



# LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

## SUMMER INSTITUTE

“For Such a Time as This”: Leslie  
Newbigin as Leader of World Mission

Michael Goheen  
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Map: Countries that spell apologise  
'apologize' and centre 'center' etc. etc.



# Way Lesslie Newbigin spelled! 😊

*aluminium; analyse; apologise; authorise; calibre; candour;  
categorise; centre; characterisation; cheque; colour; cosy;  
crystallise; defence; dialogue; diarrhoea; dramatise;  
encyclopaedia; epitomise; equalise; favour; favourite; fertilise;  
fervour; fibre; flavour; globalisation; grey; harbour; harmonise;  
honour; humour; jeopardise; jewellery; judgement; licence; litre;  
magnetise; manoeuvre; marvellous; materialise; mediaeval;  
metre; mould; organise; plough; practise; privatise; programme;  
realise; recognise; reorganise; rumour; socialise; standardise;  
sulphur; theatre; theorise; urbanisation; valour.*

# “For such a time as this”

- 1959-1965: Ecumenical office-wallah
    - 1959-1961: General secretary of International Missionary Council in London
    - 1961-1965: Director of Division of World Mission and Evangelism of World Council of Churches in Geneva
  - Importance of Newbigin
    - Critical time in mission of church: Breakdown and search for new paradigm
    - *The* key leader of world mission
    - Articulated a profound theology of mission
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# Outline

- Crisis in mission
- What did Newbigin do? His way of developing a theological response
- What did Newbigin say? His theological vision for mission

# Crisis in mission

“We have to be ready to see the day of missions, as we know them, as having already come to an end.” (Max Warren)

“. . . the lost directness of missions.” (Walter Freytag)

# Global and cultural context

- Breakdown of colonialism

# Global and cultural context

“ . . . it would be a very serious mistake therefore to suppose that the thing of primary significance about this age in which we are living is simply that the period of ‘colonialism’ is drawing to a close. . . . What is of crucial importance, however, is that though flying the colours of emancipation, they are joining the ever increasing ranks of those nations which follow the standard of of western civilisation.” (A. van Leeuwen)

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# Global and cultural context

- Breakdown of colonialism
- Global modernisation: National independence and 'rapid social change'
- Confidence of resurgent secularism

# Confidence of secular decade

We are the first . . . to have enough of that power actually at hand to create new possibilities almost at will. By massive physical changes deliberately induced, we can literally pry new alternatives from nature. . . . We can change the world and shape it to suit our purposes. . . . We are recognizing that our technical prowess literally bursts with the promise of new freedom, enhanced human dignity, and unfettered aspiration. (E. Mesthene)

# A new view of mission

- The church turned inside out (Hoekendijk)
- Problem: church is “immobile, self-centred, and introverted”
- Mission is individuals discerning where God’s Spirit is at work bringing about justice, development, revolutionary change and join God in his work
- Centrality of Christ replaced by Spirit
- Centrality of church replaced by world

# Ecumenical convictions about mission in 1960s

- Mission is interchurch aid (social, economic, technological, educational assistance) **vs.** traditional missions, evangelism, conversion, baptism, church-planting
  - Mission is the work of the individual layperson in public square **vs.** calling of congregation to be sign of kingdom
  - Mission is work of Spirit in world **vs.** Christ's Spirit in church to shape people as preview of kingdom
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# What is God doing?

The real question is: What is God doing in these tremendous events of our time? How are we to understand them and interpret them to others, so that we and they may play our part in them as co-workers with God? Nostalgia for the past and fear for the future are equally out of place for the Christian. He is required, in the situation in which God places him, to understand the signs of the times in the light of the reality of God's present and coming kingdom, and to give witness faithfully about the purpose of God for all men.

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# What did Newbigin do?

- Meetings, discussion, policies, etc.
- Listened to Christians and missionaries in 3<sup>rd</sup> world
  - Compiled and synthesised reports from missionaries
  - Travelled throughout Africa, Latin America, Pacific, Caribbean, Europe, North America [mlk, sf]

## Ecumenical Student Conference 1959

*The year 1959 not only marked the beginning of the NSCF, it was a pivotal year for another reason: the 18th SVM Quadrennial Conference held in Athens, Ohio, December 27, 1959 – January 2, 1960. It marked the entry of the student Christian movement into the most tumultuous student decade in American history. Christian students would join secular students to demand civil rights legislation, oppose the Vietnam war, and demand changes in America's institutions – educational, religious, economic, and political.*

rch in the "Whole World"

### CONFERENCE LEADERS

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, General Secretary of the International Missionary Council, will give the daily Biblical exposition. He went as a Church of Scotland missionary to South India and played an important part in the formation of the United Church of South India. He is widely recognized as a man peculiarly fitted for leadership in this new day of mission.



Martin Luther King, pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, will analyze the frontier caused by racial tensions from the perspective of his involvement in the Biblical faith and the racial problem. His leadership in this area has had a significant impact both in the United States and abroad.

D. T. Niles, a gifted Christian evangelist and leader in the Church in Ceylon, has had wide influence throughout the world. He has an extraordinary ability to articulate in practical ways the Church's task of witness. As present chairman of the World's Student Christian Federation, which is sponsoring this Conference, he will speak out of the richness of his experience.



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“Coming when it did, this journey [to Africa] did much to steady my own convictions. After all, the passing theological fashions of Europe were not the only things that had to be taken into account.”

# What did Newbigin do?

- Meetings, discussion, policies, etc.
- Listened to Christians and missionaries in 3<sup>rd</sup> world
- Studied Bible
  - Made Bible study central on all trips
  - Restudied Bible himself

# Under the word of God

We are not intended to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. God uses changes and chances in history to shake His people from time to time out of their conformity with the world; but when that happens our job surely is not just to push over the tiller and sail before the winds of change, but to look afresh to our chart and compass and to ask how we now use the new winds and the new tides to carry out our sailing orders. Every new situation is a summons to bring all our traditions afresh “under the word of God.”

# Study Scriptures with others

“If missions were to recover a sense of direction, if . . . we were to discern the distinctive missionary focus within the total life of the church, then the only way was to open ourselves afresh to the biblical perspectives. . . . I set about planning long tours of Africa and Latin America, and visits to mission councils in Europe and Asia.”

# Returned to Bible himself

“I had been asked to give a lecture for which I was quite unprepared. I therefore spent the entire night on the plane from Bombay to Rome reading right through the New Testament and noting every reference to ‘the world.’ The results of this was to set my mind moving in a new direction in which it was to travel for the next ten years.”

# What did Newbigin do?

- Meetings, discussion, policies, etc.
- Listened to Christians and missionaries in 3<sup>rd</sup> world
- Studied Bible
- Retreats of prayer, meditation on Scripture that set course by settling his convictions

# Convictions

1. That it matters supremely to bring more people to know Jesus as Saviour
2. That our responsibility in the political order arises out of the love command
3. That it does not arise out of the expectation of being able to anticipate the establishment of any particular social or political order

# Convictions

4. That the NT teaches us (a) not to expect success in our cause; (b) to expect the sharpening of the issues and the coming of the antichrist; (c) that there is no hope apart from Christ.
5. That 'Rapid Social Change' thinking has not developed any coherent theology and is in danger of identifying the movement of revolution with the work of redemption.
6. That in so far as it distinguishes these two things, it fails to show a clear understanding of the sense in which being in Christ is different from and transcends involvement in 'Rapid Social Change'

# What did Newbigin do?

- Meetings, discussion, policies, etc.
- Listened to Christians and missionaries in 3<sup>rd</sup> world
- Studied Bible
- Retreats of prayer, setting course by firm convictions
- Speaking: Academic, popular, preaching

# Newbigin's vision of mission

- Missionary dimension and missionary intention

Missionary dimension: '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.'

Missionary intention: '. . . 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.'

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# Newbigin's vision of mission

- Missionary dimension and missionary intention
- Church as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom
- Holistic: Words and deeds arise out of life of congregation
- Lay mission rooted in local congregation

# Role of congregation in mission of laity

- Fellowship that nourishes the life of Christ
- Fellowship that supports believers in their task in the world
- Formation of structures that equip for callings
- Leadership that enables believers to take up callings

# Newbigin's vision of mission

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- Mission and missions [IRM]

# Mission

- Whole task of the church to witness to whole gospel in whole world
- Involves whole life: gathered and scattered
- Perspective on whole Christian life

# Missions

- One part of task of mission
- Establish a gospel witness where there is none or where it is weak
- Distinguished from cross-cultural partnership and inter-church aid
- “. . . free from the traditional paternalistic elements.”
- Acts 13 offers paradigm

# Newbigin's vision of mission

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  - Church as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom
  - Holistic: Words and deeds arise out of life of congregation
  - Lay mission rooted in local congregation
  - Mission and missions
  - Directed to all six continents
- ‘ . . . missions 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.’
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# Newbigin's vision of mission

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- Church as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom
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- Lay mission rooted in local congregation
- Mission and missions
- Directed to all six continents
- Mission of *triune* God

# Newbigin's vision of mission

Only a fully Trinitarian doctrine would be adequate, setting the work of Christ in the Church in the context of the over-ruling providence of the Father in all the life of the world and the sovereign freedom of the Spirit who is the Lord and not the auxiliary of the Church.

# Moving to today

- Powerful currents of secular decade won the day in mission theology for the next two decades. . . . and it continues
- Yet the times enabled Newbigin to produce a powerful and nuanced view of mission
- Newbigin's vision has received new life over the last three decades
- Father of missional and emerging/emergent church movements—whole ecclesial renaissance
- Have not yet plumbed the depths of his views of mission developed through the 1960s