

5. THE MISSIONARY CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter treats the missionary character of the church in Newbigin's thought. Newbigin employs varying terminology to speak of the inextricable connection of mission to church. He uses the terms 'missionary character of the church' and 'missionary nature of the church' although he prefers the first (e.g., 1963g:12; 1978e:1). He speaks of 'mission as essential to the church' and of mission as the *esse* of the church and not simply of the *bene esse* (e.g., 1953d:162-163). He often affirms that 'the church is mission' (e.g., 1958b:25). He frequently quotes Emil Brunner's phrase 'The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning' (e.g., 1953d:162). He refers to the missionary dimension of the church (e.g., 1958b:21). He characterizes the church in terms of 'participating in' or 'continuing' or 'carrying on' the mission of Christ (1958b:17). Newbigin's language of the 'missionary character of the church' is chosen for the title as a succinct statement of his theological understanding of the church's nature.

In Newbigin's writing, the missionary nature of the church is defined by its participation in the mission of the Triune God. The church's source and identity are rooted in the missionary action of God on behalf of the world. The church participates in the mission of God, it continues the mission of Christ, and bears the witness of the Spirit. The mission of God, the ministry of Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit are all understood in eschatological context. The end-time reign of God forms the context for Newbigin's understanding of the church. His most frequent terminology always refers to the eschatological context: the church is sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom of God.

In this chapter we elaborate Newbigin's understanding of the church's missionary character in four sections. First, the church's identity is described in terms of its participation in and witness to the kingdom of the Father. Second, the nature of the church is explained as a continuation of the kingdom mission of the Son. Third, the church's missional character is elaborated in terms of the bearer of the Spirit's witness to the kingdom. The final section deals with three important matters in Newbigin's treatment of the missionary church: its dual relation to God and to the world, factors that have crippled the church's missionary identity, and the close relation between mission and unity.

5.2. PARTICIPATING IN AND WITNESSING TO THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER

Jesus announced the arrival of the reign of God. This announcement was accompanied by the call to repentance and faith. However, not everyone is able to respond; repentance and faith are gifts given to those chosen and called to participate in and witness to the arrival of the kingdom for the sake of all (1980f:25). Following the central redemptive events of the cross and resurrection, the Spirit was poured out enabling this small band of followers to participate provisionally in the healing power

of the kingdom of God so that they might bear witness to it. Pentecost was the mighty act of God that formed the church.

This brief sketch shows that the church can only be understood in terms of the kingdom of God. There are four ways that Newbigin opens up the relationship between kingdom and church. First, his reflection on the terminology of *ecclesia* leads him to define the church as an assembly that flows from the exercise of God's rule in choosing and calling out a people for the sake of the world. Second, his most common definition of the church as 'the provisional incorporation of humankind in Jesus Christ' highlights the connection between the church and the end-time kingdom. Third, his most common images of the church are that of sign, first fruits, and instrument of the kingdom of God. Finally, the church is a hermeneutic of the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

5.2.1. *The Assembly of God: A Community Chosen and Called Out by the Father*

Newbigin treats the nature of the church from the standpoint of terminology that the early church chose to designate itself. The Greek phrase is the *ecclesia tou Theou*. While *ecclesia* is often translated 'church', it is best rendered 'public assembly.' Indeed the way in which 'church' is often understood is precisely what the word '*ecclesia*' was designed to counter: a religious community organized for the personal salvation of its members. Newbigin frequently draws on Karl Schmidt's analysis of this word in the Gerhard Kittel *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* to bring out the full significance of this name choice (Schmidt 1965:501-536). Newbigin first follows Schmidt's discussion in his 1952 Kerr Lectures (1953d:20-23). He returns to this discussion often in his writing. The original meaning of the word was a public assembly to which all the citizens of the city were summoned. The town clerk was the one who issued the call and the public gathering of citizens discussed and settled affairs that were important for the city's life (1980f:46). In the New Testament *ecclesia* is either accompanied by the subjective genitive *tou Theou* or this is assumed. The significance of this modifier is that it is God, not the town clerk, who summons the citizens to a public assembly. God's authority is not confined to one city. God's kingdom is over all and therefore this summoning is "God's active putting forth of his kingly power" (1984a:7) exercised in every place. God is acting in Ephesus, Rome, Corinth, and throughout the world to gather the new humankind into community. This is an action of the Triune God: "The Church is the assembly of God, God drawing people by the power of the Spirit into the allegiance of Christ" (*ibid*). This "self-chosen name" must be contrasted with the names that were given to the church by its enemies. Celsus and others referred to the *ecclesia* as a *thiasos* and a *heranos*. Both of these words were selected to interpret the church as a private religious cult that offered personal salvation by way of knowledge, self-discipline, and religious practice; religious communities of this kind received the protection of Roman law because they did not threaten the public doctrine of the Roman empire. The name *ecclesia*, however, challenged this categorization. "The *ecclesia tou Theou* could only be an assembly to which all men and women, citizens, slaves, Romans, barbarians, were called not by the town clerk but by a much higher authority—an assembly in which even the imperial claim of Caesar could only have a subordinate place" (*ibid*). The church refused to accept the designation of

a private religious fraternity but saw itself as a people called into the end-time kingdom of God and launched into the public life of the world to challenge all competing allegiances, all *cultus publici* including the emperor cult and, much later, the modern scientific worldview of the West (1980f:46).

This discussion of the nature of the church is used by Newbigin to challenge the denominational model of the church and to challenge the timidity of the Western church that accepts the privatized role assigned to it by the modern scientific worldview. In both cases Newbigin digs to an ecclesiological foundation. The church cannot be understood in terms of its place within a certain society but must be defined by its relation to God. It is God who has called the church into being and it must be his purposes that define the church's nature. More specifically the church has been called by an exercise of God's kingly power to enter the end-time reign of God. The *ecclesia* is the first fruits of a much larger harvest that will be manifested in the last day. Thus it is God's calling and election, and God's kingdom that define the church's being.

The idea of a called-out or an elect community is scandalous to many; yet Newbigin believes that election is central to the Biblical story and essential for a proper understanding of the nature of the church. He comments that "no discussion of the nature of the Church can avoid dealing with the doctrine of election" (1953d:112). This is so because "the Church is the task-force picked for a particular job for His mission.... It is only in this way that we can make sense of what the Bible teaches about election which is in a sense the fundamental doctrine of the Bible" (1968f:3).

The importance of election in Newbigin's understanding of the mission of the church can be highlighted by two contrasts: in systematic theology with a traditional Calvinist view and in biblical theology with the redemptive-historical standpoint. The first contrast is between Newbigin's view of election and a more traditional, Reformed view. The difference between Newbigin's doctrine of election and a more traditional Calvinist view can be seen at four points. These four points share much in common with others, most notably the important work of Johannes Blauw (1962).

First, Newbigin views election corporately rather than individually. It is not the eternal salvation of the individual that is primarily in view when Newbigin speaks of election. It is a people chosen to bear witness to God's purposes.

Second, Newbigin views election as an historical act in Christ rather than an eternal decree. A traditional Reformed understanding of election is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). Chapter three is entitled "Of God's Eternal Decree." The first two paragraphs elaborate the eternal decree. In this context, paragraph three speaks of two decrees—the predestination of some men and angels to everlasting life and others to everlasting death. Paragraph four maintains that election unto life is unconditional. Then in paragraph five it states that "as God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto." The historical events of redemption in Christ and by the Spirit simply become means by which God's eternal decree is worked out. The Westminster Confession begins with the decree and moves to consider the work of Christ and the Spirit in that light. This contrasts with Newbigin who begins with the gospel and moves to consider election from that standpoint. Newbigin comments on the traditional view:

... there is a way in which the doctrine of election has been distorted by separating it from the doctrine of Christ. We surely go far astray if we begin from a doctrine of

divine decrees based on an abstract concept of divine omnipotence... We have to take as our starting point and as the controlling reality for all our thinking on this as on every theological topic, what God has actually done in Jesus Christ (1989e:86).

As is so often the case, Newbigin takes his starting point in the cross of Christ. The cross is the place where all human beings were exposed as enemies of God and accepted as beloved of God.¹ As this universal love of God is made known and accomplished at one point in history—at the cross—so it is made known to the world not in a universal spiritual illumination but by being communicated to a certain community who have been chosen beforehand for that role (*ibid*). While Newbigin does stress that election finds its source in the love of the Father before the foundation of the world, his emphasis is on the work of God in history to choose a people. Hunsberger comments:

In Newbigin's usage, the term does not designate God's eternal decree which fixes human destiny... Rather, it designates God's acting personally and particularly in history, selecting a people to be uniquely his own. Therefore, the focus of attention for Newbigin is not the "decree" of the Father (as for the Reformers), nor the "decision" in the Son (as for Barth), but the "selection" established by the historical converting action of the Spirit (Hunsberger 1998:86).

Third, election is for responsibility, not privilege. Newbigin believes that the doctrine of election has become unacceptable to many Christians because it views this doctrine as election to a privileged status before God. He refers to this as a "false belief" and, after quoting Amos 3:2 ("You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins"), says that in Scripture "it becomes clear that to be God's chosen people means not privilege but suffering, reproach, humiliation" (1989e:84). When the church begins to think of "election in terms of spiritual privilege rather than missionary responsibility, then she comes under His merciful judgement as Israel did" (1953d:149). Throughout his writings Newbigin consistently contrasts privilege with responsibility.

It would appear that Newbigin creates a false dilemma. Surely to have a foretaste of the salvation of the kingdom and to experience as first fruits the powers of the coming age is a tremendous privilege. Hunsberger does not believe that Newbigin here makes a false contrast. He argues that the two terms—privilege and responsibility—refer to the attitudes of God's people, not their experience of his grace. He notes that in many other

¹In these comments, Newbigin sounds like a universalist; and there are those who have carelessly made this charge. However, Newbigin believes that the Bible is clear in warning that there are those who will miss the final consummation. Yet his treatment of universalism and his dialectic of God's love and wrath are ultimately unsatisfactory.

places Newbigin speaks of the people of God as “bearers, not *exclusive* beneficiaries” (1978e:34). The qualifying word ‘exclusive’ marks the people of God as both bearers as well as instruments. In other words, the people of God share in the salvation they mediate to others. It is true that (in many ways not only with the distinction between bearers and exclusive beneficiaries) Newbigin highlights the fact that the church enjoys privilege and does not simply bear responsibility. Yet the strong contrast can be better explained by Newbigin’s strong reaction to the traditional doctrine of election.

Fourth, election must be understood in terms of missional responsibility. The contrast here between Newbigin’s view of election and a traditional Reformed doctrine is striking. The doctrine of election is a good example in traditional theology of a Biblical doctrine that has been taken out of its missionary context (as found in Scripture). It demonstrates how theology has been shaped in a Christendom setting over against the systems of other confessional families, rather than in reference to the task of the church in a non-Christian world. In the eight paragraphs of the Westminster Confession of Faith’s treatment of the divine decree, not a word is mentioned about the missional responsibility of the church. Yet for Newbigin this is fundamental to a Biblical understanding. He speaks of “the missionary character of the doctrine of election” (1953d:111). The following statement is typical of Newbigin’s connection between election and mission:

To be elect in Christ Jesus, and there is no other election, means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God’s saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and agent and the firstfruits of his blessed kingdom which is for all (1989e:27).

For Newbigin, election is God’s selection of a community in Christ for a missional responsibility—to bear witness to the salvation of the kingdom. This defines the role of church in the Biblical story.

Hunsberger has shown that one of the important factors that makes Newbigin’s understanding of election unique is the way in which he demonstrates the *necessity or inner logic* of election. To put it another way, in redemption God uses the channels he cut at creation. In a chapter entitled ‘The Logic of Election’ (possibly indebted to Hunsberger’s dissertation), Newbigin writes: “We can only understand the biblical teaching about election if we see it as part of the whole way of understanding the human situation which is characteristic of the Bible” (1989e:82). Articulating this logic of election, we can see even more clearly the important place of the community of God’s people for his redemptive work. Hunsberger points to three closely related areas that demonstrates the necessity or inner logic of election (1998:103): election is necessary because of the nature and destiny of humanity, because of the personal character of God, and because of the nature of salvation.

The Bible’s understanding of human life differs from both the Hindu and modern Western views that see the human person ultimately as an isolated individual. Here the relation of humanity to God is that of the relationship of the individual soul to the Eternal, of the alone to the Alone. In the Bible, God creates humankind to live in terms of relationships: in relation to each other, and as a community in relation to God. While a Hindu anthropology strips away every layer of history to get to the real self, the Bible understands humanity to exist in terms of his historical situation and manifold

relationships. “It follows that this mutual relatedness, this dependence of one on another, is not merely part of the journey toward the goal of salvation, but is intrinsic to the goal itself” (1989e:82). In other words, the historical and social aspect of humankind is creational and of the very stuff of being human and, therefore, will be redeemed; thus, the election of a community to bear salvation is not a temporary means to get to the consummation or a channel of communication extrinsic to the communities’ life, but is already an expression of what that consummation will entail. If the church is to bear in its life the salvation of the kingdom and call others to participate in it, it must be embodied in a community that experiences God’s renewing work. There is no private salvation. Salvation is a matter of the restoration of the whole creation. This means that the channel by which salvation comes to us must be consistent with this end. In his own words:

In order to receive God’s saving revelation we have to open the door to the neighbor whom he sends as his appointed messenger, and—moreover—to receive that messenger not as a temporary teacher or guide whom we can dispense with when we ourselves have learned what is needed, but as one who will permanently share our home. There is no salvation except one in which we are saved together through the one whom God sends to be the bearer of his salvation (1989e:83).

We can state the logic of election succinctly in the following way. God created us to be social creatures that can know a personal God in the context of community and history. Since salvation is the restoration of creation, the consummation will involve a restored human family reconciled to each other and to God in the midst of history. If the call to this salvation is to be consistent with the nature of salvation itself, it must be made by a community already experiencing this reconciliation to God and to each other. Election is, therefore, necessary in that it is congruous with the Biblical understanding of the human situation in its relation to God.

The second contrast is between Newbigin’s view of the election of Israel and the church as bearer of God’s revelation, and the view of authors within the “redemptive-history” hermeneutic. The contrast here is instructive because Newbigin has much in common with their view of Scripture. George Hunsberger has made a helpful contrast between Newbigin on the one hand, and Harry Boer and Oscar Cullmann on the other. Hunsberger groups Boer and Cullmann under the rubric of authors who view God’s election of His people as a mere ‘instrumental mechanism’ for his work of salvation (Hunsberger 1998:97). Boer traces the redemptive line from Abraham to Christ with attention to their “special function of preserving in its integrity the messianic line culminating in the coming of Christ” (Boer 1961:68; quoted in Hunsberger *ibid*). Hunsberger concludes that Boer’s view “assigns Israel more a function as the machinery of history than a dynamic and living vocation as its ordained purpose” (Hunsberger 1998:98). Cullmann likewise displays the same general viewpoint. Instead of being concerned with “the preservation of a biological redemptive line” as Boer is, Cullmann displays the “historical line of events” which find their culmination and mid-point in Christ (*ibid*). In both cases, the election of a people “is not tied to a missional purpose but to a historical instrumentality as a part of the redemptive process” (*ibid*). The events or the biological line become conduits for the appearance of the Messiah who brings about redemption. Newbigin’s view is much more closely tied to mission. The elect community is a people who embody in their corporate life the purpose of God. God’s

work of redemption cannot be abstracted from the reality of their communal life that incarnates the renewal God is working.

5.2.2. *Provisional Incorporation of Humankind into Jesus Christ*

Throughout the last three decades of his life, Newbigin frequently refers to the church as ‘the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ.’ The first time he refers to the church in this way is in 1973 in a discussion paper prepared for an ecumenical group in Madras in which we find a profound discussion of the structures of the church. His most extended—and maybe his only—discussion of this definition is found here. He observes that “every discussion of the structures of the Church presupposes a doctrine of the Church—hidden or acknowledged” (1973c:110). He poses the question ‘What is the Church?’ and proceeds to offer his answer.

The New Testament uses many metaphors—body of Christ, Bride of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, People of God, Followers of the Lamb and scores of others. But it is not proper to take simply one of these images and use it as the sole basis of defining the church. While there will always be relativity, Newbigin proceeds to offer his “working definition” of the church: ‘The church is the provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ.’ This definition is unfolded in four points.

First, the essential words are “into Jesus Christ.” Since Jesus is the representative man who has revealed and accomplished the end-time kingdom, participation in that kingdom means one must be incorporated into Jesus Christ. This refers to a threefold reality. It refers, in the first place, to the historical Jesus who lived, died and rose again. This Jesus lived at a point in history, in a known time and place, with a certain name. This historical person revealed and accomplished the end. The church exists in order that men may be related to that historical Jesus—continuing His life in the world and conforming itself to His death. In the second place, we are related to Jesus who is risen, alive, and present in midst of his church. The church cannot simply be explained by sociological factors because it is defined by the presence of the living Lord at work in its midst. The life of Jesus is not simply a pattern to be reproduced but the continuing presence of that life active and working in the midst of the community. Finally, being incorporated into Jesus Christ means being related to Jesus the Coming One. The church does not develop as any other institution—that is, responding to forces by reference to its past. Rather it is called forward to the future—a future in which it already participates and which is the true future of the human race and cosmos.

Second, the church is concerned with *humankind*. It is not a private organization for the benefit of those who adhere to that particular brand of religion. The church is not a *privatus cultus* but the first fruits of a harvest of the new humankind. She is *pars pro toto*, the part for the whole.

Third, the church is a *provisional* incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ. It is provisional in two senses. First, the church’s members only make up a small part of humankind and exist, not for themselves, but for the sake of all humankind. Second, the visible form of the church is provisional. It does not yet reflect the variety and richness of the life of all humankind.

Fourth and finally, it is a provisional *incorporation* of humankind into Christ. In Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection God has accomplished the end. The church is that community that has been incorporated into the life of the kingdom as deposit, first fruit,

and sign. It enjoys communion with the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit—the blessing that will be fully known at the end. However, this enjoyment of the powers of the age to come must be understood in terms of the church's task to continue the sending of Jesus into the world. As he made known the kingdom in his life, deeds, and words under the sign of the cross, so the church must continue that mission. This can only happen as the church abides in Christ as branches abide in the vine. Only in communion with Christ can the life of Jesus become evident in the life of the church.

This definition highlights the close tie between the eschatological and the missionary nature of the church. As the church is incorporated into the reign of God in Jesus, it is constituted as a community called to continue that same kingdom mission.

5.2.3. *Sign, Foretaste, and Instrument of the Kingdom*

The triad sign, foretaste, and instrument² of the kingdom appeared as a designation of the church in *The Household of God* in the early 1950s³. From that time on it became the most common way Newbigin understood the church. Again the close connection between the kingdom and the church is evident in these images. A succinct summary of his understanding is found in a speech he gave near the end of his time in Madras.

The business of this 7 percent [Christians in Madras] is to be an effective sign, instrument, and firstfruit of God's purpose for the whole city. Each of those three words is important. They are to be a *sign*, pointing men to something that is beyond their present horizon but can give guidance and hope now; an *instrument* (not the only one) that God can use for his work of healing, liberating, and blessing; and a *firstfruit*—a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for all (1994k:33).

The church is first of all a foretaste or *arrabon*. This indicates that the church has both a real experience of the salvation of the kingdom in the present and a hope for full realization of that renewal. Newbigin believes that the Eastern Orthodox church has something to teach the western church on this score. The Orthodox criticize the West for embracing too functional a view of the church. The Orthodox stress that the church is first of all a communion in the life of the Triune God. It must be defined by what it

²Newbigin uses other images to get at the same point. He will often speak of the church as agent instead of instrument and of the church as foretaste and deposit (*arrabon*) instead of first fruit.

³Already in 1948 Newbigin uses two of the terms to refer to the church: first fruits and instrument (1948d:28)

is, not simply by what it does—in ontological terms, not just in functional terms (1994k:60f.).

The church is also an instrument or agent in service of God's reign. The church can be the means by which God brings about justice, freedom, and peace in the world. The announcement of the good news of the kingdom of God must be accompanied by a people who pursue the justice, peace, and freedom of the kingdom. If the reality is not evident in the deeds of the church the words will not ring true. Words without deeds lack authority. But God does not only use the deeds of the church as instrument; He also uses the life of the community insofar as it is a faithful first fruit of the kingdom. However, we must recognize that the church is not the only instrument. God uses the state, for example, as an instrument of justice, peace, and freedom in society (1993k:61f.).

Finally, the church is a sign. A sign points to something "that is real but not yet visible" (1994k:63). The church is a 'pointing people' who witness to the fact that there is the reality of the kingdom of God that lies beyond history. The church does not offer solutions to all the world's problems. Rather by its life, words, and deeds it directs the hope of people to the coming kingdom of God. Newbigin frequently employs an engaging image to illustrate this reality.

When we have to go to a distant village in our pastoral duty we try to start very early in the morning, so that we do not have to walk in the heat of the day. And it sometimes happens that we have to set off in total darkness; perhaps we are going towards the west so that there is no light in the sky and everything is dark. But as we go, a party of people travelling the opposite way comes to meet us. There will be at least a faint light on their faces. If we stop and ask them: "Where does the light come from?" they will simply ask us to turn round (do a U-turn) and look towards the east. A new day is dawning, and the light we saw was just its faint reflection in the faces of those going that way. They did not possess the light; it was a light given to them. The church is that company which, going the opposite way to the majority, facing not from life towards death, but from death towards life, is given already the first glow of the light of a new day. It is that light that is the witness (1987a:21; cf. 1989e:120).

Newbigin's threefold description of the church as sign, instrument, and foretaste was forged in the crucible of an encounter with the ecclesiology of Johannes C. Hoekendijk. Newbigin's earliest discussion of these terms explicitly acknowledge the work of Hoekendijk (1953d:168). In two articles published in the *International Review of Mission*, Hoekendijk had brought the church-centric basis for mission in the ecumenical tradition under searching criticism (1950, 1952). Mission had gone astray because it revolved around an illegitimate centre—the church (Hoekendijk 1952:332). There was the need to rethink the nature of the church within the kingdom-gospel-apostolate-world framework (:333). The kingdom is destined for the world because it is the world that God loves and has reconciled. The gospel is the announcement about God's redemptive act that is directed toward the whole world. It is of the nature of the gospel that it be proclaimed; the gospel and apostolate belong together. Where in this context does the church stand? "Certainly not at the starting-point, nor at the end. The Church has no fixed place at all in this context, it *happens* in so far as it actually proclaims the kingdom to the world" (Hoekendijk 1952:334). Whatever else can be said of the church is of little relevance. "The *nature* of the Church can be sufficiently defined by its *function*, i.e. its participation in Christ's apostolic ministry" (*ibid*).

Newbigin protests this interpretation of the church. He recognizes what is right in Hoekendijk's thinking. Hoekendijk protests the church that has become ingrown and lost its missionary identity. He believes the church can only be understood in terms of mission. "The Church can exist only to the extent that it is the Mission.... To put it differently, it lives only in so far as it partakes in the 'economy of witness', which Christianity signifies in the New Testament" (Hoekendijk 1952:334-335). Newbigin agrees.

... 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... [N]o recovery of the true wholeness of the Church's nature is possible without a recovery of its radically missionary character (1953d:170).

Newbigin is concerned, however, that Hoekendijk has exaggerated this insight and repudiated the idea of the church as end by insisting that the church must be understood solely in terms of its instrumental or functional role. To this distortion Newbigin responds with two affirmations. First, "the church is both a means and an end, because it is a foretaste" (1953d:168). It is precisely because the church now has a real foretaste of the life of the age to come that she can be a witness and instrument of the kingdom. Or as he phrases it: "It is precisely because she is not *merely* instrumental that she can be instrumental" (1953d:169). Second, "the means by which the good news of salvation is propagated must be congruous with the nature of the salvation itself" (*ibid*). If salvation is a making whole, a healing of all things in Christ, a reconciliation to God, then the church can only proclaim this reality if it is itself a living embodiment of this healing and reconciliation. So Newbigin concludes:

Just as we must insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so we must also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary Church (*ibid*).

The next twenty years witnessed a growing popularity of Hoekendijk's views in ecumenical circles. As this view permeated the popular ranks of the church Newbigin increasingly stressed what he believed was being neglected. A quote may suffice to illustrate what became a common theme for Newbigin throughout this time.

In what I have just said, it might appear that I am reducing the Church to a merely functional level—making it merely a means to an end. That must never be done. The Church is indeed functional: its function is to bring men to their Saviour. But it can only do that if it is more than a merely functional agency. It can only do that if it is itself the place where the Saviour's presence is known and enjoyed—if only in foretaste. People must be able to get some idea of what it means to be saved by looking at the life of the Church. At least they must see here a foretaste of what Jesus is offering to the world. Otherwise 'being saved' has no clear meaning ... It must be a community in which the love of God in Jesus is known and tasted and shared and made available to others (1972e:8).

His emphasis on the church as foretaste, first fruit, and deposit during this time led him to a more nuanced formulation. After again stressing that the church cannot be described merely in functional terms as a mere instrument for the fulfillment of a

purpose beyond itself, he notes that “membership in the Church involves communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.” This cannot be considered a means to the end but the true end itself. However, it is not the end since God desires all people to be brought into this communion. So the church is neither an end in itself nor a means to the end. It is the *arrabon* (deposit) and first fruit of God’s purpose in Christ. “Only *as such* is it also sign and instrument” (1973c:113; my emphasis). There is a natural priority in understanding the church as a deposit or first fruit. It is in having a foretaste of the kingdom, in being the deposit and first fruit of the life of the kingdom that is coming, that the church is sign and instrument. Put another way, Newbigin recognizes that there are other instruments of the kingdom. However, the way in which the church is an instrument in manifesting the kingdom is by first being a first fruit of that kingdom.

Newbigin continued to employ the images of the church as first fruits, sign, and instrument of the kingdom to highlight its missionary character. He sorrowfully noted the selfish introversion of the church and spoke of “our most urgent task” and our “greatest task” to help the church move from thinking of itself simply as a saved community to thinking of itself as a community which has been caught up into God’s saving action for all men. “I think our most urgent task is to discover those changes in the life of the church which will transform it from a self-regarding, self-seeking clique into an open fellowship of those who are committed to Christ’s saving work for all men” (1972e:7) This will not come by dissolving the church as many are suggesting but by seeing the church as a community which follows Jesus taking up his mission as instrument, sign, and foretaste of the kingdom (1972e:7-8).

5.2.4. *The Church as a Hermeneutic of the Gospel*

Another designation of the church that became popular in the last two decades of Newbigin’s life was the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel (1980f:43; 1989e:222-233). The good news is that in Jesus the kingdom of God has arrived and is present in its healing power. And yet it appears as weak, foolish, and despised. The kingdom of God is hidden in the garb of weakness. How can a message of victory over sin and suffering, a message that claims to be the clue to the purpose of universal history, be made believable when it runs counter to typical understandings of power and victory?

How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it (1989e:227).

The term was first employed to counter the danger of separating the church from the kingdom. In lectures given in preparation for the WCC meeting at Melbourne, Australia in 1980 on the theme ‘Your Kingdom Come’ Newbigin traced the theme of the kingdom in 20th century missionary theology. He observed two dangers with respect to the relation of the kingdom to the church. The first danger is that the kingdom is separated from the church. When this happens, mission degenerates into a mere program or ideology. Abstract nouns like social progress and civilization in the early 20th century,

or liberation, justice, freedom, and peace in the latter part of the century, replace Biblical language about the kingdom of God. Mission degenerates into a program or ideology in a legalistic pursuit of these ideals. The other danger is that kingdom is identified with the church. In this case the mission of the kingdom is reduced to the growth and prosperity of the church. Mission equates the success of its strategies with the growth of the kingdom. The energies of the church are focussed on the growth and welfare of the church (1980f:19, 41-42). The proper answer in relating the church to the kingdom is not to find a middle way between these two dangers. "It is by a firm grasp of the New Testament teaching about the Spirit that we shall come to a right understanding of the relation between the Church and Kingdom" (1980f:41). Newbigin finds this relation in Acts 1. The disciples ask a question about the kingdom: "Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They receive an answer about the Spirit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. You will be my witnesses..." The Spirit is the foretaste, the first fruit, the *arrabon* of the Kingdom. It is both the real presence now and future promise of the kingdom. Thus the church is the community that has begun to experience the presence of the kingdom. As such it is a hermeneutic of the gospel—the living reality of a community who has a foretaste of the kingdom and is a faithful preview of its future consummation. As a hermeneutic of the gospel it is privileged and called to seek justice, freedom, and peace, to share in the sufferings of an encounter with evil, to exhibit solidarity with the oppressed, and to share the assurance, hope, and joy of the victory of the kingdom. "Such a community will be the living hermeneutic of the message of the Kingdom which it preaches. There can be no other" (1980f:43).

5.3. CONTINUING THE MISSION OF THE SON

"The church can be rightly understood only in an eschatological perspective" (1953d:153). More precisely, the church can be rightly understood only in terms of the "overlap of the ages" in which the kingdom of God is already present and yet awaits a consummation. The precise meaning of this time between the incarnation and *parousia* of Jesus is mission—the mission of Jesus continued in the church (1953d:157). Thus, "the implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology that does not issue in such obedience is a false eschatology" (1953d:153-154). The nature of the church is defined by its call to continue the mission of Jesus.

5.3.1. *The Logic of Mission*

Unfortunately, there is a long tradition in missiology that roots the mission of the church, not in the gospel and the kingdom mission of Jesus, but in obedience to a command. To counter this understanding, Newbigin speaks of the 'logic of mission' (1989e:116). This phrase refers to an essential historical connection between the mission of the church and the good news of the kingdom revealed and accomplished in the mission of Jesus. Mission is essentially connected to and flows from the coming of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ the meaning of universal history has been made known and

realized. The last day has arrived and the church now participates in the powers of the new age that are already at work (1989e:117). The call to repentance and baptism is a call to be incorporated into Jesus and “so to share his ongoing mission to the world. It is to be baptized into his mission” (*ibid*). This good news must be made known to all nations. “The logic of mission is this: the true meaning of the human story has been disclosed. Because it is the truth, it must be shared universally” (1989e:125). The universality of the church’s mission flows from the universal significance of the gospel as the revelation of the end of history.

A contrast with Konrad Raiser makes Newbigin’s position clear. Raiser is critical of the classical paradigm of the ecumenical movement for the triumphalism of universal mission (Raiser 1991a:91). He recognizes that the universal mission of the church is based on a certain Christology—what he calls a Christology “from above.” Since the church is formed by an historical and existential link to Jesus Christ, Christology will be all-determining in defining the church. Raiser points to two Christologies “from above” that are foundational for the classical paradigm. The first is an “incarnational” understanding of Christ that is characteristic of the Anglican and Orthodox traditions in which the ontological reality of Christ’s humanity and divinity is stressed. The second is a “cosmocrator” Christology advocated by the Reformation churches which accents the exaltation of Christ as Lord and Judge of the world (Raiser 1991a:43). Both are Christologies “from above”: the first highlights the divinity of Christ and the second his universal Lordship. If Christ is God and Lord, then the mission of the church is universal. Over against this Raiser calls for a “*concrete Christology*, which takes seriously the historical particularity of Jesus” (Raiser 1991a:59). In contrast to a Christology “from above” which stresses the divinity of Jesus and his universal significance, Raiser wants a Christology “from below” that emphasizes his loving and liberating care for all people. Raiser’s Christology “from below” takes seriously the ministry, suffering, rejection, service and ultimately the cross of Christ (Raiser 1991a:43). The atonement is interpreted simply as the price paid by Jesus for total devotion to God and the marginalized (*ibid*). This Christology would lead the church to give up its Christocentric and universal claims and carry out its mission in solidarity with the world.

For Newbigin Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of the character and purpose of God for the world. The incarnation, cross, and resurrection are events of universal significance and validity because Christ has revealed and accomplished the end of universal history. The exaltation demonstrates the universality of Christ’s work. If this is true, then the gospel must be proclaimed to all people and to the ends of the earth; universal mission is the logic of the gospel.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that Newbigin can be interpreted in terms of a triumphalist Christology or ecclesiology “from above.” It can be conceded that Raiser has placed his finger on an important aspect of Christology that has been neglected in classical theology; indeed questions of ontology and emphasis on the reigning Christ have blurred the ministry of Christ in the flesh. Yet Newbigin’s Christology is not rooted in ontology nor on the reigning Christ; Newbigin does maintain a Christology that emphasizes the divinity and universal Lordship of Jesus

Christ—a Christology “from above.”⁴ However, the mission of the church is rooted in the total fact of Christ that reveals and accomplishes the end of universal history. His ministry to the poor, his suffering, his rejection, service, and ultimately his cross all find a large place in Newbigin’s Christology. Veldhorst has shown that the distinction between a missiology “from above” and a missiology “from below” is a meaningless distinction in classifying Newbigin; he draws the emphases of both together in an integrated framework (Veldhorst 1989:63-68). A similar comment could be made about his Christology; our review of Newbigin’s understanding of Jesus has shown that both emphases—His historical mission and universal significance—find a place in God’s revelation and accomplishment of the end of history in Christ.

5.3.2. *As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You*

Newbigin frequently points to two texts to highlight that the missionary church is defined by the mission of Jesus: Acts 1:1-11 and John 20:19-23. Acts 1 opens with the words: “In my former book Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach...” indicating that Acts continues the story of Jesus’ teaching and acting in the church. In John 20:21 we read the words that we have become accustomed to seeing in Newbigin’s work: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Newbigin comments on the Johannine commission in the light of his missionary experience in India:

And that [John 20:21] is the launching of the church. It is a movement launched into the public life of the world. It has no life except in this sending. I came to feel vividly the truth of this during my years in the Madurai diocese, when more than half of our congregations had no buildings of their own. I became accustomed to conducting all the services of the church in the open air, in the village street. I have in my mind’s eye now those hundreds of occasions when I have ministered the word and sacrament of the gospel with the Christian congregation sitting around and, beyond them, the wider circle of the whole village standing round, watching, listening, questioning. And how often it happened that, on my next visit, some of those who had been standing at the edge then asked for baptism, coming to join the group in the centre. That scene, repeated hundreds of times, etches in one’s mind a picture of the church not as a body drawn out of the world into a secure place, but as a body thrust out into the world to draw all people to Christ. The church’s being is in that sending (1987a:22-23).

The content of the church’s mission is also given in this sending. The word ‘as’ is important: ‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ This connection between the sending of Jesus and the sending of the church enables us to understand more concretely the shape of the church’s mission. Jesus carried out His kingdom mission in the power of the Spirit, made known the good news in his life, death, and resurrection, bathed His witness in prayer for the coming of the kingdom, carried out His calling in suffering and

⁴Gordon Spykman argues that the false dilemma between a theology “from above” and a theology “from below” is a capitulation to a Kantian split. Both Schleiermacher and Barth are captive to this Kantian problematic: the one opting for the historical pole, the other for the suprahistorical pole (1992:44-48).

weakness, and finally formed and nourished a community to continue His work. This gives specific direction to the church in its kingdom mission.

5.3.3. *The Church: Mission in Christ's Way*

“[W]e are to understand the mission of the Church in the light of the fact that the history of the time between Christ's ascension and his coming again, the time when his reign at the right hand of God is a hidden reality, the time in which signs are granted of that hidden reign but in which the full revelation of its power and glory is held back in order that all the nations—all the human communities—may have the opportunity to repent and believe in freedom” (1989e:128). Yet the mission of the church has been variously understood in the history of the church. What is mission? Newbigin answers: mission in Christ's way. Newbigin opens his book *Mission in Christ's Way* with these words: “According to the fourth gospel, Jesus sent his disciples out on their mission with the words: ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you’ (John 20:21). This must determine the way we think about and carry out the mission; it must be founded and modelled upon his. We are not authorized to do it in any other way” (1987a:1). What is Christ's way?

The first set of contrasts is found in the wake of the Willingen meeting of the IMC. In the last chapter of Wilhelm Andersen's IMC. research pamphlet that studies the contribution of Willingen to a theology of mission—a chapter that is entitled ‘Problems Left Unsolved’—he draws on Karl Hartenstein's analysis to show that there were two primary ways in which this question of mission in Christ's way was answered at that conference (Andersen 1955:49ff.). In Hartenstein's critical evaluation of Willingen, he pointed to a divergence of understanding the mission of Jesus as one that required a further profound study of Scripture. The two primary ways of understanding the church and mission in the way of Christ may be designated as follows.

The first we might refer to as the Lutheran answer. This answer was elaborated at the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Hanover a few weeks after Willingen. If Christ is the starting point for our thinking about the church, we must take into consideration with equal seriousness His incarnation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. The kingdom mission of Jesus is defined by the Father in a threefold way. As the incarnate one God makes Himself known in Jesus; as the crucified one, God judges sin in the world; as the resurrected one, God ushers in the new Creation to break in on the old. “These three aspects together and equally constitute the essence of the mission of the Son, and the mission of the Holy Spirit follows upon them as their consequence. None of these aspects must be treated as though it were effective out of relationship to the others; but equally they must not be identified with one another” (Andersen 1955:50). In the end, however, the Lutheran view orients itself to the cross rather than equally emphasizing each (:51) and so the question Andersen poses to this tradition is whether or not they have taken seriously God's affirmation of the creation in the incarnation and resurrection.

The above-mentioned second way of understanding the church and mission in Christ's way is the Anglican answer. In this tradition, ecclesiological and missiological formulations are to a large extent determined by the incarnation. The missionary church is to be understood as an extension of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Andersen

questions whether or not emphasis on the incarnation is so excessive in this tradition that it is difficult to take with sufficient seriousness the cross and the resurrection.

Certainly witness to the Incarnation is part of the Christian testimony which can never be abandoned; but this is not to say that the whole mission of Christ can be considered only—or one-sidedly—in the light of the Incarnation alone. The Incarnation does not of itself constitute the whole work of Christ. The Cross and the Resurrection have, in relation to it, not merely demonstrative value; they have intrinsic value; and it is only when these three aspects are taken together that they constitute the witness of the triune God to Himself (Andersen 1955:50-51).

Newbigin's understanding of mission in Christ's way seems to manifest both of these tendencies at different times. The first and most common way Newbigin proceeds is to define the church's mission in terms of the four primary episodes of the Christ event—incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and Pentecost (1987a). The church's mission is continuing the life ministry of Jesus, in the way of the cross, in the resurrection life of the age to come, and in the power of the end-time Spirit. In this way of understanding the continuance of the mission of Jesus, there are two basic time periods in the "time between the times." The first is the mission of Jesus made up of his life ministry, death, resurrection, and outpouring of the Spirit. The second is the mission of the church which continues what Jesus began in these events.

The second way Newbigin understands mission in Christ's way corresponds more closely with the Anglican tradition outlined above. Reference has been made to the way Newbigin was influenced by the Anglo-Catholic tradition when he read Michael Ramsey's book *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Critical appreciation for the Catholic emphasis on the church as an extension of the incarnation is prevalent in both *The Reunion of the Church* (1948:55-83) and *The Household of God* (1953:61-93). On the one hand, Newbigin rejects the Catholic understanding of the church as an extension of the incarnation. He interacts with Yves Congar arguing that his notion of the extension of the incarnation removes the eschatological dimension of the church (1948:55-83). On the other hand, Newbigin is appreciative of their emphasis on the church as an historically continuous institution founded by Jesus to continue his mission. The church continues the ministry Jesus began in his life. Newbigin's emphasis is not so much on the historic succession as on the elements that made up the life ministry of Jesus. He writes, "The thing that Jesus began to do must go on. He is the Messiah, and God's rule is what is manifested in his life and deeds and words, the rule of the one who is really in charge" (1972g:56). If we characterize Newbigin's thought in this way then there are three basic time periods in the era "between the times." The first is the life and ministry of Jesus in the flesh making known the kingdom of God in life, word, and deed. The third is the continuation of that mission in the church by the Spirit. Between these two is the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost as events necessary for the church's mission to begin. Before the church can make the life of the kingdom known in life and deed and proclaim its presence, it is necessary for Christ to defeat sin on the cross, to enter into the resurrection life of the age to come as a Pioneer, and pour out the Spirit that brings the life of the kingdom. The church must be incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

These two perspectives are not contradictory but complementary. Both stress the extension of Jesus' life ministry in the church. In the life and deeds of Jesus, the

presence of the kingdom was made known; in the corporate life of the church and in its deeds of mercy and justice, the presence of the kingdom is made known. In Jesus' words the arrival of the kingdom was announced; proclamation of that good news remains a part of the church's mission. Both stress that the church's mission is carried out under the cross: suffering is the normal badge of a faithful encounter with the powers of darkness. Both stress that the life of Jesus can only be carried out by the power of the Spirit who brings the life of the resurrection.

Bosch provides a taxonomy of different views of mission that are shaped by one or another of the aspects of the Christ event: incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and *parousia* (Bosch 1991:512-518). Different models are appropriate to different settings; yet all are important for a full and balanced understanding of mission in Christ's way. While there may be a tendency in Newbigin toward an emphasis on the cross, the two perspectives articulated above have enabled him to hold the various facets of the Christ event in balance.

Newbigin speaks of the mission of the church in terms of continuing what Jesus began in his life ministry (1972g:56; 1978e:44-49; 4.4.3.), being incorporated into his death and resurrection and thereby manifesting the resurrection life in the way of the cross (1987a:22-31; 1989e:117), and bearing the witness of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost (1978e:56-65; 1987a:15-21, 29). Thus the mission of Jesus provides both the empowerment and the content of the church's mission. As to content, the church is to do what Jesus did. In an earlier section we noted that Jesus carried out his mission in the power of the Spirit, announced the kingdom with his words, demonstrated the kingdom with his deeds, embodied the kingdom with his life, prayed for the coming kingdom, pursued the kingdom in weakness and suffering, and formed a community to embody the kingdom. All of these characteristics are to mark the mission of the church. As to the empowerment, the life of the kingdom is present in the church as it is incorporated into Christ and as it shares in the Spirit.

5.4. BEARING THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible joins together the Spirit, the kingdom, and mission. James Dunn has rightly said that "it is not so much a case of where *Jesus* is there is the kingdom, as where the *Spirit* is there is the kingdom" (Dunn 1970:38). Similarly in Newbigin's thought, the Spirit brings the reality of the kingdom into the midst of the world. Thus He equips first Jesus, then the community of God's people to witness to the reality of the kingdom of God.

The church's identity is defined by the continuation of the mission of Jesus. In the New Testament the Spirit is poured out on Jesus to enable Him to carry out his mission to witness to the good news of the kingdom. "From the very beginning of the New Testament, the coming of Jesus, his words and works are connected directly with the power of the Spirit" (1978e:57). It is by the Spirit that Jesus is conceived, anointed at his baptism, and driven into the wilderness for his encounter with Satan. The Spirit's power enables Jesus to witness to the kingdom in his ministry in word and deed (*ibid*). Throughout his ministry, however, there is no evidence from the gospels that Jesus communicates the Spirit to the disciples. This awaits the completion of the ministry of

Jesus in His death and resurrection. When that is complete the way is opened for the outpouring of the Spirit on the community of disciples to continue what Jesus has begun. With the advent of the Spirit, according to Peter, the last days have dawned (Acts 2:17). The Spirit begins his work by gathering a community from all nations into the life of the kingdom. By the Spirit this people is constituted as a witnessing community: a society who share and witness to the life of the kingdom. Thus the Spirit is fundamentally a missionary Spirit—one sent to witness to the coming kingdom of God. He has taken the church up into His redeeming work giving it a fundamentally missionary identity. The church's nature is defined by its call to bear the witness of the Spirit.

Newbigin emphasizes two important features of the Spirit's work that began at Pentecost. First, the gift of the Holy Spirit is to a community and not to separate individuals (1972e:11). The Spirit creates a fellowship that shares the life of the kingdom (:14-15). While Acts does describe Barnabas and Paul as individuals filled with the Spirit, the dominant New Testament pattern is to speak of the sphere of the Spirit's work as communal (1972g:67). Second, the Holy Spirit is given to equip the church to fulfill its mission. "The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. The effect of his coming upon the Church is that the believers are enabled to continue the work of Jesus... (1972e:13). The book of Acts becomes clearer if we understand that "the gift of the Spirit is always for mission, is always for the equipping of God's people for their witness to the world, exactly as the gift of the Spirit to Jesus at his baptism was his anointing for his mission as the Messiah" (1972g:68).

David Bosch notes that by the second century, the close Scriptural link between pneumatology and mission had been broken. The emphasis shifted to the work of the Spirit in sanctification or as guarantor of apostolicity. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century linked the Spirit with the interpretation of Scripture. He believes, however, that "in the twentieth century there has been a gradual recovery of the intrinsic missionary character of the Holy Spirit" (Bosch 1991:114-115). Newbigin shares this commitment to the "intrinsic missionary character of the Holy Spirit."

5.4.1. *The Mission of the Spirit*

Mission is first of all a work of Spirit. Two factors engraved this truth on Newbigin's mind. The first was his missionary experience in India. In that missionary context, Roland Allen's emphasis on the work of the Spirit convinced him. He writes:

Over and over again we find that it is taken for granted [in the New Testament] that witness is essentially a witness borne to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and that the part that the Church plays is a secondary instrumental part.... I have come to this position not through pure theological reflection in a state of abstraction from the world, but rather by facing concrete and ordinary practical missionary experiences (1994k:22f.).

The second factor is the emergence of the concept of the *missio Dei* in the ecumenical tradition and in Newbigin's thought. The church-centric period of the IMC (1938-1952) stressed mission primarily as the church's responsibility. The Spirit empowered the church to carry out its mandate. Mission was first of all the church's duty; the Spirit was the equipping dynamic. However, involvement in the ecumenical tradition where the

missio Dei was increasingly the framework in which mission was understood, moved Newbigin to stress the fundamental and prevenient role of the Spirit in mission. He wrote: "It is not that the Church bears witness and that the Spirit helps the Church to do so. This kind of language completely misses the point. The point is that the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness. The witness is thus not an accomplishment of the Church but a promise to the Church" (1980f:38).

The book of Acts (which should be entitled 'The Acts of the Spirit') gives us a full exposition of the Spirit as the primary agent of mission. The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost and immediately the eschatological gathering of God's people begins. It is this action of the Spirit that launches the church on its mission: "It is thus by an action of the sovereign Spirit of God that the church is launched on its mission. And it remains the mission of the Spirit. He is central" (1978e:58). The Spirit continues to be the primary agent in mission. He brings Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), prepares Ananias to receive Saul as a brother (Acts 9), prepares Peter and Cornelius for their encounter (Acts 10), initiates the first mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13), and guides the apostles on their journeys (Acts 16:7) (1978e:58f.).

The Spirit continues to be present in the community in power, producing a corporate life and deeds that bring about a missionary encounter. The powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask questions. The missionary encounter between the early church and its pagan Roman environment did not come about as the unilateral initiative of the apostles but "in response to questions asked by others, questions prompted by the presence of something which calls for explanation" (1989e:119). It is for this reason that Paul's letters contain many exhortations to faithfulness but none to be engaged in mission! This theme of faithfulness tied to the sovereign working of the Spirit dominates Newbigin's understanding of the missionary church. The following quotes capture this concern.

What really needs to be said is that *where the Church is faithful* to its Lord, there the powers of the kingdom are present and the people begin to ask the question to which the gospel is the answer (1989e:119; emphasis mine).

It is the presence of this new reality which (*when the Church is faithful*) prompts the questions to which the preaching of the gospel is the answer. The true missionary dialogue, in other words, is not initiated by the Church. In a secondary sense it is initiated by the outsider who is drawn to ask: What is the secret of this new reality... In the primary sense, however, it is initiated by the presence of the Spirit who is the *arrabon* of the kingdom, and whose presence leads people (perhaps without the prior knowledge of any missionary or evangelist) to make this inquiry (1989e:134; emphasis mine).

Understanding mission as first of all a work of the Spirit will keep the church from three distortions in its understanding of mission: legalistic, triumphalistic, and humanistic distortions. There is a legalistic distortion of mission that defines mission as obedience to a command. If mission is first of all of work of the Holy Spirit, then mission is an overflow of the gospel and not obedience to a law. Newbigin writes:

We have made the missionary imperative into a law, a heavy burden laid upon the conscience of Christians, whereas the New Testament sees it as a gracious gift, as—if I may use the phrase—a spin-off from Pentecost. This is why you cannot find in Paul's letters a single passage where he urges his readers to be more active in evangelism.

There is absolutely nothing in the New Testament corresponding to the almost frantic appeals for missionary activity which have been common in Protestant missionary practice. What you *do* find everywhere in Paul's letters, as in the whole New Testament, is the admonition to every Christian to stand fast against the power of the enemy... Where that condition is fulfilled, we can be utterly sure that the Spirit will bear his own witness in his own way and in his own time. *That* is not our problem (1978c:308).

Newbigin stresses the prevenient initiative of the Spirit with a series of similar images. In the foregoing quote, mission is a "spin-off from Pentecost." He speaks in other places of mission as the "overspill" (1977d:218), the "overflow" (1982b:148), or the "fallout" (1989e:116) from the Spirit given at Pentecost. All of these images point to mission as a "logical," spontaneous, and joyful response to the outpouring of the Spirit. The church is then delivered from an atmosphere of anxiety and guilt regarding its mission (1977d:218).

Understanding mission as the work of the Spirit will also exclude a triumphalist distortion of mission. Mission is not merely church extension in which the church as a powerful body puts forth its strength and wisdom to expand its numbers and influence. Mission changes not only the world but also the church.

It is the action of the Holy Spirit, who in his sovereign freedom both convicts the world... and leads the church toward the fullness of the truth it has not grasped. Mission is not essentially an action by which the church puts forth its own power and wisdom to conquer the world around it; it is, rather, an action of God, putting forth the power of his Spirit to bring the universal work of Christ for the salvation of the world nearer to its completion (1978e:59-60).

Over against a triumphalist picture of mission two things can be said. First, mission changes not only the world but the church (1978e:59). Second, the witness of the Spirit is most evident when the church is weak and suffering (:62).

Mission as a work of the Spirit will also preclude a humanistic distortion that conceives of mission as an essentially human enterprise in which the church initiates and controls the strategy. Rather mission is God's work. The Spirit is sovereign in mission; He initiates and controls all that happens. The church is the attentive servant called to listen to and follow the Spirit's leading.

It is *not* appropriate for the Church to use in this connection the language which is natural for a commercial sales-drive or a military campaign. The true strategist is the Holy Spirit himself.... He will not allow himself to be programmed on our computers but will rather require us to follow where he leads.... If mission were *our* enterprise, if it were to be understood on the analogy of the sales-promotion of a commercial firm, then of course it would be a matter of driving, urging, persuading.... The kingdom is God's, not ours.... The agent of the Holy Spirit who is the living presence of the Kingdom in foretaste.... It cannot be too often repeated that it is He who is the witness; our witness is secondary. Our task is to believe, to obey, to follow the way of the cross, to join our humble witness to His who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate, to go forward with the light of the new creation on our faces... When that is how we believe and follow, we can be sure that the Spirit will make his own witness in his own way (1977d:217).

So it is clear that the Spirit cannot be domesticated by the church for its own designs. However, the concept of the *missio Dei* led to an opposite reaction during the middle

part of the twentieth century. Under the influence of Hoekendijk, the mission of the Spirit was separated from the church. The Spirit was at work in the liberating events of the time—the emancipation of blacks, the humanization of industrial relations, the quest for ethics in business, and urban renewal. Like any other instrument in God’s kingdom, the church could become involved in what the Spirit was doing. But there was no special connection between the work of the Spirit and the church. Newbigin believed this picture of the Spirit’s mission in relation to the church also contradicted the picture presented in Acts. Newbigin comments on this double danger:

The initiative is with the Spirit; the Church follows. On the one hand the Spirit is not domesticated within the Church but leads the Church in sovereign freedom. On the other hand the Spirit is not separated from the Church, for the Spirit’s work is to lead men and women to confess Jesus as Lord, and the Church is the place where that confession is made. On the one hand the Spirit (the *arrabon* of the Kingdom) is constantly creating and recreating the Church. On the other hand the Church, which is not the author or controller of the Spirit’s witness to the kingdom, is where that witness is given and acknowledged (1980f:39).

5.4.2. *The Spirit as End-Time Gift: Deposit, First Fruits, and Foretaste*

The Spirit, kingdom, and mission are all closely intertwined in Newbigin’s thought. The Spirit ushers in the life of the kingdom and mission is witness to the kingdom. The significance of the close relation for his missionary ecclesiology can be observed in the way Newbigin characterizes the time period between Pentecost and the *parousia*. This period can be designated in three closely interrelated ways: as a time when the kingdom has already arrived but is not yet fully present; as a time of mission characterized by witness to the kingdom; and as the era of the Spirit. About the last he says: “He [the Spirit] spans, as it were, the gulf that yet yawns between the consummation for which we long and our actual life here” (1953d:161). The Spirit dwells in the church as an end-time gift and this identifies the church in terms of its witness to the kingdom.

The eschatological nature of the Spirit has been obscured for much of church history. In Christendom ecclesiologies, the Spirit is related primarily to either the institutional church in the Catholic tradition or the individual in the Protestant tradition. Writing about Protestant theologies, Geerhardus Vos observes that the reason for the eschatological neglect of the Spirit is that His work has been elaborated in terms of the application of the work of Christ to the individual (Vos 1912:159f.). The institutionalization of the Spirit in Catholicism and the individualization of the Spirit in Protestantism has eclipsed the fundamentally eschatological nature of the Spirit. During the twentieth century, under the influence of New Testament theology—especially in Pauline studies—the eschatological nature of the Spirit has been rediscovered. Hendrikus Berkhof quotes recent twentieth century Biblical scholars to document this trend (Berkhof 1964:104-105). In his book *The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit*, Geerhardus Vos says: “The Spirit’s proper sphere is... the world to come; from there he projects himself into the present, and becomes a prophecy of himself in his eschatological operation” (Vos 1912:228). Similarly Neill Hamilton writes: “The attempt will be made to show that the Spirit is related primarily to the future” (Hamilton 1957:17). Berkhof himself refers to the Spirit as “the gift for the last days” and the “first fruits of the future” (1964:105). Likewise Herman Ridderbos writes

that “the Spirit is pre-eminently the eschatological gift” (1975: 87).

Newbigin elaborates the eschatological nature of the Spirit with three words: first fruits, *arrabon*, and foretaste. We have noted earlier the designation of the church with these terms (5.2.4.). The church shares in the Spirit who is a gift of the kingdom. Since the Spirit is the first fruits, the deposit and the foretaste of the kingdom, so the church shares in that status. His discussion of the Spirit and the Kingdom is most often placed in the context of an exposition of Acts 1 (e.g. 1980f:33-43; 1987a:15-21). Here the disciples pose a question about the kingdom (Acts 1:6), and receive an answer about the Spirit (Acts 1:8). The question about the kingdom at this point in redemptive history is an obvious question (1987a:15). Jesus has spoken to them about the kingdom of God, promised the Spirit which is recognized by them as an eschatological gift, completed his work on the cross and entered the age to come by the resurrection of the body. Now is the time for the power of the kingdom to be made manifest in its glory; surely there is no need to keep it a secret any more. Yet Jesus warns them: it is not for them to know when the kingdom will be fully revealed. But he also gives a promise (not a command): the Holy Spirit will come and you will be my witnesses. How is the promise related to the question? Newbigin answers: “The question is about the Kingdom; the promise is about that which is the foretaste, the first-fruit, the *arrabon* of the Kingdom—namely the gift of the Spirit” (1980f:37). *Arrabon* is an economic term in Greek culture. It was used to denote the payment that is made in advance of the receipt of the goods as a pledge to pay the full amount at a later time. The *arrabon* is an earnest, a down-payment, real cash and not just a promissory note or an “I.O.U.” That money is real money and can be spent. This deposit is more, however, than simply cash. It also represents a promise of a much larger amount of cash to come. The deposit assures the vendor that when the product is delivered the rest of the price will be paid. The *arrabon* is *both* cash now and the promise of more to come in future (1987a:17). The Holy Spirit is the *arrabon* of the kingdom. It is not just a verbal promise of the kingdom, a promissory note or an “I.O.U.” It is a real gift and presence of the kingdom in the present. There is a real experience of the life of the kingdom *now*, in the present. However, it is more. The gift of the Spirit carries a promise of much more to come. It is a solid pledge and the assurance that the life of the kingdom will come in fullness at a future time. The Spirit is present as a witness to the coming kingdom by making that life a reality now. “And it is this that makes the church a witness to the kingdom” (*ibid*).

The words foretaste and first fruits point to the same double character. The church has a foretaste of the powers of the age to come, yet the full kingdom banquet awaits a later date (1948d:98; 1953d:157). There is a real foretaste, an enjoyment in tasting the food; it is not simply the aroma that promises the coming meal. However, it is only a taste that produces the longing for the whole meal. Bringing this image close to home: “The Holy Spirit is the aperitif for the messianic banquet. It is something you enjoy now... But the whole point of it is that it is a foretaste, that it assures you of a greater reality still to come” (1994k:61). There is both having and hoping (1989e:120); we have received the life of the kingdom but hope for its fulfillment. Likewise the first fruits of a crop is both the reality of the harvest and the promise of more to come. “Just as the first-fruit is more than just one handful of grain or one bunch of fruit, but has the character of a sign pointing us to the coming harvest and assuring us of its coming... so the presence of the Holy Spirit is more than just the present experience of life in the

fellowship of the Church, but is the assurance of something much richer and more glorious to come. It is in this sense that the presence of the Holy Spirit constitutes the Church a witness to the kingdom which it proclaims” (1978b:6).

5.4.3. *A Threefold Relation of the Church to the Witness of the Spirit*

For Newbigin, Spirit, witness to the gospel of the kingdom, and church are joined together (1980f:40). The church is the place where the Spirit is present to witness to the kingdom. Newbigin relates the witnessing work of the Spirit to the mission of the church in three ways (1958b:19). First, the church is the place or locus of the Spirit’s witness (*ibid*). He believes that “it is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power” (1989e:119). In contrast to the church-centric period that stressed the church primarily as the agent of mission, Newbigin affirms that the church “is not so much the agent of mission as the locus of mission” (*ibid*). The Spirit acts in power to enable the church to have a foretaste of the inbreaking life of the kingdom. It is because the church is the locus of the Spirit’s mission that it is a witnessing community: the presence of the Holy Spirit “constitutes the Church a witness to the kingdom which it proclaims.... The disciples will be witnesses, not because of their own efforts, but because they will reflect in their own life the reality of the coming kingdom of which they will receive the foretaste in the gift of the Spirit” (1978b:7).

Second, the church is the place where the powers of the kingdom are available to enable the church to serve human beings in all their needs (1958b:19). The church is not only the locus of the work of the Spirit but also its agent. As such the church manifests the love of the kingdom, pursues its justice, and extends its mercy.

Third, the church is the community called to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ with words that point to the source of its new life (1958b:19-20). Where the powers of the kingdom are present, people will begin to ask questions. The gospel is the answer to these questions that have been prompted by the presence of something which calls for explanation (1989e:119).

The church is the locus of the Spirit’s witness to the gospel. Part of that which led Newbigin to this conclusion was his interviews with numerous people who were converted to Christ from other faiths or no faith. Three things were clear from these testimonies: there is no one way that people come to Christ; conversion is a result of a whole series of “apparently chance happenings” often over a long period of time that cannot be contrived by any human strategy; and “conversion is truly a work of God in which our words and deeds are given a place but of which the overall control is surely not in our hands” (1978c:306).

Three themes pervade Newbigin’s thought: the Spirit is the primary witness; the church is the locus and agent of the Spirit’s witness; and the witness of the Spirit cannot be separated from the church. His missionary experience among growing congregations in India led him to conclude that growth took place where “the local Christian congregation was fulfilling these four conditions”:

(1) It was a truly believing, worshipping and celebrating fellowship in which the Gospel was proclaimed in word and celebrated in sacrament and enjoyed in the life of a caring community.

(2) Its members were involved in the life of the society around them, not living for themselves but entering deeply into the sorrows and conflicts of their neighbours, being truly “the Church for others.

(3) Its members were ready, when appropriate, to give an account of the hope that was in them, with (as Peter says) gentleness and reverence.

(4) Its members were willing to respect and welcome, rather than to denigrate, the differing gifts of others. By this I mean that (for example) those with the gift of evangelism did not despise those whose gifts were in the direction of social service or political action, and *vice versa*, so that these differing forms of involvement did not cancel each other out but reinforced each other (1978c:308-309).

In situations where the church was faithful in these things, many people in the neighbourhood of the church were brought into contact with the congregations through “a multitude of relationships in word and act in the course of daily life” (1978c:309). Each personal contact made by word and deed led back to the fellowship of believers on Sunday morning. Newbigin concludes that “this is the work of the Spirit. The Church is but the place where this work of the Spirit is done” (*ibid*).

5.4.4. *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*

At the end of the 1940s Newbigin believed that the exclusive sphere of the Spirit’s work was the church (1948d:99, 123). During the 1950s the theme of the Spirit’s work in the world came to the fore within the ecumenical movement. By the early 1960s Newbigin recognized that he had limited the working of God’s Spirit to the church and that a much greater place need to be given to His activity in the world (1963g:33; 1993h:187). The last chapter traced this development noting, on the one hand that Newbigin attempted to find a larger place for the work of the Spirit in the world, and on the other hand that his formulations remained underdeveloped. This weakness manifests itself in the mission of the church.

The relation of the work of the Spirit in the church to His activity in world history was a question that challenged the ecumenical gatherings at Willingen, New Delhi, and Mexico. There were two principal answers to that question. The first emphasized the classical ecumenical understanding that the Spirit was at work in the church. The discontinuity between the gospel and culture or world history was emphasized. In this view the separation between the church and its environment was highlighted; mission is concerned with the development of churches and world history becomes the backdrop against which God works out His salvation in His people. The second answer accented the work of the Spirit in world history and culture. Emphasis was placed on the continuity between the mission of the church and the historical development of human society. The task of discerning the work of the Spirit in history and participating in His work by forwarding and completing the general progress of human society defines the mission of the church.

Newbigin set out to find a way to formulate the Spirit’s work that would integrate the insights of both views. His starting point is the mission of Christ. Jesus carried out his mission in the context of the rule of the sovereign Father. The Father governs history directing all events according to His purpose. Jesus submits Himself to the Father’s ordering of events not as the agent of the kingdom but as witness to what the Father is doing. Nevertheless the coming of Jesus is decisive for all humankind and all history.

In Jesus is the salvation and judgement of the world; all people are judged by their acceptance or rejection of Him. “The coming of the Son is the event by which the Father has chosen to bring all things to the point of decision, to the issue of judgement and salvation” (1963g:36). In the mission of Jesus and the church the Father calls human history to its decisive moment through the work of the Spirit. There is a double process whereby all humanity is gathered or separated based on their response to Jesus. This witness of Jesus to ultimate issues in human history by the Spirit is extended in the mission of the church sent out after the resurrection. The mission of the church is “the continuation of that double process through history till its end” (1963g:48). Like Jesus the church goes through history “as the servant people, looking up to the Father who alone is the Lord of history, accepting his disposition of events as the context of their obedience, relying on His Spirit as their guide” (1963g:37). The continuing coming of Jesus to all humanity through the church is not simply an enterprise of the church. Rather “it is the work of the living Spirit of God, of him who is one with the Father and the Son. The Church is the outward form of the continuous work of the Spirit in re-enacting Christ’s coming among men” (1963g:49). The Spirit witnesses through the church to the meaning of the events in world history so that precisely *in relation to these events* all people are compelled to embrace or reject the salvation offered in Jesus Christ (1963g:37f.).

Mark 13 forms the lens through which Newbigin looks at world history. As the gospel spreads throughout the world, false messiahs arise offering salvation on other terms demanding a choice between Jesus and another way. The church is a *suffering* witness to the true meaning of the events of world history. In this context, the witness that the church offers is not a “work of the Church. It is the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the church” (1963g:44). Newbigin expresses this succinctly:

It is the Father’s purpose, revealed in Jesus, to lead all mankind to this ultimate decision. The presence of the Church in the midst of mankind is the means by which He does so. But the witness to his purpose which brings men to the point of decision is the witness of the Holy Spirit himself (1963g:45).

Newbigin’s Trinitarian formulations have moved beyond a churchcentric understanding of mission. The missionary church is not simply an institution that builds itself up; it stands in the midst of the world witnessing to the real meaning of the events of world history. However, the underdevelopment of Newbigin’s doctrine of the Spirit’s work in the world becomes evident here. Newbigin recognizes that the revolutionary events of the 1960s are means of liberation and bearers of evil (1963g:40). Yet how are we to identify what is a work of the Spirit and what is twisted by the evil one, what is liberating and what is oppressive? What form does the missionary church take to witness *credibly* in the midst of history? Newbigin does not answer these questions.

5.5. THE MISSIONARY IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

“As the Father sent me, so I send you’ defines the very being of the Church as mission. In this sense everything that the Church is and does can be and should be part of mission” (1977a:242). Mission belongs to the *esse* of the church and not to its *bene*

esse. Without mission “the Church simply falls to the ground. We must say bluntly that when the Church ceases to be a mission, then she ceases to have any right to the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament” (1953g:163). The following section will elaborate the missionary nature of the church in three sections. First, the church’s nature will be defined in terms of its relation to God and to the world. Second, three historical developments that have eclipsed the missionary nature of the church will be sketched. Third, the importance of unity for the missionary church will be articulated.

5.5.1. *Related to God and to the World*

There are two sides to the missionary nature of the church. On the one side, the church’s nature and purpose is defined in relation to God’s calling. On the other, it is defined in terms of its relation to the world. Newbigin believes that a “very elementary point... in the New Testament” is that “the Church is always and only designated by reference to two realities: one, God in Christ, and the other, the place where the Church is” (1994k:50-51). On the one hand, the church is the *ecclesia tou Theou*, but on the other hand, the church is designated in terms of its place—in Ephesus, in Thessalonika, and so on. The church is a human community that does not exist for itself: “It is the Church of God *for that place*, and that is because the Church does not exist for itself but for God and for the world that Jesus came to save” (1994k:53).

5.5.1.1. The Church’s Role Defined by Reference to God

The church is designated by reference to God in Christ. This has been elaborated in the pages of this chapter. The church’s role defined by reference to God can be summarized in four intertwined themes: Biblical narrative, *missio Dei*, the *basileia tou Theou*, and election. Each of these themes is not separate or distinct. Rather they look at the same reality from differing vantage points. They are differing facets of the same diamond.

The church is defined by the role given to it in the Scriptural narrative. The Bible is universal history. Therefore, the unique role of the church must be understood in the context of the Biblical story. The Bible tells the story of God’s mighty acts of redemption for the whole creation. In the Old Testament, the purpose of God moved toward its consummation in Christ. Christ arrived but the final consummation has been held off to a later time. God has opened up a space in redemptive history. This time has a specific meaning: the witness of the Spirit through the church to the end of history. Thus, the church’s role in this story is to be the bearer of the Spirit’s witness to the kingdom.

The church is defined by its participation in the *missio Dei*. God is a missionary God and mission is the activity of God to redeem the creation. The church exists because God has this mission to redeem the creation. The source of this mission is God’s love. His long path of reconciliation culminates in His sending Jesus. Jesus revealed and accomplished the kingdom and poured out the Spirit so that people might enter that kingdom. The mission of God has created the church: it is the locus of God’s mission. The *missio Dei* has also taken the church up into its work as an instrument. Through the life, words, and deeds the Spirit works to carrying out His renewing work. There is no participation in Christ’s redemption without participation in the His mission.

The nature of the church is further defined by its relation to the kingdom of God. History is moving toward its consummation in the kingdom of God. The church is that body which has already begun to enjoy a foretaste of the kingdom. It is called to be a preview of the kingdom in its life and deeds and to announce the arrival of the reign of God with its words.

Finally, the nature of the church is defined by its election: God chooses the church for a certain task. That task is continue the mission of Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

This brief summary points to the significant fact that the church can only be defined in terms of its purpose in the mission of God.

5.5.1.2. For the Sake of the World

The church is also designated by reference to the place in the world in which it exists. The church is the ‘church for others’ in the sense that it “does not exist for itself or for what it can offer its members” (1980f:45). When the church “tries to order its life simply in relation to its own concerns and for the purposes of its own continued existence, it is untrue to its proper nature” (1977g:119). The church exists for the place in which it is situated. This raises two questions: What is the significance of the word ‘for’? What is the meaning of the word ‘place’? Put in other words, the first question is about what it means for the church to be *for* a particular place. The second is about how to define place. The second question will be taken up in two later sections in the following chapter. Here the first question will be addressed.

The relation of the church to its place is shaped by the relation of Christ to the world. In other words, the *for* is defined in the way that Christ is *for* the world.

It is of the very essence of the church that it is *for* that place, for that section of the world for which it has been made responsible. And the “for” has to be defined christologically. In other words, the Church is *for* that place in a sense that is determined by the sense in which Christ is *for* the world (1994k:53f.).

Newbigin describes this relation of Christ to the world in a threefold way (1977g:118f.). First, Christ is related to the world as Creator and Sustainer. This means that the church in each place is to love and cherish all of its created goodness. Second, Christ is also the one that will bring the world to its appointed end; He is the One in whom all things will be reconciled and consummated. Therefore, the church is called to be a sign and picture of the true end for which that place exists. Finally, Christ is the one who has died and rose again for that place. In his atonement Christ both identified with the world, but was also separated from it. He identified with the created world he loved but rejected the sin that had scarred it. The cross stands as the salvation and judgement of each place. Therefore, the church in every situation must be wrestling with both sides of this reality: for and against the world. “The Church is for the world against the world. The Church is against the world for the world. The Church is for the human community in that place, that village, that city, that nation, in the sense that Christ is for the world. And that must be the determining criterion at every point” (1994k:54).

There are at least three ways in which the church has failed to live up to its true nature and be the church *for* its place. The first is irrelevance. Newbigin points to two occasions where “the churches are essentially external to and irresponsible towards the

secular reality in which they are set” (1977g:118). On the one hand, the church fails to be for the place when its theology, ecclesial structures, and churchmanship is imported from another place, from a foreign culture. On the other hand, the church fails when its form is a survival from another time. In other words, the church fails to be the church *for* the place when it is seen as an alien body, whether that foreignness comes from cultural or temporal distance. The second way the church fails to be *for* the place where it is set is when it assumes the wrong relationship to culture. It is possible for the church to live in uncritical identification with the world around it, merely being conformed to the world. It is also possible to live in polemical confrontation with it. Both of these extremes hinder the church from taking the right posture to the place in which it is situated. Third, the church can fail with a conservative stance that does not account for change in a culture. The context is constantly changing, and if the church is to be for the place it must be a dynamic and not a static body “making constantly new and difficult decisions in a changing context” (*ibid*).

5.5.2. *The Church in History: Factors Crippling Missionary Consciousness*

Newbigin points to three factors that have crippled the missionary self-consciousness of the church. The first is the unity of church and state in Christendom; the second is the powerful vision of the Enlightenment; the third is the separation of mission and church in the modern missionary movement.

5.5.2.1. Christendom

Newbigin’s historical interpretation of the church’s missionary existence can be divided into three eras: the pre-Constantinian church, Christendom, and the church in modern, post-Enlightenment culture (1966b:102-107; 1980d:5f.; 1980f:46-50; 1986e:99-102).

The pre-Constantinian church was a missionary community (1966b:104). As we noted earlier, it chose the name *ecclesia* (public assembly) rather than *thiasos* or *heranos* (private religious communities) to describe its identity. The latter were *cultus privati* which were given the protection of the state. They played a role in the private sector of the empire offering a future, personal salvation to its members. The church refused such a designation and adopted the identity of *ecclesia*—a public assembly of citizens.

In other words, the early Church did not see itself as a private religious society competing with others to offer personal salvation to its members; it saw itself as a movement launched into the public life of the world, challenging the *cultus publicus* of the Empire, claiming the allegiance of all without exception (1980f:46).

This universal claim put the Church on a collision course with the established powers. For the next three centuries the church paid the price for its audacious claim (1986e:100).

All this changed with the new sacral unity of church and state during the Constantinian period. This *corpus Christianum* ceased to be a missionary religion. Hemmed in by Islam to the south and to the east, Christianity became a folk religion for the European peoples (1966b:102). “To put it in one sentence, the Church had become the religious department of European society rather than the task force selected and

appointed for a world mission” (1966b:103). Mission ceased to have any meaning both within Europe and to the ends of the earth. Within Western culture “the whole community was baptized” while in terms of world mission “the great pagan world was out of reach and out of sight” (1966b:106). Christendom was a self-contained world and “the sense that the Church is a body sent into all the world, a body on the move and existing for the sake of those beyond its borders, no longer played an effective part in men’s thinking” (1961c:110).

According to Newbiggin, the Christendom situation brought negative effects for the missionary understanding of the church. Five are mentioned here: ecclesiological reflection, patterns of churchmanship, relation to culture, disunity, and a loss of eschatology.

The *corpus Christianum* was the background for the self-understanding of the church and thus for all ecclesiological reflection. This can be clearly seen in all the Reformational theologies. The shared tacit assumption is that they are not in a missionary situation. Each of the ecclesiologies of the Reformation period is defined over against each other within the context of Christendom rather than over against the pagan world (1953d:1-2). In the confessional documents of the Reformational churches, the marks of the church are defined apart from any reference to the church’s missionary identity (1966b:104).

The Christendom context also shaped our patterns of churchmanship. “The period in which our thinking about the Church received its main features was the period in which Christianity had practically ceased to be a missionary religion.... It was in this period, when the dimensions of the ends of the earth had ceased to exist as a practical reality in the minds of Christians, that the main patterns of churchmanship were formed” (1966b:102). Newbiggin points to a number of examples (1961:110f.; 1966b:102-105). Ministry is guardianship of the faithful rather than leadership in mission (1966b:102). He makes this critique specific in a paper given at the Anglican-Reformed International Commission in 1983. He contrasts ministry in the New Testament that assumes a missionary situation with ministry in the Reformed and Anglican traditions that “have been formed in the ‘Christendom’ era, in a society presumed to be Christian.” In the New Testament ministry is primarily leadership in mission while in the Christendom situation ministry is “primarily pastoral care of established communities” (1983c:1). The congregation is an inward-looking gathering place for the faithful to be edified and sanctified rather than a staging post for witness and service to the world outside (1961c:110f.; 1966b:102). The sacraments are reshaped by Christendom: baptism is no longer commitment to mission but a *rite de passage*, and the eucharist is no longer renewal to a missionary commitment but the feeding of the community with the bread of life (1983c:1). Theology is not formulated in the context of a struggle between the gospel and the non-Christian culture but shaped over against rival interpretations of the gospel (1961c:111; 1966b:102). Church history is not taught in terms of the missionary advance of the church and its encounter with non-Christian cultures, but in terms of doctrinal and polity conflicts within the life of the church (1961c:111; 1966b:102f.). The structures of congregational life are patterned in a medieval undifferentiated society and are simply invalid for mission of the church in the West today. The structures we have inherited are *neither relevant* to the secular and differentiated life of the West *nor true* to the Biblical picture of the Church as a missionary community (1966b:107).

A third negative manifestation of the Christendom church is two faulty attitudes toward culture. The first is especially evident in the national church that falls within the Christendom trajectory. In this model, the church takes responsibility for the cultural development and social life of the community. However, the antithetical tension between the church and culture is slackened; the church loses sight of its calling to be a community separate from the world. Newbigin comments: “We are painfully aware of the consequences of that [Constantine’s] conversion; for centuries the Church was allied with the established power, sanctioned and even wielded the sword, lost its critical relation to the ruling authorities” (1980f:47). When the church loses its prophetic-critical stance in relationship to its culture, it accepts a role as the “protected and well decorated chaplaincy in the camp of the dominant power” (1983a:4). And when “the Church is the spiritual arm of the establishment, the critical role of the Church devolves upon separate bodies—the monks, the radical sectarian groups, the millenarian movements on the fringes of the Church” (1980f:48). This emphasis on the importance of antithetical tension for the missionary church and its eclipse in Christendom is indebted to Hendrik Kraemer. Newbigin’s view of the relation of church to culture is shaped by Kraemer’s subversive fulfillment.⁵ Kraemer highlighted the importance of maintaining a healthy tension between church and culture: “The deeper the consciousness of the tension and the urge to take this yoke upon itself are felt, the healthier the Church is. The more oblivious of this tension the Church is, the more well established and at home in this world it feels, the more it is in deadly danger of being the salt that has lost its savour” (1956a:36). Kraemer believed that this tension was surrendered in the ‘symphonia’ of Christendom: “The symphonia, to use the official orthodox theological term, of faith and empire, of Church and State... when put in the light of the prophetic message of Biblical revelation, is a surrender of the tension, inherent and necessary in the relation of the Christian faith and world... (1956a:36, 43).⁶

The second faulty attitude is manifest in the churches that have reacted against the churches that have peacefully accommodated themselves to the culture. In these churches there is a concern to be different and distinct from the world. Yet these churches withdraw from the world washing their hands of all cultural and social responsibility (1953g:7-8).

⁵This theme will be pursued in chapter 8.

⁶This theme has been fruitfully explored in the work of Wilbert Shenk (1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1999a). In *Write the Vision* Shenk argues that in Christendom the church has taken its place along side of the other powers within the culture and as a result has “surrendered the vital critical relationship to its culture that is indispensable to a sense of mission” (1995:34).

The missionary church stands in contrast to both of these models. The church in a missionary setting cannot afford to be either irrelevant or domesticated without fatal consequences. The church is both “separated from” and “set in” the ancient religious cultures of non-Christian lands (1953g:8).

A missionary Church in a pagan land can take neither of these attitudes. On the one hand it must be a distinct body, separate from the pagan world around it. But, on the other hand, it cannot divest itself of responsibility for those whom it has uprooted from their ancient soil and transplanted into a totally new soil, or for their children (*ibid*).

A fourth negative effect of Christendom that Newbigin points to is the disunity of the church. “Everything about such a missionary situation conspires to make Christian disunity an intolerable anomaly” (1953g:8). The churches of Christendom could ignore most aspects of cultural life since the supposed neutrality or Christian character of cultural life did not require an antithetical stance. Instead of standing together over against a pagan culture, the churches could concentrate on rival interpretations of the Christian faith. The difference between Lutherans and Calvinists, Protestants and Catholics, and so forth was of greater importance than the division between Christ and no-Christ. Thus churches were splintered as they defined themselves over against one another. When the church was thrust into a missionary situation at the end of Christendom, it became clear “that the division of the Church into rival and hostile bodies is something incompatible with the central verities of the Gospel.... When the Church faces out toward the world it knows that it only exists as the first-fruits and the instrument of that reconciling work of Christ, and that division within its own life is a violent contradiction of its own fundamental nature” (1953g:9). Within Christendom the church accepted its disunity as a matter of course, but within a missionary situation it found it to be an intolerable scandal.

Finally, in the Christendom context there has been a loss of eschatology. When the eschatological perspective is lost, evangelism becomes merely the rescue of individuals one by one from this present evil age. The church becomes a waiting room that attempts to preserve these individuals unharmed for the age to come. The church turns in on itself as pastoral care replaces missionary concern as the primary task of the church.

When this [a loss of eschatology] becomes dominant the Church thinks primarily of its duty to care for its own members, and its duty to those outside drops into second place. A conception of pastoral care is developed which seems to assume that the individual believer is primarily a passive recipient of the means of grace which it is the business of the Church to administer (1953g:166-167).

Newbigin does not only elaborate the *negative* consequences of Christendom; there is also a positive dimension. He believed that the church was right in taking responsibility for the cultural, social, and political life of early medieval Europe. He remarks:

Much has been written about the harm done to the cause of the gospel when Constantine accepted baptism, and it is not difficult to expatiate on this theme. But could any other choice have been made? When the ancient classical world... ran out of spiritual fuel and turned to the church as the one society that could hold a disintegrating world together, should the church have refused the appeal and washed its hands of responsibility for the political order? It could not do so if it was to be faithful to its origins in Israel and the ministry of Jesus. It is easy to see with hindsight

how quickly the church fell into the temptations of worldly power. It is easy to point... to the glaring contradictions between the Jesus of the Gospels and his followers occupying the seats of power and wealth. And yet we have to ask, would God's purpose as it is revealed in Scripture have been better served, if the church had refused all political responsibility, if there had never been a "Christian" Europe, if all the churches for the past two thousand years had lived as persecuted minorities...? I find it hard to think so (1986e:100f.).

Newbigin describes the Constantinian settlement as "the first great attempt to translate the universal claim of Christ into political terms" (1980f:47). The result of this attempt was that "the Gospel wrought into the very stuff of [Western Europe's] social and personal life" (1953g:1). The whole of public and private life was shaped by Christian revelation (1986e:101). Newbigin's missionary experience in a culture dominated by a non-Christian worldview enabled him to see that western culture had been positively shaped by the gospel and "that we still live largely on the spiritual capital which it generated" (1980d:6). He writes: "It is, I think, difficult for those who have lived only in Western Europe to feel the enormous importance of the fact that the Church is surrounded by a culture which is the product of Christianity. One needs to have had experience both of this, and of the situation of a Church in a non-Christian culture, to feel the difference" (1953g:5).

A vivid illustration of the impact of Newbigin's experience can be found in his reflection on his return to Britain during his first furlough in 1946/47. He relates his first impression: "The first thing I saw when I landed was a queue. Perhaps it will seem ridiculous to say that it brought a lump to my throat, but I confess that it did. The queue system will not work in India, because it contradicts the fundamental basis of society—which is caste" (1947:9). He relates several other impressions: a moral climate where people are concerned for the starving and various kinds of free institutions that exist on the basis of a personal sense of responsibility. He recounts his initial response: "I will sum up the impression I have tried to convey by saying that it was the impression of a society deeply-rooted in the Christian belief that every man is precious in the sight of God and is responsible before God for his neighbour..." (1947:10). He points out that this is the capital of the past, and that if this precious legacy is to continue, there will need to be an intentional affirmation of the Christian faith.

While the Christendom model was carried over into the national churches of Europe, a number of factors were combining to break down the *corpus Christianum*: the missionary experience of the 19th and 20th centuries, the rise of the Third World church, the dechristianization of the West, and the power of secularism. Thus, while there may have been some validity to Christendom at one time in history, it is no longer valid (1966b:106). Today theologians are questioning the whole traditional doctrine of the church from a missionary angle. The church has been set into a new relation to society that has forced new ecclesiological reflection and led to the "beginnings of a recovery of a biblical doctrine of the Church as a missionary community" (1966b:104). Conscious of the paganism in Europe the churches "are painfully struggling back to the truth that mission is the task of the Church, and that a Church which is not a mission is not a Church" (1948d:11). However, while there are many signs of this struggle toward a missionary relation between the church and its context, the ordinary congregation still does not regard itself as missionary nor is its churchmanship oriented toward its pagan environment.

This section reveals an ambivalence in Newbigin's thought toward Christendom. On the one hand, he is critical: the Christendom church does not correspond to the New Testament description of a missionary church. On the other hand, he is often much more appreciative: there are situations in which the Christendom arrangement is still valid. He remarks: "There are some places in the world—not many—where this pattern is still valid, in some of the South Pacific islands, for example, where church and society are coterminous, a single *corpus Christianum*" (1966b:106). In later chapters we will see this ambivalence; for example, in his call for a missionary encounter with western culture when he wants to highlight missional involvement in the public life of culture, Newbigin speaks very positively about the period shaped by Augustine's thought. Newbigin does not resolve this ambiguity but allows criticism to remain side by side with affirmation without a criteria evaluate the *corpus Christianum* experience.

5.5.2.2. The Privatization of the Church in the Enlightenment

In the last three centuries the church has left the Christendom era behind and has moved into a new situation. A new public doctrine has replaced the Christendom vision as the *cultus publicus* of Western Europe. This new public doctrine is shaped by the Enlightenment. The term Enlightenment is a profoundly religious word. It points to the corporate conversion of Western culture. The light of scientific rationalism had dawned and the darkness of superstition was being banished. The public life of Western culture was now shaped by a new vision: human mastery of the creation by human science and technology to build a better world. The Christian understanding of the world could provide light for the private and domestic life but it had no business challenging the modern scientific vision that controlled the public life (1980f:48-49).

The impact of this historical shift on the church was devastating. It failed to challenge the new Enlightenment *cultus publicus*. It took the road which the early church had refused to take by retreating to the private sector and effectively becoming a *cultus privatus* (1980f:48). "The Church took on more and more the shape which the early Church had refused: it became a group of societies which were seen as offering spiritual consolation and the hope of personal salvation to those who chose to belong" (1980f:49). In this new situation the church is not a sign of the kingdom but a religious chaplain ministering to the private needs of society.

As Newbigin sees it, the situation today is to recover a shape of the missionary church as a sign of the kingdom that manifests Christ's rule over all of life, yet does not fall into the Christendom trap. We cannot go back to a pre-Constantinian innocence in which we treat all power as evil (1986e:102). We cannot strive for a new *corpus Christianum* nor accept relegation to the private sector of post-Enlightenment culture.

The Christendom era is behind us. Around us is the situation I have tried to describe, where Christianity has become a *cultus privatus* tolerated within a society whose *cultus publicus* has been shaped by the vision of the Enlightenment. Before us is the new task of developing a pattern of churchmanship which can credibly represent Christ's claim to universal dominion over all of the life of the world without attempting to follow again the Constantinian road. That is our task now (1980f:50; cf. 1986e:102).

A later chapter will explore the privatization of the gospel in western culture in more depth. At this point it is important to note that Newbigin stresses the discontinuity

between the Christendom and post-Enlightenment church. Wilbert Shenk and Darrell Guder et. al. have rightfully called attention to the continuity that also exists between these two period (Shenk 1995; Guder et. al. 1998:47-60). The very reason the church takes a privatized role in western culture is because of its Christendom legacy. In Christendom the church found a place for itself within the constellation of powers within the culture; in the Enlightenment the place is much reduced but the mindset of establishment remains. This contributes to Newbigin's ambivalent interpretation of Christendom.

5.5.2.3. The Separation of Church and Mission in the Modern Missionary Movement

A third historical development that has crippled a missionary understanding of the church is the separation of church and mission in the context of the modern missionary movement. In the thinking of most Christians, the words 'church' and 'mission' designate two different bodies. The church is a society devoted to worship and the nurture of its members. Mission is a society responsible for the propagation of the gospel. The converts of this activity are then passed on to the church for safekeeping (1953d:164).

Newbigin began to see the disastrous effects of this dichotomy early in his career as a missionary in Kanchipuram. "Madras is a field which has suffered tragically from a wrong policy with regard to the relations of Church and Mission." The result of this tragic dichotomy was "sterile introversion", "the absence of evangelistic outreach", and "congregations [that] are largely ineffective" who "repudiate any responsibility for or relation with the Mission" (1993h:66). Later as General Secretary of the IMC he observed the disastrous effects of this dichotomy on a wider scale. In his booklet *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (1958b) he pursued an understanding of mission that would move beyond the colonial framework yet preserve the missionary enterprise. At the top of the agenda was the healing of the dichotomy between mission and church. He believed that "the fundamental question is whether the church as such *is* mission" (1958b:18).

The separation of these two bodies is rooted in the origins of the Protestant missionary movement. In the Protestant churches of the 18th century the majority of people were blind— even hostile—to the missionary responsibility associated with their church membership. The missionary movement resulted from a fresh re-discovery of the Bible and a new work of the Spirit in the churches. Those who were eager to obey the Great Commission expressed their obedience in extra-ecclesiastical channels. They banded together to form separate bodies for mission.

As so often happens, the correction of a deformity in the Church was itself deformed by its opposition to that which it sought to correct. The New Testament knows of only one missionary society—the Church. The eighteenth century knew Churches which had totally ceased to be missionary societies and saw the birth of missionary societies which made no claim to be Churches (1948d:10).

This is the origin of the separation of mission and church. Few Christians today would question the validity of cross-cultural missions. Yet the dichotomy remains; the organ of mission remains bodies formed for this one purpose and separated from the church (1958b:25).

There have been harmful results for both missions and church: “The separation of these two things which God has joined together must be judged one of the great calamities of missionary history, and the healing of this division one of the great tasks of our time” (1958b:26). This separation has had deleterious effects on both the older churches in the West and among the younger churches where the dichotomy has been perpetuated (1953d:164). The primary effect on the church is that it “becomes an introverted body, concerned with its own welfare rather than with the Kingdom of God” (*ibid*). In terms of the younger churches, mission exists alongside of the congregations as two parallel bodies. Mission is responsible for the propagation of the gospel while the churches become receptacles into which the converts of the missionary activity are placed (1958b:16) or “a sort of bowl into which the fish that were caught could be put for storage” (1978c:311). When this happens the congregation is bound “to draw the obvious conclusion, cease to concern itself with the rest of the village, and become a body concerned only with its own welfare” (1958b:32). In terms of the older churches, mission is considered to be the business of full-time specialists. While the church supports this worthy enterprise with giving and support, the real work of mission itself is carried out by full-time, paid professionals. Mission is no longer the *raison d’être* of congregation (1958b:16).

Over against this distortion, Newbigin places the Bible’s teaching and his own missionary experience. In the book of Acts we do not find two different organizations labelled ‘mission’ and ‘church.’ Such a dichotomy would have been unthinkable for the apostles. There was only the church and “that body was both the Church and the Mission—the place where men were being saved, and the agent of God’s saving purpose for all around separating d” (1958b:26). Newbigin’s own experience confirmed both the disaster of church and mission and the possibility of a congregation being a missionary body (1978c:311). In his missionary experience, when mission and church are separated, the church becomes an introverted body concerned with its own maintenance. When new converts are taught from the beginning that being a Christian means being involved in Christ’s mission to the world, they become the vanguard of the church’s evangelistic work (1958b:26). They take for granted that to be a Christian is being part of mission and the gospel is propagated. Newbigin’s own practice as a bishop was to say to the new converts on the day they were confirmed and took communion for the first time:

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’s own experience confirmed that when the church took responsibility for mission in a place, the gospel was spread “by a multitude of anonymous non-professional Christians— merchants, travellers, soldiers, coolies, even beggars (1958b:27). This was the “normal way” in which God’s missionary purposes were fulfilled “when the whole membership of the Church, not a few professionals only... knows that by membership in the Church it is committed to a mission in the world” (*ibid*).

There were many difficult issues on the agenda of missions at this time. In every single case, Newbigin attacked the problem by challenging the dichotomy of church and

mission and affirming the missionary nature of the church. A clear example is the problem of the relation between mission and inter-church aid. The “deepest root” of perplexity on this matter was

... simply the fact that we have corrupted the word ‘Church’ (and distorted the life of the churches) by constantly using it in a non-missionary sense. If it was always clear, both in our speech, and in our ecclesiastical life, that the Church *is* the mission, that it is essentially something dynamic and not static, that (as Emil Brunner has said) the Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning, then inter-church aid would always be aid-for-mission and nothing else. Perhaps real clarity will only come when there has been a sufficiently deep process of self-examination in the life of the ordinary congregation so that the ordinary churchman understand that to be a member of the Church means to be part of a mission to the world (1958b:42).⁷

Note the italicized ‘is’ in the above statement ‘the Church *is* mission.’ We find this throughout the document as Newbigin tackles numerous problems of the missionary enterprise (1958b:16, 42, 46). “Mission belongs to the essence of the Church” and therefore, “you cannot have fellowship with Him without being committed to partnership in His mission to the world” (1958b:26-27).

5.5.3. *Mission and Unity*

The unity of the church was a long-standing concern for Newbigin. Perhaps there is no other subject that he addressed more often in his writings than this one. His early concern for unity was nourished by his involvement in the SCM at Cambridge and the SVMU at Glasgow. His earliest published address contains words that would echo down through the decades of his life.

In so far as the Church is not truly and deeply one the world over, demonstrating to the world a unity that can transcend all sectional aims, however lofty, it is not merely failing to take account of the plain facts of the world as it is today, it is also to that extent denying its own true nature and contradicting its own true witness (1933:98).

The last sentence highlights two things Newbigin believed about unity: it belongs to the true nature of the church and it is essential to the missionary witness of the church (cf. Jongeneel 1997:186-187; Saayman 1984).

Newbigin’s participation in issues surrounding church unity is vast and deep. The focal point in Newbigin’s long-standing involvement in issues of ecclesial unity is his statement on organic unity that was adopted and endorsed by the New Delhi Assembly (1961). This statement is, perhaps, his most important contribution to the ecumenical church. What needs to be clearly demonstrated is how this statement on organic unity

⁷The oft-quoted statement from Brunner comes from *The Word and the World* (1931), p.108. Cf. Jongeneel 1997:88.

is closely tied to his understanding of the nature of the church as missionary. His missionary experience and involvement in reunion struggles in South India shaped his understanding of unity. After 1961, Newbiggin continued to defend this model of unity in the context of the globalization of the world and the widespread capitulation to denominationalism. The primary concern in developing, articulating, and defending this view of unity was that the church might remain true to its missionary nature.

5.5.3.1. Missionary Experience and the Unity of the Church (1939-1948)

For Newbiggin the true nature of the church, when its life is shaped by the gospel, is that it is one and it is missionary; and there is the closest possible connection between the two. This truth, which shaped his broad participation on issues of church reunion and theological discussions of unity, was formed in the crucible of his missionary experience. In his early years in India he observed a dramatic difference between the attitudes toward unity in the younger churches⁸ of the “mission field” and the older churches of “Christendom.” The western churches showed an astounding complacency toward disunity that “so plainly and ostentatiously flouts the declared will of the Church’s Lord” (1948b:9). On the other hand, the non-western churches found themselves drawn together emphasizing more what they had in common than what divided them as they faced ancient and powerful religious systems that controlled the public doctrine of their countries (*ibid*). Why was there this difference in attitude toward unity?

The answer often given in Western churches was that the enthusiasm for reunion in the younger churches issued from the different perspective and situation of the church as a minority movement. The younger churches stand as a minority community in the midst of ancient and powerful religious systems and this particular setting forces the church toward a pragmatic unity that ignores the real issues of division. Newbiggin believes this answer to be mistaken. The answer he offers to the question makes clear the close connection between the gospel, the church, unity, and mission.

The younger churches found their origin in the modern missionary movement of the 19th century. One very important feature of the development of church life on the “mission field” of the 19th century was the principle of mission comity. Since the areas to be evangelized were so vast and the workers so few, it was generally agreed that competition and overlapping should be avoided. Comity was the “mutual division of

⁸Newbiggin speaks of ‘younger churches’ and ‘older churches’ in 1948. Today these terms are no longer valid. See Jongeneel 1997:178-182 for ways western churches have referred to ‘missionary churches’ in the non-western world. Jongeneel opts for the term ‘independent churches.’

territory into spheres of occupation, on the one hand, and the non-interference in one another's affairs, on the other.... its purpose was to prevent wasteful duplication, competition, and presentation of variant forms of worship and polity which might confuse non-Christians and hinder communication of the gospel" (Beaver 1971:123).

This practice had a profound influence on the way the younger churches developed. Where this principle was practiced it meant that "there is *normally* but one Christian congregation, and upon this congregation rests the responsibility for the evangelization of the area allotted..." (1948d:12). This situation dictated an overriding concern for the evangelization of the area in which the church was placed.

... the effect of the principle of comity was to keep the Church constantly aware of its evangelistic task. Where there is only one Christian congregation in a town or village or district, its members can never forget the fact that the responsibility for making known the Gospel in that area rests upon them alone. If they do not do it, no one else will... where there is only one congregation it is impossible for its members to escape from the solemn recollection that on the day of judgement it is they and they alone who can be questioned about their neighbours who had never heard the good news (1948d:15).

It is this sense of obligation and understanding of their missionary nature that was pressed on the younger churches from the beginning of their existence. This also shaped the character of the churchmanship of those churches. They understood that "their life was dominated by the idea of mission" and that "evangelism was their lifeblood" (1948d:10). Or as he puts it a little later: "The life of the younger Churches is, on the one hand, much more influenced by the missionary impulse which produced them and by the enormous evangelistic task which confronts them" (1948d:11).

This is to be contrasted with the older churches of Christendom. In most of the West there is a multitude of competing congregations of every denominational stripe. When this happens it becomes more difficult to sense the full obligation for the evangelization of one's neighbours. It is inevitable that congregations who compete alongside of one another will finally be more concerned with the maintenance of their own distinctive traditions. They will define themselves over against other congregations rather than in light of the responsibility they have toward their neighbour and their cultural context.

[The] ordinary congregation in a Western city or village does not regard itself as a mission. It would, in fact, repudiate the appellation as an insult. The Church carries on missions at home and abroad. But its ordinary congregational life is not oriented towards its pagan environment or dominated by the missionary aim (1948d:11).

There is a contrast between the younger and older churches in that the life of the former are shaped by the missionary impulse as they face outward to the world. There is a second consequence of the principle of comity, however. Generally there is only one church in any given area. This means that Christians from every caste, class, and even denomination must find a home in that congregation. When the church must include within itself all varieties of people from different backgrounds determined by caste, education, wealth, class, and emotional types "then either it visibly disintegrates into warring factions, or else it stands before men as a society constituted by nothing

else than its relation to God through Christ, facing fallen humanity not as a series of particular associations but simply as humanity restored to itself in Christ" (1948d:17). Pointing to the Church in South India, Newbigin observes that they are committed to the conviction that to have Christ in common is enough. The typical Indian congregation consists of folk who have nothing in common save their lives centred in Jesus Christ and the gospel. They are forced to return to the gospel alone as the source of their life and to recognize that "the Church in its true nature is founded on the Gospel alone" (1948d:18).

Newbigin refers to this as the "process of simplification" (*ibid*). The South Indian church has been forced to strip away anything that is not of the essence of the gospel itself in order to find the true source of its life that will endure tremendous diversity. They have to recognize that "to add anything to the Gospel is to corrupt the sources of the Church's life and to reduce it to the level of a human association based on some identity of belief or practice" (*ibid*). Newbigin is not suggesting that theological reflection is unnecessary; in fact, he insists that it is crucial in its task of protecting the gospel (1948d:16, 18). Nor is he suggesting that matters that have divided churches be ignored, for "when this is attempted among Christians it is apt to produce a kind of tasteless slush devoid of any power to salt the earth. Differences of belief have to be faced with the fullest seriousness and realism" (1948d:17; cf. 105-106). And he is not suggesting that all traditions are equally faithful to Scripture. Rather the question is whether or not Christ as presented in the gospel is the sufficient centre for ecclesial unity.

This must be contrasted with the Western church that has existed as numerous confessional bodies. While Newbigin believes that confessional and theological statements are important for the purpose of protecting the gospel from the distortion of human thought, the danger is that these confessions can go beyond this legitimate task and become a series of additions to the gospel. When there are rival congregations, each group will accent their distinctiveness to justify their continued existence. The force of group egotism is to shape congregations that focus more on what they alone hold rather than on what they hold in common (1948d:16).

Thus the "position of the Church under the arrangement known as 'mission comity' has tended both to force the Church to face the question whether the common fact of redemption in Christ is by itself a sufficient basis of outward unity, and also to lay upon the Church a vivid sense of its evangelistic responsibility" (*ibid*). However, for Newbigin comity meant still more than this. It is not simply a matter of recovering one of the aspects of the church's ministry (mission) and distinguishing between primary and secondary matters for the sake of unity. It is nothing less than a return to the gospel that leads to a recovery of the true nature of the church itself. In the missionary situation under the comity agreements, it was much easier to recover the truth, which is so often eclipsed in the Christendom situation where there are many competing churches, "that the Church is not primarily an association constituted by the agreement of its members on a number of points of belief and practice, but simply humanity reconstituted by its redemption and regeneration in Christ" (*ibid*). The church is the new humankind that in its true nature is founded on the gospel alone. Adding anything to the gospel corrupts the church's life and its nature. Creeds and confessions protect the gospel that is the source of the church's life, and the community that identifies itself on the basis of their

own intellectual constructions and traditions of piety is a human association that is not spiritual but carnal (1948d:18). The situation of the younger churches under the comity agreement has driven the church away from these theological constructions and ecclesiological traditions back to the gospel. As they have been forced to live out of the gospel it has resulted in making the church true to its nature as one body and as a missionary body. As Newbigin puts it, the mission context of the younger churches has had the effect “both of making the Church more truly the Church, and of making it more truly a mission to the world. The connection between the movement for Christian reunion and the movement for world evangelization is of the deepest possible character. The two things are the two outward signs of a return to the heart of the gospel itself” (1948d:19).

Newbigin’s answer to the Western churches is clear. The enthusiasm for the reunion of the church on the former “mission fields” is not a pragmatic move in the face of an imposing religious system, but a return to the gospel which has enabled them to recover the true nature of the church as missionary and as one. The enthusiasm of the younger Churches for reunion is not merely the natural effect of the minority status of the younger churches on their perspective, it is “a very deep and significant movement of the Spirit in the life of the church” (*ibid*) and “the fruit of an act of obedience to the Gospel” (1948d:20). The church in the West, on the other hand, for the most part lacks an urgency for reunion because its lack of a missionary focus has allowed it to make central theological additions to the gospel and thus reshape the church as a human association based on human constructions. It is the attitude that each has toward mission that governs their attitude toward unity.

I believe that it is this attitude in character which accounts for the difference in attitude to the question of reunion. It is not possible to account for the contentment with the divisions of the Church except upon the basis of a loss of the conviction that the Church exists to bring all men to Christ. There is the closest possible connection between the acceptance of the missionary obligation and the acceptance of the obligation of unity. That which makes the Church one is what makes it a mission to the world (1948d:11).

His experience as a missionary in the Indian church that lived in the midst of a powerful Hindu society confirmed the close connection between mission and unity. He describes a typical situation in a Hindu village when he stood on the steps of the village church to proclaim the gospel with the Christian congregation sitting in the middle and a great circle of Hindus and Muslims standing round. As he proclaims Christ as the Saviour of all humankind with the following promise: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself”, he knew that the Hindu and Muslim listeners would only believe this promise if they could see evidence of this promise in a reconciled fellowship of believers centred in Jesus Christ.

If they can see in the congregation in the centre not a new clique, or a new caste, or a new party, but a family in which men and women of all cliques and castes and parties are being drawn in mutual forgiveness and reconciliation to live a life which is rooted in peace with God, then there is the possibility that they may believe. If, on the other hand, they see only a series of rival groups competing with one another for influence and membership, they are not likely to be impressed by the message of our Savior (1961g:4).

The importance of this experience for his missionary ecclesiology is seen in the words that follow. He calls this common village scene “a true parable of the position of the Church in the world” (*ibid*). The church stands as a sign, first fruit, and instrument of God’s purpose to draw all men to Himself in Christ. The disunity of the church is a contradiction or a public denial of the gospel. It weakens the proclamation of Jesus. “It is not possible to continue steadily testifying to men that the one thing that matters to them is their relation to Christ and at the same time steadily to maintain that many of the things on which Christians differ matter so much that even the common bond of redemption in Christ is not big enough to transcend them” (1948d:15). The urgency of the prayer of Jesus was impressed on him during his missionary years: “I pray... that all of them may be one... that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

In *The Household of God* Newbigin summarizes the “very close connection between the Church’s mission and the Church’s unity” (1953d:170) in two statements. First, mission is dependent on unity. Unity is needed so that the world may believe, as seen most clearly in the words of Jesus in John 17. The church’s unity is a sign of the salvation which Christ has accomplished. That salvation is the reconciliation of all things in Christ. If the church proclaims the good news of salvation but is disunited her life publicly contradicts the message of the gospel and the sufficiency of the atonement to accomplish reconciliation. Second, unity depends upon mission. When the church is faithful to her nature as missionary, her disunity is seen as the public scandal⁹ that it is. In the missionary situation of the churches outside of old Christendom, the stark contrast between Christ and no-Christ forces the Christian community to the heart of the gospel which enables them to recover the whole nature and being of the church. “When Christians are engaged in the task of missionary obedience they are in the situation in which the Church is truly the Church. They are actual participators in Christ’s apostolate.... In that situation the disunity, which is easily taken for granted among Churches which are not in a missionary situation, becomes literally intolerable” (1953d:173). This interdependence of mission and unity leads Newbigin to conclude:

I do not think that a resolute dealing with our divisions will come except in the context of a quite new acceptance on the part of all the Churches of the obligation to bring the Gospel to every creature; nor do I think that the world will believe that Gospel until it sees more evidence of its power to make us one. These two tasks—mission and unity—must be prosecuted together and in indissoluble relation one with the other

⁹Newbigin explains his use of the word scandal with a vivid illustration. Two rival temperance societies in the same town is unfortunate but not scandalous. But a temperance society whose members are habitually drunk is scandalous. This is because the nature of their life contradicts their central message (1948d:23f).

(1953d:174).

5.5.3.2. Reunion and the Church of South India (1942-1947)

In the context of this missionary concern for unity, Newbigin was drawn into discussions about the reunion of the church in the early 1940s (cf. Sundkler 1954). While many missionaries were weary of these discussions that had been carried on for over twenty years, Newbigin's commitment to the importance of unity for mission sustained his patient pursuit of reunion. He was elected as the convener of the Union Committee of the SIUC. For the next six years he helped to design the South India scheme of reunion and subsequently defended it in India and in Britain (1944a; 1944b; 1948d). The Church of South India was formed in 1947. During this process Newbigin produced a major book defending the South India scheme of reunion. The book is important for our purposes since he defends a certain view of unity and bases that squarely on the nature of the church.

The problem Newbigin addresses is the exact nature of the ecclesial unity. There were two different traditions of ecclesiology that came at the problem in different ways. Each of these traditions was shaped by a different ecclesiology, explained disunity differently, and offered a different understandings of the unity that should be sought in the CSI. Unfortunately, the South India scheme of reunion did not satisfy either of these traditions.

The first tradition was that of the Anglo-Catholics. According to them, the heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ in the flesh, who lived, died and rose again. That is, it is a concrete historical man at the core of the message. Jesus chose the apostles and formed a visible community and this was the beginning of the church. Anyone in subsequent generations who wants to be incorporated into Christ must become a member of this historically continuous, visible body. The visible and the institutional is not secondary or peripheral to the nature of the church but a essential to its nature. The church is one body that has developed historically from Christ. Visible unity and historical continuity are of the essence of the church. Therefore any plan for reunion must simply be a return of all those who have fallen out of the historically continuous body. This tradition represented the biggest threat to the South India scheme of reunion because it insisted the continuous historic order maintained by the bishop as successors of the apostles was essential to the church. They demanded supplemental ordination in which all ministers outside the Anglican fellowship be reordained by bishops.

The second tradition was that of Free Churches. According to them, people are incorporated into the body of Christ by faith in Christ and by the working of the Spirit. The church is not simply an historically continuous community or visible body. Rather it is an invisible temple not made with hands. The church is not an organization but a community of the Spirit constituted by faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, true unity is spiritual unity. Reunion for this type was simply an increase of cordiality. They were unconcerned with issues of historical and even organizational unity.

Newbigin believed that each of these ecclesiologies "does justice to one aspect of the New Testament teaching about the Church" but both fail "to do justice to the effect of sin in severing the two things that God has joined" (1948d:25). The remainder of the book is an attempt to articulate a Biblical ecclesiology that shows the strength of each of the positions and joins them together in a way that forwards the cause of reunion in

South India.

Newbigin addresses the Anglo-Catholic tradition first (1948d:27-43). His tactic is to show the place of the people of God in the Biblical story. The importance of the church in Newbigin's thought can be seen in the way that he connects God's redemptive work to a chosen people. God does not reveal ideas about himself in the Scripture so that humanity can be redeemed by having a correct understanding of God. Rather the Bible narrates a story in which God acts in history to form a people. This community is to be a bearer of His revelation and the means by which humankind can be reconciled to God. In the 20th century it is by the church that the gospel comes to humanity. God meets humankind through His people and invites them into the fellowship of the church. Reconciliation comes by fellowship with His reconciled people. There is no other way that the gospel comes to people except through a particular historical fellowship. "The Gospel comes to men not only as a set of ideas... It comes in the concrete actuality of an encounter with God's people" (1948d:28). In fact, it is "a false spirituality, divorced from the whole teaching of the Bible, which regards this visible and continuing Church as of subordinate importance for the life in Christ" (:29). God's purpose is a reconciled new humanity wrought in Christ; the church plays a pivotal role in God's redemptive work as the first fruits and instrument of that purpose. The church's unity is indispensable for the church's missionary calling because God's purpose is to redeem all humanity and draw them into one.

The question, then, must be posed: "What is the church?" (*ibid*). Newbigin answers this question by narrating the Biblical story in which God forms a people beginning with Abraham and culminating in the body of apostles gathered around Christ who receive the Spirit at Pentecost. The question that is critical is how one can be ingrafted into this historically continuous community? "The Church is faced at once with a question that affects decisively its whole nature and constitution: the question 'Upon what terms are Gentiles to be incorporated into the Church?'" The burden of the remainder of Newbigin's argument is that "faith has always been in fact—from the human side—the constitutive fact of Israel's existence as the people of God.... Not circumcision, but faith, is the human condition of membership in the Israel of God" (1948d:33-34). The weight of this Biblical evidence stands over against the Anglo-Catholic tradition that wants to define their ecclesiology primarily in horizontal terms as a historically continuous structure. The Bible stands opposed to any attempt to define the church simply in terms of ingrafting into an historical body; Paul's arguments in Romans and Galatians in the midst of the circumcision controversy are evidence of this. The church is not Israel after the flesh but after the Spirit and one is not ingrafted into Israel by circumcision but by faith. And so, to "insist on outward and institutional continuity with 'Israel after the flesh' is to contradict the Church's nature" (1948d:39). This does not mean that historical continuity and visible unity are insignificant. In fact, Romans 11 shows that this is at the centre of the apostle's concern. However, it is faith that is constitutive of incorporation into this historically continuous body.

Newbigin then turns to consider the ecclesiological claims of the Free Churches (1948d:44-54). While Galatians and Romans address people who are primarily concerned with an outward rite of incorporation into a visible and historically continuous community, the first epistle to the Corinthians addresses a group who emphasize the Spirit to the point of destroying the visible unity of the body. Paul refers

to this “spiritual” group as carnal—a word that must have shocked them. Newbigin details Paul’s argument against a false spirituality that glories in any ground of confidence other than the cross.

It has no ground of glorying save in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In so far as the Church permits any other ground of confidence to displace this, whether it be confidence in a great leader, in a great preacher, in some tradition of spirituality, of learning, or of order, it becomes simply a human association, not spiritual but carnal, not the nucleus of regenerate humanity, but an ordinary human society (1948d:49).

The common life of sharing in God’s redemptive work accomplished at the cross is the work of the Spirit. Paul tells us we were all baptized by the Spirit into one body. Therefore, “dependence upon the one Holy Spirit would have produced the visible unity of the one Body” (*ibid*). Thus the use of the phrase ‘spiritual unity’ to oppose a visible unity is totally irreconcilable with the New Testament. A visible unity is the proper expression of love that is the work of the Spirit. The one body of love is the normal counterpart of the one Spirit. “The unity of the Church is of its essence. That unity is a spiritual unity. It is also a corporeal unity” (1948d:51-54).

If both of these traditions have correctly defined one aspect of the church’s nature, then how is it that they stand in tension with one another? In other words, how can their emphases be affirmed and the stalemate transcended? Newbigin’s answer is twofold. First, the church must be understood in the context of the eschatological doctrine of justification wherein the church is both sinful and holy (1948d:84-103). Both views—the Anglo-Catholic and the Free Church—define the church from the standpoint of what it should be. And in this sense, the two views of the church are correlates: “The one Holy Spirit, and the one visible Church united through all the world and through all time from the Apostles to the present day, are necessarily and indissolubly correlates.” And yet, as Newbigin goes on to add, the fact of sin upsets this correlation. “While this is true in the sense that there is no rational ground upon which the two can be separated, yet in fact the irrational and absurd fact of sin *in the Church* always and everywhere upsets the correlation” (1948d:100). The second point follows naturally from the first.

If it is the remaining sinfulness of the church that obscures both the proper historical continuity and the unity of the Spirit by faith in Christ, then the only proper response is one of repentance and reunion (1948d:104-123). The division of the church must be compared to the separation of two divorced persons with the only solution being repentance and reunion.

But if, as we have argued, the Church is divided because of sin, there are required of us both a penitent return to Christ and His atoning work, and also acts of obedience to His will (1948d:104).

5.5.3.3. The Nature of the Unity We Seek: Organic Unity (1950-1961)

Newbigin’s understanding of the importance of unity for the true nature of the missionary church was given expression at an ecumenical level in 1961. His involvement in issues of ecclesial unity in the WCC began early. The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 immediately raised the question of the nature of unity being sought by that body and its ecclesiological foundation. This question was

taken up by the central committee of the WCC meeting in Toronto in 1950. They declared that the WCC is not based on any particular ecclesiology and does not prejudice the ecclesiological problem. This neutrality meant that members of the WCC need not treat their ecclesiologies as relative and that membership in the WCC did not mean accepting a certain doctrine of church unity. There were at that time a number of competing models of unity available, all built on their distinctive ecclesiologies: re-integration into the original mother church, organic union along the lines of Lambeth Quadrilateral, a federal relationship between confessional fellowships, and spiritual unity. A number of significant figures in the WCC were asked to respond to this statement and Newbigin was one of them. He responded that the neutrality of the WCC was provisional so that unity could be pursued in a Biblical way. If the neutrality were to become permanent it would be an answer to the question and it would be the wrong answer because the proper embodiment of unity is the church and not a council of churches. This response drew Newbigin into discussions in the WCC about the nature of the unity the WCC ought to be seeking, that would culminate in the statement made in New Delhi (1961). That statement said:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people (New Delhi 1962:116).

This statement was fashioned to a large extent by Newbigin (Fey 1970:148f.); and it has a history. His first statement on this subject was made at a plenary lecture in the Evanston meeting of the WCC in 1954 (1955).¹⁰ A further paper on the 'Nature of the Unity We Seek' was presented to the Faith and Order Working Committee of the WCC (1957b,c). This led to a minute addressed to the Central Committee of the WCC and finally on to New Delhi where it was adopted. These two papers (1955, 1957b) present the theological foundation for Newbigin's understanding of the unity to be sought in the WCC. In the context of this study, it is important to observe three things about his theological argument: unity is essential to the church; unity is for the sake of mission; therefore, unity ought to have both local and universal dimensions.

What has garnered the most attention in Newbigin's formulation is the consideration he gives to the local and universal dimensions of the unity of the church. In fact, this continued to be an important factor in shaping the WCC discussions on the nature of unity. Back of this concern is Newbigin's concern for the missionary nature of the church. Unity belongs "to the true nature of the Church as grounded in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" and "all disunity among Christians is a contraction of that upon

¹⁰This lecture was never published. However, the substance of it was incorporated into a speech made at the University of Chicago that same year. See 1991i:1044 and 1955.

which their being Christian rests. It has the character of sin, being a repudiation of the God-given nature of the Church” (1957b:182). This is because community reconciled in love is the proper fruit of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

This unity is visible in such a way that its result will be that the world will come to believe the gospel. Newbigin quotes John 17 as evidence of this intimate connection between a visible unity and mission: “that the world may believe that thou hast sent me... that the world may know that thou has sent me and hast loved them even as thou lovest me” (1957b:181). Indeed, the unity of the church is only rightly understood in a missionary context.

The quest for unity is misunderstood if it is thought of in isolation from the fulfillment of God’s whole purpose “to unite *all* things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph.1:10). The Church is both the first-fruit and the instrument of that purpose.... The unity of the Church is wrongly sought unless it is sought from a missionary point of view—as part of the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to draw all men to himself (John 12:32) (1957b:187).

It is precisely this stress on the missionary importance of unity that leads Newbigin to conclude that unity must have local and ecumenical dimensions. For the sake of each place where the church is situated, the church in that place must be visibly one fellowship. It is the missionary obligation that constrains the church to seek a visible demonstration of the power of the atonement to bind humankind together. The world must see in each place a body that transcends the divisions that plague humankind. A visible, local unity is necessary for a faithful witness to the gospel. But there must be a universal dimension as well. If that visibly united fellowship is to be seen by the world as more than a local group, it is necessary that each local community be “so ordered and so related to the whole that its fellowship with all Christ’s people everywhere, and with those who have gone before and will come after, is made clear” (1955:15). The missionary obligation binds the church to demonstrate an historical and ecumenical unity to preclude the misunderstanding that the church is a parochial association.

5.5.3.4. The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Humankind

The statement at New Delhi affirmed an understanding of unity that was a fully committed fellowship in each local place that was also recognizable as a universal fellowship for the sake of a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. Even though the New Delhi statement attempted to hold these two dimensions—local and universal—together it was the local aspect that attracted immediate attention. Much attention was given to the local church in the Mexico meeting of the CWMC and the Faith and Order meeting at Montreal, both held in 1963. However, by the time that the WCC met at Uppsala in 1968, there was an attempt to recover the universal dimension of this statement. This was prompted by the growing recognition that the world is one interlocked unit. The process of modernization, westernization, and globalization was sweeping the world into one current of world history. This deepening sense of being part of one world history challenged the church to reflect on the ecumenical nature of unity. The phrase “the unity of humankind” became an explicit topic of conversation in ecumenical circles in the 1960s, was accelerated by Vatican II’s emphasis on the church as a sign of unity for the world, and was incorporated into the language of the WCC assemblies in

Uppsala. What did unity mean in this new setting?

Newbigin addresses this issue at several points. In each case his primary concern is to combat the view that a Hinduized understanding of religion is a key to human unity. His discussion of this issue highlights the importance of the united church in world history.

The starting point for a proper understanding of the church and its call to unity and mission is the cross of Jesus Christ. "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32) is a text Newbigin frequently quotes. This word of Jesus was spoken to some Greeks who wanted to see him. Like most Greeks, they were interested in the teaching of Jesus. In response, Jesus points to his death as the centre to which all men will be drawn. The centre for unity is not the teaching or person of Jesus (1961e:5) but his crucifixion—an event in history.

The cross is not simply an historic event, but a mighty act of God whereby he accomplishes an atonement "so deep and all-embracing, that the deepest divisions between men are transcended, and a body is created in which men of every sort and kind are drawn together" (1961e:7). Human sin has brought about a disunity caused by self-love, envy, and hatred. The cross is an act of atonement, a mercy-seat (*hilasterion*) around which humanity can be reconciled to God *and* to one another. Both of these relationships are important. The cross is not simply God's act of reconciling humankind to himself; it is also an act that reconciles humanity to each other. The cross is God's creative act of reconciliation in the midst of a humanity fractured by sin. Sin, the root cause of human disunity and conflict, is judged at the cross. God's reconciling act in the cross puts to death the root cause of human brokenness and hostility. A community is created that is nothing less than the new humankind re-united and re-created by its incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the Christian starting point in the cross requires the creation of a visible community. As Newbigin puts it: "The gospel has the church at its heart" and "the Church is organic to the gospel" (1955:11). "It belongs to the very essence of the atonement wrought by Christ, that it leads to the creation of a visible community binding men together in all nations and generations" (1955:10).

The way in which the church is incorporated into that reconciling death is by the baptism of the Spirit into one body. Baptism is the work of the Spirit whereby He incorporates us into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our hostilities and divisions are crucified and buried with Him and we are raised with him to live by the power of the Spirit in one body. The new existence of the believer is the life of the Spirit of God given to him or her through Christ. "This is the common life in the Spirit, and this is what the Church properly is. But if Christians begin to get together in groups to exalt the name of a particular teacher or leader, to compare themselves with other Christians, and to glory in the things which separate them from other Christians, then—says St. Paul—they are falling back from the life of the Spirit to the life of the flesh" (1961e:15).

The work of God in the cross of Christ and by the baptism of the Spirit is to repair and heal the divisions and hostilities of humankind. This redemptive work of God will necessarily issue in a community that is in fact reconciled by its participation in God's healing work. The church is that body which has begun to share in foretaste the reconciling work of God. It is a sign, first fruit, and instrument of His purpose "to be put

into effect when the times will have reached fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:9f.) (1957b:187).

The atoning work of Jesus Christ places me into a new relationship to other believers who claim to find their centre in the cross: we are one. It is not a unity based on intellectual agreement, natural sympathy, feeling, doctrinal agreement, or participation in a common religious experience. “It is an actual knitting together... which can be described either by saying that the Holy Spirit unites us or by saying that the death of Christ for us both places us in a new relation to each other wherein we can but acknowledge each other as brothers” (1955:10). The atoning work of Jesus Christ also places me into a new relationship with the unbelieving world.

The church is organic to the gospel. But, in saying this, we have only said the first half of what has to be said. The atoning work of Christ places me in a new existential relationship not only with my fellow-believer but also with every human being whether he is a believer or not; for that atoning act is directed to the whole human race, and not to anything less (1955:12).

It is precisely here that we see the wide gulf between the Christian and the Hindu position. The ultimate centre for human unity according to the Hindu religion is the experience of mystical union with the ultimate (*brahman*). The unity that Hinduism offers is a negative unity of tolerance. Salvation is conceived in terms of individual contact with the divine outside history. For this reason, “Hinduism has no doctrine of the Church.... Hinduism can never put a visible community into the centre of its creed, as Christianity puts the church. The unity which it offers is the cessation of strife, not the creation of a new community” (1955:6). The unity of humankind can only be achieved around some centre, and the proper question is “what is that true centre?” In contrast to Hinduism, Christianity has put the cross of Jesus Christ in the centre. That cross is the work of God which in fact reconciles humanity to God and to each other. “Therefore, it belongs to the very essence of the atonement wrought by Christ, that it leads to the creation of a visible community binding men together in all nations and all generations” (1955:10). The unity that results from the cross is not a mere toleration but a communion of the Holy Spirit. In fact, a Christian unity will oppose an insipid toleration. It will obligate the church “to wrestle with these differences in frankness and humility, until they yield deeper insight into God’s nature and will” (1955:11).

The Christian starting point in the atonement requires a visible community that is truly reconciled. While Hinduism advocates a unity with individual religious experience at the centre, the gospel places at the centre a visible community as a demonstration of the reconciling power of God in Christ and by the Spirit. The church’s task is to call all humankind to the reconciling centre provided by God. Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself,” and those who have begun to share in Christ’s reconciliation are committed to participation in His reconciling ministry. “In other words, by their membership in the church they are committed to a mission to the world. They cannot abandon the latter without forfeiting the former” (1955:12). And that mission must be conceived “as the presence throughout the world of the one new family, the household of God, the sign to all men of their true destiny in Christ, the servant of all men for Christ’s sake, the embassy of Christ to all men everywhere inviting them to be reconciled to God” (1960j:17).

It is in this light that we see the scandal of disunity. The proclamation of Christ's atonement as the centre for the uniting of humankind requires a community that has begun to embody that unity. Disunity distorts the picture beyond recognition. "The Church faces the world not as one fellowship but as a fantastic medley of splintered fragments divided on grounds of race, of tradition, of doctrine. Instead of seeing the face of its one Saviour, the world sees a monstrous gallery of caricatures" (:1960j:17f.). The evidence of the church's life must be in harmony with its message if its mission is to be authentic.

The disunity of the church is a public denial of the sufficiency of the atonement. It is quite unthinkable that the church should be able effectively to preach that atonement and to become, in fact, the nucleus of the reconciled humanity, while that denial stands. So long as it stands, the world will see in the church not the one place where all men may at last come home, but a series of separatist bodies, each marked by a whole series of cultural peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of belief and practice (1955:13).

It is this argument that Newbigin presses in the context of the revolutionary decades of the 1960s. He characterizes this period as a time when colonialism has ended and there is a growing world culture bound together by the western way of life. But it is also a time when the church is present in almost every part of the world. Newbigin articulates several things that must be recovered if the church is to be faithful to her mission in this global world. The first is that it must recover the missionary character of the church (1961c:109ff.). The second is that there must be a recovery of the church's unity. The question of a missionary church is always: What is the body into which I am inviting this person? In a global world, the answer "one of several hundred bodies into which, in the course of the cultural and religious history of the West, the Church of God has been divided" (1961c:124) becomes increasingly implausible. It draws the response:

If it is true that Jesus is the Saviour of all men, and that all mankind is to be made one family through him, how is it that you who speak in his name are unable to live as one family? If, as you say, the message which you bring is not merely part of the Western cultural tradition, but is something which transcends all cultures and belongs to man as man, how is it that you have not found in it something sufficiently transcendent, sufficiently fundamental, to enable you—with your relatively minor differences—to find a basis of unity? How can you expect us to recognize in your fellowship our true home, when you have yourselves not yet found in Jesus a foundation for a common life as one family? (1961c:125).

Our life contradicts the message of the gospel. The prosecution of the missionary calling of the church requires that the church embody the sufficiency of the atonement to bind all humankind together. Mission and unity are indissolubly united in a global world.

5.5.3.5. The Threat of Reconciled Diversity and Denominationalism

The statement on organic unity elaborated at New Delhi expressed Newbigin's understanding of the model of unity that most fully conformed to the missionary nature of the church. During the last three decades of his life, Newbigin believed that the primary challenge to organic unity came from the model of reconciled diversity rooted in a denominational view of the church. The model of reconciled diversity had its

origins in the notion of conciliar unity. Ironically it was Newbigin who drafted the operative document for conciliar unity at the Louvain meeting of Faith and Order in 1971 (1993h:220f.). Conciliar unity advocated “the coming together of Christians—locally, regionally, or globally—for common prayer, counsel and decision, in the belief that the Holy Spirit can use such meetings for his own purpose by reconciling, renewing and reforming the church by guiding it toward the fullness of truth and love” (Louvain 1971:226). It is clear that councils can be the means by which organic unity is sought but can also become a substitute for organic unity. In other words, conciliarity can be an alternative to and departure from the tradition of organic unity, or it can be one dimension of that unity. This tension was present throughout the decade of the 1970s in ecumenical circles. At the Faith and Order meeting in Salamanca (1973), it was advocated that conciliar unity is not a departure from organic unity but one expression of it. The Christian World Communions (CWC) meeting in Geneva in 1974 was unable to endorse the Salamanca statement. The desire to preserve denominational identities led to a view that seized conciliar unity as a model to protect these communions as identifiable bodies. Thus conciliar unity was elaborated in terms of a reconciled diversity (Protestant) or a communion of communions (Roman Catholic)—models that departed radically from the pursuit of organic unity. The guiding principle of these models of unity is that the variety of denominational traditions is legitimate and can be a source of enrichment for the church universal. Therefore, a reconciled diversity or communion of communions model of unity does not demand a surrender of denominational identity. Different confessional traditions can live together as identifiable bodies in a dialogue of mutual enrichment and correction.

It is the denominationalism that undergirds the model of reconciled diversity that becomes Newbigin’s primary sparring partner from the mid 1970s until his death. He interacts with two books that form the backdrop for his critique: *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* by John Macquarrie (1975) and *Denominationalism* edited by Russell Richey (1977). He detects in these books a celebration of denominationalism in contrast with the words of Richard Niebuhr a half century earlier when he said that “Denominationalism... represents the moral failure of Christianity” (Niebuhr 1929:25; 1978f:189; 1986e:144). And the reconciled diversity of unity that is based on denominationalism seems to pursue the strategy that “since grace has been given to us in our divisions we may continue in division that grace may abound” (1983c:17). It is for this reason that Newbigin believed that “a radical theological critique of the theory and practice of denominationalism” remained an urgent item on the agenda of a missionary encounter with western culture (1986e:144).

Newbigin’s fundamental critique is that denominationalism—whether represented in local denominational congregations or denominations linked together in a federal unity or reconciled diversity—has surrendered to an alien ideology and thus misunderstands the true nature of the church. The question he poses at the end of a review of Richey’s book sets the tone for his various critiques of denominationalism: “Can the phenomena here described make any claim to be an authentic manifestation of what the New Testament means by the Church?” (1978f:189). Denominationalism, in Newbigin’s eyes, has corrupted the nature of the church in at least three ways.

First, a denominational ecclesiology believes that the unity of the church can take proper form in a congeries of separate identifiable bodies. Macquarrie offers a form of

the church that maintains “the peaceful co-existence of separated bodies each representing particular traditions and a particular style of churchmanship” (1976a:328). He takes his clue for ecclesiology from sociology rather than theology (:329). For Macquarrie it is within the general context of the search for a truly pluralist society that the issue of ecumenicity must be understood (Macquarrie 1975:11). In contrast, Newbigin believes that the answer to the question of the nature of unity “can only be answered by reference to some basic understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church itself” (1976a:330; cf. :329).

For Newbigin, the church must be defined in terms of Jesus Christ and his mission (1976a:330). Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God and called out a community to follow him, to be with him, and to be sent out with the same announcement. That announcement is not simply about a future hope but a present reality. It is an announcement that all nations will be gathered around Jesus Christ on the basis of his atonement. “Clearly the Church is seen here as a company of people who are bound together in a recognizable unity, centred in the person and work of Jesus and looking towards a universal consummation of which the manifest kingship of Christ will be the centre” (1976a:330). The church must be a living embodiment of the truth of the announcement. If the church is a group of societies all manifesting a variety of styles and types they bear witness that Christ’s atonement is not a sufficient centre to enable different types to live together as one body (1976a:336).

Newbigin refers to both Galatians and Corinthians as examples of Paul’s refusal to allow different types to exist within the one body (1976a:330-331). The letter to the Galatians shows a conflict between Paul and Peter over the issue of visible unity at the table of the Lord. There were two different ‘types’ of Christians and surely, one would think, finding a way to maintain their distinct identity could be a source of enrichment. “But Paul believed that the whole truth of the Gospel was involved in resisting the proposal. To break the fellowship at the one table would be to deny the central reality of the Gospel” (1976a:330). This division would be a corruption of the very nature of the church and a denial of the gospel. In the Corinthian church, the division was based on a celebration of rival names which no doubt represented different expressions of the Christian faith, different styles, different ‘types.’ Paul rebukes this mindset and calls it carnal. The Corinthians were one body drawn together by the cross of Christ and the baptism of the Spirit (1976a:331). The reconciled diversity model of unity must fall under the same critiques from Paul; it too celebrates distinct identities as a source of enrichment. However, what is at stake is the nature of the church, faithfulness to the mission of the church, and ultimately the gospel itself.

The claim that the church’s form is properly in a loose connection of distinct bodies is sometimes bolstered by the claim of vigour and enrichment that comes from diversity. Macquarrie extols church life in the United States for just this reason. The diversity and vigour of the church in the United States is contrasted with the monochrome church life in Spain or Sweden. Supposedly reconciled diversity leads to the first, while organic unity leads to the second. Newbigin does not deny the importance of diversity and the enrichment and vigour which results from diversity. What he does contest is that this is best found in a reconciled diversity. He pits against this claim his own missionary experience when he returned to Madras in 1965. At that time the CSI had been in existence for eighteen years. He had experienced the churches in Madras before reunion

as competing congregations, but the church he found in 1965 was not the uniform church Macquarrie predicted: “on the contrary I found a rich variety of styles in worship and practice. What I found was congregations less concerned about their own affairs and more ready to think in terms of God’s will for the life of the city as a whole, less like competing clubs each trying to enlarge itself and a little more recognizable as signs and foretaste of God’s kingdom” (1976a:334).

A second way the denominational model corrupts a true understanding of the church is that it makes no claim to be the church for that local place and therefore make no claims that all in that place must be incorporated into it. Newbigin quotes from Winthrop Hudson’s famous essay on denominations which includes the disclaimers that “no denomination claims to represent the whole church of Christ;... [and therefore] none claims that all members of society should be incorporated into its membership” (1986e:144; cf. Hudson 1955). Again Newbigin attacks this misunderstanding by an appeal to the nature of the church in Scripture (1984a:7). According to the New Testament the term *ecclesia* refers to both local congregations *and* the entire body that belongs to Christ. The word *ecclesia* is qualified two ways in Scripture: first by *tou Theou* and secondly, in Rome, in Corinth, in Ephesus. Both of these designations are significant for defining the church over against a denominational misunderstanding. First, Paul refers to the church in each place as an assembly *of God*. Since it God that is calling this congregation together, it does claim to represent the whole church of Christ. But this is qualified by the second modifier. The church represents the whole church of Christ *for that place*. If this is true then “in contrast to what is said of the denominations, it *is* claimed that all members of society should be incorporated into this gathering. The Church is in fact simply the provisional incorporation of all humankind into the new humanity of Jesus” (1984a:7). A Biblical definition of the church challenges both pillars of the denominational structure: the true nature of the church is that it claims to represent the whole church of Christ and that all members of society ought to be incorporated into its membership. It is only when the church can make this universal claim that there can be a missionary encounter. To surrender this universal claim is to become a religious society for interested adherents.

A comparison of the early church’s understanding of itself with a denominational model highlights the distortion of a denominational view of the church. As we have seen, the self-chosen name of the early church—*ecclesia tou Theou*—made the claim to be a public assembly called by God to which all citizens were summoned. They refused the common designations of *qiasos* and *‘eranos* which were names for private religious societies. However, this is precisely what denominations are—private societies that exist to offer a future salvation to its adherents. This development is the result of the Enlightenment. Europe hailed the dawning of the new light of autonomous rationality and the Christian vision was “banished from the public sector” and “relegated to the private. The Christian faith became a private option. The Church was no longer the *ecclesia tou Theou* but a religious fraternity for those who wished to make use of its services” (1984a:8). In other words, the post-Enlightenment church embraced an identity that the early church refused at the cost of blood. This privatized Christianity takes shape in the denomination.

The visible form of this privatized religion is precisely the denomination, a body of people who, exercising their freedom as autonomous individuals, join together to

practice and propagate the religion of their choice. Such a body actually makes no total claims. It does not claim the allegiance of all, but only of those who care to join. It is not the *ecclesia tou Theou* of the New Testament. It is precisely a *thiasos*, a private association of religiously minded people. And even if all of these associations could agree to co-exist in friendly cooperation, the result would not be the Church as the New Testament portrays it (1984a:8).

The denominational model of the church, and its counterpart the reconciled diversity model of unity, is “the religious aspect of secularization” (1986e:145) and “an illicit syncretism with an alien ideology” (1984a:9). As such denominationalism surrenders the true nature of the church and abandons its claim of universality. The missionary calling of the church is compromised:

It follows that neither a denomination separately nor all the denominations linked together in some kind of federal unity or “reconciled diversity” can be the agents of a missionary confrontation with our culture, for the simple reason that they are themselves the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual surrender to the ideology of our culture. They cannot confront our culture with the witness of the truth since even for themselves they do not claim to be more than associations of individuals who share the same private opinions (1986e:146).

The third way denominationalism misunderstands the nature of the church is the way that it defines mission in terms of a shared responsibility of all denominational types for society. Winthrop Hudson argues that in the denominational model “all recognize their shared responsibility for society.” This may take the social activist form in which churches are responsible for the social, economic, and political needs of society or the evangelical form in which churches share the responsibility for verbally sharing the gospel with unbelievers in that local place. Both, however, suffer from the same misunderstanding of the mission of the church. A brief look at the way Newbigin responded to Macquarrie’s understanding of mission will highlight this.

Macquarrie defines mission in terms of service to the political, economic, and social needs of society. Newbigin’s understanding, however, is that “the Church is not just (though it should always be) a body that serves society” (1976a:333). Macquarrie’s view of mission defines the church simply in terms of the instrumental role it plays in society. Questions of unity can be left to the side because they are not integral to the service the church provides society. However, the Bible defines the church not only as an instrument but also as a sign. “My belief is that the Church is put into the world as sign and foretaste and instrument of the unity of mankind” (:339). If the church is also a sign and foretaste, then unity cannot be so easily separated from the mission of the church. Central to its mission will be the manifestation of the peace, unity, and reconciliation it proclaims. The words of the evangelical and the deeds of the ecumenical must arise out of a community that embodies the new reality of the kingdom of God.

In summary, for Newbigin unity and mission belong to the very nature of the church. Both are characteristics of a church that is the fruit of the gospel. Mission and unity are closely connected. The unity of the church bears witness to the world of the sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus Christ to reconcile humankind. According to Newbigin the statement on organic unity made at New Delhi is the model of unity that is most fully consistent with the nature of the missionary church. The thread running through

Newbigin's thought on unity is to express the unity of the church in a form that most fully conforms to the missionary nature of the church. This understanding of unity took shape in his missionary experience, was further developed during his involvement in developing the South India scheme of reunion, and was most succinctly expressed in a statement at New Delhi. He articulated the universal dimension of this definition in discussions about the unity of humankind, and defended it over against denominationalism.

5.6. AN ABIDING TENSION IN ECUMENICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

To understand Newbigin's conception of the missionary nature of the church, it is helpful to place his ecclesiology in the context of an abiding tension that remains in the ecumenical tradition. David Bosch has formulated that ecclesiological tension by placing it in the context of a summary of the ecclesiological developments within the missionary stream of the ecumenical tradition (Bosch 1991:368-389). He begins with the observation that an institutional understanding of the church has prevailed in Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy for much of church history. He traces the ecclesiological developments in the world missionary conferences from Edinburgh (1910) to New Delhi (1961), noting the fundamental shift that emerged in the perception of the relationship between church and mission. In the emerging ecclesiology the church is seen as essentially missionary. Mission is not one ministry of the church and therefore secondary to its being; rather the church exists in being sent by God to participate in His mission to redeem the creation. The missionary nature of the church is captured in images like sacrament, sign, and instrument which are most characteristic of the Roman Catholic tradition but are finding central expression in the Protestant tradition also (Bosch 1991:374-376; cf. Gassman 1986:1-17; Dulles 1987:63-75). These images articulate that the church does not exist for its members but for the sake of those who are not members of it. When these images of sacrament, sign, and instrument become the centring metaphors for the church, a new perception of the relationship between church and world is implied. "Mission is viewed as God's turning to the world. This represents a fundamentally new approach in theology" (Bosch 1991:376). While ecclesiology has hitherto been done from the standpoint of a church which is a static and self-contained entity, a slow change is leading to the insight that the church can be understood only in terms of its essential orientation to the world. Barth has traced six phases of this turn to the world within Protestantism (Barth 1961:18-38; cf. Bosch 1991:377; Berkhof 1979:411). A similar shift took place within the Roman Catholic church at Vatican II. This fundamental orientation to the world has paved the way for a rediscovery of the New Testament emphasis on the local church. The missionary church is primarily the local church wherever it is found in the world (Bosch 1991:368-381).

Bosch concludes his description of this emerging ecclesiology by sketching an "abiding tension" between two fundamentally different and apparently irreconcilable views of the church (Bosch 1991:381-389). Both understandings are the fruit of the ecclesiological shift Bosch has described and accordingly both share a fundamental commitment to the missionary nature of the church, both share the common language

of sign and instrument, and both are oriented to the world. Bosch articulates the differences in terms of a spectrum:

At one end of the spectrum, the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration—in word and deed—of God’s involvement with the world. Where one chooses the first model, the church is seen as a partial realization of God’s reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. Where one opts for the alternative perception, the church is, at best, only a pointer to the way God acts in respect of the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution toward the humanization of society—a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of the consciousness-raiser (Bosch 1991:381).

In his book *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Konrad Raiser exemplifies this tension. As the subtitle indicates, Raiser discerns a decisive change taking place in the ecumenical movement (1991a). He identifies a classical ecumenical paradigm which he labels “Christocentric-universalism” which shaped the ecumenical movement from its inception until the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) and which remains a continuing stream today (Raiser 1991a:36-51). However, various factors have produced a crisis in this paradigm (Raiser 1991a:54-78). The phrase “the crisis in the ecumenical movement” appeared in the wake of the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC, an assembly that marked a new direction for the WCC. He believes a second paradigm is emerging that accounts for various anomalies that challenge the classical paradigm (Raiser 1991a:79-120). A missionary ecclesiology is essential to both paradigms but they differ regarding the role, place, and status of the church. The ecclesiology of the classical paradigm bears marked similarities to Bosch’s first model—the church as bearer of the message of salvation. The ecclesiology that Raiser calls for manifests the characteristics of Bosch’s second model—the church as illustration of God’s involvement with the world.

Using Willem Visser ’t Hooft as his primary exemplar, Raiser explicates the classical, Christocentric-universalist ecumenical paradigm in terms of four elements. First, “the all-determining central element” in the paradigm is a deliberate *Christocentrism*” (Raiser 1991a:41). Raiser argues that the Christology of the classical paradigm brings “incarnational” and “cosmocrator” motifs to the fore (Raiser 1991a:43). The incarnational motif, advocated especially in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions, stresses the ontological reality of Christ’s humanity and divinity. The cosmocrator motif, more characteristic of Reformation churches, emphasizes the exaltation of Christ as Lord and Judge of the world.

The second dimension of the classical paradigm and corresponding to the Christocentric orientation is a “concentration on the church” (Raiser 1991a:43-44). The church is formed by its historical and existential link to Jesus Christ. “This linking of Christology and ecclesiology is of decisive importance for the paradigm” (Raiser 1991a:44). Raiser points to two different ecclesiological emphases based on the foregoing Christologies. In harmony with the incarnation Christology, a sacramental ecclesiology that embodies the new divine-human reality has emerged. The cosmocrator approach has given rise to a functional ecclesiology in which the church is conceived as an instrument to establish Christ’s universal rule through word and deed (*ibid*).

The third aspect of the Christocentric-universalist paradigm is the universal perspective. The Christ event has universal significance: he has an absolute claim to Lordship over all peoples and all areas of life by virtue of His work in creation and the new creation. The concentration on the church is a direct consequence of this universal perspective. The Lordship of Christ is made empirically visible as a unique community distinct from the world (*ibid*). This body is charged with the mission of proclaiming the Lordship of Christ to the end of the earth (Raiser 1991a:45).

A final plank in the classical ecumenical paradigm is its emphasis on salvation history and eschatology as a central category of thought. A dynamic conception of universal history links together the Christocentrism, the focus on the church, and the universalism of the paradigm (Raiser 1991a:45-46).

Raiser believes this Christocentric-universalist paradigm is facing challenges that place its continued existence in question. He emphasizes especially religious pluralism, various forms of oppression and injustice, and the ecological threat as burning issues that question the viability of the centrality of Christ, the church as a unique body, and the universal mission of the church (Raiser 1991a:54-78).

These challenges lead Raiser to the foundational issue of ecclesiology (Raiser 1991a:71-77). He recognizes that central to this whole debate is the nature of the church: "The ecclesiological orientation of the paradigm and the debate in the ecumenical movement determined by it is thus not an additional element but rather the central element of the paradigm itself" (Raiser 1991a:71). He highlights six elements of the classical ecclesiology that the ecumenical tradition shares with Roman Catholicism: its biblical foundation, its salvation-historical approach, its Christocentrism, its fresh appreciation of local churches, its universal expression in a fellowship of local congregations, and its belief that all lay people are members of the people of God called to participate in the church's mission (*ibid*). Orienting himself to the Uppsala assembly, Raiser argues that the inadequacy of this ecclesiology has become increasingly evident as it has been confronted by new challenges. The challenges to the Christocentrism, universalism, and salvation history of the classical paradigm also call into question the notion of the church underlying that paradigm. In light of this Raiser calls for a "future ecumenical ecclesiology":

Because of the central role of ecclesiology in the paradigm and its indissoluble connection with the other elements, i.e. Christocentrism, the universal orientation, and history as the central category of interpretation, it is to be expected that the difficulties indicated should also be reflected in ecumenical debate on the church and its unity and that they might well reinforce one another....

It is thus not surprising that the new directions I have mentioned, which attempt to go beyond the current ecumenical paradigm, also concentrate on discussions on a future ecumenical ecclesiology. Critical revision of the ecclesiological assumptions and implications of the current paradigm is increasingly seen as one of the decisive tasks to be undertaken in the present situation of transition (Raiser 1991a:72).

According to the classical paradigm, the church is a unique body with a mandate for worldwide mission because it bears a universally valid message concerning Jesus Christ; it is this ecclesiology that Raiser believes needs revision. Raiser offers an alternative ecclesiological vision: the church in the emerging paradigm is part of the broader worldwide community (*oikoumene*) with the mission to discern the Spirit's

work in the world and to act as an agent of change. We can summarize this revision in five points. First, the focus of God's work is no longer the church as in the older paradigm, but the world, the *oikoumene*; salvation history is replaced by the one household of life as the primary category of thought (Raiser 1991a:84-91). Second, the Christocentrism of the classical paradigm is replaced by a new emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the world to create the *oikoumene* (Raiser 1991a:91-96). Third, the church exists as a eucharistic fellowship in the midst of the *oikoumene* as a picture of God's involvement in the world to create his household of life (Raiser 1991a:96-102). Fourth, the boundary between the church and the world is blurred; the church lives in solidarity with the world as part of the broader *oikoumene* (Raiser 1991a:44-45; 73). Incidentally, it should be noted that unlike the Hoekendijk tradition, Raiser does recognize some need for a distinctive identity for the church; yet that uniqueness derives from its "primary task" to reconstruct sustainable human communities (Raiser 1997:26; 47). Fifth, the mission of the church is not to Christianize the world but to change it. The tensions of religious pluralism, the wrongs of economic injustice, and the threat to all natural life systems requires the church, not to bear the gospel to the world, but to contribute to the restoration of an ethical culture and the restoration of the basic moral fabric of society (Raiser 1991a:104-105; 1997:31). The primary way the church's mission contributes to one household of life is to "cooperate with others in rebuilding the moral fabric that sustains life in community" (Raiser 1997:39; cf. :18, 26, 31).

The impetus for Raiser's ecclesiology is frustration with an irrelevant, rigid, and self-centred church—an attitude that has much in common with the impatience of the WCC Uppsala meeting (1968) and the Bangkok CWME meeting (1973). Bosch criticizes the anti-ecclesiological thrust characteristic of the 1960s and early 1970s. Yet he also comments on the value of this stream of thought: "Thus one has to say that the attacks on the institutional church, launched by Hoekendijk and others, are pertinent insofar as they express a theological ideal raised to the level of prophetic judgment" (Bosch 1991:385). Both Uppsala and Bangkok which most characterized this trend, showed a "holy impatience" with the complacency, the introversion, the structural rigidity, and the self-preoccupation of the church in the face of terrible social evil and inequity. "For the first time a world Christian body squarely faced structural evil and made no attempt at spiritualizing away its responsibilities by seeking refuge in a sacrosanct institution" (*ibid*). The title of one of Hoekendijk's books during this time captures the mood of the day—*The Church Inside Out* (1966).

This holy impatience continues to shape Raiser's thought; he too expresses concern about the structural rigidity and introversion of traditional forms of the church. Yet Raiser's ecclesiology cannot be fairly labelled anti-ecclesiological in the same manner as Hoekendijk; his writings recognize the church as a distinct body within the *oikoumene* (Raiser 1991a:105; 1997:47). The question arises, however, whether the importance of this insight is obscured in the development of his argument. Raiser stresses the widening of the term *oikoumene* to the whole world. He criticizes both the sacramental and the 'Christocratic' ecclesiologies of the classical paradigm for their "Christian exclusivism" manifested in "attitudes and practices which not only draw a distinction between church and world but actually separate them..." (Raiser 1991a:44). He believes that subsequent ecclesiological revisions in the WCC do not go far enough in correcting a Christian exclusivism because they continue to assume that "the church

in history [is] an institutionally constituted corporate body in society” (Raiser 1991a:73). He criticizes traditional ecclesial structures, arguing that flexible structures are needed in varying contexts (*ibid*). Raiser calls for an ecclesiogenesis in which “the institutional distinctions between church and world and church and society fall into the background” (*ibid*).

Raiser’s formulations exemplify a continuing tension between the two ecclesiologies. There are two closely related, but distinct issues that contribute to this tension. First, the church is *both* a unique body separated from the world *and* members that are deeply involved with the cultural community in a relationship of solidarity. The church in its relation to culture maintains a stance of solidarity and distinctiveness. Second, the church is *both* an institution whose gathered expression is an essential element in its life and mission *and* a people who are called to contribute to the needs of the world. The church finds expression in its gathered and scattered forms.¹¹ The ecclesiology of the classical ecumenical paradigm emphasizes the first of these aspects while the post-Uppsala ecclesiology highlights the second.

Newbigin’s ecclesiological formulations maintain the emphasis of the classical

¹¹Both Bosch and Berkhof seem to confuse these two related but distinct issues. They relate a being-different-from-the-world to the church in its gathered or institutional form and a being-in-the-world with its scattered form in the world. This is especially clear in Bosch where he speaks of the church as an ellipse with two foci. The first focus is the gathered and institutional life of the church where prayer and worship are emphasized. The second focus is the mission of the church in the world. He equates being “called out of the world” with its gathered form. After speaking of the gathering and dispersion of the church being held in redemptive tension he equates the gathered form with its being-different-from-the-world, its uniqueness and inalienable identity. He seems to identify the dispersed form with being-in-the-world (Bosch 1991:385-386). Yet the church’s being-different-from-the-world, the church’s unique and inalienable identity cannot be confined to our being called out of the world to worship. This is where, perhaps, it is given visible expression. But the antithesis extends to every area of life.

paradigm by stressing the importance of the church as a distinct body or institution distinguished from the world. His most characteristic definition emphasizes the Bible's teaching that the church is *both* a foretaste and an instrument of the kingdom. The church is not merely an instrument in the form of an action group, a campaign, or movement within society (cf. Raiser 1991a:74); the church is viewed in Scripture as the firstfruits of the kingdom of God. Thus the church has a peculiar identity and it is precisely in that identity as firstfruits of the kingdom that it can function as an instrument. Berkhof makes this same observation:

Especially from the N[ew] T[estament] it was bound to become clear that the church cannot be conceived of as a purely apostolary functionality; in that case the letters to the small congregations in a hostile world would have looked entirely different. For that reason, Van Swigchem sees the church not only as the proclaimer of the Kingdom, but also as the provisional result, the foretaste.... G. Sevenster... reaches the same conclusion;... [namely] "that the church is also something very essential in itself, something unique... a peculiar community, in which in a variety of ways something of unique and independent existence around word and sacrament must come to expression. This fact of being church has a significance all by itself..." (1979:414).

This emphasis on the church as a sign of the kingdom and as both firstfruits and agent enables Newbigin to hold together two closely related emphases. First, while the tradition issuing from Uppsala has emphasized the instrumental role of the church at the expense of its institutional and communal nature, Newbigin maintains the importance of the latter without de-emphasizing the former. Both Berkhof and Bosch have demonstrated that a purely instrumental approach to the church is untenable and that a Christianity devoid of a communal and institutional form cannot offer the gospel as an alternative (Berkhof 1979:411-415; Bosch 1991:384-388).

A second pair of emphases that Newbigin holds together is the importance of both involvement in and antithesis with the world. While an apostolary ecclesiology rightly affirms solidarity with the world, emphasis on the antithetical posture to the world is often minimized. Berkhof reviews the Biblical evidence and observes that "apparently turning toward and antithesis are not exclusive of each other but belong together" (1979:412f.). He rightly insists that the church's being-in-the-world is at the same time a being-different-from-the-world (Berkhof 1979:414). Antithesis toward and solidarity with the world is essential to the church's mission; these do not stand in competition but are two sides of the same coin (Berkhof 1979:415). When Newbigin speaks of the church being 'for the sake of the world' he attempts to emphasize both of these aspects of the church's relation to its context.

Yet once again Raiser's uneasiness about the classical paradigm point to a weakness in Newbigin's ecclesiology. Raiser is concerned that when participation in God's mission is defined in an exclusively Christocentric manner, the work of the Spirit in the world and the solidarity of the church with culture are obscured. This is why he calls for a move from salvation history to the *oikoumene* as a central category of thought, a move from Christocentrism to the work of the Spirit in the *oikoumene*, and a broader solidarity with the *oikoumene* that breaks down the barriers between the church and world. Newbigin shares many of these concerns; however his theological basis needs development. This is especially clear when we observe Newbigin's emphases on the church as "the bearer of the Spirit." In Newbigin's understanding of the work of the

Spirit, the primary emphasis remains on the church.

5.7. CONCLUSION

In Newbigin's understanding, the church is missionary by its very nature. Mission is not one (even the most important) of the many tasks of the church. Mission is not secondary to its being nor does mission simply belong to the *bene esse* of the church. Rather, mission is essential to the church's being and of the *esse* of its nature. Newbigin formulates the church's missionary identity in terms of two poles: its relation to God and to the world. In its relation to God, the church is defined by its role and place in the Biblical story, by its participation in the *missio Dei*, by its relation to the kingdom of God, and by its election. Yet the church is also characterized by its relation to the world. It is the church for others; as such it does not exist for itself but for the sake of the world. The people of God live in solidarity within the cultural context in which they find their existence.

The fact that the ecclesial community is defined by its relation to God constitutes the church as a unique body. The church has begun to share in the life of the end-time kingdom of God. Accordingly it is chosen by God to bear witness in each place to that kingdom precisely by being different. Yet the church is called to exist as part of a particular place in solidarity with the cultural community. Raiser is concerned that emphasis on the church as a separate body will lead to an introverted church that is preoccupied with its own forms. He calls for an ecclesiology that downplays distinctiveness in which the church identifies itself with the struggles of the *oikoumene*. Raiser emphasizes the 'world' pole of the missionary community. By contrast Newbigin begins with the relation of the church to God. The church's missionary identity is defined by its participation in God's redemptive work.

Newbigin's understanding of the redemptive work of the Triune God is both Christocentric and eschatological. The church is the fruit of the gospel; the good news is the announcement that in Jesus Christ the end-time reign of God that will be consummated at the end of history has been inaugurated. The logic of mission is that the true meaning of universal history has been disclosed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, this universally valid news must be made known. The church is formed by Jesus to bear this good news. The church's mission is defined by Jesus Christ: as it receives the life of the kingdom by being incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus and receiving the Spirit, the church continues the kingdom mission of Jesus. This Christocentric starting point enables Newbigin to define the church in its missionary character and give substance to the mission of the church.

Newbigin also insists that the church can only be understood in an eschatological context. This connection between the church and kingdom is elaborated with a number of helpful formulations. Newbigin's discussion of the label *ecclesia tou Theou* chosen by the early church reveals the early church's self-understanding; it was a kingdom community called out by God for the sake of all humankind. Newbigin's explication of the church as the 'provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ' provides rich insight into the relation between the church and the kingdom. His description of the

church as a 'hermeneutic of the gospel' also provides a view of the church as a kingdom community that is both fresh and helpful, as evidenced by the frequent reference to that label by many in the North American church. Newbigin's most common reference to the church as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom elaborates the relationship between church and kingdom. This formulation protects Newbigin from two dangers evident in the ecumenical tradition. On the one hand, his emphasis on the church as instrument stands against the church-centric emphasis. On the other hand, his insistence that the church is also a foretaste and first fruits does not allow the church to be reduced to an instrument. Newbigin's formulation allows him to hold together the two important emphases: the church as a unique body standing separate from the world, and the church in solidarity with its cultural context.

Defining the missionary church in terms of the Christological and eschatological context provide the foundation for Newbigin's articulation of the close connection between mission and unity. If all things will be ultimately united in Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God, the church offers a sign of that unity in its life. Newbigin's understanding of organic unity flows from this commitment. His formulation of the church in terms of organic unity that remains inscribed in the proceedings of New Delhi is one of his most significant contributions to the 20th century church. That formulation flowed, not only from his theological commitments but also from his missionary experience and struggles for the reunion of the church in South India. Newbigin's stubborn insistence on organic unity as the only faithful model of unity raises questions. On the one hand, it rightly challenges any model that defines unity in terms of a pragmatic union which allows independent bodies to maintain their own autonomy. On the other hand, it seems to make the CSI model of ecumenism normative for unity. What would organic union mean for worldwide ecumenism? That question highlights the weakness of Newbigin's ideal. Are all other models that are less costly than organic unity simply compromises that settle for something less than the Lord intended? This remains more of an open question than Newbigin's apparent certainty indicates.

While the Christological and eschatological dimensions of Newbigin's ecclesiology are well-developed, the pneumatological dimension must be judged inadequate. Newbigin recognizes two different understandings of mission that issue from two contrasting understandings of the relation of the Spirit, church, and world. If emphasis is placed on the relation of the Spirit to the church, then mission is understood as church extension. If emphasis is placed on the relation of the Spirit to world history, then mission is understood in terms of discerning and participating in the Spirit's work in culture. Newbigin attempted to provide a solution to this dilemma by describing the church's task as a witness to what God was doing in world history. However, Newbigin did not succeed in integrating the concerns of those who want to stress the Spirit's work in history into his ecclesiology; that is, he failed to integrate an understanding of the work of the Spirit in the world with the work of the Spirit in the church. Newbigin recognizes the liberating work of the Spirit in the world; however, there are both liberating and oppressive currents in world history. The tradition within the WCC that seeks a basis for mission in the work of the Spirit in the world requires a criterion that enables the church to carry out its mission in cooperation with the Spirit. Newbigin's interpretation of world history in terms of Mark 13 does not provide a criterion by which the church can discerningly share in the Spirit's work beyond the bounds of the

church.

Newbigin has helpfully articulated three historical processes that have crippled a self-understanding of the church as missionary: Christendom, the privatization of modernity, and separation of the church and mission in the modern missionary movement. Yet certain inconsistencies and questions remain. Newbigin's interpretation of Christendom is ambivalent. On the one hand, Newbigin has provided an insightful critique of the church in Christendom: the established church of Christendom cripples a missionary self-understanding; it shapes the ministry, sacraments, structures, and theology in an unmissionary pattern; it distorts the relationship of the church to culture; it diminishes concern for the unity of the church; and it eclipses eschatology. On the other hand, Newbigin stresses the positive side of Christendom. The church was right in taking responsibility for the social, cultural, and political life of Europe. The Constantinian settlement represents the faithfulness of the church to bring the universal authority of Christ to bear on politics, culture, and society. The church's faithfulness during this period has left us with a legacy that has lasted to the present. Newbigin correctly notes within Christendom both the importance and the danger of cultural participation. The problem is that he has left these two emphases side by side without any attempt to integrate them. The need for a framework that integrates both cultural responsibility and prophetic critique is necessary to rightly evaluate Christendom and its continuing legacy.

The way Newbigin relates the church in Christendom to the post-Enlightenment church seems one-sided and inconsistent. The connection between them can be described in terms of discontinuity. Newbigin has articulated that discontinuity well; the post-Enlightenment church has permitted the privatization of the gospel, while the church of Christendom held the gospel as public truth. However, the insightful observations of Wilbert Shenk that there is deep continuity between the privatization of the post-Enlightenment church and the Christendom church would illumine the situation of the church today. The church in Christendom formed its self-identity by its role in the established political order; it took its place as one of the powers among the constellation of powers. In so doing, the church lost its antithetical posture toward culture. The loss of a prophetically critical stance is carried over into the post-Enlightenment church. It is precisely because the church of Christendom learned to define its identity by its role *within* the culture that in modernity it accepted its place in the private sector. Today's consumer church is the legacy of Christendom. Newbigin's penetrating critique of modernity would be strengthened by this insight. However, Newbigin is hindered from making this connection because in his interpretation of the post-Enlightenment church he tends to only regard the positive side of his interpretation of Christendom. In opposing the privatization of the church in modernity, Newbigin highlights the role of the gospel in Christendom in terms of public truth. The problems of Christendom for the missionary church are not raised. The relationship of the *corpus Christianum* and the Enlightenment calls for much more scrutiny that goes beyond the work of Newbigin.

A final critical note should be registered: Newbigin's understanding of the missionary church is defined almost exclusively in the context of the ecumenical tradition. The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Evangelical traditions make little contribution to Newbigin's formulations. Newbigin himself recognized this. He

comments that in his *Household of God* he says nothing of the Eastern Orthodox interpretation of the church and that this would be unpardonable if his book pretended to be a systematic treatment on the church. Yet his limited knowledge of Orthodox ecclesiology prohibits him from interacting with their insights on the doctrine of the church (1953d:xii). Newbigin's reference to the "Pentecostal" tradition in *Household of God* is not a reference to the confessional tradition by that name but to the pneumatological teaching of Scripture. Newbigin's contact with the Pentecostal tradition is not exploited in his understanding of the work of the Spirit. It is perhaps understandable that Newbigin did not interact with the evangelical tradition; evangelicals in general have a weak ecclesiology. However, the same cannot be said of the Roman Catholic tradition. Newbigin does interact with Yves Congar and the Catholic tradition of the church as 'extension of the incarnation.' However, the rich and broad Roman Catholic tradition on ecclesiology finds little place in Newbigin's writings. Further appropriation of the insights of these traditions would have enriched Newbigin's understanding of the missionary church.