



LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

SUMMER INSTITUTE

The Good Shepherd: Lesslie
Newbigin as Bishop in Madras

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God's purpose for the whole city

'Looking back in 1965 upon my earlier ministries in Kanchi and Madurai I felt that I had been too narrowly ecclesiastical in my concerns, and I resolved that I would try to challenge the strong churches of Madras City to think less of their own growth and welfare and more of God's purpose for the whole of the vast and growing city.'

Sign, instrument, and firstfruit for Madras

‘The business of this 7 percent [Christians in Madras] is to be an effective sign, instrument, and firstfruit of God’s purpose for the whole city. Each of those three words is important. They are to be a *sign*, pointing men to something that is beyond their present horizon but can give guidance and hope now; an *instrument* . . . that God can use for his work of healing, liberating, and blessing; and a *firstfruit*—a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for all.

Agenda setting installation sermon

Ephesians 4.11-12

- Jesus is not just Lord of Christians but Lord of all, absolutely and without qualification
 - Entire membership in their daily vocations are to be signs of his lordship in every area of public life
 - Task of bishop to help them in this ministry
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Words from installation sermon

‘The church is *for* the nation—not withdrawing into the sheltered existence of a minority community, but playing its full part in every aspect of national life, in its mental and spiritual wrestlings as well as its labours of social and economic developments, its politics, its art and music and drama—because all these things belong to Christ and because the Church has been set in the nation as a sign and instrument of Christ’s plan for its perfecting.’

‘I was to spend much of my time in the next nine years helping them to shoulder these responsibilities.’ [1965-1974]

How would he help them shoulder these tasks?

- Bishop's job is to lead and enable ('Follow me as I follow Christ'; 'Come on. Let's go')

He is not like a general who sits at headquarters and sends his troops into battle. He goes at their head and takes the brunt of the enemy attack. He enables and encourages them by leading them, not just by telling them. In this picture, the words of Jesus have a quite different force. They all find their meaning in the central keyword, "Follow me"

How would he help them shoulder these tasks?

- Bishop's job is to lead and enable

There had been heavy rains which had destroyed a number of houses, huts and school buildings. Without delay Lesslie rushed to these spots and found roofless schools and stunned, apathetic people. He called for a ladder, climbed it, asked the local people to pass him the leaves that had blown off, and began to thatch a shed to make into a school. It was a fascinating spectacle to see him so involved and exhibiting his faith and theology to a people who had lost not only their roofs but were also spiritually shattered. He did it and he got them to do it! (Sundar Clarke)

The Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd 'calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.' They follow him 'because they know his voice.' A true Christian pastor will be one who can dare to say to his people: 'Follow me, as I am following Jesus.' That is a terrible text for any pastor. A true pastor must have such a relation with Jesus and with his people that he follows Jesus and they follow him.

What was important for Newbigin as bishop of Madras?

- Social witness (justice and mercy)
- Calling of laity in public life
- Dialogue
- Evangelism
- Local congregation
- Ecclesial structures
- Ministerial leadership
- Unity and mission
- Worship
- Finality of Christ and world religions
- Missionary encounter with culture
- Pentecostalism

Social witness of church

- No issue appears more often in Newbigin's ministry and writing
- Burning issue of the day
- Practice
- Deep reflection (“ . . . it caused me to think very hard about the Christian approach to social justice.”)

Social witness of church

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 as an inferior substitute for the work of passing on the good news of salvation. Action for social justice *is* salvation in action.

The piety which can comfortably co-exist with flagrant social injustice is an abomination to God

Practice

- Urban slums (600 among 200 churches)
- Lepers
- Education for harijan
- Relief for disasters
- Christian counselling centre

‘ . . . a Christian congregation must be seen as a community which cares for its neighbours.’

Nature of social witness

- Character of witness to the presence of power of the kingdom

‘They are not means by which God establishes his kingdom. They are witnesses to its present reality.’

Nature of social witness

- Character of witness to the presence of power of the kingdom
- Flows from love for our neighbour
- Concerned for conversion

‘We are out to convert people, not just feed them.’

Nature of social witness

- Character of witness to the presence of power of the kingdom
- Flows from love for our neighbour
- Concerned for conversion
- Cannot build kingdom or new social order but they may spill over the bounds of church and have salting impact on society
- Justice and mercy
- Words interpret deeds; deeds validate words
- Flow from congregation rooted in and manifesting the gospel

Social witness: Attached to congregation

Mentions: work in slums (disaster relief, sanitation, housing units), 'Christian Service to Industrial Society' (equipping those in industry for Christian calling), Community Service Centre (equipping folk for witness in public life. Then says . . .

. . . these programmes must not be detached from the life of the congregation but must be seen to be part of that total life which has its source in the Gospel and in the regular ministry of word and sacrament.

Social concern did not minimise evangelism

‘I was also eager to find effective ways of evangelism for this bustling city, but seemed to me essential that the Church which preached the Gospel should be recognisable as a body which cared for its neighbours.’

‘There is a gospel to be proclaimed and we are not allowed to be silent about it. However much we 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.’

Evangelism: Background

- Evangelical-ecumenical divide
- Uppsala (1968): 'shattering experience'

Evangelistic praxis

- Identified three large areas in diocese which had no Christian presence
- Worked ecumenically with Mar Thomas and Lutheran church
- Mobilised funds and workers for these areas
- Result was flourishing churches

Word and deed

- Words are absolutely necessary to interpret deeds; deeds will never by themselves make known the gospel
- Not every word needs a deed attached to it and not every deed needs a word
- Both words and deeds flow from the full life of the church
- Both word and deed are the means by which the Spirit witnesses to the kingdom
- There are different gifts given to the body

Laity and public life

- Christian Service to Industrial Society: Equipping Christians in industry to be faithful witnesses
- Community Service Centre: Equip folk for calling in many sectors of public life
- Conferences on specific issues Inter-faith cooperation and dialogue: What should we do? Why do we do it? Opportunity for witness to Jesus

Ministerial leadership

- Bishop: Pastoring, leading, and equipping pastors
 - Sermons to pastors (*Good Shepherd*)
 - Theological education
- ‘ . . . a kind of ministerial training which was more truly appropriate to a missionary Church than anything I have known before or since.’

On Preaching

This life-giving word of God is the power by which the Church lives. The Church is created and constantly renewed by the Word of God. . . . The business of the sermon is to bring the hearers face to face with Jesus Christ as he really is.

On Preaching

It means that people go out from the church not merely comforted with the assurance they are saved, and not merely crushed by the unbearable knowledge that they are sinners, but rather re-enlisted in Christ's army as fighters for the rule of God in the world.

On Preaching

True preaching of Christ springs out of action and leads into action. The word which we preach was made flesh, became part of history. If you and your congregation are really involved together in tackling the trouble and pain and sin in the world around you, in the slums around your church, in the lives of your members; if you are standing beside your members in their battles with the world and in their trials and problems, then the words you speak in the pulpit will not be empty words. They will be a part of the obedience of you and your congregation to the Living Lord. And they will lead your people into further action.

On Worship

I am ashamed to say this, but I must say that much of the worship in our churches is carried on in a way which can only be called slovenly. By our worship we dishonour God. We are made for God. To worship God with heart and soul and mind and strength is the highest exercise of all our powers. . . . The corporate worship of the Church should enlist all the very highest powers of which our minds and spirits are capable. . . . how much of what happens in our churches every Sunday morning is dull, flat, and joyless.

On the Gospel

The centre of the revealed mystery of the reign of God is the Cross. There the power of God is revealed—but it is revealed as weakness. The glory of God is revealed—but it is revealed as humiliation. The victory of God is revealed—but it is revealed as defeat. To the ordinary eyes . . . the Cross is weakness, humiliation, defeat. To those who turn around, face the other way, and *believe*, it is power, glory, and victory.

On Evangelism

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.

On Suffering

. . . we note that there is the repeated warning that those who follow Jesus must expect suffering, must 'take up the Cross' . . . To follow Jesus means being caught up into a great battle in which the power of the rule of God is attacking and overcoming the power of the rule of Satan. In this battle the Christian suffers, but this suffering is all within the context of the mighty victory of the Cross, so that all suffering is seen in a new perspective.

On Training the Laity

. . . we have to think of our task in a city like Madras to train our lay members who are playing key roles in the 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.

On Presenting Everyone Mature in Christ

When we have had a ‘wonderful service’ we must not forget that this is only half of our work; the other half is that we should be concerned that what we have said and done in church is carried out in the world. One half of our work is to gather people together for worship, that their union with Christ may be renewed . . . The other half is to send them back to their daily tasks equipped to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. If we forget this second part, the other can be positively dangerous.

On the Inner Life

. . . there is an inner reality which is only rarely visible—a secret inward discipline, a consecration, a life of prayer, Bible study and meditation, through which he is being conformed more and more inwardly to the Cross of Jesus. Without that inner consecration, the outward life would be worldliness and nothing more.

On Baptism and Industry

The difficulty is that most of them have misunderstood their baptism. They have thought that it was something that had nothing to do with their work on the shop floor or in the office, that it was a personal matter concerning their personal and private salvation and not a commitment to be part of God's mission to industry. Our main job in industry is to set ourselves to correct this misunderstanding.

On Pastor as Student

- (a) Always try to have one *big* book on which you are working. . . .
- (b) Try to read original works rather than summaries and digests. . . .
- (c) Always keep some Bible work going. . . .
- (d) Keep on always reading something which is *not* theology. . . .

On the Hidden Life of the Pastor

Let us apply these words honestly to ourselves. If we do not do this one thing, if we do not convey this life-giving sap which is the very life of Jesus himself to men, what are we good for? A lawyer, a doctor, a carpenter, a driver, a baker—all of them may be bad men, but fulfill a useful function in society. But what is the use of a pastor who is not doing this one thing? As much use as a dead branch from a vine.

Pentecostalism

- Pentecostal: 3rd category of Household of God misunderstood but opened relationships
- Experienced the explosion of Pentecostal church in Latin America
- In Madras again encountered Pentecostal church: Teaching on Spirit and baptism

‘It was during Newbegin’s [sic] bishopric that the charismatic movement entered India and the CSI.’
LN responded: ‘It was also during this time that the USA invaded Vietnam but I was in no way responsible for either.’

Pursuing the unity of the church

- Nine year struggle for unity between CSI and Lutheran church
 - Doctrinal consensus reached after 20 years!
 - CSI voted in favour but Lutherans never voted on it
 - Convened National Council of Churches Faith and Order with Orthodox priest
 - Extensive dialogue and conference with Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Mar Thoma, Protestant churches
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Other noteworthy events

- Beecher Lectures at Yale – *Finality of Christ*
- Continued involvement in ecumenical meetings including World Council of Churches (Uppsala, 1968); Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (Bangkok, 1973); Faith and Order (Louvain, 1971)
- Visited by Malcolm Muggeridge, Hans Kung, Mother Teresa

Follow-up

<http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/597>

<http://newbigin.net/>

<http://missionworldview.com/>