so there could be equal partnership among churches. Newbigin has much to say about this, but we need not traverse this territory. He wrote a half century ago, and there is much detail that is not relevant for our purposes. The need that does remain today is to struggle with how to make missions the task of local congregations and the global church working together in partnership. For Newbigin missions is part and parcel of the task of the missionary congregation. The question for us is whether that same passionate conviction is part of those who claim him as an ecclesial mentor.

The Ultimate Goal of Mission Is the Glory of God

The goal of the biblical story is the cosmic renewal of the creation, and the church's mission is to participate in God's purpose by a faithful witness in life, word, and deed to what he is doing to the ends of the earth in order to invite others into it. Newbigin asks, "What, then, is the point of missions?" Is our ultimate concern the need of all people for salvation? Is it the renewal of society? These are valid concerns, but they are not our primary goal. So what is? "The answer I believe quite simply is the glory of God." If God has done what the Bible says he has done, then our response should be to witness to his love and ask, "How can I glorify God?" so that there "may be throughout the world those who turn their faces to God and give Him thanks and glorify him. The glory of God is the purpose, the goal of mission, and our one aim is that we should praise and glorify Him."¹³⁹

Newbigin was consistently averse to any kind of anthropocentric view of mission. He believes mission in both the evangelical and the ecumenical traditions has been "terribly Pelagian." He explains: "Whether the emphasis was upon the saving of individual souls from

perdition, or on the righting of social wrongs, the overwhelming emphasis has been upon missions as our program.”¹⁴⁰ In the evangelical tradition, the whole discussion has been derailed by asking the wrong question concerning “the individual and his or her need to be assured of ultimate happiness, and not with God and his glory.” When we privatize God’s mighty work of grace and talk “as if the whole cosmic drama of salvation culminated in the words ‘For me; for me’ . . . this is a perversion of the gospel.”¹⁴¹ In the ecumenical tradition the discussion has centered on our task to renew society, and this too has led to a misunderstanding of mission. “The center of the picture is not the human need of salvation (from sin, from oppression, from alienation) but God and God’s immeasurable grace. So the central concern is not ‘How shall the world be saved?’ but ‘How shall this glorious and gracious God be glorified?’ The goal is the glory of God.”¹⁴²

The New Testament provides us not with a Pelagian picture of human effort saving people and the world but with a picture of an overflow of gratitude and joy that arises from God’s grace for us in Jesus. “For anyone who has understood what God did for us all in Jesus Christ, the one question is: ‘How shall God be glorified?’ How shall his amazing grace be known and celebrated and adored?” In this context he turns to a text he often quoted throughout his life: “He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11 KJV). Our goal in mission is that Jesus might be satisfied when he sees the fruit of his atonement. Our whole discussion of the Christian faith is skewed if we make the main questions, “Who is going to be saved at the end?” or “How shall the world be saved?” Rather, we “have to begin with the mighty work of grace in Jesus Christ and ask, How is he to be honored and glorified? The goal of missions is the glory of God.”¹⁴³

Perhaps the most important indicators of Newbigin’s focus on the glory of God are not these explicit statements. The whole of his

theological work on mission has a defining theocentric cast, and it is evident in many places that he abhors the anthropocentrism and narcissism that so often corrupt Christian faith and mission. I have a vivid memory in this regard. I was present at a talk he gave on mission. He was protesting the human-centeredness that so often shapes Christian mission. He searched for language in an attempt to express what should be our focus—the glory and transcendence of the living God. He sputtered, “We are talking about . . .” and paused, looking skyward as he searched for the strongest word possible. Not finding a word big enough, he threw his hands straight down to his sides in frustration and finally simply blurted out, “. . . God!” And, indeed, there is no bigger word to define the goal of our mission.

Conclusion

The church’s missionary existence is rooted in God’s mission. The mission of the Triune God is to move history toward cosmic renewal. This has culminated in the kingdom mission of Jesus. The church participates in that mission as a firstfruit and instrument of this restoration. The church continues the mission of Jesus to make known the kingdom in Christ’s own way, in the confidence that the Father is working out his purpose and the Spirit is witnessing in power to the coming kingdom. This will mean an ecclesial witness that is as broad as life; all of the church’s life, both gathered and scattered, has a missional dimension. But it will also mean intentional efforts to erect signs to the coming kingdom—the witness of deed and word. This is the vocation of every congregation in the place they have been set. Their calling, however, also invites them to participation in the witness of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. And our goal is not first and foremost the salvation of individuals or the renewal of society, although we

pray for that. Rather, it is that God might be glorified. The business of the missionary congregation is to embody and tell the true story of the world, narrated in Scripture and centered in Jesus, in its own place and to the ends of the earth, all to the glory of God.

¹. Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission and Unity of the Church" (Peter Ainslie Memorial Lecture, Grahamstown, South Africa, Rhodes University, October 17, 1960), 16–17.

². Michael W. Goheen, *"As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You": J. E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000), 275–330 (chap. 7).

³. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (1963; repr., Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 54.

⁴. Norman Goodall, ed., *Missions under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting* (London: Edinburgh House, 1953), 190; see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1.

⁵. Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 15, 19, 20, 24, 28.

⁶. Lesslie Newbigin, "The Future of Missions and Missionaries," *Review and Expositor* 74, no. 2 (1977): 214.

⁷. For an analysis of that debate, see Michael W. Goheen, "The Future of Mission in the World Council of Churches: The Dialogue between Lesslie Newbigin and Konrad Raiser," *Mission Studies* 21, no. 1 (2004): 97–111.

⁸. Lesslie Newbigin, "Ecumenical Amnesia," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18, no. 1 (1994): 2.

⁹. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 134–35.

¹⁰. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 1.

¹¹. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme* (London: SCM, 1948), 71. Newbigin makes much of this twofold way of relating to Christ in this chapter of *Reunion of the Church*. He rejects Yves Congar's notion of the church as an extension of the incarnation because this makes the

church only a historical institution related to the historical Jesus and misses the eschatological nature of the church that is related also to the living and ascended Lord. See Lesslie Newbigin, *Christ Our Eternal Contemporary* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1968).

[12.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 33.

[13.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 39.

[14.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 39.

[15.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "The Mission of the Church to All the Nations" (address, National Council of Churches General Assembly, San Francisco, December 1960), 2.

[16.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 56. This is the title of the whole chapter on the work of the Spirit and mission.

[17.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 58.

[18.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 56.

[19.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

[20.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

[21.](#) Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 20.

[22.](#) Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 39–40.

[23.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1958), 43–44.

[24.](#) Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 43.

[25.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 231. He turns the table and says that if the gospel is for whites only, that is "a peculiar form of racism"; see Lesslie Newbigin, "The Pastor's Opportunities: VI. Evangelism in the City," *Expository Times* 98, no. 12 (1987): 358.

[26.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission and Missions," *Christianity Today*, August 1, 1960, 911.

[27.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Crosscurrents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 149.

[28.](#) Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 179.

[29.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Our Task Today" (address, fourth meeting of the diocesan council, Tirumangalam, 1951), 5.

[30.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 81–84.

[31.](#) Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 85.

[32.](#) Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 87.

[33.](#) Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 90.

[34.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 128–40.

- [35.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 133–34.
- [36.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 136.
- [37.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 137 (my emphasis).
- [38.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “A Missionary’s Dream,” *Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 1 (January 1991): 6.
- [39.](#) Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 86–87.
- [40.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 137.
- [41.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222.
- [42.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.
- [43.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.
- [44.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 233.
- [45.](#) Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 250.
- [46.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “Vision for the City,” in *Renewal of Social Vision*, ed. A. Elliot and I. Swanson, Occasional Paper 17 (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Edinburgh, 1989), 40.
- [47.](#) Newbigin, “Vision for the City,” 41.
- [48.](#) Michael W. Goheen, “The Missional Calling of Believers in the World: The Contribution of Lesslie Newbigin,” in *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin*, ed. Thomas F. Foust, George R. Hunsberger, J. Andrew Kirk, and Werner Ustorf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 37–54.
- [49.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Asian Churches,” in *A Decisive Hour for the Christian World Mission*, by Norman Goodall, Lesslie Newbigin, W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, and D. T. Niles (London: SCM, 1960), 28; see Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 154; Lesslie Newbigin, “Baptism, the Church and Koinonia: Three Letters and a Comment,” in *Some Theological Dialogues*, ed. M. M. Thomas (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1977), 127.
- [50.](#) Newbigin, “Our Task Today,” 6.
- [51.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Christian Layman in the World and in the Church,” *National Christian Council Review* 72 (1952): 186.
- [52.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 62.
- [53.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 62.
- [54.](#) Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 203.
- [55.](#) Newbigin, “Christian Layman in the World and in the Church,” 186.
- [56.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 62.
- [57.](#) Newbigin, “Work of the Holy Spirit,” 28.

- [58.](#) Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 84–85; see Lesslie Newbigin, “What Kind of Society?” (lecture, Hickman Lecture Series, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, 1994); Lesslie Newbigin, “Can a Modern Society Become Christian?” (lecture, Kings College, London, 1995).
- [59.](#) Newbigin, *Word in Season*, 150.
- [60.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 45.
- [61.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “Bible Studies: Four Talks on 1 Peter,” in *We Were Brought Together*, ed. David M. Taylor (Sydney: Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, 1960), 112.
- [62.](#) Newbigin, “Our Task Today,” 6.
- [63.](#) Newbigin, “Our Task Today,” 4.
- [64.](#) Newbigin, “Our Task Today,” 5.
- [65.](#) Newbigin, “Bible Studies: Four Talks on 1 Peter,” 111.
- [66.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 230–31.
- [67.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Priorities for a New Decade* (Birmingham, UK: National Student Christian Press and Resource Centre, 1980), 6.
- [68.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 231.
- [69.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 76.
- [70.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 129.
- [71.](#) See Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 133, 137.
- [72.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 137.
- [73.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Bible Study Lectures,” in *Digest of the Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU)*, ed. Paul A. Crow (Princeton: COCU, 1970), 216.
- [74.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 105–6.
- [75.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 109.
- [76.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “Address on the Main Theme, ‘Jesus, Saviour of the World,’ at the Synod Assembly of January 1972,” *South India Churchman*, February 1972, 5.
- [77.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Set Free to Be a Servant: Studies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969), 20.
- [78.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Church as a Servant Community,” *National Christian Council Review* 91 (1971): 260.
- [79.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Journey into Joy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 102.
- [80.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 108.
- [81.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 93.

- [82.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 51; cf. 46.
- [83.](#) Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine*, 47.
- [84.](#) Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 51–52.
- [85.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *A Faith for This One World?* (London: SCM, 1961), 89–91.
- [86.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Duty and Authority of the Church to Preach the Gospel,” in *The Church’s Witness to God’s Design*, ed. Lesslie Newbigin and Hendrik Kraemer, Amsterdam Assembly Series 2 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1948), 19.
- [87.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 93.
- [88.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 92–93.
- [89.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “Servants of the Servant Lord,” *Vivekananda Kendra Patrika*, February 1972, 155.
- [90.](#) Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 54–55.
- [91.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “The Churches and CASA,” *National Christian Council Review* 93 (1973): 546. For Newbigin’s view on parachurch structures, this is the best article on the subject.
- [92.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 109.
- [93.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, “Bible Studies Given at the National Christian Council Triennial Assembly, Shillong,” *National Council Review* 88 (1968): 131.
- [94.](#) Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community,” 261.
- [95.](#) Newbigin, *Journey into Joy*, 107; Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 95.
- [96.](#) Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community,” 260.
- [97.](#) Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community,” 263–64.
- [98.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 87, 89.
- [99.](#) Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community”; Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 81.
- [100.](#) Newbigin, *Journey into Joy*, 112.
- [101.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 139.
- [102.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 74–78, 80; Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community,” 261.
- [103.](#) Newbigin, “Church as a Servant Community,” 259–60.
- [104.](#) Newbigin, *Faith for This One World?*, 87.
- [105.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 78.
- [106.](#) For an articulation of Newbigin’s understanding of evangelism, see Krish Rohan Kandiah, “Toward a Theology of Evangelism for Late-Modern Cultures: A Critical Dialogue with Lesslie Newbigin’s Doctrine of Revelation” (PhD diss., University of London, 2005).

- [107.](#) Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 146.
- [108.](#) Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 22.
- [109.](#) Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 9.
- [110.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 67.
- [111.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "From the Editor," *International Review of Mission* 54 (1965): 418.
- [112.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "The World Mission of the Church," *South India Churchman*, September 1968, 4.
- [113.](#) Newbigin, "Bible Study Lectures," 212. See Lesslie Newbigin, "Bible Studies on John 17: The Hinge of History," *Lutheran Standard (USA)*, April 4, 1967, 10; Newbigin, "Bible Studies Given at the National Christian Council Triennial Assembly," 130.
- [114.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 132.
- [115.](#) Newbigin, *Faith for This One World?*, 92. Newbigin offers a biblical study of the word "witness" (or rather the *martyreo* word group) in Lesslie Newbigin, "Witness in Biblical Perspective," *Mission Studies* 3, no. 2 (1986): 80–84. This is an oft-used, comprehensive, and important term in his mission thinking.
- [116.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Context and Conversion," *International Review of Mission* 68, no. 271 (1979): 304–9; Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 93–94; Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 146–49; Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 22–23; Newbigin, *Faith for This One World?*, 89–92.
- [117.](#) Newbigin, "Context and Conversion," 304.
- [118.](#) Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 140.
- [119.](#) Newbigin, *Word in Season*, 151.
- [120.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, *What Is the Gospel?*, SCM Study Series 6 (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1942), 10–11.
- [121.](#) Newbigin, "From the Editor," 148.
- [122.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Conversion," in *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*, ed. Stephen Neill, Gerald H. Anderson, and John Goodwin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 147; Lesslie Newbigin, "Conversion," *National Christian Council Review* 86 (1966): 309–23.
- [123.](#) Newbigin, "From the Editor," 140.
- [124.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 134–35.
- [125.](#) Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 67.
- [126.](#) Newbigin, *Word in Season*, 12.
- [127.](#) Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission and Missions," *Christianity Today*, August 1, 1960, 911.

- [128.](#) Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 185.
- [129.](#) Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 149.
- [130.](#) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 129. Newbigin credits much of his insight into missions to Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).
- [131.](#) Newbigin, "Crosscurrents," 150.
- [132.](#) Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 32.
- [133.](#) Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 27.
- [134.](#) Newbigin, "Mission of the Church to All the Nations," 3.
- [135.](#) Newbigin, "Future of Missions and Missionaries," 216.
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- [138.](#) Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 26.
- [139.](#) Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 120–21.
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