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The Congregation Gathered:  
Sign and Foretaste of the Truth

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### Public Truth?

- The gospel is a factual statement in the original sense of the word "fact," namely *factum* something which has been done, and having been done, it cannot be undone. The gospel is the story of God's mighty acts in creation, in redemption and in consummation...a story, a statement, about things which have been done, namely, that almighty God, by whom all things exist, in whom all things cohere, has in his infinite love come into our alienated fallen world to bear in his own being the agony of our alienation, so that there should be a place here in this fallen world where we, fallen, alienated, sinful people may have fellowship with Almighty God."
 

—LN, "The Gospel as True"  
The Gospel in the Public Square  
Hickman Lectures, Duke Divinity School, 1994

### But... is it TRUE?

- "*belief* is a persuasion that falls short of knowledge."
 

—John Locke
- "I believe in order to understand."
 

—St. Augustine

### The ONLY Hermeneutic of the Gospel

- "I have come to feel that 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? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel— evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community."
 

—LN, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989)

## Reliving the Story

- “The community of the Christian Church understands itself and the human and cosmic history of which it is a part in terms of the biblical story. Its being and life are incomprehensible apart from that story. Its liturgical actions are the *reliving of this story*...The gospel, the account of God’s actions for the creation and redemption of the world, is always in narrative form.

—Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*

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## Reliving the Story

- “How is the life of Christ, the life which is a true foretaste of the kingdom, continued in the period after the ascension? It will not be by the universal application of an unchanging pattern of personal and social behavior as laid down in the faith and practice of Islam. It will not be in a series of abstract moral and political principles. It will be in the life of a community which remembers, rehearses, and lives by the story which the Bible tells and of which the central focus is the story told in the NT. The remembering and rehearsing will be through the continual reading of and reflection of the Bible and the continual repetition of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

—Lesslie Newbigin, *TGIAPS*

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## Painful Tension/Challenging Relevance

- “[the church] must communicate in the idiom of that culture both the divine good that sustains it and the divine purpose that judges it and summons it to be what it is not yet”

—LN, *The Open Secret*

- “We must always, it seems to me, in every situation, be wrestling with both sides of this reality: that the Church is for the world against the world. The Church is against the world for the world. The Church is for the human community in that place, that village, that city that nation, in the sense that Christ is for the world. And that must be the determining criterion at every point”

—LN, *A Word in Season: Perspective on Xn World Missions*

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## Gathered for the World

- The Church is wrongly described unless it is described as the Church *for that place*, and the meaning of the preposition “for” is determined Christologically; that is to say, it is determined by what Jesus Christ has done, is doing and will do with and for the world as its author, redeemer and consummator. The Church in each place is the Church for that place, in the sense in which Christ is for [humankind] and for the world. Jesus as Christ is not understood unless He is understood as the Word by whom all things came to be, for whom they are, and in whom they are to be consummated, and as the Last Adam in whom alone [humankind’s] destiny lies; so also the Church in any place is not rightly understood unless it is understood as sign, first-fruit and instrument of God’s purpose in Christ for that place. And in this sentence the word “place” must mean the whole secular reality of the place including its physical, social, cultural and political aspects... a sign, planted in the midst of the present realities of the place but pointing beyond them to the future which God has promised; an instrument available for God’s use in the doing of his will for that place; foretaste—manifesting and enjoying already in the midst of the messianic tribulations a genuine foretaste of the peace and joy of God’s reign. As often as it gathers to hear God’s word and to share in the eucharistic celebration, the church is renewed as the body of Christ in and for that place.

—LN: *In Each Place: Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (1977)

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### 6 Characteristics of Community Formed By Jesus

1. A community of praise.
2. A community of truth.
3. A community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbors.
4. A community where men and women are prepared for and sustained in the exercise of the priesthood in the world.
5. A community of mutual responsibility.
6. A community of hope.

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