

2. FROM A CHRISTENDOM TO A MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY (1909-1959)

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the ecclesiological development of Bishop J. E. Lesslie Newbigin until 1959. The chapter is divided into two primary sections. Following this introduction, the first section surveys the early period of Newbigin's life (1909-1939), noting important convictions and experiences that shape his later missionary ecclesiology. The second section examines the shift in Newbigin's ecclesiology from a Christendom to a missionary understanding of the church. Specifically we will investigate the impact of his missionary experience in India and his involvement in the ecumenical movement at the time when a missionary ecclesiology was developing. Newbigin served as a district missionary in Kanchipuram (1939-1947) and as bishop in the Church of South India (1947-1959). This cross-cultural missionary experience transformed Newbigin's view of the church. In the ecumenical movement, the same period (from Tambaram 1938 to Ghana 1958) was an ecclesiocentric period in which great gains were made towards a missionary ecclesiology. Newbigin's roots in the ecumenical tradition also shaped his doctrine of the church.

2.2. SEEDS OF A MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY: NEWBIGIN'S EARLY YEARS (1909-1939)

Reflecting on the various experiences that shaped Newbigin's ecclesiology, one might be inclined to overlook the first three decades of his life. That would be a mistake. A number of foundational experiences provided compass headings for his later ecclesiological development.

2.2.1. *Summary Sketch of Newbigin's Early Years*

This early period of Newbigin's life is divided into five different stages. The first nineteen years were spent in Northumbria. His father, a devout and articulate Christian, lived out the gospel in the context of his shipping business. His mother was a homemaker who provided a loving home for Lesslie and his siblings. Until his eighteenth birthday he attended a Quaker boarding school in Reading. During his teenage years Newbigin abandoned the Christian faith of his early childhood.

The second stage of his life commenced when he entered Queens' University, Cambridge, as a student of geography and economics. During his first year in Cambridge Newbigin returned to faith in Christ and was drawn into the Student Christian Movement (SCM). In turn, this led Newbigin into a number of service and evangelistic projects and also exposed him to numerous ecumenical leaders who visited Cambridge. In his later years at Cambridge his vocational direction changed. His early

ambition was to follow his father, joining him in the shipping business and eventually taking it over. During a SCM Swanwick meeting, Newbigin experienced God's call to the ministry of the gospel. With reluctance he took the advice of John Mott who advised him that the Christian ministry was "the most highly multiplying form of Christian service" (1993h:16).

Upon graduation from Cambridge Newbigin assumed the post of SCM secretary at the University of Glasgow. During his years in Scotland, Newbigin became engaged to Helen Henderson and together they committed themselves to cross-cultural missionary service in India. He participated in the SCM Edinburgh Quadrennial in January 1933, a conference that was to have a shaping effect on his life.

After three years of service in Glasgow, Newbigin returned to Westminster College, Cambridge as a theological student. His academic prowess at Cambridge is legendary. His theological work during this time, especially in the book of Romans and the topic of revelation, led him to consider himself much more of an evangelical than a liberal, although his commitment to unity and social issues continued unabated. His time at Cambridge climaxed with his ordination in the Church of Scotland, marriage to Helen, and a call to missionary service in India.

The final stage of this early period of Newbigin's life is a three-year period (1936-1939) during which he travelled to India. One year after he arrived in India in 1936, he was forced to return to Edinburgh as Candidates' Secretary because of a serious leg injury incurred in a motor vehicle accident.

2.2.2. Foundational Experiences: The Birth of Ecclesiological Awareness

During these early years Newbigin became aware of the importance of the church through a number of foundational experiences that planted seeds which would later bear ecclesiological fruit. In the light of Newbigin's later ecclesiology, eight foundational experiences can be identified.

2.2.2.1. The Centrality of Christ and the Cross

The 'fact of Jesus Christ' was the compass that gave direction to Lesslie Newbigin throughout his life and was also at the core of his ecclesiology. The centrality of Jesus Christ was cemented in his mind during his early years as a result of two formative experiences—his conversion and an intensive study of the book of Romans.

Newbigin's stirring account of his conversion points to the cross of Jesus Christ as the clue that would give meaning to his life. The context of his vision was the social work he was carrying out among unemployed miners in South Wales and mill-workers in Lancashire. His early hope in the progress of humanity toward a new social order was shattered. What hope could he offer in this hopeless situation? This is how he records that formative experience of the cross:

As I lay awake a vision came to my mind ... It was a vision of the cross, but it was the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world. I saw it as something which reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory. I was sure that night, in a way I had never been before, that this was the

clue that I must follow if I were to make any kind of sense of the world. From that moment I would know how to take bearings when I was lost (1993h:11f; cf.1946b:106).

During his years at Westminster a second formative experience focussed this same issue. In his first year he undertook an intensive study of the book of Romans which, by the end of the exercise, led him to say that he was “much more of an evangelical than a liberal.” He relates that this study of Romans “was a turning point in my theological journey. I began the study as a typical liberal. I ended it with a strong conviction about the ‘finished work of Christ’, about the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on Calvary” (1993h:29).

One final significant event must be noted. During the years of Newbigin’s convalescence in Edinburgh (1937-1939), the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Conference was held. One of the hallmarks of this conference was the powerful voice of Hendrik Kraemer. The theology of mission had been dominated in the years preceding Tambaram by the report of the famous Laymen’s Foreign Mission Inquiry (1933) and the book *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen’s Inquiry After 100 Years* edited by W. E. Hocking (1933). These documents had proposed a mission theology that eclipsed the central place of Jesus Christ, except as a supreme religious teacher and pattern of religious life to be commended to those who wished “to carry out the same venture” (Hocking 1933:55). The debate provoked by the theology aroused J. H. Oldham and others to commission Hendrik Kraemer to author a book for the Tambaram Conference that would address the issue of the gospel of Jesus Christ and other faiths (Yates 1994:108). Kraemer’s book (1938) dropped like a bomb-shell focussing the discussions at Tambaram and for the next several decades. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Tambaram, Newbigin noted Kraemer’s fundamental theme:

Kraemer’s book was—by implication—a direct repudiation of this attempt to domesticate the gospel within western, European, and American values. It was an affirmation of the uniqueness, the decisiveness, the sufficiency of the gospel—of those mighty acts of God, which have their centre and climax in the incarnation, ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1988i:327).

Newbigin appended a lengthy autobiographical note recalling that “for those of us who lived through those days it is hard to communicate to others the sheer liberation that this simple message brought... . We were part of the great confusion, the great betrayal, which had bracketed the gospel with all sorts of causes and interests... .” (*Ibid.*). Newbigin remembered Kraemer as one who carried the protest against the marginalization of the gospel to the heart of the missionary movement. His bold witness made an impact on Newbigin (1988i:327f.). Kraemer’s writings strengthened the

centrality of Jesus Christ in Newbigin's life during this time.¹

2.2.2.2. Life of Christian Service Rooted In Prayer

Prayer played a central role in Newbigin's life as a missionary and as a church leader. He would later articulate its pivotal place in the life of a missionary church and among its leaders. His convictions about prayer were formed early in life.

In the brief descriptions of his parents' home, Newbigin included the memory of his father's commitment to prayer every morning before he took up the task of working in the tough world of business. The significance that prayer would have for Newbigin himself can be understood by noting the first answer he received to his queries about becoming a Christian. As he was being drawn to faith in Jesus Christ, Newbigin asked one of the SCM members: "If I wanted to be a Christian, how would I begin?" The answer: "Buy an alarm clock", which Newbigin understood as a reference to the 'morning watch', a tradition of early morning Bible reading and prayer (1993h:10). He began the practice of rising early to read the Bible and pray—a habit that continued to his death. He was drawn to Christ especially through the life of Arthur Watkins, a fellow SCM member. He describes Arthur in this way. "As I came to know him I realized that the centre of his life was a profound devotion to Christ. Prayer was his deepest being, and he made me want to learn to pray" (1993h:10).

Newbigin did learn to pray and its importance is revealed in the further references he made to prayer at several other points during his early years. It was while he was praying at the Swanwick Conference in 1930 that he was called to the ministry of the Word. During his years of theological education, he expressed thankfulness that Herbert Farmer, a theology professor at Westminster College, introduced a quiet day during which the students were encouraged to meditate and pray. However, he lamented

¹It is surprising to note that Newbigin does not refer to Tambaram or Kraemer's influence in his autobiography. Yet his later reflections refer to this as a significant event in his life. On my first meeting with Newbigin in his London home in 1994, after he had ushered me into his room, his first gesture was to point to one of two pictures he had kept when he moved into his smaller apartment at retirement. It was a picture of Hendrik Kraemer. (The other was a picture of Karl Barth.) He asked me if I knew who he was and then proceeded to talk at length about Kraemer's shaping influence on him.

that Westminster College and the Reformed tradition of ministerial training largely ignored the interior life of prayer and meditation.

The repeated references in Newbigin's autobiography to prayer and the nourishment of the interior life by Bible reading, contemplation, and meditation, and the importance that he ascribes to these exercises, adumbrate later developments in his ecclesiology. The life of service can only be sustained if it is nourished by prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.

2.2.2.3. An Ecumenical Vision: The Unity of the Worldwide Church

The early years of the 20th century saw the development of a new paradigm of ecclesiastical unity. Growing in the soil of global confessional alliances and comity agreements in the late 19th century, and continuing in the international student movements and the international missionary conferences, this new paradigm was a unity born out of a missionary concern for the world. Willem Saayman begins his study on mission and unity with these words: "The ecumenical movement does not derive simply from a passion for unity; it sprang from a passion for unity that is completely fused in mission" (Saayman 1984:8). Unity and mission were inextricably intertwined in this new paradigm. A milestone in this growing concern for unity was the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. This conference gave rise to several structural initiatives that fostered cooperation: *International Review of Missions*, International Missionary Council (IMC), Faith and Order. This growing tide of commitment to the unity of the church would lead to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Amsterdam in 1948.

William Richey Hogg notes four tributary streams of co-operation that flowed together to make Edinburgh and the formation of the IMC possible (Hogg 1952:16, 81). The most important of these was the student movements that arose in the universities. The Student Christian Movement (SCM) at Cambridge and the Student Volunteer Mission Union (SVMU) of Glasgow were instrumental in nourishing Newbigin with a passionate vision for the unity of the body of Christ. The Cambridge SCM was able to attract many great men and women to come and speak to the students. These were men and women with an ecumenical vision and a breadth of cross-cultural experience. Many of them, like John Mott, Joseph H. Oldham, Hendrik Kraemer, and William Temple, were leaders in the ecumenical movement. It is not surprising that exposure to these men and women began to give Newbigin a "thrilling sense of sharing in a worldwide Christian enterprise which was commanding the devotion of men and women whose sheer intellectual and spiritual power was unmistakable... the Christian faith into which I was growing was ecumenical from the beginning" (1993h:13). Consistent with the development of the ecumenical movement, Newbigin's longing for unity was very closely related to the mission of the church; the church, as a foretaste of the new world, must witness to the power of Christ to draw all people to Himself in one body.

From his early years, Newbigin attempted to heal division in the body of Christ. In Cambridge there was a division between the evangelical Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) and the more ecumenical SCM. The official view of the CICCU was that the SCM members were unbelievers. This division was displayed at every evensong in the college chapel when the bodily posture of the various groups

broadcast deep division. Later as an SCM president Newbigin pled with the CICCUC president to join together in a public celebration that would honour the work of the 'Cambridge Seven' whose offer for missionary service triggered the formation of the SVMU; but his pleas were to no avail. The adamant refusal of the CICCUC to recognize the SCM as a legitimate part of the Christian church brought Newbigin bitter disappointment.

2.2.2.4. The Unity of Evangelism and Social Concern

Newbigin's early years coincided with a scandalous and crippling controversy that was polarizing the body of Christ. The conflict raged over the understanding and practice of mission. Flowing from revivalism of the late 19th century, the evangelical tradition stressed verbal proclamation. Rooted in the social gospel movement of the same time period, the ecumenical tradition emphasized social action.

The early years of Newbigin's life were occupied with this struggle. His association with the ecumenically oriented SCM involved him early in social activity. However, his interest in social issues and ministries of service to the needy were displayed before his conversion and involvement in the SCM. In his first year at Cambridge he became involved in Quaker social projects to boys on the street and miners in South Wales. At the same time, he recognized that these men needed "some kind of faith that would fortify them for today and tomorrow against apathy and despair... . They needed the Christian faith that was beginning to draw me" (1993h:11). It was in this context that the vision of the cross that "reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory" came to him (1993h:11).

After his conversion, involvement in the SCM reinforced this commitment to merciful service. His life continued to offer him opportunities to be involved socially and politically. His reflection on the relationship between evangelism and social concern was forming during this time. While struggling with Romans and understanding himself to be much more of an evangelical than a liberal, he makes the following statement: "But this shift in no way implied a lessening of commitment to political and social issues" (1993h:29). His frequent contact with Oldham in preparation for the Oxford Conference on 'Church, Community, and State' and his Scriptural studies on the Kingdom of God kept him resolute in his commitment to social issues.

As a young theological student Newbigin was aware of the tension that existed between social concern and evangelism. He manifested a commitment to overcome this division. In his years in theological college he was involved in evangelistic campaigns as well as in work camps that laboured to help the needy. "There was always a certain tension between those who were keen on direct evangelism and those who were concerned about social justice" (1993h:33). In 1935, he became involved in an operation to bring the evangelistic campaigns and work camps together. The result was that in July of that year a substantial group of students spent eight hours a day building a playground for needy children and more hours at night preaching the gospel in the streets. In his later ecclesiological formulations the inextricable unity between word and deed would play an important role.

2.2.2.5. The Gospel and Believers in Public Life

Throughout his life issues of gospel and public life were central to Newbigin's understanding of the missionary church. The early years of Newbigin already demonstrated this deep interest as he struggled to relate the gospel to the public life of society. He comments:

National and international politics, the rise of Italian and German Fascism, the question of Indian independence and the ever-present reality of unemployment and destitution among Clyde shipyard workers—these were the living issues in relation to which we tried to understand and articulate the Christian faith (1993h:23).

Perhaps it was his struggle with the relationship of the gospel to business that was most formative. Newbigin would later identify the mission of the “laity” as the primary place where the missionary encounter occurs. That conviction was nourished early in his life by at least two things: his father's faithful witness, and the missionary report he compiled for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

His father was a businessman who faithfully attempted “to apply his Christian faith to the day-to-day issues of business and politics” (1993h:3). His commitment fostered this interest in young Lesslie. He struggled with issues of capitalism and socialism, describing his first exposure to “structural sin”, as he would later learn to call it, in the fierce and exciting jungle of the market. As a new believer he noted that he was the only committed Christian that was not moving toward ordination. Preparing instead to follow his father in business, he “had seen in him that to be a Christian in the world of commerce was a difficult thing” (1993h:14). SCM did not challenge its members to consider this calling, or to struggle with these issues. He formed a society for “Christians *not* intending to be ordained” but willing to struggle with issues of gospel and public life. When later he was called to the ministry of the Word part of his distress was the question: “And what about the vocation to be a Christian in business, and the group of fellow-students at Cambridge whom I had encouraged to accept this calling?” (1993h:15, cf.16). The ‘Christians in Business’ society was to wilt when he withdrew—an event that brought him shame, distress and much pondering in the years to come (1993h:17).

While Newbigin was recovering from his serious leg injury, he was given the full-time job as Candidates Secretary for the Foreign Missions Committee of the Church of Scotland (1993h:43). Part of his task was to plough through the annual reports of several hundred missionaries and compile a popular annual account of the foreign missionary enterprise for the members of the church. In his concluding chapter he records three lessons for the home church. The reports of the missionaries pressed him to register his conviction that “the success or failure of the Church depends supremely upon the witness to Christ of the ordinary lay member” (1938b:58).

2.2.2.6. The Enduring Validity of Cross-Cultural Missions

On 5 October 1987, Newbigin delivered an address at the service of dedication and inauguration of the new Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut which was given the title that heads this section (1994k:113-120). More than 54 years before this he gave an address at the SMVU Missionary Conference in Edinburgh that

could have been given the same title (1933). This address demonstrates Newbigin's early conviction that cross-cultural missions is central to a missionary church. The nature of the church is ecumenical and this worldwide nature must be demonstrated in cross-cultural mission (1933:100). These two addresses bracket a life committed to foreign missions as a necessary dimension of the church's calling.

This conviction was undoubtedly shaped by the SCM, which nourished his early faith. He comments that early in his Christian life he had "a thrilling sense of sharing in a worldwide Christian enterprise which was commanding the devotion of men and women whose sheer intellectual and spiritual power was unmistakable" (1993h:13). He began to read the *International Review of Missions* during these early years. He sealed this commitment with his life's service. Upon his engagement he and his fiancée Helen committed themselves to foreign missionary service. His conviction had to withstand a powerful challenge from Oldham who was determined to dissuade Newbigin from going to India so that he might work for the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State.

2.2.2.7. Mission and Western Culture

Since Newbigin's ministry would culminate in a call for a missionary encounter with western culture, it is important to attend to the early formative experiences that would shape that challenge. During his high school years in the Quaker boarding school he remarks that in his last year he read a book that shaped his thinking significantly (1993h:6). That book, entitled *The Living Past: A Sketch of Western Progress* (1920) written by Francis S. Martin, led Newbigin to believe that the human story was an upward striving towards freedom, happiness, and enlightenment that would be achieved by science, technology, and social organization that began in the West and was spreading across the globe. He saw himself as part of that "noble campaign."

Six years later another formative experience would lead him to reflect on the challenge of the gospel to the story that shaped western culture. This was the Edinburgh Quadrennial of January 1933. It brought together several thousand students from nearly fifty nations to put before them a call to world mission. This conference was different in that the issues of western culture, and not the concerns of traditional mission fields, dominated the agenda. The German theologian and Lutheran church leader Hans Lilje, for example, spoke of "the falsification of Christianity which had made it a 'mere appendage of bourgeois thought'" (1993h:25; cf. Lilje 1933:49). However, the significance of this event for Newbigin's life was in "a profound and prophetic address" of Oldham in which "he spoke of the radical departure of Europe from the Christian faith when it followed Descartes and the pioneers of the Enlightenment" (1993h:25). He challenged the students—although not in so many words—to regard the western world as a mission field.

The significance of this address for Newbigin's development is reflected in an observation he made in 1985: "I would dare to say that missionary thinking in Europe and North America has not yet met the challenge which Edinburgh gave to develop a genuinely missionary encounter with post-Enlightenment European civilization"

(1993h:25).² These words were penned when his book *The Other Side of 1984* (1983d)—the book that would launch such an encounter—was coming off the press. Oldham's challenge of 1933 would bear fruit in the later work of Newbigin.

Already in these early years that encounter was forming. The single subject that dominated his thinking in his early years was the relationship of God's kingdom to history. He worked on this subject during his last years at Westminster College

²Oldham's address never explicitly speaks of a radical departure from the Christian faith when Europe followed Descartes and the Enlightenment leaders. He never mentions the Enlightenment at all. He mentions Descartes once (Oldham 1933:58) as the starting point for modern thought. Further, he does not refer explicitly to the West as a mission field. Newbigin admits this when he adds "though it was not said so bluntly" (1993h:25). Oldham does address modernity's reductionism (not his term) to what he calls the dimension of appropriation. However, in the written form of the address I cannot hear what Newbigin heard. In the speech given the day before by Hans Lilje there is much more of a call for a missionary encounter with western culture: in an encounter with Communism western Christians must "get away from the bourgeois falsification of its message" (Lilje 1933:50f.). When one looks at the schedule of the Edinburgh Quadrennial a recognition of the West as a mission field is undeniably present. There were afternoon sessions each day on "The Western World" and "Industry" along with sessions on India, Africa, China, Japan, Moslem World, and Jews. This bears out Newbigin's comment that missionary thinking has not yet met the challenge issued at *Edinburgh* "to develop a genuinely missionary encounter with post-Enlightenment European civilization." Perhaps Oldham's address must be heard in this context to understand that the mission field is now in the "Christian world."

(1993h:68). That reflection bore fruit in a series of lectures he gave at the United Theological College in Bangalore in 1941. In the first of those lectures he criticizes the doctrine of progress that has shaped western culture and has also shaped the Christian church. This lecture contains seeds of his later critique of progress, science, and the syncretism of the church with western culture.

Hendrik Kraemer also contributed to Newbigin's consciousness of the syncretism which takes place in the West between the gospel and culture. Years later Newbigin would reflect on the significance of Kraemer's book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938) prepared for Tambaram. Newbigin remembered it at that time as "a direct repudiation of this attempt to domesticate the gospel within Western European and American values." The churches of Europe and North American "had become domestic chaplains to the nations, rather than bearers of the word of God to the nations." Kraemer's powerful voice challenged this "dangerous syncretism between Christianity and the values of nation and of western civilization" (1988j:81). Commenting on Kraemer's impact, Newbigin says:

His deepest concern was for the integrity of the Christian message, for its sovereign freedom, and therefore for its sharp separation from the contemporary confusion between the gospel and the values of western civilization (1988j:82).

2.2.2.8. Theological Reflection on Revelation

In Newbigin's last year of theological training he wrote a thirty-six page paper that would prove to be significant for his later thinking on the church. In this essay he reflects on the doctrine of revelation. On the first three pages he articulates two foundational assumptions that emerge a number of times in his later writing.

The central importance of revelation in Christianity depends on two fundamental beliefs about the nature of the world and humankind (1936:1). First, the world is personal. By this Newbigin means that ultimately a personal God gives meaning and purpose to the creation. If this is the case, then scientific knowledge—marked by skepticism and experiment—is not an appropriate way to understand the meaning and purpose of the world. We can only know a person's will or purpose by listening to that person if he chooses to reveal himself.³ Second, human life is fellowship or community. If it were not, every human being could receive a direct revelation from God. However, the communal nature of humankind means that "revelation which is the key to our highest blessedness does not descend to us straight from heaven, but has to reach us passed from hand to hand of our fellow men along the chain of a historic community" (1936:2).

These two assumptions in this paper would play an important role in Newbigin's

³This contrast of scientific knowing with personal knowing appears to be indebted to Martin Buber I/Thou, I/It distinction (Buber 1937). How Newbigin was influenced by Buber is not so clear. Newbigin never mentions Buber in this paper but notes his indebtedness a number of times in later works (e.g. 1989e:60). Buber's *I and Thou* was not translated into English until 1937—a year after Newbigin's paper was written. Ronald Gregor Smith, translator of Buber, mentions in his introduction to the second edition of *I and Thou* that contemporary theology was shaped by Buber. Specifically he points to J. H. Oldham and H. H. Farmer who acknowledge their indebtedness to Buber's book. Oldham's influence on Newbigin was significant. H. H. Farmer was Newbigin's theology professor during the time he wrote this paper. Perhaps it was through these men that Newbigin embraced this important distinction.

ecclesiology: revelation is the disclosure of God's purpose and will for the creation; this disclosure is given to a community that becomes the bearer of that revelation for the sake of the rest of humanity.

2.2.3. *The Tambaram International Missionary Council Conference (1938)*

It is surprising that Newbigin does not make reference to the influence of the Tambaram Conference of the IMC in his autobiography. While he did not attend this conference his later writings show the importance of this conference in his thinking. This is most clearly seen in the debt he owes to Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. It can also be observed in the number of times he registers Tambaram as a turning point in ecumenical thinking on mission (1963g:11; 1980f:9f.). It was at Tambaram that a truly missionary ecclesiology began to develop.

If the notion of a missionary church was to blossom, a number of foundational assumptions about mission would need to change. If mission is considered to be primarily an enterprise of Christian expansion that takes place from the West to the third world, then the church will be either an institution in the West which nobly supports such projects or a parallel institution in the third world alongside mission that functions as a container in which to place converts. This misunderstanding of mission leads to the following problematic conclusions: mission and church are separated; the western church supports missions as one of its worthy causes; the third world church stands alongside the work of western missions as a parallel organization; the world is divided between a Christian West and a pagan non-West; the West is the home base and the non-West is the mission field; the world church is divided into older and younger churches wherein the older western churches take the primary initiative for mission. If an understanding of the congregation as the fundamental unit of mission—wherever it is located—was to develop then these assumptions would need to be challenged.

The rise of the modern ecumenical movement is customarily dated from the time of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910. In the period up to 1910, including Edinburgh, the dominant understanding of mission was expansion (Yates 1994:7). At this conference the issue of the relationship between church and mission was not touched. The overwhelming emphasis was on the responsibilities of all believers to proclaim the gospel and a major concern was the absence of such a missionary enthusiasm among individual church members. Mission was to bring the gospel to every individual: "the evangelization of the world in this generation." The world was divided between the home base for mission in the West and the mission field outside the West. The West was made up of Christian nations while the non-West was considered non-Christian. The primary concern was how to carry the gospel to the whole non-Christian world (cf. opening message) and the agenda revolved around "missionary problems in relation to the non-Christian world" (cf. subtitle of conference proceedings).⁴ A spirit of conquest permeated the Edinburgh understanding of mission.

⁴There is one statement in the report of Commission II on "The Church in the Mission Field" which questions this division. "The whole world is the mission field, and there is no Church that is not a Church in the mission field. Some Christian communities are younger and some are older, but that is all the difference" (Edinburgh 2:4). However, this statement was contradicted by the very structure of the commissions (e.g., Commission 2 was "The Church in the Mission Field; Commission 6 was "The Home Base

By 1928 when the World Conference of Jerusalem met, the geographic expansion model of mission was being challenged. The relationship between older and younger churches received considerable attention (cf. Jerusalem 3: The Relations Between the Younger and Older Churches). The Chinese Christian leader S. C. Leung argued that “the time for two parallel organisations, the mission and the indigenous church, was past” (Yates 1994:67). Rufus Jones challenged the geographic distinction between the Christian West and non-Christian world: “We go to Jerusalem, then, not as members of a Christian nation to convert other nations which are not Christian, but as Christians within a nation far too largely non-Christian, who face within their own borders the competition of a rival movement as powerful, as dangerous, as insidious as any of the historic religions” (Jerusalem 1:273; quoted in Hogg 1952:247). Consideration of these issues would pave the way for the development of a missionary ecclesiology. However, that reflection was only in its infancy; the expansion model remained the norm.

In 1938 Kraemer⁵ posed the question that would set the tone for ecumenical thinking for at least a quarter of a century: “The church and all Christians ... are confronted with the question, what is the essential nature of the church, and what is its obligation to the world?” (quoted in Stransky 1991:688). The watchword of the 1937 meeting of the Oxford Life and Work Conference on Church Community and State that defined this emerging period was “let the church be the church.” The Church which had so long been ignored or taken for granted in missionary discussion now came to centre stage.

The third missionary conference in Tambaram 1938 marks the beginning of a new period of church-centred missiology. John Mott sounded this note in his opening address. “It is the church which is to be at the centre of our thinking ... the Divine Society founded by Christ and His apostles to accomplish His will in the world” (IMC 1939a 7:4). Bishop Azariah of Dornakal, one of the influential figures at Tambaram, also sounded a clarion call to recognize the central redemptive significance of the church. He opened his address with these words:

That the Church is the divine society created by God for the continuation in the world of the work that Jesus Christ began through his life, death, and resurrection is a truth that has not yet received universal recognition (IMC 1939a 3:32).

These opening summonses found frequent expression throughout the official report.

of Mission”) and the consistent use of language identifying non-western nations as “non-Christian” and western nations as “Christian” (Edinburgh 6:272).

⁵In 1936 Hendrik Kraemer received a *doctor honoris causa* (Honourary Ph.D) from the University of Utrecht on the occasion of the university’s 300th anniversary.

“World evangelism ... is inherent in the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ created by God to continue in the world the work which Jesus Christ began in His life and teaching, and consummated by His death and resurrection. This conception of the Church as the missionary to the world is given in the New Testament” (IMC 1939b:35). Indeed, the central subject of the entire Tambaram report is the church. As Newbigin points out: “the Church is the subject of almost every significant sentence about mission” (1980f:9; cf. Hogg 1952:297). This emphasis on the church led veteran Indian missionary E. Stanley Jones to complain that missions was taking a wrong road and that the proper concern for mission ought not be the church but the kingdom of God (Anderson 1988:107; Hogg 1952:298,425). Jones notwithstanding, mission took an ecclesiocentric path. In this emphasis on the church a new note was sounded: mission is not only an aspect of the church’s life but the church is constituted by mission. As the IMC historian Hogg says: “One point they [Tambaram Council] made pre-eminently clear: the mission is not a segment of the church’s life. On the contrary, the church exists to fulfill a divinely ordained mission ...” (Hogg 1952:298).

These insights would be developed further until, at Willingen, they were given consistent theological expression in the *missio Dei*. Tambaram and the future developments of a missionary ecclesiology in the missionary conferences of the IMC would play a significant formative role in the Newbigin’s ecclesiological formulations.

2.2.4. Summary

The first three decades of Newbigin’s life were significant for the future development of his ecclesiology. Early family life, subjects of study in college and seminary, service projects, significant people, and the theological formulations of the Tambaram Conference were among the life experiences that gave clear direction to Newbigin’s later ecclesiology.

Newbigin immediately became involved in the life of the church. He refers appreciatively to his involvement in St. Columba’s Presbyterian Church in Cambridge where George Barclay was pastor (1993h:14). During this time Newbigin did not author anything on ecclesiology. His first writing on the topic in the next decade would show evidence of a Christendom understanding of the church.

2.3. FROM A CHRISTENDOM ECCLESIOLOGY TO A MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY (1939-1959)

Newbigin’s first ecclesiological articulations came in the decade of the 1940s (1942; 1944a; 1948d). A comparison of these writings with his ecclesiological formulations in the next decade show that a shift had taken place from an understanding of the church shaped by Christendom to a missionary ecclesiology. Although by 1948 the impact of Newbigin’s missionary experience led him for the first time to refer to the church as missionary (1948d:10, 165), he does not yet develop this insight. The shift to a more consistent missionary ecclesiology would take place in the decade of the 1950s.

To understand this shift we must take account of two important formative factors in Newbigin’s life—his missionary experience and his close association with the ecumenical tradition during a time when the contours of a missionary ecclesiology were

taking shape. This section will briefly sketch this ecclesiological shift and then account for that change by describing Newbigin's missionary experience and involvement in the ecumenical tradition.

Newbigin's thinking changed significantly concerning the place of the church by the time he wrote *Sin and Salvation* in 1956 (1993h:137). While the church played a somewhat marginal role in his thought early in his missionary career, there is a gradual transition which brings the church to a much more central role. This shift can be seen by comparing a brief tract on the gospel (1942) with this new formulation (1956c).

The little booklet *What is the Gospel?* (1942) was part of the SCM study series written for Bible Study leaders in the Indian church. Following several sections on the faith, the authority of Scripture and the nature of God, Newbigin turns to the heart of the gospel as revealed in Jesus Christ. In the next nine sections he treats the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Following a section on the testimony of the apostles to the Lordship of Jesus, he devotes the next three sections to the "new powers which follow" (1942:15-17). Here we find a treatment of the Holy Spirit, the new relationship between the individual believer and God, and the freedom and good works of the believer. Tacked on to the end in one short section of one paragraph is a discussion of the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Here he speaks of the work of the Spirit in creating a new community of believers. So the order we find in this booklet is faith, gospel, Spirit, individual salvation, and church.

We can note the following. First, the gospel is treated primarily from an individual standpoint. The challenge in the first section is to each person to believe the testimony of Scripture. Then the gospel or the content of belief follows. The Holy Spirit is the One who makes the salvific work of Christ effective in producing a new relationship of freedom and good works. The church is then a community of individual believers who have believed and received the Holy Spirit. Second, there is no recognition of the indispensable and central place of the church as the primary instrument by which the gospel is transmitted. The challenge is to believe the testimony of Scripture. This can be contrasted with an emphasis that surfaces for the first time in *The Reunion of the Church* (1948):

If God's purpose of salvation could be accomplished by providing each one of us with an infallibly correct statement of the truth about Him expressed in the form of propositions, then Christ would have written a book. There would have then been no need for a Church... . It would be sufficient for each individual to know and accept what the book contained (1948d:131).

Newbigin emphasizes that we meet Christ in the Bible, but this cannot be understood in individualistic terms, in fact, "this meeting is always in the context of the fellowship of His people" (1948d:135). Third, there is no mention of the church as a missionary community. In keeping with Christendom ecclesiologies, the church is described simply as a community of individuals who have experienced the new powers of the Holy Spirit. Its instrumental role in the coming of God's kingdom is not even noted.

By the time he wrote *Sin and Salvation*, Newbigin had almost twenty years of missionary experience behind him. Commenting on the fact that the church had moved to a central place in his theology, he writes: "I found that the experience of missionary work compelled me to it. I saw that the kind of Protestantism in which I had been nourished belonged to a 'Christendom' context. In a missionary situation the Church

had to have a different logical place” (1993h:138). What was that logical place?

The order of themes in *Sin and Salvation* is as follows. Following three chapters on sin and one chapter on the preparation for salvation in the Old Testament the work of the Saviour follows. Chapter seven is entitled “How Salvation Becomes Ours.” Here the order has changed from that of the 1942 booklet. Instead of faith, gospel, Spirit, fruits of salvation for the individual, and church we find gospel, church, Spirit, faith, fruits of salvation. The church is no longer an addendum but finds a primary place after the gospel as the primary vehicle by which it is communicated. “Now I found that I had to begin with the Church—the point at which the unbeliever came into contact with the redemptive work of Christ—and then go on to speak of word and sacraments, faith, regeneration and justification” (1993h:137; cf. 1948d:29). In his preface Newbigin explains the logic of this decision:

When I came to write that chapter [How does salvation become ours?] I found that I had to make a decision about the order of the sections. In the tradition in which I was brought up it would be normal to begin with a section on ‘Faith’ and work through to a (probably brief) concluding section on the Church. After a good deal of reflection I decided to reverse the order... there seem to me to be two good reasons for the order I have adopted. Firstly, it is the order which the reader of the New Testament finds himself following: the Acts of the Apostles come before the Epistles—the fact of the Church before the clue to its inner life. Secondly, it is the order which the non-Christian has to follow when he comes to Christ. What he sees is a visible congregation in his village. It is that congregation which holds out to him the offer of salvation. Only when he has come within its fellowship does he (usually) come to any deep understanding of its inner source (1956c:8f.).

In the section on the church we no longer find a description of the church as a fellowship of redeemed individuals. Rather the question of how do the benefits of the gospel become mine is answered: “It becomes mine when I become part of this society, this fellowship, He left behind Him to be the continuation of His life on earth” (1956c:93). As he moves on to the Spirit, faith, and the benefits of salvation the church is never out of the picture. In fact, it is explicitly mentioned in each part. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the new man. This putting on of the new man means two things. First, it is “a constant participation in the life of the fellowship of God’s children, and in the means of grace with which it has been furnished” (1956c:113). Second, the task of witness to the world is noted—a theme not mentioned in 1942. “[T]he extension of this life in Christ will be seen in the acts of witness and service by which we go out to bring all things under the power of Christ’s atonement” (1956c:113; see also :124, 125).

While it was his writing of *Sin and Salvation* that brought the recognition of the ecclesiological shift that had taken place, we find a much more comprehensive, systematic and nuanced discussion of the church in two other books written during this time—*The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953d) and *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (1958b).

The central insight in Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology is expressed in the commissioning words of Jesus in John 20:21, a verse that would define his understanding of the missionary church to the last days of his life: “As the Father has

sent me, I am sending you.”⁶ This commission gives the church its existence and its identity: it is a body chosen and called to continue the kingdom mission of Jesus in this redemptive time period between the coming of Christ and his coming again (1953d:153; 1958b:17ff.). Mission is not one function or ministry of the church but rather, in the words of Emil Brunner that Newbigin is fond of quoting, “the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning” (Brunner 1931:108, quoted in 1953d:162). Or put in Latin, mission belongs to the *esse* of the church, not to the *bene esse* (1953d:163). Since the church has received the eschatological Spirit, it participates already in the end-time kingdom. This participation in the kingdom of God establishes the church, during this redemptive era, as a sign, first fruits, and instrument of the age to come (1953d:167). As such it is called to witness in life, word, and deed to the good news of the kingdom locally and to the ends of the earth (1958b:23f.).

2.3.1. *Newbigin’s Early Missionary Experience*

The shift to a missionary ecclesiology was the result of at least two factors—his missionary experience and his ecumenical experience. After his convalescence in Edinburgh and return to India, Newbigin spent seven years (1939-1947) in Kanchipuram, one of the seven most sacred cities to the Hindu. As a district missionary he oversaw the mission work in the city and the surrounding villages. When the South India United Church (SIUC: made up of former Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches) united with the Methodist and Anglican communions to form the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947, Newbigin was appointed as the bishop of Madurai. He laboured the next twelve years in that city (1947-1959). It was, in large part, this missionary experience that reshaped Newbigin’s understanding of the church.

2.3.2. *Ecclesiological Themes Arising Out of Missionary Experience*

A number of issues and themes arose out of this missionary experience that played a formative role in Newbigin’s ecclesiology. Seventeen such themes are noted here. The order of these themes is determined by Newbigin’s later mature ecclesiology. The question that will occupy us in this section is, how did Newbigin’s missionary experience shift his ecclesiology from a Christendom to a missionary understanding?

2.3.2.1. *Missionary Conviction Applied to the Church*

As a missionary Newbigin learned that the difference between most believers and a

⁶One of Newbigin’s last sermons given at Samford University in June 1997 is based on this text and given the title of the words of Jesus.

missionary is that the missionary knows he is in a place for one reason: to bear witness to the gospel faithfully. This is not one more task alongside others but shapes every aspect of his or her life. He would affirm in 1948 in Amsterdam that the church must proclaim the good news of the kingdom because “the Church’s duty to preach the gospel belongs to its very nature” (1948:32). This missionary conviction deepened as a result of his ministry in India. He recounts how his street preaching would often produce sharp encounters from questioners amidst a hostile crowd. “Such experiences test as with fire those views which first took intellectual shape in friendly battles round college coffee cups, test and also sharpen one’s missionary convictions” (1993h:52).

These missionary convictions as applied to the church in India gradually deepened throughout his time there. The church’s fundamental purpose is evangelistic (1993h:87): Newbigin’s experience in India, where the church is a tiny minority of the population in the midst of other religions made this clear. Later as he carried out his job as bishop he saw his whole task as developing missionary congregations (1993h:99).

2.3.2.2. The Church Chosen to Continue Christ’s Witness

This missionary conviction was nourished by an understanding that God had chosen a particular people to continue Christ’s witness to the salvation of the world. This conviction was fostered by the Indian context of his missionary experience. Preaching the gospel raised opposition in India. The gospel was “unwelcome teaching” to the Indian ear because of its historical particularity. Newbigin places this objection in the words of a hypothetical questioner: “We are inclined to ask: ‘Why should I study the history of this obscure and unattractive tribe? Why should I not study what God has done for my own people and my own land? Can I not find Him in these things?’” (1956c:44). Opposition to this particularity of the gospel raised the question of authority. What right did he have to preach the gospel in India? How could a missionary in India claim universal validity for a particular history—the history of the Jews culminating in Jesus?

Newbigin’s answer was twofold. First, the duty and authority of the Church to preach the gospel spring from the authority of Jesus Himself. Jesus received authority from God the Father to embody and preach good news. The mission of the church is continuing what Jesus began based on the authority of the name of Jesus (1948b:20f.). The texts that he refers to at this point to summarize this commitment (John 20:19-23 and Acts 1:1-8) will become foundational for Newbigin’s missionary understanding of the church. The second reason Newbigin gives in answer to the authority of the church to preach the gospel is a missionary understanding of the doctrine of election. The central theme of the Bible “is God’s choosing (election) of a people to be His own people, by whom He purposes to save the world” (1954e:75). The church has been chosen by Jesus and, therefore, it “has the duty and authority to preach the Gospel... because God has chosen it for this thing” (1948b:30). The doctrine of election became a central feature in Newbigin’s ecclesiology early as a result of his missionary experience in India (Hunsberger 1998:48-58).

2.3.2.3. The Witness of the Church in Word and Deed

A third conviction that continued to develop during this time as a result of his

missionary experience was that the witness to the gospel is given in word and deed. Newbigin early began the practice of street preaching. While he questioned the value and effectiveness of street preaching, he believed it to have some effect because it was clear that those who preached were also those who taught their boys and girls in the schools, helped the poor in their desperate poverty, were involved in attempts to make a more just society, and cared for their sick in the hospital (1994k:62). High schools, hospitals and dispensaries, leprosaria, orphanages, colleges, and agricultural co-operative societies were among the many institutions that western missions had established in India. Although Newbigin would have occasion to criticize these institutions in the mission of the Indian church, he recognized that the institutional work gave weight to the preaching and preaching gave point to the institutional work (1993h:53).

It was not only the institutions of mercy that shaped Newbigin's convictions about the importance of witness in deed; it was also the pervasive presence of the poor (1993h:73). The caste system, a growing population (5 million per year), the technological revolution, and natural disasters all contributed to poverty on a massive scale.

From the beginning of his ministry, Newbigin identified himself with the poor. E. H. Johnson, General Secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Christian Mission in 1951, summarizes Newbigin's solidarity with the marginalized as follows:

The message of His mighty acts, culminating in the life, the death, the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, must be preached. It preaches to all men, but in particular reaches out to the outcastes, the dispossessed, the poor.

Here is where Newbigin begins. He spends much of his time with the poor, for his task is to identify himself with them.... His mission is to be one with these who are struggling out of poverty, injustice, and filth.... He considers his primary task so to identify himself with those in trouble that they might feel that he is one of them, sympathetic with their needs and determined to help them. When the poor find their wells dry, he tries to help them get water. When a farmer is hurt, he goes to serve him. When a mother is deserted, he is there to find ways of support. He writes, "Surely it is of immense significance that the Church has become rooted here and among the lowest strata in society" (Johnson 1951:17).

The villages where Newbigin spent much of his time during this period were made up of "the inarticulate and exploited millions whose labour keeps the world going" and upon whom "that other world [the West] is built" (1993h:58). These were among the poorest in the world, the exploited untouchables, who were excluded from participation in the social and religious life of the nation by traditional Hindu law. These people were subject to systematic humiliation at every point. Newbigin was involved in numerous efforts to help improve their economic position, such as introducing high-yielding poultry and village school gardens (1993h:59).

While these efforts did not have big results, the gospel did. Later, he looked back at the church's involvement with the poor: "One could not fail to see that the Gospel was doing what it has always done, making it possible for those who were formerly 'no people' to become 'God's people'. The reality of the term Ghandi coined for these people—*Harijan*, meaning God's people—was actually experienced and enjoyed by those who had been enabled through Jesus to look up and say 'Father'" (1993h:59).

2.3.2.4. Incarnation, Involvement, and Identification

Newbigin's later descriptions of a missionary church as a congregation whose life is "deeply involved in the ordinary life of its neighbourhood" (1987a:20; 1989e:229) was also shaped during his missionary years. He learned and practiced this kind of "incarnation" as a missionary and learned of its importance to a faithful witness to the gospel. In his description of what a foreign missionary should be, Newbigin mentions the "principle of identification" with those to whom the missionary is sent, a principle "which derives its sanction from the Incarnation itself" (1945:88). If missionaries are to foster and enrich the pastoral and evangelistic work of the church, then they must "identify themselves much more closely with the life of the people... . This kind of identification will increasingly be the condition of any future missionary service in the Indian Church" (1945:92). He wrote these words seven years after he arrived as a district missionary in Kanchipuram. In those seven years in India and the years that followed Newbigin exhibited this principle in his own missionary practice.

Early, he involved himself in both the great and small problems of the villagers (1993h:51). His priorities and methods of missionary work put him in the midst of the people (1993h:55). The habit of quick one or two hour missionary visits to the villages that had been practiced by his predecessors ended with Newbigin. From the beginning he made it his practice to spend more time in the villages including overnight stays (1993h:57). He vigorously opposed the idea of a district missionary who ossified in the office away from the lives of people (1993h:61). He writes: "I did not think that the proper role of a foreign missionary was to sit at a desk and organize the work of Indian pastors and evangelists. I thought that he ought to be himself a pastor and evangelist sharing in their joys and sorrows as a colleague" (1993h:65; cf. 1945).

One sees this identification with the Indian people especially in two particular incidents in Newbigin's life. He was the first missionary who gave up his ministerial credentials in the Church of Scotland in order to become a minister in the South Indian United Church. This has become standard practice today but he was the pioneer in this identification (1993h:67). The other circumstance was the expected invasion of Madras by Japan in April 1942. The United States ordered all missionaries to leave. He describes the "unedifying spectacle generally known among Indians as the 'Great White Flight'" as a "cataract of missionaries" came down from the Kodai hills where they were spending their holidays. Newbigin believed that it was his "duty to stay with the church" (1993h:77) and thus donned Indian clothes and disappeared into one of the village congregations.

2.3.2.5. The Local Congregation: The Radiating Centre

Both word and deed along with identification with people in their needs are essential for a faithful witness. But Newbigin learned in India that what is even more essential is that it must be plain that those words and deeds flow from the radiating centre of a local community that believes the gospel. As he puts it: "What matters is that word and deed are not separated. What matters more is that they are seen to flow from a centre where Jesus Christ is confessed and worshipped" (1993h:53). It was through Newbigin's missionary experience that he learned the importance of a community that

embodies the gospel. In 1985 the picture of the church impressed on his mind at this time continued to give guidance to his ecclesiology (1994k:48-65). He writes: “My picture of the Church formed in those years is deeply etched in my mind” (e.g., 1994k:55). This was a picture to which he would return repeatedly. He expresses it in the early 1960s as follows:

During my visits to the hundreds of small villages in my old diocese in South India, I was often asked to speak to the non-Christians of the village just before going into the village church to conduct a service with the Christian congregation. I have often stood at the door of a little church, with the Christian congregation seated on the ground in the middle of a great circle of Hindus and Muslims standing around. As I have opened the Scriptures and tried to preach the Word of God to them, I have always known that my words would only carry weight, would only be believed, if those standing around could recognize in those seated in the middle that the promises of God were being fulfilled; if they could see that this new community in the village represented a new kind of body in which the old divisions of caste and education and temperament were being transcended in a new form of brotherhood. If they could not see anything of the kind, they would not be likely to believe (1961e:24; cf. Niles 1962:197).

He also saw “many who where sufficiently interested by what they had experienced in school, in hospital, in listening to a street preacher or in reading a Gospel, to want to come and listen in the place where it all had its centre” (1993h:53f.). And so the importance of a congregation that believes and embodies the gospel was etched in his mind. Since these “village congregations were the foundation for everything else” (1993h:118), Newbigin spent much time visiting these congregations encouraging them to be signs of the kingdom, breaking down the distinction between church and mission, promoting unity, and building up local leadership in the congregation. A reading of Newbigin’s memoirs as a bishop in the churches of Madurai (1951c) impresses one with the fundamental commitment he had to “helping each one of them to be a living sign and foretaste of the Kingdom” (1993h:99).

Enabling these congregations to understand their proper nature was complicated by the history of the relationship between the Indian church and western missions. As a young bishop Newbigin realized that many of the congregations of Madurai saw themselves as branches of an organization whose headquarters was in the old mission station now occupied by an Indian successor of the former western missionary. In this setting he found that one of his most important tasks as a bishop was “to help local congregations to understand their real nature as local manifestations of the full reality of the Catholic Church, not local branches of it” (1982a:152). In this experience “the significance and integrity of the local congregation” (*ibid*) was firmly impressed upon him.

2.3.2.6. The Work of the Spirit in the Mission of the Church

One of the things that Newbigin noticed quickly as a young missionary in Kanchi was that even though he was involved in the kinds of activities a missionary ought to be doing, the conversions and baptisms seemed to have no visible connection with his activities. A later experience in Madras of taking confession of faith from a number of new converts taught him the same thing. No human strategy could program conversion.

It was a work of the Spirit operating through several different experiences spread over many years. The witness of the church was secondary to the witness of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting later on this fact in the context of his work in India Newbigin concludes:

But one factor was common to all: it was the presence of a believing, worshipping, celebrating congregation of people deeply involved in the ordinary life of their neighbourhood. These many different happenings had their centre there, and drew those whose lives had been touched in so many different ways to ask what was the source from which all this radiated. This was no humanly devised programme for mission. It was the work of the Spirit, present in the life of the congregation, flowing out into the community through the faithful words and deeds of its members (1987a:19f.).

At this time Newbigin was also deeply shaped by Roland Allen. In *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912) Allen argued that the methods of western missions stood in contradiction with the practice of St. Paul. What was the fundamental difference between Paul and western missions? According to Newbigin: "Allen answers that, from the start, the Apostle assumed the power and sufficiency of the living Holy Spirit to create, sustain, and guide the Church, and to equip it with all the gifts and abilities needed for its life" (1950b:2). Newbigin's own missionary practice squared with Allen's observations. His own experiments in church leadership led to thriving evangelistic congregations (1993h:117, 138f.). This deepened Newbigin's confidence that the mission of the church was first and foremost a work of the Spirit. Reflecting on his missionary experience in an address entitled "Missions and the Work of the Holy Spirit" (1960) he states that the reason why the work of the Spirit became central to his thinking was "not through pure theological reflection in a state of abstraction from the world, but rather by facing concrete and ordinary practical missionary experiences" (1994k:23).

2.3.2.7. The Kingdom of God and History

Already during his Westminster days Newbigin struggled with a Biblical eschatology and its relationship to historical progress. While in India in 1941, he was invited to give a series of lectures at the United Theological College in Bangalore. He chose the topic "The Kingdom of God and the Idea of Progress" (1941). In those lectures he criticizes current notions of progress in western culture, emphasizes the importance of history, and develops a Biblical eschatology by criticizing both a view of the kingdom that is this-worldly, optimistic, and entirely realized, and a view that is otherworldly, pessimistic, and entirely future. He solves the issue of the continuity and discontinuity between the kingdom and history with an exposition of death and resurrection.

Newbigin's time in India only nourished these convictions. Hindu philosophy displays an ahistorical mindset that Newbigin would oppose throughout his life. He notes the surprise of one of the Hindu monks in Kanchi at his statement that he was willing to stake his future on the historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1998b:4). The importance of history, God's revelation in history, and the revelation of the culmination of world history in the events of Jesus Christ all receive increasing attention during this time in the Hindu environment.

His eschatological views developed further in his participation with the ecumenical

movement. In his book *Hope in Action* (1962), Hans Jochen Margull argues that the developments at the Willingen meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) (1952) and the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (1954) mark the entry of the eschatological into the ecumenical movement (Margull 1962:13-37). Commenting on Evanston, Margull observes: “This step marks *the breakthrough of eschatology* in the ecumenical discussion, which was immediately followed by the breakthrough of the eschatological ground of missions” (Margull 1962:36, emphasis his). Newbigin was deeply involved in both Willingen and Evanston. He wrote the statement that was finally adopted at Willingen entitled *The Missionary Obligation of the Church* (Willingen 1952). He chaired the meeting of the famous twenty-five (1993h:123-125, 131, 140) that was appointed by the WCC Central Committee in 1950 to prepare for the theme at Evanston of ‘Christ the Hope of the World.’ Their task was “to clarify the nature of our hope for human history as distinct both from the nineteenth-century idea of progress and the popular religious idea of personal immortality” (1993h:124). The intense struggle between the different eschatological orientations of the Europeans and the Americans sharpened Newbigin’s own eschatology, which lay somewhere in between the two.

2.3.2.8. The Church as Sign, Foretaste, and Instrument of the Kingdom

This emphasis on the eschatological context of the church led Newbigin to his most characteristic description of the church. The church is a sign pointing men and women to the kingdom of God. The church is the first fruits, deposit, or foretaste of the kingdom. It is a community that already has a real enjoyment now of the salvation of God’s kingdom. The church is an instrument or agent that God uses for his kingdom work today. This threefold description of the church that becomes so common throughout Newbigin’s life emerges for the first time in the Kerr Lectures (1953d:166). From that point on these ecclesiological images become central for Newbigin.

During this period the influence of Hoekendijk’s functional ecclesiology which emphasizes the church as exclusively an instrument of the kingdom motivated Newbigin to underline the Biblical description of the church as both first fruits and instrument (1953d:168-174). According to Hoekendijk the church’s nature could be defined by its instrumental role in the world. Against this Newbigin believed the church could only be an instrument of the kingdom if it was first of all the first fruits of the kingdom.

2.3.2.9. The Relation of the Church to Western Missions

The critical role which the village congregation played in drawing people to Christ highlighted three barriers to the missionary witness of these local churches. First, the relationship of western missions to the village churches was hindering the emergence of a missionary congregation. Second, western forms of ministerial leadership threatened a spontaneous evangelizing church. Third, caste and denominational division threatened the witness of the gospel. Newbigin devoted himself to these concerns during his missionary work. The next three subsections will expand on each of these.

Newbigin’s understanding of the church as a missionary congregation was sharpened during these early missionary years by his experience of the relationship between the western missionary organizations and the Indian church. Newbigin pointed out that

western missionary practices hampered the church's calling to be a missionary congregation:

At this stage the Mission necessarily overshadowed the Church, and to the casual onlooker the impression given was that the whole organization (Mission-cum-Church) was a large, heavily financed organization engaged in a series of activities somewhat parallel to the government social services, and building up round itself a community of people who were the primary beneficiaries of those activities.... in spite of all we believe and teach about the Church, to the ordinary man both inside and out it is apt to appear not very different from the caricature given above.... there seems to be a peculiarly grave danger that the real character of the Church, as the congregation of those who are bound to Christ by faith, should be obscured by its character as a heavily financed and highly centralized organization based on paid agents (1945:86f.).

In 1946, he wrote a letter about the situation in Madras. It describes a church that had become introverted and involved in institutional maintenance with a "complete absence of evangelistic outreach." This depiction demonstrates Newbigin's awareness of the devastating effects of a wrong understanding of the relation between church and mission.

Madras is a field which has suffered tragically from a wrong policy with regard to the relations of Church and Mission. Pursuing the ideals of independence and self-support, and seeing that the Madras congregations comprised many people of wealth who could well support their own churches, missions have largely withdrawn from Madras except for the maintenance of large institutions. But if independence and self-support are interpreted too narrowly, they lead only to sterile introversion, the fruits of which are perpetual internal quarrels and the complete absence of evangelistic outreach. The unity of Church and Mission should have been secured and self-support gradually developed within that unity. That, at least, seems to be the moral to be drawn from the situation in Madras. The congregations are largely ineffective, repudiate any responsibility for or relation with the Mission, and spend their time in disgraceful quarrels (1993h:66).

We can summarize the problems Newbigin encountered with the current relation between church and missions with two words: separation and dependence.

The first problem was that mission had been separated from the church, leaving the impression that they were two different societies with different functions. This had obscured the missionary nature of the church. Missionary work came to be considered primarily the business of full-time specialists employed by mission agencies. While it is the duty of all church folk to support mission work by giving and praying, the work is taken care of by full-time paid agents (1958b:16). However, for Newbigin the "missionary agency" that is called to preach the gospel is the church (1950:141f.; 1958b:16f.). Unfortunately the mission-church relationship in India during the early 20th century had obscured the theological point that the church is mission. Mission and church are conceived as two parallel organizations and this has profoundly corrupted the nature of both (1950:142). No longer is the congregation considered to be the "fundamental unit of the Christian church" (1951c:4).

The idea that the mission can be an enterprise apart from the Church, acting over its head, directed from elsewhere, and the Church a receptacle into which the products of mission can be deposited, is surely one which corrupts both. The truth is that the Church is not the Church in any New Testament sense unless it *is* mission. The Church is the outflowing of God's love into the world. It is the body of Christ who came to seek and save the lost and, if it is not all the time actively seeking and saving, it is—to that extent—not the Church. I like very much the phrase of Emil Brunner, "The Church

exists by mission as fire exists by burning'... By detaching mission from the Church, and thinking of it as a separate activity, we have grievously corrupted in practice our whole conception of what the Church is (1950:142).

When the church is no longer regarded as mission but as a receptacle for the results of missionary activity, it corrupts both the congregational life of the local church and Christian action in the world (1958b:16). A separation of mission from church corrupts the congregational life by forcing it into passivity: viewing itself as a container for converts and as an institution constantly receiving outside funds. This same separation distorted the Indian church's understanding of Christian action in the world: mission was considered the maintenance of large institutions, such as schools and hospitals, which eclipsed the "primary witness" of all believers in their tasks and occupations (1960n:28). Maintaining these organizations that had been established in past generations was draining the human resources of the church. There were no fresh impulses for creative work and witness in a new situation with changing needs. The enormous preponderance of the church's witness occurred where the church members spent most of their time—at work in the office, field, home or shops. Newbigin was convinced that a "much greater proportion of our energy... must be put into this work of helping our lay members of different professions and occupations in the day-to-day details of their Christian warfare" (1951c:6). Thus, when church is separated from mission, the church is reduced to a repository for converts and mission is reduced to the management of large institutions, which paralyzes the missionary calling of believers.

The second problem Newbigin encountered in the relation between church and mission was that the Indian church was heavily dependent on western missionary organizations. These patterns of dependence in India were having a crippling effect on the church. Instead of being independent from the beginning they had learned to depend upon the western church for money, leaders, and patterns of church life (1960k; 1960n:29). In a lecture in 1959 at the Founding Assembly of the East Asian Christian Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, Newbigin pleaded with the Asian churches not to continue the patterns of missionary work that had been practiced by the West but to attend to more Biblical models (1960k:40).

Over against the current practice of western mission organizations Newbigin argues that the thinking of Roland Allen is much more faithful to the Scriptural model (1951b:2).⁷ Allen calls the church to reconsider its missionary methods by contrasting them with the missionary work of the apostle Paul (Allen 1962a, b: the former originally published in 1912, the latter in 1927). The missionary methods of Paul and the current western missionary organizations clash at four points. First, Paul spent ten years in Asia Minor and then considered his missionary work done in those regions. Western missions had been involved in missionary work in India for 150 years and the work was far from done. Second, the churches of Asia Minor were fully equipped with an ordained ministry and able to carry on their own life. The churches in India were still heavily dependent on the churches of the West for leadership. Third, the churches of Asia Minor were largely independent financially. They were treated as fully mature churches, sisters of the church in Jerusalem. The churches in India, on the other hand, were still heavily dependent financially on the churches of the West. This financial dependence contributed to an immaturity that characterized the Indian church. Finally, Paul did not attempt to shape the life of the churches in Asia Minor according to the pattern of the

⁷In the American edition of Allen's books, Newbigin wrote an introduction strongly recommending the theses put forth by the author (1962c, d).

church in Judea. There was a great deal of freedom for the church to shape their own life in the light of the gospel by the work of the Spirit. The Indian church had for years been patterned after the western church in worship, structure, and theological education (1960n:29). What was the underlying difference between the apostle Paul and western missions organizations? Allen answers that from the very start Paul believed that the power of the Spirit would create, uphold, and guide the Church (1960k:39; 1960n). The Spirit would equip the church with all the gifts—financial and ministerial—that would be necessary to sustain and nourish its life.

Newbigin did not simply theorize about what was wrong but also constructively sought to build new models and practices that would lead to a more independent church. When, as a result of a flurry of conversions in Dharapuram at the northern border of the diocese, a great number of people came asking for baptism, Newbigin saw an opportunity to establish a different pattern that would lead to a truly responsible church. The traditional practice would have been to launch a big campaign among the American churches, raise lots of money and new workers, and establish these churches with the newly paid workers. But this would have led to the old patterns of dependence on foreign money and leadership. With the backing of the diocesan council, Newbigin embarked on a different path. It was a six point plan.

First, identify the person that God had used to bring about this new interest in the gospel and accept him as the leader that God had chosen. Second, baptize without delay the people who had made clear their intention to turn from idols to serve the living God. Third, provide a team of four workers who, like Timothy and Titus, would assist the new leaders by providing an intensive teaching opportunity. Fourth, at the end of this period confirm and receive these people into full communion. At the confirmation of the people Newbigin 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” (1958b:32). Newbigin comments that when that is the approach, “the effect is that the new congregation takes it for granted from the first day that being a Christian is being part of a mission—and the Gospel spreads. To deny that responsibility to the young church is to do it an irreparable injury” (*ibid*). Fifth, provide a long period of training—normally four years—for the leader to prepare him for ordination. This training is to be done in the villages when there is no field work to be done. Sixth, the work of the village leader is to be supported and supplemented—but not displaced—by the teaching ministry of fully trained and paid pastors (1993h:138f.). This plan was put into effect from 1954-1959. During this time twenty new village congregations were born through the spontaneous witness of these people. Newbigin comments: “They were, however small, truly indigenous and responsible expressions of Christian faith. I believed, and I still believe, that this is where the power of the Gospel is to be seen and known” (1993h:139). His successor George Devadoss did not approve of this experiment and the program was discontinued (cf. Wingate 1983 for analysis of this experiment). In a paper published in 1953 Newbigin wrote why he believed—in spite of his successor’s views⁸—that this experiment was so important for a missionary church.

⁸In Andrew Wingate’s discussion of this experiment he writes that the “plan may have been ahead of its time” and “in the long run could surely have been the right answer.” Unfortunately, “it was never given a chance and was too dependent on his [Newbigin’s] personal vision and initiative” (Wingate 1983:58).

When a new congregation understands from the beginning that the responsibility for its own life is a responsibility which it must itself discharge before God, it can stand on its own feet and propagate its own faith without the presence of a resident paid worker. On the other hand there is also abundant evidence to show that if, at the beginning, a new congregation is taught to lean upon a paid worker sent from outside, it will be almost impossible for it to outgrow that dependence (1953e:354).

2.3.2.10. Church Leadership

As the previous section has already shown, it was not only patterns of missions-church relationships that prevented a missionary church from emerging; it was also patterns of church leadership. Leadership in a missionary church has been a dominant concern throughout Newbigin's life. This theme appears in perhaps his most important book published near the end of his life. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Newbigin writes a whole chapter on "Ministerial Leadership for a Missionary Congregation" (1989e:234-241). Newbigin's early missionary experience was a catalyst for this enduring concern. He writes that the development of local ecclesiastical church leadership was one of his main preoccupations for the whole of the twelve years he was in Madurai (1993h:118).

In his Indian missionary experience, three factors pushed issues of leadership for a missionary congregation to the forefront. First, Newbigin struggled with the relationship of western missions organizations to indigenous churches. Like Saul's armour on David, western missions had weighed down the Indian church with certain forms of leadership that required advanced levels of education and large amounts of money. These western forms of leadership patterns and training had forced the church in India to depend upon the western church and its money. New patterns of leadership and theological education had to be a priority. During his time in India, Newbigin was deeply involved in experiments in the field of indigenous leadership and theological training (see previous section; 1993h:138-140; 1994k:30; Wingate 1983).

Western missions contributed to the problem of leadership in the church in another way. The Indian pastorate had taken a subordinate position under the administrative post that had been filled by the district missionary. A hierarchy had been built up in which the key posts were held by western missionaries: district missionaries, superintendents of hospitals, principals of schools and colleges, etc. Under these respected administrators a hierarchy of Indian workers came into being—pastors, catechists, evangelists, teacher-catechists, teachers, Bible women—each group conscious of its place in the hierarchy. The chief position of honour was the district missionary with his desk, files, and safe. The administrative had triumphed over the pastoral in the Indian church (1945:87). The church was more a foreign organization than an indigenized community of good news.

The administrative policy of the western missions organizations did not merely frustrate a few missionaries. The steady pursuit of this policy, not only in India but in all so-called Third World countries, caused a lack of missionary consciousness in the life of the churches (1993h:65). Mission was the work of a western organization. The church was an insignificant container for converts when compared with the real administrative work of mission. In other words, mission and church were separated structurally by this policy.

Over against this practice, Newbigin called for a dismantling of this system and for a new role for the foreign missionary. But probably the most significant action he took was the training of Indian pastoral leadership. "I was sure," Newbigin writes, "that the

strengthening of local leadership in the villages was the key to future expansion. It was the same principle that I had learned in the Cambridge SCM, that the health of the whole depends on the health of the smallest unit” (1993h:64).

A second group of experiences forced Newbigin to reflect on church leadership for a missionary congregation: issues of church reunion. Prior to the reunion of 1947, matters of church leadership in the united church were central to the whole discussion. In fact, the form of ministry that was to be accepted in the new united church had become an insurmountable problem. Anglican church leaders claimed that the ministerial order—specifically the historical episcopate—was a necessary element in the united church; they demanded that all other ministers must submit to a supplemental ordination. Many SIUC and Methodist ministers did not agree. Newbigin played a crucial and critical role in defining a mediating position that ultimately contributed to a resolution and the union of 1947. It is important for our purposes to note two things. First, the controversy forced Newbigin to reflect theologically on the nature of the church. Was apostolic succession a necessary element in the church? In this connection an important development in Newbigin’s ecclesiology was the reading of Michael Ramsey’s book *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1993h:70; cf. Ramsey 1936). This book was, for Newbigin, “the first bridge of understanding which enabled a Protestant to begin to enter into the Catholic understanding of the Church.” Even more importantly for Newbigin’s ecclesiology was the fact that this book compelled reflection on the relationship between the structure of the church and the gospel it embodied. He learned from Ramsey’s main thesis that “the structure of the church is itself an expression of the Gospel” (1975e:172; cf. for example, Ramsey 1956:50). In terms of ecclesiology, Ramsey’s book convinced him of three things: the church cannot be defined solely in terms of the word and sacraments; that a body existing in unbroken continuity through history was central to a proper understanding of the church; and that the ministry of bishops in succession with the apostolic church could play an important role in the life of the church in the present (1982a:149f.). Newbigin’s later ecclesiological formulations in *Household of God* (1953) that appreciate both the Protestant and the Catholic ecclesiologies was forged during this time. A second observation to be made about Newbigin’s struggle with church leadership in the reunion discussions was that his deliberation of these issues always centred on what kind of ministerial leadership would produce a missionary church in India.

After the reunion of the church a whole new set of issues obligated Newbigin to continue theological reflection on church leadership. Four different confessional traditions with four different ministerial orders were now united in one church. This produced complex and delicate problems. Throughout this time the guiding principle continued to be what kind of leadership would contribute to a missionary church.

The third and final experience that led Newbigin to fresh consideration of church leadership was his appointment as bishop. Newbigin was a Presbyterian! What was the role and calling of a bishop? How could a bishop contribute to making the church what it is called to be? His ministry as a bishop also opened up the opportunity to pastor pastors and urge them to be what they are called to be.

We will take up in some detail Newbigin’s theological work on church leadership at a later point (6.6.). At present it is important simply to recount how Newbigin’s missionary experience led him to a deeper understanding of the importance of church leadership for a missionary church. Struggling with issues of western missions and the Indian church, unifying leadership in a united church, and defining the role and responsibility of a bishop contributed to this reflection.

2.3.2.11. Ecclesial Unity and Mission

Newbigin's passion for the unity of the church is well known. This passion was forged in the heat of various controversies, concrete problems, and ministry responsibilities that took place during his missionary career. There are at least three experiences that forced Newbigin to consider the issue of church unity.

The first was his missionary experience. He notes that the western churches manifest an "astounding complacency" about disunity "which so plainly and ostentatiously flouts the declared will of Church's Lord" (1948d:9). This indifference contrasted sharply with the younger churches who, as a minority facing ancient and powerful systems, felt bound together by what they held in common. Newbigin believed that it was the missionary impulse that motivated these younger churches to pursue unity, while a loss of missionary identity in the western churches led to a scandalous indifference. Further, Newbigin was deeply aware that it was only if unbelievers could see a "new community in the village represent[ing] a new kind of body in which the old divisions of caste and education and temperament were being transcended in a new form of brotherhood" (1961e:24) that they would believe the gospel. Denominational divisions exported to India by western missions and the hostilities of the deep-rooted caste system flared up in disgraceful quarrels. However, the younger churches as a minority amidst a hostile, Hindu majority understood the importance of unity. This experience further confirmed his ecumenical commitment.

During this time Newbigin's deep conviction about the importance of unity for a missionary church forced him to wage battle for ecclesial unity on two fronts: nationally, in South India, and internationally, in the World Council of Churches. Only a few years after his arrival in India he was drawn into the ongoing discussions on the reunion of the church. In the early 1940s, the movement which had been initiated to bring together the Anglican, Methodist, and South India United Church (Presbyterian and Congregationalist) had reached an impasse. The early initiators and leaders were dying or retiring. There was much weariness about the matter since talks over a quarter of century had produced nothing. Newbigin remarked that "some of my colleagues openly regarded the whole enterprise as a waste of time and a diversion of energy from the real business of a missionary" (1993h:69). For Newbigin, unity and mission could not so easily be separated and so he pursued the reunion of the church with fervour. In 1942, he was elected as the convener of the Union Committee of the Madras Council. Subsequently he was elected to convene the Committee of the South India United Church as a whole. This launched him into discussions about church unity. Both in India and in England Newbigin played a central role in the struggle that eventually led to the formation of the Church of South India in 1948.

The experience of the unity of the CSI and its importance for a faithful witness was a theme that was often raised in Newbigin's later writings. His visits as a bishop became the occasion by which the disparate churches in Madurai began to know the reality of unity (1982a:150). This unity produced a church much more concerned for witness to the kingdom. Reflecting back on his Indian ministry, Newbigin noted that before 1947 the churches he knew in India were "separate congregations each concerned about its own affairs" (1975c:25). After union, congregations were more willing to think about the needs of the city and to become deeply involved in addressing the social problems of the city. Newbigin writes that "no one could live through the experience that I have had, from 1936 to 1947, and from 1965 to last year [1974], without being conscious of

the difference” (*ibid.*). For Newbigin “union was not just a matter of organisational efficiency, but a matter of learning from one another to be more truly the Church of Christ.” It was also true, he went on to say, “that a united church is in a position to think and work for the whole community more easily and more effectively than a number of bodies which are committed to nothing more than occasional co-operation” (*ibid.*). These words were written a couple of decades after this time when “ecclesiastical joinery” was pitted against concerns for justice, peace and human survival. Newbigin’s missionary experience in a united church in India taught him that this is a false dichotomy; mission and unity belong together.

This struggle for unity in South India did not only produce new models for unity, but also, as Marcus Ward has noted, led to a deepened reflection on the nature of the church. Ward specifically mentions the ecclesiological awareness of Newbigin in *The Reunion of the Church* that had come “out of the life of the Church of South India and rais[ed] general issues of primary importance” (Ward 1953:155). He notes that it was this struggle in South India that led to the (then) upcoming Kerr Lectures, in which Newbigin would formulate the ecclesiological understandings gained from this whole process. Those Kerr Lectures were published under the title *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953d).

In a similar way Newbigin was forced to reflect on the doctrine of the church as he was drawn into discussions in the World Council of Churches on the nature of unity. He was asked to comment on the famous ‘Toronto Statement’ on unity (1951a). The issue was ecclesiology. In the Toronto Statement the WCC attempted to assuage the fears of member churches by assuring them that membership in the WCC did not mean they had to compromise their own conflicting ecclesiologies since the WCC was neutral on the matter. He challenged this stance, arguing that models of unity always give some kind of answer to the ecclesiological question and that the present form was the wrong answer.

This comment on the ‘Toronto Statement’ led Newbigin into a deeper involvement in the ecumenical movement with questions of mission and unity. He chaired a session of the WCC Central Committee at Rolle in 1951 that produced “the most explicit and significant document on this interrelationship [mission and unity] that had yet appeared” (Saayman 1984:14; cf. Bosch 1991:459; Bassham 1979:31). Newbigin continued in further discussions in the Faith and Order division of the WCC that wrestled with the question concerning the nature of unity which the WCC was seeking. He delivered a lecture at the Evanston Assembly in which he argued that the proper form of churchly unity included a local and an ecumenical dimension (1955:15; 1991i:1044). In the summer of 1958 Newbigin was asked to prepare a paper articulating more fully what he meant by ‘churchly unity.’ The debate on this paper led to a minute addressed to the central committee. In this paper, presented to the Working Committee, Newbigin calls the WCC to take the next step and face questions of ecclesiology and the nature of unity. He details his views on the type of unity which is to be sought—an organic unity with local and ecumenical dimensions. After this paper was revised it was passed along, each time with further revisions, to the Central Committee of the WCC and then on to the New Delhi assembly where it was adopted (New Delhi 1962:116). This now famous New Delhi Statement on Unity was shaped to a great extent by Newbigin (Fey 1970:148f.). These ecumenical discussions challenged Newbigin continuously to develop his ecclesiology.

2.3.2.12. Church, Gospel, and Culture

In *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986e), Newbigin begins his profile of western culture with the following words: “A missionary going to serve in another country is advised to make a thorough study of its culture. When I was preparing to go to India, and during my years there, I spent much time in trying to understand the whole complex of ideas and practices that make up what western peoples during the past 150 years have called ‘Hinduism’” (1986e:21). He goes on to say that wrestling with questions of gospel and culture enabled him to see how he had been blinded to many assumptions of his European worldview.

Those questions of gospel and culture were forced upon Newbigin by a number of experiences: learning a new language, hearing a different “explanation” of his broken leg, proclaiming the gospel on the streets of India, teaching the book of Mark to villagers, and studying the Upanishads and the gospel of John with monks at the Ramakrishna monastery.

Newbigin’s lengthy convalescence before his return to India in 1939 offered him a unique opportunity to master the Tamil tongue. He learned its intricacies and became an expert linguist in both the traditional Brahmin Tamil with Sanskrit roots and the contemporary Tamil that used only Dravidian roots (Dharmaraj 1969; Sundkler 1954:302; Jebaraj 1969; Devanesan 1969; Gnanadason 1969). Learning Tamil had implications that went far beyond the mastery of a particular language. Newbigin began to see things in a new light. He began to realize how language shapes one’s lens for understanding and viewing the world. His mastery of Tamil opened up the Hindu worldview. As a result of this experience, he later said that he felt “the immense power and rationality of the Vedantin’s vision of reality—in many ways much more powerful and rational than the ‘modern’ world view” (1982c:9). In his later writings Newbigin reflected more systematically on how the worldview of a culture shapes language.

Breaking his leg, an event which may have been a “decisive turning point in his life” (Veldhorst 1989:6), also provided an opportunity to learn about the way culture shapes our understanding of the world and the gospel. Looking back, Newbigin described himself as a young missionary who was confident of his criticism of Hinduism based on the work of Christ. However, he learned to see that his assumptions were shaped more by his own culture than he realized and that immersion in another culture enabled him to gain a critical stance in relation to western culture (1986e:21). The experience of breaking his leg was a first step in that process. He explained the event in terms of the stupidity of the driver. An Indian pastor explained it as the will of God (1983d:18; 1993h:44). This set in motion a process that would lead him to see how his “explanation” was governed by the cause-and-effect reductionism of a naturalism and scientism that shaped western culture (1983d:18).

His street preaching also provided an opportunity for deepening his understanding of gospel and culture. As he preached the gospel on the streets of India, he wrestled with the question how one could communicate the gospel in the language and categories shaped by Hinduism and still remain faithful to the gospel. His later reflections on that experience are illuminating (1978b:1-3). How can one preach to a crowd of people who have never heard of Jesus? The evangelist must use the language of the hearers. Yet that language uses terms that reflect a worldview by which the hearers make sense of their world. Their language expresses commitments that are irreconcilable with the gospel. How can the gospel be expressed in a way that is faithful to the gospel itself and relevant to the culture? This question burned itself into Newbigin’s heart.

As a young missionary explaining the book of Mark to village teachers in India,

Newbigin was also challenged to rethink his syncretistic fusion of gospel and western culture. Trying to make sense of the miracle stories in India the way he had learned in British theological college brought bewildered questions from his listeners and drew the response, “Why are you making such heavy weather over a perfectly simple example?” The villager who had posed this question proceeded to recount a number of healings and exorcisms that had taken place in his village congregation. If only he could induct that villager into his own western culture, Newbigin thought, he would be able to “see things as they really are” (1994k:99). At this point he recognized that the Indian’s worldview was much closer to the gospel of Mark than was his own western understanding (*ibid.*). That which presents a problem for the modern scientific worldview is no problem at all in India. “Christ was already known as the one who heals and casts out devils” (1978a:5). The evangelist must try to understand the culture through the spectacles provided by the gospel rather than the other way round.

Early in his years in Kanchipuram, Newbigin began the practice of spending time studying the Svetasvara Upanishad and John’s gospel with Hindu monks at the Ramakrishna monastery. He learned to “see the profound rationality of the world-view of the Vedanta” (1993h:54) and to see how the Hindu viewed the Christian. For the Hindu, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ belonged to the world of *maya*. It was precisely this encounter with the Hindu worldview that would lead Newbigin to place such emphasis on revelation as the acts of God in history. This is illustrated by his evaluation of contrasting interpretations of *bhakti* Hinduism. One of the teachers at the Ramakrishna monastery was a respected teacher in the school of Visishtadvaita, a *bhakti* form of Hinduism in the tradition of Ramanuja’s thought. Rudolf Otto had argued that this form of Hinduism had many close parallels with Christianity (Otto 1930). Hendrik Kraemer critiqued Otto in *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Kraemer 1938:168-173). Kraemer argued that Hindu monism had not been overcome in Ramanuja’s thought. A serious concern for history and the world is entirely absent from the whole field of *bhakti* theology and experience (Kraemer 1938:171). Newbigin concluded that Kraemer had more fairly evaluated *bhakti* religion. Newbigin’s view of the relationship of the gospel to other religions was shaped significantly by Kraemer’s “subversive fulfillment” (1992e:80) This study of a form of Hinduism, purportedly continuous with the gospel, led Newbigin to recognize a deeper discontinuity.

2.3.2.13. Mission in the Public Square

The context in which Newbigin carried out his first bishopric in Madurai (1948-1959) was charged with tension. In the wake of independence an explosive mixture of renascent Hinduism, a budding Communism, and a powerful secularism all vied for the hearts of people during this revolutionary time of nation building (Devanandan 1956:1-39). The double-pronged threat of Hinduism and Communism is pictured in two processions that Newbigin witnessed one Sunday evening. The first was a Hindu parade in which an idol was carried by a number of men, accompanied by Brahmins chanting slogans from the Vedas, and followed by a crowd. The second was a Communist demonstration in which a rigidly disciplined crowd marching four abreast, arm in arm, chanted slogans in unison directed by the leaders (1951c:56f.). Newbigin challenged both secularism and Hinduism in the sphere of education. Under the syncretistic acceptance of Hinduism and the religious tolerance of secularism, the government limited the right of Christians to teach the Bible, even in Christian schools. Newbigin comments: “These two factors [Vedanta philosophy and secularism] powerfully reinforce one another. Their effect is that ‘religious neutrality’ becomes a determination

to push religion to a harmless place at the periphery of life, in which syncretism appears as much a necessity of life as it did to the Roman empire” (1951c:61). While Newbigin was sympathetic with the explosive religious situation that gave rise to this policy he remarks that “we must constantly resist and expose the fallacy that ‘education’ is neutral and ‘religion’ an optional extra” (1951c:60).

Hinduism threatened the church in two ways (Johnson 1952:14). First, its elastic syncretism threatened to neutralize the gospel and render it powerless. Jesus can be regarded as another manifestation of God along with numerous other idols. Christianity becomes a drop in the ocean of Hinduism. Second, economic, social, and political pressure is effective in a country where jobs are scarce (1951c:91). While the official government policy was religious freedom, the coercive pressure was real.

Communism was appealing to the university students and the dispossessed. Poverty, economic injustice, deep resentment toward Britain, impatience with the speed of development in technology and in material prosperity, and the failure of western missions all combined to make communism an attractive option. Raymond Dudley, a former missionary to Madurai, assessed the threat of communism in a letter to Newbigin:

In spite of 120 years of history, and in spite of our great institutions, even yet we know all too little as to how to redeem village life... . Sometimes I wonder if the communists will combine with the outcastes (including Christians) in a strenuous protest that missions have done little to raise the standard of living of poor village people (1993h:116).

Upon independence India declared itself to be a secular state. It quickly entered the global race to master western ideas, technology, and institutions. This provoked a counter awakening in Hinduism. The combination of these factors created a new and revolutionary India.

How was the church to be a faithful witness in all this? After commenting that “village congregations were the foundation for everything else,” he makes an important observation: “If the Gospel was to make its full impact on all the vast, varied and profound experience of India, leaders were needed who had really come to grips at a deep level with the issues which were posed for the Church not only by traditional Hinduism but also by the new intellectual and spiritual movements that were agitating the newly free nation” (1993h:118). Early in 1951 Hendrik Kraemer made a visit and declared that “the Church in India was not equipped and was not equipping itself for its real theological and missionary tasks—meeting the challenge of renascent Hinduism at a deep level, finding a prophetic and priestly role in the midst of the turmoil and conflict of nation-building, discovering its proper role in education and (above all) equipping its lay membership for its secular witness” (1993h:119; cf. Kraemer 1952). Over the next number of years, Newbigin threw himself into the creation of a centre for study, research, and training that would analyze the currents of Indian culture from both a theological and a sociological perspective. Some of his writing on the issue during this time shaped his thinking for the rest of his life (1952a).

2.3.2.14. The Christian Laity in the World

We must not miss the “above all” in the above quotation by Kraemer. Newbigin agreed that the CSI was not equipped nor equipping its “lay” membership for “secular” witness. The flame that was ignited during his early years concerning a faithful witness

in the sphere of business was fanned into a burning fire during his missionary years. Newbigin began to speak of this particular dimension of the church's mission as the primary place where a missionary encounter takes place.

Newbigin's interest in the role of the laity coincides with a growing interest in the ecumenical tradition. A "theology of the laity" was slow in developing in the 20th century. The church-centric vision of the ecumenical movement that dominated from Tambaram (1938) to Willingen (1952) went hand in hand with a clericalism that viewed the church as an organization managed by professional clergymen. However, this same period also saw a gradual rediscovery of the laity prompted by ecumenical lay movements founded in the late 19th century, the work of J. H. Oldham and the Oxford World Conference on Church, Community, and State in 1937, the establishment of lay academies throughout Europe after 1945, and the growth of secularization and the breakdown of the *corpus Christianum* (Adler 1991:581). In 1946 the Ecumenical Institute was founded at Bossey, led by Hendrik Kraemer and Suzanne de Dietrich, to nurture discussion among the laity about the relevance of the gospel for their work. In 1949, following strong emphasis on the issue at the Amsterdam Assembly, a Secretariat for Laymen's Work was established. The work of the Secretariat and the Ecumenical Institute combined to make the issue of the laity a focal point. All of these developments led to a rediscovery of the laity that would come to dominate the ecumenical agenda commencing with Evanston.

At the Evanston Assembly in 1954 the issue was among the six major subjects dealt with and this bore ecclesiological fruit. It stated:

We must understand anew the implications of the fact that we are all baptized, that, as Christ came to minister, so must all Christians become ministers of his saving purpose according to the particular gift of the Spirit which each has received, as messengers of the hope received in Christ. Therefore in daily living and work the laity are not mere fragments of the church who are scattered about in the world and who come together again for worship, instruction and specifically Christian fellowship on Sundays. They are the church's representatives, no matter where they are. It is the laity who draw together work and worship, it is they who manifest in word and action the lordship of Christ over the world, which claims so much of their time and energy and labour (Evanston 1954:161).

The growing significance of the laity for understanding both the church and its mission led the Evanston Assembly to replace the provisional Secretariat for Laymen's Work with a permanent Department on the Laity led by Hans Ruedi Weber. Books by Kraemer (1958) and Yves Congar (1957) on the laity and the church deepened theological reflection on the issue.

It was not only the ecumenical tradition that fostered this conviction in Newbigin; it was again his missionary experience in India (1993h:62). As a district missionary and bishop he inherited great mission institutions of education, healing, and service. The enormous size of these institutions in relationship to the church eclipsed the fact 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 farmer, factory worker, and so on" (1960n:28). The failure to recognize this goes far back into the history of the church. However, Newbigin remarked that in India the problem was "accentuated... where the Church is dominated by large mission institutions, and those church members who are not employed in these institutions come to feel that they are mere camp-followers in the Christian enterprise, instead of knowing that they truly are its front-line troops" (*ibid.*). In the revolutionary

context of India where education, politics, business, and industry were being fashioned by a new secular ideology, an eclipse of the witness of the laity by large mission institutions was a major problem.

2.3.2.15. Conversion and Suffering

Newbigin's experience of street preaching and his attempt to proclaim the gospel in a hostile Hindu culture sharpened his understanding of the incompatibility of the regnant worldview and the gospel. This meant two things. First, a radical conversion was necessary. Newbigin commented that in a Hindu culture the way of proclamation lies along a knife's edge: "on the one hand the kind of words that lay one open justly to the charge of embittering India's already bitter inter-religious tensions; on the other the kind of words that will allow the crowd to disperse happily reassured that no fundamental conversion is necessary, peace restored and the cause decisively betrayed" (1993h:53). This also meant, secondly, that suffering would be the lot of one who was faithful. The dominant worldview in a particular culture will strive to become the exclusive worldview. This brings pressure on believers who live in a different story to conform to the public doctrine of the dominant community. If one continues to stand on the gospel, suffering will result. Newbigin speaks of "sharp encounters with questioners generally hostile, often very able, and always backed by a crowd ready at any moment to flare up in resentment and anger when it seems that the ancient faith is being attacked" (1993h:53). Later in his life he would often make reference to his encounter with these questioners who posed challenges based on other religious assumptions (e.g., 1961e:20f.). In the context of his visitation to village congregations he noted the antipathy towards conversion in India:

To those who are under the influence of the Vedanta, Christian evangelism is an intolerable assertion of truth on behalf of one among the many forms of illusion. Activities aimed at conversion from one religion to another are both an offense against the ultimate truth of man's existence, and also destructive of the ordered harmony of social life based upon the proper performance by every man of the duties of his station. For the vast majority of our well-educated contemporaries the attempt to persuade a man to change his faith is something that arouses the deepest hostility and disgust. (1951c:61).

One incident, among many, that impressed the truth of this on Newbigin, took place during his bishopric in Madurai (1951c:90-93, 115). After independence the government of India required all elementary schools to switch to the Gandhian model of education. Hindu syncretism was built right into the program. The teachers were to be tightly knit communities that engaged in daily acts of worship that acknowledge all religions to be equally valid paths to God. A village boy who took up a teaching position in Madurai lost his teaching certificate because he refused to compromise his faith by participating in this syncretistic worship. Newbigin reports the result: "the costly witness of a village boy who was willing to lose his teaching certificate rather than compromise his faith so shook the whole institution that I was soon baptizing students within the college campus" (1993h:120). This event—and others like it—convinced Newbigin of three things: the incompatibility of the gospel with the dominant doctrine shaping public institutions, the cost of faithful witness, and the power of a costly witness to draw others to Christ.

As Newbigin visited the village congregations around Madurai, the social fabric of village and caste became evident to him. The church had taken root among the lowest

castes and in the villages. The gospel had spread along the channels provided by the social structure. Often this meant the church was made up of one caste in a village. In this setting Newbiggin struggled with the issue of how to make clear the nature of the church as a community that transcends caste. Newbiggin concluded that it is “part of the mission” of the church to set up a tension between the culture shaped by Hinduism and the church shaped by the gospel. “The church, as a totally new kind of community, must challenge the older form of community, and a painful tension is set up. It is part of the mission of the Church to set up such a tension.” As an alternative community the church was not to be taken captive by the sinful social structures of caste and village. However, this did not mean that the church was to disown those social ties. “It must not evade it [the tension] either by seeking to deny and repudiate all ties of kinship, or by capitulating to them and allowing them to have control. It must demonstrate its character as something of a wholly different order” (1951c:51).

Newbiggin’s experience as a bishop in India was formative for his understanding of a faithful witness, a hostile culture, conversion, and suffering. He learned the incompatibility of the gospel with the reigning idolatry of Hindu culture and caste. This demanded radical conversion which was often followed by suffering. This insight would prove to be seminal for his mission in culture project. Then he would stress the incompatibility of the gospel with the public doctrine of western culture (1993k:41, 58).

2.3.2.16. The Necessity of Prayer

The centrality of prayer in Newbiggin’s understanding of the Christian faith was already noted in the first part of this chapter. His missionary experience strengthened this resolve. Later references to the importance of prayer for the faithful missionary witness of the church find much of their inspiration from this time. Insight into the way that his missionary experience deepened the importance of prayer can be found in a reference he made to J. S. Subramaniam, a close Indian friend. He comments that “it was an enormous strength to be able to share all our problems and to spend time in prayer together seeking God’s help at the many points where we felt helpless” (1993h:56). The demands of a faithful missionary witness broke down western self-confidence and self-sufficiency. It was at the point of weakness and helplessness that Newbiggin understood anew the importance of prayer for a faithful witness.

In the accounts of his bishopric, a demanding ministry frequently “crystallizes into a prayer” (1951:119). “Holy Spirit! take these words and make them living and powerful to the creating of faith” (1951:35); “Lord grant us Thy people to worship Thee in spirit and in truth and being nourished by Thy Word to be strengthened for Thy service...” (1951:37).

In “My Personal Reminiscences of Bishop Newbiggin” written on the occasion of Newbiggin’s sixtieth birthday, A. C. Dharmaraj, secretary of the National Council of Churches in India in 1969, comments about Newbiggin’s reputation in Kanchipuram: “One spoke about the regular and punctual morning devotions in which he used to sit engrossed in meditation in the mornings on the terrace of the Mission Bungalow, on the Railway Road, till the rays of the sun disturbed him” (Dharmaraj 1969). Eugene Blake, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1966-1972, comments as follows about the life of Newbiggin just after his first stint in India: “The new Director strenuously maintained the inseparability of evangelism and service. Moreover, he has demonstrated by his example that both find their source in a life of prayer and meditation” (Blake 1969).

The necessity of a faithful missionary witness rooted in prayer would be translated into the necessity of a faithful witness by a missionary congregation likewise deeply rooted in prayer.

2.3.2.17. Partnership in the Task of World Evangelization

In both his ministry and theological reflections on missionary ecclesiology, Newbigin strongly stresses the local congregation. Each congregation is the church of God for that place. It is responsible before God to witness to the coming kingdom in that particular location. However, the responsibility for local witness did not eclipse the obligation of all churches for world evangelization: “The Church’s mission is concerned with the ends of the earth. When that dimension is forgotten, the heart goes out of the business” (1958b:27).

The Church in South India must not only be concerned for the evangelization of its neighbourhood, according to Newbigin, but also the whole world (1950:144f.). This is not something to be carried out only when the church appears to be strong enough but is a call from the very beginning. In fact, the spiritual health of the church depends on this broader vision of world evangelization. This broader vision, which is vital to the health of the church, will be achieved only by the “steady and sacrificial giving of ordinary church members to the missionary work in other lands” (1950:145).

Newbigin was part of an effort to establish a strong board of missions for the newly united Church of South India that would “co-ordinate and encourage fresh missionary outreach throughout South India and to support the newly launched mission in Papua” (1993h:101; cf. Ward 1953:16-19, 27-29). The missionary initiative in Papua was a challenge put before all the members of the Church of South India and Newbigin commented on this when he spoke to all the churches in Eastern Asia: “The fact that we have to put before each member this responsibility for the evangelization of a distant part of the world is of great value for the development of the Church’s sense of missionary responsibility. I covet for every church this same privilege” (1950:145).

2.3.3. *Toward a Missionary Church: Missionary Conferences from Tambaram to Ghana (1938-1958)*

Along with his missionary experience, another important factor played a formative role in Newbigin’s ecclesiological shift: the missiological developments in the IMC between Tambaram (1938) and Ghana (1958). Up until the 20th century the *corpus Christianum* formed the context for ecclesiological reflection. All this began to change in the 20th century with the rise of the third world church, the decay of the “Christian” West, and the breakdown of the distinction between church and mission. The need for the reformulation of ecclesiology was recognized in the ecumenical movement early in the 20th century. This ecclesiological reflection was prompted by the fusion of mission and unity that characterized the early ecumenical tradition. Jurgen Moltmann believes that “today one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission” (Moltmann 1977:7). The twenty-year period between Tambaram and Ghana saw fruitful developments in a missionary ecclesiology.

Newbigin’s participation in the ecumenical movement began in the founding Amsterdam Assembly of the WCC in 1948. The first IMC conference he attended was at Willingen in 1952 where he was a “major participant” delivering a plenary address

and playing a leading role in drafting the conference report (Bassham 1978:333; Thorogood 1991a:69). Along with his actual involvement, he studied all the reports of the earlier missionary conferences (1973f:52). From 1952 on Newbigin was immersed in the ecumenical tradition attending all the conferences of the WCC, IMC and later CWME. He was often called upon to write the assembly or conference reports. He was involved in many different committees associated with the IMC and WCC. Between Willingen and Ghana he was heavily involved in the IMC/WCC joint committee to draft an integration plan (1993h:153f.).

The two books that best exemplify Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology during this period are *The Household of God* (1953d) and *One Gospel, One Body, One World* (1958b). These books have a twofold relationship to the ecumenical movement as it developed its missionary ecclesiology. On the one hand, they summarized the ecumenical discussion to that point. *The Household of God* summarizes and interacts with the two Christendom ecclesiologies that shaped the ecumenical discussion—Protestant and Roman Catholic. Geoffrey Wainwright has referred to this book as the best ecumenical ecclesiology written in the latter part of the 20th century (1994). David Bosch said that *One Gospel, One Body, One World* “summarized a consensus that had now been reached” (Bosch 1991:370; cf. Scherer 1987:102, 251). On the other hand, each of these books is a creative contribution to the ongoing discussion. *The Household of God* draws a “Pentecostal” ecclesiology into the discussion and consolidates the insights of all three traditions in an elaboration of the eschatological and missionary nature of the church. It attempts to provide an ecclesiological foundation for the quest for visible unity since “the Ecumenical movement was not being undergirded by an adequate doctrine of the church” (1993h:128). *One Gospel, One Body, One World* is also a creative contribution to ecumenical theology as an apology for post-colonial mission.

Since these books are so interwoven in the ecumenical developments of this period, it is necessary to review in some detail the developments of a missionary ecclesiology in the IMC meetings.

2.3.3.1. From Tambaram (1938) to Whitby (1947): Developments Toward A Missionary Church

If the church was to be understood as essentially missionary, it was critical that the fundamental dichotomy between a sending church in the Christian West and missionary work in the non-Christian non-western world be abandoned. An important step in this process at Tambaram was the abandonment of the dichotomy between the Christian West and non-Christian Third World—although it would take many decades before this insight would be widely grasped. A world war and the rise of totalitarian ideologies like National Socialism, Fascism, and Marxism had shattered any confidence in Europe as a Christian continent (Bosch 1991:370). The West now had to be viewed as a mission field. This loss of a supposed Christian cultural context had a profound effect on the relation of mission to church. The church could no longer see itself as the spiritual facet of a Christian West. It had to define itself in terms of its mission to the world. With the distinction between the Christian and non-Christian nations abandoned in principle, the way was paved for the development of a truly missionary ecclesiology for the church in every place. However, even with these insights Tambaram represented a church-centred mission. Mission was still primarily evangelistic and social work in the non-western world. This would continue on into Whitby.

The IMC Whitby conference was convened in 1947, in the wake of World War II, under the theme “Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World.” Even though the second world war had dismantled much of the colonial framework of mission, it was not yet clear to what extent a new paradigm for mission was needed. Colonial patterns of thought and practice lingered.

The stress on the centrality of the church at Tambaram continued at Whitby; in fact, the whole of Tamabaram’s understanding of mission was left intact. “The virtually untouched 1938 findings were still relevant in 1947”, Hogg comments, “and what emerged from Whitby was meant not to supplant but to supplement them in a changing world scene” (Hogg 1952:335). Many fruitful insights regarding a missionary church were gained, but perhaps the most important contribution of Whitby to a missionary ecclesiology is found in its most memorable phrase: “partnership in obedience.” This gave expression to the further dismantling of the distinction between the older and younger churches. The use of these familiar terms—older and younger—was recognized to be “obsolete” because “for the most part the tasks which face the churches in all parts of the world are the same. Each church, older and younger... is to be a worthy partner in the task of evangelism” (Ranson 1948:174).

These insights did not issue in a consistent missionary ecclesiology. A few statements to the contrary, mission continued to be conceived of primarily as an activity by the West in the non-West; partnership meant mission together in the so-called third world countries; and the West remained outside the vision of missionary concern. One reason a missionary ecclesiology did not ensue was that, while insights into a missionary church were emerging, there was no theological framework to bring them into fruitful relation to one another. An extremely important result of the Whitby conference was the recognition of the urgent need for further theological reflection on the missionary calling of the church (Bassham 1979:27). A year later, at the Oegstgeest (Netherlands) meeting of the IMC committee, the principal theme was chosen for the next conference in Willingen: the missionary obligation of the church (Goodall 1953:10).

2.3.3.2. Willingen (1952): A Theological Framework for a Missionary Church

The third world consultation of world mission was convened in Willingen, Germany in 1952. Its task was to draft a new theological framework for mission. Under the directive of Whitby a major study on “The Missionary Obligation of the Church” had been undertaken. Important preparatory work was done by Walter Freytag, Johannes Hoekendijk, Max Warren, and others, as well as by two constituted study groups from the Netherlands and North America. This preparatory study remained incomplete and much disagreement was already in evidence as the conference was convened in July, 1952. Willingen was not envisaged to be a conference of consolidation of settled gains made in mission theology but an opportunity to grapple with new theological issues related to the mission of the church (Goodall 1953:13).

Newbigin notes that the Willingen meeting “was widely thought at the time to have failed in its major task. But subsequent history has shown that it was in fact one of the most significant in the series of world missionary conferences” (Fey 1970:178). Bassham explains both why the conference was thought to be a failure and why it proved to be so important. “The IMC meeting [in Willingen] marked a milestone in the development of mission theology in the ecumenical movement. Although its members could not agree on the basic theological issues raised in the interim report, several of

Willingen's themes represented new developments which became important points for subsequent reflection" (Bassham 1979:36). Its importance stems, then, from the fact that in its theological discussions on the missionary obligation of the church a number of themes emerged that would prove fruitful in the development of a missionary ecclesiology. In his introduction to the Willingen conference report, Goodall says: "It was... recognized that in the fields of Biblical and theological studies there had been taking place, for some years, movements that were proving deeply significant for all who sought a fuller apprehension of the Christian faith. At the same time, it was felt that these studies and movements of thought had not become related, with sufficient explicitness, to the missionary calling of the Church" (Goodall 1953:10f.).

The most important legacy of Willingen to missionary theology is the concept of the *missio Dei*.⁹ This provided a framework for gathering and relating many other insights in a consistent missionary ecclesiology. The Willingen understanding of the *missio Dei* can be summarized as follows. Mission has its source in the Triune God Himself (Goodall 1953:189). Mission flows from the love of the Father who has sent his Son to reconcile all things to Himself (Goodall 1953:189, 241). Christ came to usher in the kingdom of God. This kingdom has already arrived but has not yet been fully consummated. This already/not yet time period is a time of mission (Goodall 1953:188f., 239). Salvation was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus. On the foundation of this accomplished work of Christ, God has sent forth the Spirit of Jesus to gather his church together. By virtue of being chosen by Christ, reconciled to God through Him, being made members of His body, sharing in His Spirit, and heirs to hope in His coming Kingdom, the church is committed to full participation in His redeeming mission (Goodall 1953:190). As Christ was sent by the Father the church is sent by Christ to continue His 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'" (Goodall 1953:190). The church's very existence is one of witness or mission. Mission is not one more task among others but defines its nature. "When God says to the Church: 'Go forth and be my witnesses,' He is not giving the Church a commission that is added to its other duties; but a commission that belongs to its royal charter (covenant) to be the Church" (Goodall 1953:241). Therefore, the church is "an organ of His cosmic redemptive purposes" (Goodall 1953:208) and "a redeemed fellowship and a channel of God's redeeming grace, in the place and country where it is" (Goodall 1953:195). Where there is a local congregation, there, by its very existence, is a witness to the gospel, however imperfectly its faithfulness (Goodall 1953:195). To be a Christian is to be a member of that body. Every Christian is called to total commitment to the church's whole missionary task (Goodall 1953:195).

This vision of the mission of God opened the way for many theological, missiological, and ecclesiological insights to find consistent and systematic expressions (cf. Bassham 1978:331-337). Many insights from the theological guild, such as the already-not yet nature of the Kingdom, the relationship between salvation history and world history, and the work of the Spirit were brought into a fruitful connection with mission; nevertheless, as Goodall points out, many questions remained (Goodall 1953:20-22). The mission-of-God concept also paved the way for many missiological

⁹Willingen contributed the *concept* of the *missio Dei*, not the precise *term*, which goes back to Karl Hartenstein's reflection on the Willingen conference (Rosin 1972:6; Bassham 1978:332; Bosch 1991:390; Jongeneel 1997:59-60).

convictions that had been gaining strength in the missionary tradition to find a more consistent expression—convictions such as “unreal” (Goodall 1953:18) distinctions between older and younger churches, home base and mission field (Goodall 1953:190-191), domestic and foreign missions; the relationship between church and mission; the West as a mission field; the integral relationship between evangelism and social involvement (Goodall 1953:216, 220); and unity and mission (Goodall 1953:193f.). The consistent formulation of these convictions in a new framework played a major role in dealing a death blow to the colonial framework for mission. Finally, many ecclesiological insights, such as a pilgrim church (Goodall 1953:191; Bosch 1991:373), new, more flexible forms of ministry (Goodall 1953:197; Fey 1970:179), and the importance of the laity (Goodall 1953:107-116; Bosch 1991:502) could be placed more consistently in the context of a missionary church.

2.3.3.3. Ghana (1958): A Call for Institutional Expression of Unity of Mission and Church

Willingen had provided a new framework for mission. The *missio Dei* had replaced the more obsolete Christendom understanding. Whenever a paradigm shift occurs, there are many issues and problems that must be addressed. Many questions were raised about the practice of mission in a world where colonial categories had collapsed. Not least of these issues was the institutional expression of the older paradigm. The separation of the IMC and WCC embodied the separation of church and mission. This was the chief matter on the agenda of the IMC meeting in Ghana in 1958. Newbigin expressed his support of that integration as a first step in dealing among many other issues that remained. When asked to serve as General Secretary of the IMC, Newbigin responded in a letter:

I have come to feel increasingly that there is a dangerous dichotomy at the present time between what we (in the missionary enterprise) are saying and what we are doing. This in two respects: (1) We are saying that our working picture is not the nineteenth-century one but one of a global fellowship facing a global task, with the missionary frontier running through every village. But we are not acting according to that picture.... (2) We are saying that we have recovered a radically missionary theology of the Church. But the actual structure of our Churches (younger as well as older) does not reflect that theology. On the contrary it continues placidly to reflect the static ‘Christendom’ theology of the eighteenth century. At Yale I said that I supported IMC-WCC integration simply as a preliminary step to the much more radical changes which I believed to be necessary in the whole structure and functioning of the missionary enterprise (1993h:147f.).

It is not necessary for our topic to deal with all the arguments pro and con integration. Nor is it necessary to detail the other issues at Ghana. For our purposes we call attention to one issue that presented itself urgently. This issue was one of two that were “of most significance for the understanding of our missionary obedience at this hour” (Orchard 1958:10). The question was asked: “Are we in danger of making the conception and practice of mission so broad and diffuse that it loses its distinctive character and cutting edge? Or are we in danger of limiting it in such a way that our practice fails to express the fullness of the Gospel or to meet the real needs of men today?” (Orchard 1958:10). If the colonial framework was inadequate and mission was in every continent, and if mission involved the witness of *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia* (as proposed by Hoekendijk; cf. Jongeneel 1995:19; 1997:307), then what was

mission? As Stephen Neill would put it later, “if everything is mission, nothing is mission” (quoted in Bosch 1991:511). Was there a danger of losing intentional missionary activities in some kind of “panmissionism”? (the word is Freytag’s; quoted in Bosch 1991:511). These questions highlight the struggle in which Ghana engaged in an attempt to relate the intentional mission that had characterized the colonial era to the new understanding of a missionary church which characterized the whole life of the church as mission. In his reflection on the role of the IMC, Erik Nielsen made a distinction between missionary dimension and missionary concentration that foreshadows Newbigin’s important distinction between missionary dimension and intention. Nielsen writes:

We have tried to indicate that the phrase “Mission belongs to the *esse* of the Church” has far-reaching consequences for the Church itself, for its whole conception of its own nature and calling.... Perhaps one may say that what is involved is *both* a widening of the missionary perspective or dimension *and* a concentration; a realization of the fact that Mission is not just a special type of activity which can be identified and circumscribed within a mission board or a special Division of Mission, but is something which has to do with the very existence of the Church, with its very *raison d’etre*, with its not being for itself but for the world, to the ends of the world and the end of time, that every element of the Church’s life and existence is part of this ‘sentness’ to proclaim the Cross and the Resurrection to and in the world, whether it has to do with the Christian witness in the sphere of politics, of social-economic questions, of health and education or anything else.... In every aspect of this existence there must be the missionary dimension and call. And yet at the same time as the perspective is widened there is need for concentration. We have not said that everything the Church does is Mission, but we have said that in the very existence of the Church, and therefore in everything the Church says and is and does, there must be a “missionary perspective” (Orchard 1958:224).

2.3.3.4. Summary of Ecumenical Developments Toward a Missionary Church

The view of mission held at the beginning of the 20th century prevented a genuinely missionary understanding of the church from emerging. Mission was separated from the church. Mission was a specialized agency organized in the West for missionary purposes in the non-western world. Western churches supported this cause and non-western churches became containers for the converts of the missionary endeavours. The world was divided into the Christian West and the non-Christian parts of the world. The Christian West was the home base for mission while the non-Christian third world was the mission field. The world church was divided into older churches in the West which took responsibility for the task of mission and the younger churches in the non-West that were subordinate helpers.

These assumptions gradually broke down throughout the first half of the 20th century. With the church moving to the centre of missiological discussion, the separation of church and mission was challenged. The growth of the third world church and the demise of the Christian “West” challenged the notion of a Christian West and a pagan non-West as well as the distinction between a home base and a mission field. Mission was partnership in obedience.

However, all these seminal insights remained unfruitful for a couple of reasons. First, there was no theological framework in which to relate these gains in a profitable way. Second, mission and ecclesial structures continued to embody these older distinctions. Willigen provided an initial answer to these problems. In terms of the first, the notion of the *missio Dei* brought together Christological, eschatological, and pneumatological insights from the theological guild in a way that allowed an authentically missionary

understanding of the church to emerge. A number of books followed this conference that summarized, consolidated, and formulated the gains made during this period. George Vicedom's *Missio Dei* (German edition 1959, English translation 1965) and Johannes Blauw's *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (1962) admirably expounded the consensus on the missionary nature of the church rooted in the mission of God. D. T. Niles firmly placed this mission theology in the context of a global fellowship in his book *Upon the Earth* (1962).¹⁰ As to the second barrier to the emergence of a missionary church, namely the ecclesial and missional structures that embodied a separation between mission and church, the call for new structures was heard at Willingen, although this became a major issue only later.

The separation of the WCC from the IMC was one structure that betrayed the earlier separation of mission and church. The joining of these two bodies at New Delhi (1961) was the symbol and institutional expression of the insight that the church is mission.

Newbigin formulated his own understanding of the church within the context of the developing missionary ecclesiology in the ecumenical tradition. He was an active and creative participant in this tradition, contributing to the development while being shaped by it.

2.3.4. Newbigin's Ecclesiological Publications

The two books *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953d) and *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (1958b) are Newbigin's most clearly articulated ecclesiological formulations during this time period. In a remarkable way, both books summarize and interact with the ecclesiocentric developments in the ecumenical tradition. They also make a contribution in their ability to pull all the various threads together into one tapestry. In *Household of God* Newbigin attempted to establish a solid theological foundation for the missionary church with the Christological, eschatological, and pneumatological insights of 20th-century theology. His *One Body, One Gospel, One World* consolidated many of the gains of the missionary conferences, providing a theological foundation for them, forging them together in a cohesive unity, and applying them to problems faced by the global missionary community.

These books are not only the fruit of Newbigin's interaction with the ecumenical tradition; they are also shaped by Newbigin's two decades of missionary experience. Elements articulated above, that emerged from his ministry in India, are given systematic articulation in these books. This section will briefly summarize these two documents in their historical context.

¹⁰See Niles 1962:21ff. for a brief history behind the writing of both his and Blauw's book. These books were commissioned to provide a systematic discussion of the issues of the Willingen Council in the context of a worldwide forum.

2.3.4.1. *The Household of God: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*

As we have seen, the development in the missionary conferences that recovered a missionary understanding of the church was not matched by adequate theological reflection on the nature of the church. Newbigin notes this deficiency: “the Ecumenical movement was not being undergirded by an adequate doctrine of the Church” (1993h:128). The two doctrines of the church that dominated the ecumenical discussion during this time—most recently in evidence at Amsterdam—were the Protestant and Roman Catholic ecclesiologies shaped at the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Alan Richardson saw the potential of the ecclesiological insights that Newbigin had developed in the struggle for reunion in South India. He challenged Newbigin to lift out the implicit ecclesiology that Newbigin had developed in his 1948 publication *The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme* and to formulate it explicitly (1993h:128). Newbigin’s concern in this book had been to defend the South India scheme of reunion against its detractors especially in England. He faced the criticisms of the Free Church and the Anglo-Catholic traditions with extensive ecclesiological reflection. His Anglican antagonists critiqued the reunion scheme for failing to make supplemental ordination by a bishop integral. They based this on an ecclesiology that makes historical continuity and institutional visibility fundamental to the nature of the church. Free Church critics rejected precisely this dimension of ecclesiology and found their clue for ecclesiology in faith in Christ and the work of the Spirit. Ecclesiological statements pepper the pages of *Reunion of the Church* as Newbigin challenges the Protestant-Anglican/Catholic deadlock with affirmation and critique of both positions. This whole experience would place Newbigin in a strategic position to address the Protestant-Catholic problem in ecclesiology as it surfaced in Amsterdam in 1948.

Newbigin was invited to give the Kerr Lectures at Trinity College, Glasgow in 1952 and this gave him the opportunity to develop these insights into an ecumenical ecclesiology. The lectures were later published as *Household of God* (1953d).

The question that concerned Newbigin in the Kerr Lectures was the nature of the church. There was a growing interest in this issue in the ecumenical tradition. Three factors contributed to this resurgent interest. The first was the breakdown of the *corpus Christianum* (1953d:1-4). Christendom had been the background for all the Reformation ecclesiologies. These Christendom ecclesiologies formulated their understanding of the church over against one another rather than in the context of their calling in a non-Christian environment. The dissolution of Christendom had brought a crisis for all ecclesiologies framed on its assumptions. The second factor that compelled a rethinking of the nature of the church was Christian mission and the rise of non-western churches (1953d:5-9). The new setting of the pagan environments where new churches were flourishing required a reformulation of the ecclesiologies formed in a western setting. It is precisely this problem in India that forms the backdrop for Newbigin’s ecclesiological reflection in *The Reunion of the Church*. The third factor that placed ecclesiology at the centre of the theological agenda was the rise of the ecumenical movement (1953d:10-17). As churches came into contact with one another they recognized each other to be churches *in some sense*. But in what sense? The WCC struggled with that issue and it forced ecclesiological questions to the fore.

“We are all agreed,” Newbigin writes, “that the Church is constituted by God’s atoning acts in Christ Jesus.... But how are we of subsequent generations made

participants in that atonement? *What is the manner of our ingrafting into Christ?* That is the real question with which we have to deal” (1953d:24; emphasis his). This question sets the stage for Newbigin’s ecclesiological investigations. He identifies three main answers that issue in three different ecclesiologies. The first two traditional answers have been embodied in two of the great Christian traditions of church history. The Protestant answer is that we are incorporated into Christ through faith in the gospel. The Catholic answer is that we are incorporated into the historically continuous, institutionally united and visible church by sacramental participation. The third answer to the question comes from a tradition of more recent vintage. Hesitating to name it at all, Newbigin finally uses the term Pentecostal. This tradition answers the question that we are incorporated into the church by receiving the Holy Spirit. Newbigin maintains that none of these traditions adequately answer the question because they have contrasted these three Biblical answers in mutually exclusive ways. Each of the answers dominate a particular tradition, and distortions arise as one of these answers is taken as the single fundamental clue to the nature of the church.

In the last two chapters of the book Newbigin attempts to integrate the insights of all three traditions in a discussion of the church as eschatological and missionary. This period of redemptive history is characterized by an overlapping of the ages. The victory of God’s kingdom has been gained at the cross and demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ. This victory, however, must remain hidden so that there is room left for a free response to the gospel. The Spirit as an end-time gift is given as a foretaste and earnest of what is in store. This means that there is real possession of the life of the age to come but also the promise of the future fulfillment at the consummation. The blessings of the reign of God are known in this time period by faith, not by sight; in foretaste, not in full enjoyment; in signs that point to a great reality, not in complete manifestation (1953d:126f.). The church is that body that has begun to share in the reign of God. The church must be understood in this eschatological context.

How does this eschatological framework bear on the ecclesiological problem that Newbigin has articulated? The question of how one is incorporated into Christ is answered in three ways in the three above-mentioned traditions. All of the answers are true; yet, at the same time, “when any one of them [is] taken alone as decisive, error and distortion follow” (1953d:148). The problem is that each tradition looks at the church’s *esse* in terms of what the church has and is. However, the church is a body that contradicts its own *esse*. The church must be defined in faith in terms of the eschaton for which we hope. “None of us can be said to possess the *esse* of the Church” (1953d:152) and therefore, we do not only ask what the church is now but what the church is becoming (:153). All three traditions of ecclesiology describe something important about the essence of the church. The problem is that no church can claim faithfulness to all the church is called to be (:123-152).

The concluding chapter describes the church as missionary. There is a fundamental connection between the eschatological and missionary nature of the church. While Newbigin mentions the eschatological and missionary dimensions of the church in *The Reunion of the Church*, he makes two important advances in *The Household of God*. First, while an awareness of the missionary nature of the church lurks below the surface of the entire book and comes to expression at times (1948d:165), this dimension finds a much more explicit and detailed elaboration in his latter book. Second, Newbigin does not explicitly connect the eschatological and missionary in *Reunion of the Church*; this explicit connection in the Kerr Lectures also represents an important step in the development Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology. He opens the last chapter of *The*

Household of God with the following words:

The meaning of this “overlap of the ages” in which we live, the time between the coming of Christ and His coming again, is that it is the time given for the witness of the apostolic Church to the ends of the earth. The end of all things, which has been revealed in Christ, is—so to say—held back until witness has been borne to the whole world concerning the judgement and salvation revealed in Christ. The implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology which does not issue in such obedience is a false eschatology (1953d:153-154).

The fundamental connection between eschatology and mission may be seen by looking at the Holy Spirit (1953d:161-162). The Spirit is an eschatological gift that brings the power of the coming age. He is given to the church as an earnest and witness. As firstfruits and earnest the Spirit brings the coming age into history. Since the church shares in the Spirit, it shares in the salvation of the kingdom and is constituted by that fact as a community that witnesses to what is coming.

This means that mission “belongs to the very core of its existence as a corporate body” (1953d:163) and “a Church which has ceased to be a mission has certainly lost the *esse*, and not merely the *bene esse* of the Church” (*ibid.*). The nature of the church can be summarized with three important words: sign, instrument, and foretaste. Each of these words implies that the church can be understood only in the context of the kingdom of God. However, in contrast to this radically eschatological and missionary nature of the church, the ecclesiological conception that dominates the western churches that are the fruit of western missions is “that of a fundamentally settled body existing for the sake of its own members rather than of a body of strangers and pilgrims” (1953d:166). The depth of Newbigin’s commitment to the missionary nature of the church can be gauged by the following words:

... the very general belief of Christians in most Churches that the Church can exist without being a mission involves a radical contradiction of the truth of the Church’s being.... no recovery of the wholeness of the Church’s nature is possible without a recovery of its radical missionary nature (1953d:170).

This brief sketch of Newbigin’s Kerr Lectures reveals that many of the insights of the theological community—Christological, eschatological, pneumatological—are brought together to formulate a radically missionary ecclesiology.

2.3.4.2. One Body, One Gospel, One World: An Ecumenical Consensus

The short book *One Body, One Gospel, One World* consolidated, interpreted, and disseminated many of the missiological and ecclesiological gains that had been made in the period between Tambaram and Willingen. Bassham notes that the development of mission theology within the ecumenical movement needed interpretation for the worldwide church and that *One Body, One Gospel, One World* fulfilled that role. Explaining Newbigin’s unique qualification for this task, he writes: “His complete immersion in the ecumenical movement through the CSI gave him special insight for interpreting developments within mission theology” (Bassham 1979:44). The immediate issue that motivated Newbigin to write this booklet was his concern to restate the missionary calling of the church in such a way that it would be free from the stench of colonialism. The missionary movement had carried out its task in a political, psychological, and theological framework informed by colonialism. This colonial framework was being rejected and many were also rejecting the whole missionary

enterprise along with it. Newbigin's concern was to restate the missionary calling in a fresh way that accounted for the insights of the ecclesiocentric period from Tambaram to Willingen yet preserved a role for the traditional task of missions.

Newbigin carries out this project in three steps. First, he provides a Biblical foundation for mission. Second, he states three principles that flow from the foundation that must guide missionary thinking. Third, he applies these principles to the problems and issues challenging the missionary movement.

First, Newbigin returned to the Scripture for "the unchanging basis" and sketched his vision of mission. He takes his starting point in the view of the *missio Dei* that had prevailed in Willingen. He begins: "The church's mission is none other than the carrying on of the mission of Christ Himself. 'As the Father has sent me even so send I you'" (1958b:17). He blends together the eschatological and pneumatological insights that had emerged at Willingen in relation to ecclesiology. This mission is "the continuing work of Christ Himself through the Holy Spirit" (1958b:18). The reception of the Holy Spirit relates the church to mission in three ways. First, the church is the place where the reign of God is experienced in foretaste (*koinonia*). Second, the power of the Spirit equips men and women to serve others in all their needs (*diakonia*). Third, it is the place where verbal witness is borne to Jesus Christ (*marturia*). *Koinonia*, the common life of the Spirit shared by the church, is the foundation from which spring deeds of service, *diakonia*, and words of witness, *marturia* (1958b:20).

In the ecumenical movement—the intended audience for this book—defining the mission of the church in such a broad manner threatened missions as an deliberate action of the church to take the gospel to where it was not known. In response to this problem Newbigin introduced a distinction that has continued to play an important role in missionary theology (Bosch 1991:373). He distinguished between missionary dimension and missionary intention (1958b:21; 1993h:155). Since the whole life of the church is characterized by witness, a missionary dimension permeates everything it does. However, not all of its activities have a missionary intention—specific activities which have the intention of crossing the frontier between faith and unbelief have a missionary intention. Faithfulness to its missionary nature means that intentional missionary efforts to cross these frontiers of unbelief is essential to its life.

In this context two further comments are made about the missionary church. First, it will be a community that seeks to communicate the good news of the kingdom by word and deed. Words and deeds take their place together within the total mission of the church. They both have the character of witness as signs of the presence of the kingdom (1958b:22f.). Second, mission is both local and to the ends of the earth (:23). The first place of mission is our neighbourhood but since God's love embraces the whole world, there must be a universal expression of this love in mission to the ends of the earth.

From the standpoint of this Biblical foundation Newbigin articulates three principles that consolidate the gains of the missionary conferences. These principles summarize a consensus of the ecumenical movement (Bosch 1991:370). First, the Church is mission. Mission has been separated from the church because during the times of the great non-Roman missionary movements much of the church was blind to its essential task of mission. Those who desired to express this obedience formed separate organizations to carry out the missionary task. However, this separation must be healed. Jesus formed one body and "that body was both the Church and the Mission—the place where men were being saved, and the agents of God's saving purpose for all around. The separation of these two things which God has joined together must be judged as one

of the great calamities of missionary history, and the healing of this division one of the greatest tasks of our time” (1958b:26). Mission belongs to the essence of the church.

Second, the home base is everywhere. The church’s mission is concerned with the ends of the earth. For years this meant that foreign missions was launched from Europe or America to the other parts of the earth. However, when the church becomes a global body, this view is invalidated. We have left the era of western missions behind and “we are required to look at the missionary enterprise from a completely new point of view—from the point of the view of the world-wide church” (1958b:28). The home base is each local congregation and mission is the intentional crossing of frontiers between faith and unbelief. However, in this missionary task a place for cross-cultural missions must be maintained.

The third principle is mission in partnership. The non-western church is not a receptacle for converts but an active participant in the missionary calling of the church. The non-western church is not an immature body dependent on the more mature western church. These anomalies must be removed and there must be a genuine sharing of the missionary task together.

In the remainder of the booklet Newbigin brings these principles to bear on the many and difficult issues that faced the church in its mission at that time. In the latter part of the sections of the book, Newbigin notes the colonial patterns of mission that continued to corrupt the church and mission agencies, the increasing hesitancy and opposition to mission born of the rejection of colonialism, the replacement of missions by ecumenism and inter-church aid, the difficulty in defining the role of the foreign missionary, the way the growth of the third world church was challenging older patterns and structures, and the disunity of the church. Newbigin tackled these problems from the foundational principles he articulated.

2.3.5. Summary

Two factors shaped Newbigin’s developing ecclesiology during this period (1939-1959): his missionary experience and his participation in the missionary conferences of the IMC. They influenced his main publications in this period.

Newbigin’s early missionary experience in Kanchipuram and Madurai played a powerfully formative role in the development of his ecclesiology. A Christendom understanding of the church would not stand the fires of missionary work in India. His convictions concerning the centrality of mission both in his own life and in the life of the church deepened. The church is chosen for the purpose of bearing witness to the gospel. This witness to the kingdom continues what Jesus began in his ministry. A faithful witness to the gospel of the kingdom is to be given in both words and deeds. A missionary witness must incarnate itself deeply in the lives of the people especially among the poor. The Spirit is the primary witness. Therefore, a pneumatological and eschatological foundation for mission is essential to develop a missionary self-understanding. All barriers to this missionary consciousness and practice must be removed. In this light Newbigin struggled with the relation of western missions to the Indian church, issues of church leadership, and ecclesial unity. The church must understand itself as mission; forms of leadership that foster a missionary congregation must emerge; and a faithful witness must be a unified witness that does not allow division to compromise that witness. A new cultural environment forced Newbigin to struggle with the relationship of the gospel and church to the culture. Revolutionary times refreshed convictions about mission in the public square, the witness of the layman in the world, and the correlation of conversion and suffering. It is through

prayer that missionaries and mission churches must overcome weaknesses in the enormous task of witness. And finally, since mission is directed to the ends of the earth, a missionary congregation has to be committed to world evangelization. Many elements of a missionary church either emerged or were reinforced and deepened as a result of Newbigin's early cross-cultural experience.

Newbigin was also heavily involved in the missionary conferences of the IMC during this time. In the period from Tambaram (1938) to Ghana (1958) many assumptions that undergirded a Christendom ecclesiology were broken down, allowing a missionary ecclesiology to develop. Newbigin's participation and leadership in this development enabled him to further cultivate a missionary theology.

The fruit of this missionary and ecumenical experience were two main publications, *The Household of God* and *One Body, One Gospel, One World*. In these works a missionary ecclesiology is given clear expression and systematic articulation.

2.4. CONCLUSION

In the first three decades of Newbigin's life (1909-1939) a number of important convictions emerge that later will shape his missionary ecclesiology. As evidenced by his first ecclesiological reflections in the decade of the 1940s, his ecclesiology is shaped in the traditional Christendom mould. The terminology of a missionary church briefly appears but is not developed consistently.

The first major ecclesiological shift in Newbigin's life was from a Christendom to a missionary ecclesiology. This shift was the result of two important factors. First, his missionary experience in India as a district missionary in Kanchipuram (1939-1947) and as a bishop in the newly formed Church of South India (1947-1959) challenged a Christendom understanding of the church that had been formed in Europe. Numerous elements of a missionary church emerged in the context of this missionary work. Second, Newbigin was heavily involved in the ecumenical movement during a time when a missionary ecclesiology was forming. During the twenty-five year period from Tambaram to Willingen, many missiological and theological tributaries flowed together to produce a missionary ecclesiology. In theology, the *missio Dei*, with both a fresh grasp of eschatology with a deepened understanding of its missiological significance and a rediscovery of the work of the Spirit, provided a new theological framework for mission. In *The Household of God* (1953) Newbigin draws these strands together to provide a theological basis for the mission church. The terminology of a missionary church becomes prominent and central to Newbigin's ecclesiology at this time. In mission studies, the reunion of church and mission, the breakdown of the distinction between home base and mission field with the recognition that the home base is everywhere, and the abandonment of the distinction between older and younger churches with a fresh understanding that mission is partnership all contributed to a missionary ecclesiology. In *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (1958) Newbigin summarized these developments with a clear statement that the church is mission.

Shaped by both his missionary experience in India and his involvement in the missiological reflection of the global missionary conferences of the IMC, the Christendom ecclesiology with which he had entered India gave way to a missionary understanding of the church.