

6. THE MISSIONARY CHURCH AS INSTITUTION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

If the first relationship of the missionary church is to God, the second relationship is to its own mission. That mission is a faithful witness to the good news of God's kingdom revealed in Jesus Christ. The previous two chapters defined the church as missionary in its very nature by virtue of its participation in the mission of God. Assuming that mission is of the church's essence, the question arises as to what that missionary church would look like. What are the implications of the nature of the church for its visible life? The next two chapters discuss the two sides of the church's life: internal, in terms of its institutional character, and external, in terms of its mission in the world.

Newbigin does not often use the word 'institution' with respect to the church. However, the word is common in systematic theological discussion to discuss the internal structuring of the church's life. The ecclesiological formulations of Hendrikus Berkhof offer a helpful framework to introduce us to Newbigin's understanding of the church as an institution. Berkhof analyzes the church in terms of its threefold character (Berkhof 1979:339-422). First, the church is an institution (:345-392). Through a number of activities and ministries organized in a particular societal institution the church ministers Christ to the people. From the institutional perspective, a believer can be said to be *in* the church (:395). Under the rubric of church as institution Berkhof discusses nine different facets and activities of the church: instruction, baptism, 'preaching'¹, discussion of the sermon, the Lord's Supper, the diaconate, the meeting, office, and church order. Through this organization and activity the church mediates Christ to the congregation. Second, the church is a community (:392-410). We are not only or even primarily *in* the church as institution, but *are* ourselves and collectively the church, the communion of saints. The church is a community of believers that has been given diverse gifts for the sake of building up the body of Christ.

Berkhof continues, "Yet it is not enough to ascertain this twofold character of the church" (1979:344). In ecclesiological understanding and formulation the institutional aspect of the church has dominated throughout the history of the western church, while emphasis on the community aspect has evolved since the time of the Reformation. Two factors—Europe's colonial expansion and the secularization of Europe—have highlighted the importance of adding a third dimension: the church's orientation to the world (Berkhof 1979:345). The final goal of the church cannot be the individual believer nor even the ecclesial community but the renewal of all of humanity, all of humanity's life, and all of creation. Thus the church stands between Christ and the world and is equally related to both (*ibid*).

This third aspect of the church, its orientation to the world, is not simply an addendum or an important ministry that properly belongs to the church; it is far more

¹Berkhof distinguishes between "the sermon" and "proclamation" or preaching. The latter category is broader than the first. The first is a fixed institutional activity that involves the regular exposition and application of Bible in the official gathering of the congregation (Berkhof 1979:356). I designate this activity with the more common word 'preaching.' The second is more evangelistic in nature.

important than that. Berkhof speaks of a chain running from Christ to the world: Christ is mediated to the congregation through the institution; the congregation mediates Christ to the world. “In this chain the world comes last, yet it is the goal that gives meaning and purpose to the preceding links. Everything that has come before serves this goal, even when it is not deliberately stated” (Berkhof 1979:410). Indeed, the church is misunderstood if this aspect of ecclesiology is neglected; its significance is such that it demands the rethinking of all ecclesiology from the standpoint of the relation of the church to the world (*ibid*).

In this chapter, we consider three aspects of the institutional and communal life of the missionary church—ecclesial structures, church leadership, and worship. Under these headings Newbigin addresses many of the issues that Berkhof elaborates in his nine points of the institutional church. What is significant about Newbigin’s treatment of these traditional subjects in ecclesiology is that Newbigin consistently works out each theme with a missionary orientation to the world; this third aspect of the church’s life pervades every area of his ecclesiology. The elaboration of ecclesial structures, ministerial leadership, and worship is missional through and through. That is, each of these subjects can be properly understood only when it is placed in the context of God’s mission to redeem His world. The mediation of Christ to the world—to use the formulation of Berkhof—gives meaning and purpose to each aspect of Newbigin’s ecclesiology treated in this chapter.

6.2. THE CHURCH—LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL

To speak of Newbigin’s understanding of the missionary *church*, it is necessary to ascertain exactly what he means by ‘church.’ He notes that the “idea of a supra historical, invisible Church has often tempted Christians” (1996c:5) and finds evidence of this in his older ecumenical mentor Joseph H. Oldham. He relates the comment of close friends of Oldham who said that when he spoke of ‘the church’ “it was never quite clear whether he was talking about the ordinary, parson-led congregation, or about something more exciting but less visible” (1989e:226). In contrast to this, Newbigin notes that the word ‘church’ is used in the New Testament to describe *visible* communities of human beings. At the same time, this term that refers to visible communities is used in two senses. It is applied equally to local congregations and to the entire community of those who belong to Jesus Christ (1984a:7). This double usage is possible because the modifier “of God” (in *ecclesia tou Theou*) indicates that God is at work in Corinth, in Rome, in Ephesus, and throughout the world drawing a community to Himself. This calling is a single action of God assembling his people in various places. “It is one action of God in each place and in all places because God is equally present in each place and in all places” (*ibid*). Thus the local community gathered in Corinth is the *ecclesia*. But since the action of God is a single action also in Rome, Ephesus and throughout the world as well as in Corinth, the whole body being assembled by God can also be designated *ecclesia*. Newbigin puts it succinctly: “Because it is the one Lord who assembles his people in every place these many local assemblies form one assembly universally. For the same reason the assembly in each place *is* the catholic Church in that place, for it is the one Lord who is assembling them”

(1985c:176). The church has both a local and universal dimension; both dimensions must be visible embodiments. Jongeneel speaks of “missionary congregations” and “missionary churches” to distinguish between the local and universal dimensions of the church: “*Missionary congregations* are local communities of Christians who dedicate themselves to ‘the spread of the Gospel’...; the planting of churches; service to one’s neighbours; etc. And *missionary churches* are communities of Christians which do the same at a supra-local level” (Jongeneel 1997:172). Newbigin’s terminology is not consistent; he uses congregation, church, and community as equivalent terms qualifying them with local, universal, or ecumenical.

The distinction between the local and ecumenical dimensions of the church is evident in the formulation of the unity of the church that eventually prevailed in New Delhi. This statement, shaped by Newbigin’s ecclesiology, speaks of the unity of the church being made visible as “all in each place” are brought together into a fully committed fellowship. A true expression of this unity must move beyond this local embodiment to include a more global manifestation. This local body must be visibly united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and in all ages (1970b:73-74). Newbigin comments on the New Delhi statement:

The primary emphasis of the statement falls on the unity of “all in each place” who confess the name of Jesus, but it immediately goes on to make clear that this local unity is to be the local expression of a universal unity which embraces all in all places and all ages who have confessed the same name (1969e:121).

This distinction between the local congregation and the universal church is driven by a missionary concern. The local congregation is the provisional incorporation of the new humankind into Christ for its particular place and therefore called to embody a witness that effectively offers to all human beings *in that place* the invitation of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God through Him. At the same time the church must be visible also as an ecumenical community if it is to offer to humankind *as a whole* the same invitation (1969e:118). It is this distinction that led Newbigin to struggle repeatedly with a form and structure of the church that would express both the local and ecumenical dimensions (1969e; 1973c; 1977g; 1984a).

The recognition of the local and universal expressions of the church did not mean that Newbigin gives equal weight to each. In fact, Newbigin makes clear as early as 1950 that the local church is “the fundamental unit of the Christian Church”, “the primary unit of the church”, or “the basic unit of Christian existence” (1951b:4; 1960o:26; 1962b:20). Indeed, this emphasis on the local congregation only increased in the later decades of his life. He “welcomed eagerly every new effort to see the life of the local congregation afresh in missionary terms,” spawned by the growing attention given to the local congregation in the ecumenical tradition. A missionary ecclesiology that did not affect the local congregation was futile: “The whole thrust of the 20th century rediscovery of the missionary nature of the Church is lost if it does not lead to a radical re-conception of what it means to be a local congregation of God’s people” (1976e:228). In the last couple of decades of his life, Newbigin frequently expressed the conviction that the local congregation is the “primary reality” of the church and is therefore the only possible hermeneutic of the gospel (1980f:62; 1989e:227).

This growing emphasis on the local congregation as the primary reality of the

missionary church did not lead Newbigin to abandon his commitment to a visible expression of the global church. This comes out most clearly in Newbigin's response to Leslie Lyall's paper *The Church—Local and Universal*. In his paper, Lyall argues that "the essential unit" of the church is the local congregation. He continues:

God's purposes for the Church must ultimately be carried out through the local congregation. The local congregation is of far greater importance than all the complicated and costly machinery of committees and councils with which 'the Church' has become encumbered (Lyall 1962:8).

Lyall reduces the church to the local congregation, dismissing attempts to find structures that express the global dimension of the church simply as costly bureaucratic machinery that encumbers the church. His quotation marks around the expression 'the church' indicate that this attempt at global expression cannot be dignified with the label church. Lyall emphasizes the local congregation, giving little credence to any idea of a universal expression of the church. He believes the cause of Christ is best served by fostering autonomous and independent congregations who treasure a spiritual unity but devote themselves to mission in their particular location (Lyall 1962:18-19).

Newbigin's response shows, on the one hand, how much he appreciates the strong emphasis on the local congregation, but on the other hand, how he refuses to jettison the ecumenical expression of the church. He registers "strong sympathy" with Lyall: "I believe that it is true that the local congregation is the primary unit of the Church in a way in which, say, a diocese or province cannot be." He continues:

But having registered these strong agreements, I must go on to say that I think the thrust of the paper is carried beyond the limit which the New Testament evidence allows and which missionary experience indicates. I think a good case is overstated (1962b:20).

There are no independent congregations; there are only congregations that are born as part of a larger family and in a visible historic chain. Episcopal, Presbyterian, Papal, and Missionary-bureaucratic organization are simply attempts—more or less faithful—to express the wider reality of the ecumenical church. A full understanding of the church cannot be exhausted by reference to the local congregation. God's gathering in each place and in all places means that the word 'church' designates both a local and an ecumenical body.

It will be necessary to keep this distinction in mind as we proceed with an analysis of Newbigin's understanding of the witness of the missionary church. Yet a neat distinction cannot be made between the witness of the local congregation and the witness of the universal church. A fair summary statement would be that when Newbigin speaks *concretely* of the witness of the missionary church he is usually referring to the local congregation. He intentionally focusses on the witness of the universal church when he speaks of structures of unity, missions, and leadership that give expression to the ecumenical dimension. The present chapter focusses on the witness of the local congregation, except at points where it is specifically stated that the global church is in view.

6.3. ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES

The church must be given expression in ecclesial structures appropriate to its missionary character (cf. Jongeneel 1997:172-176). During his struggle for the reunion of the church in South India, Newbigin grappled with two broad ecclesiological traditions: Protestant and Catholic. He remarks that during this time he read Michael Ramsey's book *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* and was convinced of its main thesis: "the structure of the church is itself an expression of the Gospel" (1975e:172). This theological conviction was confirmed in later years by the sociological insight that if any idea is to have an impact in history it must take on an institutionally embodied form (1973b:6). While the gospel is not an idea—it is a verbal message about events—it too must take on a visible, structural form in the body of Christ. Consequently, "the sociologist and the theologian will be one in insisting that the idea of a structure-less Christianity is a pure illusion" (1973c:109). Newbigin devoted much of his ministry to reforming structures and much of his writing to reflecting on what kind of structures would best express the true nature of the missionary church. An oft-repeated theme in his writing is that "highest priority must be given to bringing about those changes in the structure of the Church" (1969a:263).

6.3.1. *The Urgency of Structural Renewal: Developments in the 20th Century*

During the 1950s, interest in ecclesial structures increased dramatically. The backdrop for this resurgent interest was the recognition that the structures that shaped the church at that time were given form in an era when Christianity had ceased to be a missionary religion (1966b:102). During the 7th and 8th centuries, the rise of Islam effectively encapsulated the church on the European peninsula, cutting off all possibility of missionary endeavour. The familiar forms of the church—organizational, liturgical, and theological—were shaped at this time, when the church was reduced to a static society (1977d:213). The church had become "the religious department of European society rather than the task force selected and appointed for world mission" (1966b:103). The structures, therefore, corresponded to this established position in society rather than to its missionary identity.

The basic structure was the parish with its focus in the church building standing in the centre of each town and village. The entire population was considered to be the responsibility of this one unit of the church's organization (1980f:58). The visible centre expressed the divine invitation 'come to me' but did not express the divine command to go (1966b:106). The parish developed as a result of the mass conversion and baptism of the barbarian tribes. What was needed for this new religio-political community was a place where the local population could gather for worship and instruction in the faith (1966b:105-106). Newbigin points to at least five characteristics of the church shaped by the *corpus Christianum*: it was centred in a building; it had a central geographical location; it enjoyed an established role in society; it was wealthy; and it was characterized by institutional inertia (1966b:102-111).

While this structure may have been valid for the medieval community (1966b:106), and *may* still be valuable in a South Indian village (1966b:106, 108), these patterns "which we have inherited appear to be neither relevant to the life of the secularized

society, nor true to the biblical picture of the Church as a missionary community” (1966b:107).²

In the 20th century a number of factors challenge the Christendom structures. Newbigin notes in various places four of these factors. The first was the growing conviction that emerged between the Tambaram meeting of the International Missionary Council (1938) and the Willingen meeting of that same body (1952) that the church is missionary by its very nature. Mission is not one activity of a settled established church but the defining characteristic of its existence. With this theological conviction came the growing recognition that the church’s structures were inappropriate to her missionary nature. Jongeneel observes that “every Christian congregation and every church needs both a ‘missionary spirit’... and a ‘missionary structure’... (1997:173). The development of a ‘missionary spirit’ produced by a new self-understanding of the church as missionary was not sufficient; it was necessary to bring structures into line with that conviction. The middle of the century brought worldwide discussions on the missionary structure of the congregation (Jongeneel 1997:172-174). Newbigin voiced the question that dominated much of ecumenical discussion: “Does the very structure of our congregations contradict the missionary calling of the church?” (1963a:9). About five years earlier he wrote in a letter: “We are saying that we have recovered a radically missionary theology of the Church. But the actual structure of our Churches (younger as well as older) does not reflect that theology. On the contrary it continues placidly to reflect the static ‘Christendom’ theology of the eighteenth century” (1993h:148). Church structures were directed to mere maintenance rather than mission (1963a:8). At worst the introverted nature of the church had led congregations to become “clubs for self-centred enjoyment of the benefits of the Christian religion” (1969a:263). Newbigin was convinced that “the primacy of the missionary obligation” is “to be determinative of the forms of the Church’s life” (1963a:8) This constituted a radical challenge to the present ecclesial structures.

The second factor that challenged the traditional Christendom structures was the social activism that erupted in the mainline churches during the secular decade. In a time of ‘rapid social change’ when social, economic, and political problems dominated the agenda of the church, self-centred and introverted structures appeared, not only outdated, but positively heretical (WCC 1967:19). There was widespread disillusionment among young people about all institutional structures. There was a revolt against congregational structures because they were “irrelevant to the task of the Christian life and action at the present hour” (1973c:108). “Ardent spirits” concluded that the mission of the church was something that should be carried on outside the present structures of the church (1969a:263; 1973c:108). If the church was to engage the social, economic, and political issues of the day, its structures must be reformed.

²I express the abiding ambivalence in Newbigin’s thought concerning Christendom with the word ‘may.’ Newbigin is both critical and appreciative of the Christendom church.

A third factor was the growing recognition that the secular society of the 20th century West was a highly differentiated society in comparison with the undifferentiated medieval world. The Christendom structures assumed a social organization in which the family, political, economic, and social life of people were intertwined in a visible whole. The place where a person lives is also the place he works, enjoys leisure, and develops friendships. The church located geographically in the centre of that religio-political unity could stand as a sign of good news for the whole community. The secular society, on the other hand, was highly differentiated and much more mobile. A person will live in several different sectors or 'neighbourhoods.' His place of work is often remote from the place of his home, family, and leisure. He lives in many 'places' and is related to many people. The parish structure which is a single geographically determined location cannot reach the whole of society with good news. The church must rethink its structures to be, speak, and do good news in a particular place (1960n:32; 1966b:111; 1969e:122f.).

An inconsistency in Newbigin's thought arises at this point. We have noted in an earlier chapter that Newbigin's ecclesiological understanding was formed by a picture of the church in the small villages of India (2.3.2.5.). The structures of the local congregation were consistent with the undifferentiated nature of those Indian villages. Newbigin recognized in the 1960s that the complex and differentiated society of the modern West required new structures to engage the public life of Western culture (1960n:32; 1966b:111). This commitment to flexible structures within a differentiated society continues to exercise influence in his later thought (1980d:6; cf. 1980f:64-67). However, the image of the church in the undifferentiated Indian villages also remains a dominant image in his understanding of the missionary church (1961e:24; 1994k:55). In an analysis of Newbigin's later writings about the church, George Vandervelde states: "At the most crucial point in his thought, Newbigin fails to be contextual... he does not take into account the effects of Western culture, namely individualism and differentiation" (1996:13). The question arises as to how these two very different images can be reconciled? Newbigin does not offer any resolution. The image of the church formed in the Indian villages exerted increasing pressure on Newbigin's thought in the later decades of his life, and may be the reason that Newbigin never fleshed out his early suggestions in detail.

The final factor that led to a re-examination of ecclesial structures was the struggles for unity in the ecumenical tradition. Attempts to find a basis for reunion led to clashes at the level of ecclesial structure between various confessional forms. The divisions of the Reformation had produced rival doctrines concerning ecclesial structures. Claims for divine institution were made for these various forms. The ensuing polemics in pursuit of unity often led competing factions to harden their positions and absolutize their structures. The question this raised was: are these confessional traditions divinely instituted or culturally relative (1973c:107f.)?

In an effort to meet this changing situation a number of new structural forms appeared that played an important role in the mission of the church. Newbigin highlights three of these (1980f:57-62). The first of these is program agencies that have a specific focus for their ministry. They may be denominational or ecumenical organizations but their *raison d'être* is bound up with one aspect of the church's mission: evangelism, missions, education, social and political action. These program

agencies do not in any way claim to be local churches but are attached to these congregations in various ways. The second type of emerging structure is what Newbigin calls “sector ministries.” This again is a widely divergent group of ministries but what distinguishes them is that they are related to a particular sector of cultural life such as industry, education, or healing. These may be groups of Christians who meet within a particular institution or chaplains that function within a particular sector. The third new structural form is the ‘para-church.’ Newbigin says: “I use this term without any negative intention to describe the great and growing numbers of groups which are formed on the basis of a common vision for the Church, or of a common concern about Christian action in the world, and which meet apart from the traditional gatherings of the ‘local church’ for worship” (1980f:59). He includes the base ecclesial communities of Latin America and the house churches of the West in this category. This definition makes it difficult to distinguish between the local congregation and the ‘para-church’ group.

Newbigin finds many healthy signs in the development of these new forms but also points to weaknesses (1980f:59-63). These structures have arisen as a result of the insufficiency of Christendom and privatized ecclesial structures to carry out the mission of the church. Different needs that have been obscured or denied by traditional structures find expression in these new ministries. They pose a danger, however, in that their separation from the local Eucharist fellowship separates their activity from a centre in the gospel. He summarizes:

Each of these structural developments is playing an important part in enabling the Church to penetrate areas of secular life from which the privatised religion of Western culture has been largely excluded. They are important growing points for the mission of the Church. Their weaknesses arise precisely at the point of their separation from the local congregation (1980f:59).

6.3.2. Criteria for Structural Renewal

Newbigin agrees heartily with those who believe that the Christendom and Enlightenment structures of the church are irrelevant to the present situation and are in need of re-formation so that they “may correspond to its proper nature and calling” (1973c:125; cf. 1969a:263; New Delhi 1962:189). What are the criteria for this structural renewal? Newbigin points to two closely related requirements: faithfulness to the nature of the church, and relevance to the particular community in which the church is set.

Newbigin observes that “every discussion of the structures of the Church presupposes a doctrine of the Church—hidden or acknowledged” (1973c:110). He learned from Michael Ramsey that the structure of the church is itself an expression of the gospel (Ramsey 1936). In two major discussions of ecclesial structures, Newbigin articulates the nature of the church first, and then proposes structures that are consistent with that reality. In the first, he begins with a summary of the contemporary context of the question (1973c:107-110). He follows with a section ‘What is the Church?’ (:110-113) and then discusses ‘Structures of the Church and Structures of Society’ (:113-117). A similar structure can be observed in a second article where, following an opening section on the background of the discussion (1977g:115-117), he proceeds to ask and

answer the question: ‘What is a local church?’ (:117-122). Only after this question has been treated does he advocate various structures (:122-128; cf. also 1969e; 1984a).

Newbigin’s approach differs in the various discussions. In one paper he gives an elaborate explanation of his definition of the church: “the Church is the provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ” (1973c:110-113). In another he analyzes the church in terms of the title we find in Paul’s letters. The church is modified by two phrases: ‘of God’ and ‘in a specific place.’ The church is a body that is defined by the call and purpose of God for a specific place (1977g:117-122; 1984a:10). At yet another point he critiques the denominational model of the church, focussing his discussion on the early church’s self-designation with the term ‘*ecclesia*’ (1984a:6-10).

In these discussions of ecclesial structures, however, Newbigin makes a fundamental point each time. It can be best stated by returning to his discussion of the importance of ‘place’ in ecclesiology. Newbigin stresses that the church must be understood as missionary by its very nature. Accordingly the church must be recognizable as ‘good news people’ in a particular place. The church exists *for the place* in which it is situated. When the church orders its life in keeping with its own concerns it becomes untrue to its proper nature (1977g:117-119). The church’s nature is to exist for the place in which it is set. Newbigin makes this point, not only by reference to the title of the church in Paul’s letters (for instance, the church *at Ephesus*), but also by his definition of the church. To say that the church is the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ also stresses the role of the church in God’s plan for the sake of the world. The church is the *provisional* incorporation of humankind into Christ. The church does not exist for itself but for the sake of all humankind (1973c:112). The church is concerned with *humankind*; “it can never regard itself as a private or sectional organization for the benefit of those who choose to adhere to this form of religion” (*ibid*). The church is the representative of humankind, the *pars pro toto*, the firstfruits of the harvest. The triad of sign, instrument, and first fruits also point to the same reality (1973c:113; 1977g:119).

The fundamental point that Newbigin makes in all these cases is that the missionary nature of the church demands that the ecclesial community be intrinsically related to the place to which God calls it. This has implications for the structures of the church.

If the Church is the provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ, then it follows that the given structures of society in any historical situation will be those which shape the structures of the Church. As the Church is for all mankind, it follows that—in relation to each segment of mankind—the Church will be the Church *for* that segment—be it nation or province or local community. The Church does not try to demolish the forms of society (except in so far as they contradict the purpose of God for mankind as revealed in Jesus Christ), but rather accepts them as the provisional form in which the new humanity is to be made manifest (1973c:113f).

With this statement we have moved into the second criteria: ecclesial structures in any historical situation will conform themselves to the given structures of society (1973c:113). The church in any social situation is to take over into its own life the forms of social organization found in the society of which they are part. Newbigin points to a number of examples in church history: the eldership in the Jewish synagogue; the episcopate in cities that reflected the predominant cultural and social power; the diocese in metropolitan centres. The principle is of enduring validity precisely because of the

nature of the church.

Accordingly there must be flexibility and change when it comes to congregational structures (cf. WCC 1967:19; Bassham 1979:71). The structures of Christendom *may* have been suitable for a time when society was static and undifferentiated. The dramatic changes of the contemporary world, however, demand new structures that conform to a mobile and differentiated situation. Newbigin draws on his missionary experience to analyze this issue. The missionary must become a pilgrim that is willing to sacrifice well-worn patterns and to utilize the idioms and patterns of the community to which he or she is sent (1966b:111). Pilgrims dwell in tents, not in permanent houses. Every movement gathers through its history personnel, experience, money, and a tradition. It becomes interested in its own development and concerned for its own maintenance (1960e:5). A missionary must be willing to leave that behind and employ new patterns and forms that are relevant to the people to whom he or she is sent. As a mission, “the Church must be where men are, speak the language they speak, inhabit the worlds they inhabit” (1966b:112).

If structures have changed, will change, and ought to change, two questions arise at this point. First, what is the relationship of structural change to the gospel and nature of the church that has been given once for all? Structural change should not be regarded as mere adaptation to changes that take place within society. Rather this change is a reflection of the gospel as translatable and of the nature of the church as the provisional new humankind. The church adjusts to the changes of its context in order to be what it is called to be: the embodiment of good news for that situation. It is not a mere adjustment to social change but an adjustment to the demands of the gospel (1983a:9).

The Church is concerned with being faithful to him, not only in its words but in its whole being. The question about the Church is not just a question of adjustment to (or even ‘relevance’ to!) the social context at any moment; it is the question of truth or falsehood. It is the question of being truly, or failing to be, the Body of Christ (1973c:109-110).

The second question is: what is the relationship of structural change to ecclesiastical traditions? Newbigin believes that any attempt to absolutize a certain structure developed in church history—whether it is Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, or Congregational—must be abandoned; there are no eternally valid structures (1973c:109; 1983a:8). This does not mean, however, that traditional forms are to be discarded. Newbigin has employed the term ‘incorporation’: we have been incorporated into the new humankind. This means there is a tradition that has been given. This tradition is rooted in the gospel and has made its course through history. We have been incorporated into this living tradition. Our question should be, “how do we move *from within this reality* to meet the demands of obedience to Christ in the circumstances of society today?” (1973c:117). It requires discernment of what Jesus demands in this particular situation. Newbigin contrasts a mechanical metaphor with an organic one. When a machine is no longer serviceable for the purpose for which it was constructed, it can be simply scrapped. In an organism, however, there is always the process of adaptation to a new environment which continues without a radical break. There will be continuity and discontinuity: the old is maintained but adapted to new situations. Newbigin’s call is for a reformation of existing structures rather than a revolutionary

destruction or a conservative preservation. There will always be both progressives and conservatives in this process, but there must be patience since it is always a struggle to properly interpret the situation and respond faithfully.

Newbigin's position can be summed up in a slogan he himself offers: "Since the study of the missionary structure of the congregation has been prolific of polysyllabic slogans, I will venture to plead for a judicious combination of morphological radicalism with evangelical fundamentalism"³ (1969a:264). Structures must change but always in keeping with the call of the church to embody the gospel.

6.3.3. *Congregational Structures*

Since the word *ecclesia* is used in Scripture to refer both to the local congregation and to one church of Christ worldwide, it is necessary to express that reality structurally. In Newbigin's discussions of ecclesial structures, we do indeed find that this ecclesiological insight shapes his formulations.

Newbigin's systematic grappling with structural issues for the congregation began in the late 1960s, when he held high hopes for the ecumenical study of the missionary structure of the congregation. That study, however, was swept into the currents of a secularism that had little place for the local church and, in the end, said little about missionary structures of the congregation. This failure led Newbigin to address the issue with more frequency and detail. It is unfortunate, however, that his suggestions remain general and never appear to plumb the depth of his missionary experience.

Newbigin enumerates four areas of church structure in need of change: the parochial and diocesan organization, the deployment of men and money, the pattern of ministry, and forms of assembly. The second falls under the category of missions and the third under ministerial leadership; these topics are treated later in this chapter. Newbigin does not discuss in any detail the changes needed in the parochial and diocesan organization. The remainder of the present section will explore his suggestions for change in structural forms of assembly.

The problem with traditional structures, according to Newbigin, is their size and character (1969b:358). First, along trends in the WCC Newbigin emphasized that the fundamental ecclesial unit is too large (Bassham 1979:81). In the New Testament, Paul addresses groups that are small enough for members to take responsibility for building

³Newbigin's allusion is to the WCC study *The Church for Others* that castigates parish forms of congregational life for their "morphological fundamentalism"—a rigid and inflexible attitude toward traditional structures of congregational life (WCC 1967:19). This term was introduced by Hoekendijk. For a history of the term see Jongeneel 1997:174.

one another up. Newbigin is emphatic that “we must do more than has yet been done to strengthen the small informal groups of believers who meet regularly to build one another up in the faith” (1969b:359):

We absolutely require the development of a multitude of occasions when Christians can meet together in small groups, where they can know each other, listen to each other, pray for each other and bear each other’s burdens. It is from such groups as these that real renewal can come to the Church (1974b:80).

Unfortunately, church politics tends to move churches further in the direction of large scale organizations. Yet the nurture of small groups need not destroy existing structures. In fact, the “more we can strengthen this kind of intimate, local, *caring* fellowship in the life of the churches, the more shall we find that our larger structures are delivered from their rigidity and brittleness and can become flexible means to ensure the widest possible unity of fellowship and action” (1969b:259).

Second, the character of local congregations also is inadequate. The structure of the local congregation has emerged from an undifferentiated society. The parish church could be an effective ecclesial unit for its ‘place.’ However, with an increasingly differentiated society the question of ‘place’ must be revisited. In an earlier chapter we noted Newbigin’s affirmation that the church exists *for the place* in which it is set. This raises two questions: what is the meaning of *for*? And what is the meaning of *place*? The first question was treated in an earlier section (5.5.1.2.). The question of the meaning of ‘place’ is appropriately addressed here.

In an undifferentiated society—medieval society or villages in South India, for example—most people live, work, play in one place. In a differentiated society most people live at the same time in several ‘places’ (1977g:119f.). There is the geographical place of residence, the ‘place’ of work in a certain place (as a factory or office, for example) or within a certain profession, the ‘place’ of kinship, the ‘place’ of leisure, the ‘place’ of shared political, ideological, or religious commitment, and various other places. If the church is called to be a hermeneutic of the gospel for its place, it is necessary that it be related to all these ‘places.’ Accordingly to define place simply in terms of the geographical location of a person’s residence is inadequate. There is precedent in church history for a definition of place that extends beyond geography: language, particular sector of society (various chaplaincies), and ethnic groups have been the basis for different understandings of place. While these bases have various levels of validity, Newbigin believes that this is an expression of the nature of the missionary church. It must be good news for the various *places* of humankind. Consequently, there needs to be much more diversity in the effective unit of church life.

Newbigin suggests four different forms of small groups that will begin to address the twin problems of size and character. The first is a neighbourhood group (1969b:259; 1974b:77). This provides the opportunity for those who live in the same neighbourhood to meet together for bible study, prayer, fellowship, and mission. All four must be held together. As such it can function as the sign of the kingdom for that neighbourhood.

The second is a work group that provides the opportunity for those working together in a factory or office to gather together as a sign of that kingdom for that particular work location. During his tenure as bishop in Madras this kind of fellowship became a fundamental concern for Newbigin. Madras, it will be recalled, was a centre of heavy

and light industry. A significant number of Christians worked as labourers or in management in these factories. Newbigin's experiments and suggestions challenge the traditional notion of the local congregation.

Newbigin asks: "What does it mean for the Church to be both the *congregation* of God and the *mission* of God in today's secularized, fragmented society?" (1966b:111). Negatively, "locality can no longer be the sole basis of congregation" (*ibid*). Positively, the church must experiment with congregations grouped on the basis of special types of work, responsibility, and vocation (1960n:32). In Madras, there must be congregations organized on the basis of common calling in industry. These groups must be acknowledged as truly congregations (1966b:115). They are not para-ecclesiastical organizations or out-stations of the local church but true congregations of Christ. They should be furnished with an unordained ministry (someone who also works in that setting), word, and sacraments as the centre of their common life (1966b:112, 114).

For Newbigin, it is extremely important that all mission should arise out of the gospel made known in the word and sacrament, and as importantly, that this be recognizable. It was noted above that problems with many program ministries is that they become separated from the life of the local eucharist congregation. Newbigin insists that the congregation rooted in word and sacrament is the only hermeneutic of the gospel. All activity of sector or program ministries must be seen to arise out of such local congregations (1980f:59-61). In this regard it is significant to note the primary difference between Peter Wright, chaplain of the Portsmouth Polytechnic, and Newbigin on the issue of a witness to the gospel in an academic setting. Wright wrote Newbigin letting him know of ways in which he was implementing suggestions raised in *The Other Side of 1984* in the context of the polytechnical institution. They exchanged several letters. One of the points of difference was that Newbigin believed that there ought to be a eucharistic community as a visible hermeneutic of the gospel *within the polytechnic* (1985d:2-3) while Wright was concerned only to engage people "at the level of their polytechnic experiences" (1985e:2). For Wright it was the place of the local church to provide word, fellowship, and sacrament.

This does not negate the place of the local church organized on the basis of geographical location in Newbigin's understanding. The place where people live, where their homes and families are, will continue to be one of the spheres in which people live their lives. This cannot, however, be the only structure of the church (1966b:112, 115). It will be the normal pattern that a Christian belongs to more than one congregation (1966b:116).

A third category Newbigin refers to as "frontier groups." Newbigin borrows this term from Joseph Oldham. The idea of frontier groups developed in the late 1930s among Oldham, T. S. Eliot, and John Baillie.⁴ The concept arose out of a dilemma: how could the gospel be expressed as public truth in society yet not override the competence of the church. The church is not equipped to speak on public issues yet the gospel is public truth. Frontier groups are groups of Christians who have an expertise in the a sector of society. They bring the gospel to bear on that area of life. Thus it is believers in community that address the public square but it is not the institutional church. While frontier groups carried the notion of public truth and the mission of the laity, it is the

⁴I owe these historical insights regarding frontier groups to private communication with John Flett of the Gospel and Our Culture network in New Zealand.

second of these that Newbigin emphasizes. These are small groups of Christians “working in the same sectors of public life meeting to thrash out controversial issues of their business or profession in the light of their faith” (1989e:230f.). Whereas the work groups are organized on the basis of working in the same work space, this group meets as a witness within a specific sector of public life. One of the primary goals of this frontier group is to search for ways to bear witness to the Lordship of Christ in that particular area of culture.

A final group that Newbigin identifies is an action group. This group will be organized around a concern for a particular kind of evangelistic or social action with the context of the community.

Newbigin notes three dangers that are present in the formation of small groups. The first is that they will become introverted and privatized—a place where the benefits of salvation are selfishly enjoyed. Newbigin warns that there must be an outward look that strives to understand and embody ways in which God’s will is done in the office, factory, and so on. To do this Newbigin articulates four elements that should be a part of every group. First, each should have a non-professional ministry. This person should be deeply involved in the life of the neighbourhood, factory, profession and so on, and be ready to give missional leadership. Second, each group should have full access to the congregational and sacramental life either within that small group or within the wider fellowship of a local congregation. This will sustain the life of Christ in the midst of that ‘place’ and will also connect all missional action to its source in the gospel. Third, there must be a recognition of cross-confessional unity in common commitment to a place and task. Each confessional tradition must give their blessing to these small groups as a kind of structural congregation. For the sake of faithful mission, the church must be recognizable as the *one* new humankind for that place. Finally, these groups must be committed to four things: prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and mission. The loss of any of these will lead to imbalance—either self-centred maintenance or an activism unrooted in the gospel (1969b:360f.). The second danger is that great traditions of church history will be lost. He comments that there is “a real danger that we lose the great essentials which have been preserved and handed on through the ordered life and liturgy of the great churches” (1970b:74). The final danger is that these small groups will be disconnected from the universal body of Christ. In these small groups the emphasis falls on the local place but they “give little sign that they have any organic connection with Jesus Christ” (1970b:73). Since the church is a local and universal fellowship, the structures must express both of these dimensions.

With Newbigin’s concern for small groups that maintain a missionary orientation, it is surprising that he did not engage the burgeoning literature on Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in South America.

6.3.4. *Ecumenical Structures*

Two ecclesiological convictions lead Newbigin to address ecumenical structures a number of times during his life. First, the church is a universal fellowship that transcends local or cultural boundaries and must be recognizable as such. Second, the

church is always defined by its calling from God and its place in the world. Place must include all recognizable forms of human community and this includes a global dimension. These convictions are put in the form of a twofold question:

What is the form of the church order which will effectively offer to all the *human beings* in this place the invitation of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God through him?
And: What is the form of church order which will effectively offer to *mankind as a whole* this same invitation (1969e:118; italics his).

Newbigin's concern for ecumenical ecclesial structures is driven by his understanding of the missionary church. If the church is to be good news for all humankind, it must be recognizable as a global fellowship.

Newbigin identifies the principle that guides him as he discusses ecumenical structures of the church: "If the Church is the provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ, it follows that the structures of the Church's life will reflect the structures of human life. To put it more precisely, each effective unit of the Church's life and ministry will correspond with some effective unit of the wider life of mankind" (1973e:122). He distinguishes four levels of human society and church structure (1973c:122-124).

The first level of church structure will be the 'the church in each place.' The reference here is to the local congregation situated in its neighbourhood or village. This has been discussed above. The second level of church structure is the church in the 'human zone' (*zone humaine*). The concept of the human zone was used in ecumenical circles to designate an area which is wider than the local community but which still remains an effective unit of society. The example Newbigin gives is the district into which all Indian provinces are divided. There should be an ecclesial unit that corresponds to this wider human zone—a recognizable body which is the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ for that area.

Third, there must be a unit of the church to correspond to the nation-state. The nation state has become one of the most recognizable and powerful units of human organization in the modern world. Protestant churches have accepted the nation-state as the major unit of human society and have organized their church life accordingly. The Orthodox church is largely organized in terms of autocephalous national churches. The importance of a national expression of the churches is becoming increasingly important within the Roman Catholic communion. There are at least two concerns here, however. The first concern is the uncritical acceptance of the nation-state as the most fundamental unit of human society. National churches have become the church *of* the nation rather than *for* the nation. Second, the marked development of globalization requires that new emphasis be given to the international level of human organization.

The fourth human social unit that must be taken into account in ecclesial structures is the global level. What kind of ecclesial structure corresponds to the increasing global unity of humankind? The Roman Catholic church is the only church that gives a clear answer. There are growing developments in this direction within the Protestant communions—WCC, LWF and other world confessional bodies—but these are only imperfect beginnings.

Newbigin's struggle to define global structures arises from his concern that the church be recognizable as the new humanity. This missionary concern shapes his

discussions.

What matters is that the Church should everywhere be recognizable as simply the new, the true humanity; as the place where every human being is given the freedom of his own home where he can know and love and obey God as his Father, and Jesus as his Lord in the power of the Spirit who is himself the living presence now of the blessedness to which all are called (1977g:128).

6.3.5. *An Evaluative Comment*

Newbigin's discussion of ecclesial structures is rich with many seed suggestions for future development. His faithful adherence to the missionary nature of the church consistently shapes his discussion of the structures of the church. Unfortunately, many of his suggestions remain rather general. It is surprising that with his concern for more faithful structures that he did not expand his own dialogue on structures to include other confessional traditions and other experiments in ecclesial structures undertaken in the global church that share his concerns. Although he started a house church while in Geneva he does not engage the growing literature on that topic. But more significantly is an absence of any discussion of Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in Latin America. Rene Padilla has spoken of "the emergence of a new ecclesiology" in Latin American in connection with the BECs (Padilla 1987:156). He comments further:

That a new church is taking shape in the grassroots ecclesial communities can hardly be denied. The new ecclesiology that is rooted in it has become the most powerful challenge to Protestant Christians in this region of the world, and it may well become the most powerful challenge to the church of Jesus Christ everywhere else in the next few years (Padilla 1987:162).

Newbigin is concerned for structures that are more flexible, smaller, and directed toward mission. The development of BECs are concerned precisely for these issues. They are concrete experiments that have attempted to offer alternative structures that are thoroughly missional. The prolific literature that has arisen on these BECs addresses precisely the kinds of questions that engage Newbigin (Cook 1985:95-104; Boff 1988; Bonino 1988; Libanio 1987; Munoz 1988). Leonardo Boff's *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Boff 1986) is a good example of a rigorous discussion on the structures of the church and mission. Richard Shaull comments about Boff's book: "He also provides us with a new perspective from which to look critically at existing church structures, and makes a strong case for the *reinvention* of the church as an inescapable consequence of its faithfulness to the tradition in which it stands" (comment on back of book). An engagement with this literature would have enriched Newbigin's discussion of ecclesial structures.

6.4. MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP FOR A MISSIONARY CONGREGATION

The two issues to which Newbigin devoted more time and effort than any other were ecclesial unity and ministerial leadership. The title for this section, which treats Newbigin's understanding of ministerial leadership, is taken from the next to last chapter of *The Gospel and a Pluralist Society* (1989e). This book represents a summary of Newbigin's most mature thought in a number of areas of mission theology. The

importance of missionary ecclesiology in his thought is revealed in the structure of the book wherein the entire argument climaxes in a call for the congregation to be a hermeneutic of the gospel (1989e:222-233). The importance of ministerial leadership for the missionary congregation is displayed in the fact that a chapter immediately follows which points to ministerial leadership as one of the fundamental means by which the congregation will be a faithful hermeneutic of the gospel. He opens the chapter thus:

“If I am right in believing, as I do, that the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it, one has to ask how such congregations may be helped to become what they are called to be” (1989e:234). He offers the answer that it will only happen with a ministerial leadership that leads the congregation in mission, enabling, encouraging, and sustaining believers in their callings (1989e:235, 238, 240). This section will explore Newbigin’s understanding of ministerial leadership for a missionary congregation.

6.4.1. Rooted in Ministry and Missionary Experience

Newbigin’s later reflections on church leadership are not the formulations of a systematic theologian who engages the subject in academic isolation from the messiness of church life (cf. Verkuyl 1978:56). Rather his discussions of church leadership arise from vast experience in many different settings. That historical setting has been briefly sketched in the historical chapters. Here three themes are presented by way of introduction.

First, Newbigin’s reflection on the shape and formation of ministerial leadership has emerged from his cross-cultural missionary experience. Newbigin has described the way that a cross-cultural missionary experience enables one to see how deeply he or she has been conditioned by their own culture. Describing the early experience of a missionary he says:

Initially I am not aware of this as a myth [the worldview that shapes Western culture]. As long as I retain the innocence of a thoroughly indigenous Western man, unshaken by serious involvement in another culture, I am not aware of this myth. It is simply ‘how things are’... No myth is seen as a myth by those who inhabit it: it is simply the way things are (1978a:3).

Serious involvement with another culture begins to challenge the missionary’s most fundamental assumptions, enabling the missionary to see his or her culture with new eyes. Slowly, insight into the deep impact of the cultural myth on the shape of every part of one’s existence begins to materialize. It is precisely this process that led Newbigin to recognize the foundational assumptions that were embodied in traditional forms of ministerial order. He recognized how the non-missionary church of Christendom and the Enlightenment worldview of the West had shaped forms of ministry that were being transported to India. This led in turn to two results. First, Newbigin’s writings manifest what he has called in another context “the process of simplification” (1948d:18). In this process, all that is not of the Biblical essence of ministerial leadership is stripped away so that the real purpose of ministerial leadership might be apprehended afresh in its proper role. This process of simplification led Newbigin to the conclusion that ministerial leadership must “serve the fundamental

evangelistic purpose of the church” (1993h:87). The second result was experiments with new forms of leadership that did serve the missional calling of the church and that were appropriate to the Indian setting. He later remarked that what he had learned in India with various experiments in leadership was equally applicable to the modern western situation (1980f:65f.).

There is a further dimension to Newbigin’s missionary experience that makes his reflection on pastoral oversight valuable. Newbigin’s insight into the importance of ministerial leadership for the local congregation arises from his ministry as a bishop. The bishopric provided opportunity to implement experiments with new forms of leadership in virgin territory where the church was emerging. Also entailed in the responsibility of bishop was the training and equipping of ministers in a more settled ministry. Both of these settings provided Newbigin with a growing wealth of experience in questions of ministerial leadership.

Third, Newbigin’s discussions of pastoral leadership are framed in the context of a world setting. Throughout his life Newbigin was involved in issues of ministerial leadership at several levels. At the level of the diocese, he trained and equipped ministers and experimented with new forms of leadership. At the level of the CSI denomination, he helped develop policies on ministerial order and theological training. A third level of involvement was the world context. Newbigin participated in a number of ecumenical committees that grappled with questions of ministerial order. His most extensive experience in this regard was in the Faith and Order Committee of the WCC.

6.4.2. Ministry in the Context of the Missionary Church

To properly understand the role of the ordained ministry, Newbigin writes, it is essential to place the discussion in the context of Jesus’ intention for the church to continue his mission. “We cannot talk long about ministry without talking about mission. Ministry must be conceived always in terms of the Church’s mission” (1980d:8f.). Many of Newbigin’s discussions about ministerial leadership are immediately placed within the context of a discussion of God’s intention for the church (1977a:242-247; 1980d:7-10; 1982a:149-161; 1982e:1f.; 1983c:6-18; 1990b:335-339; cf. Hanson 1975). John 20:19-23 gives us the substance of that intention (1977a:242; 1982e:1; 1983c:6f.). Newbigin observes five points: It is a sending: “The Church is constituted from the outset as a mission” (1983c:6); The church’s mission is governed by the ministry of Jesus himself (“As the Father sent me”)—a ministry of word and deed; Mission is in the way of the cross (“He showed them his hands and side”); The mission can be carried out only in the power of the Spirit as the church shares in the risen life of Christ (“He breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”); The church continues Jesus’ ministry of deliverance from the power of sin (“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”) (1983c:6f.). This commission was given to the disciples. The question arises: Did Jesus speak to the disciples as ‘the ministry in embryo’ or as ‘the church in embryo’? (1982e:1, 5; 1983c:5). Do we move from Jesus to the ordained ministry to that of the whole church or do we move from Jesus to the whole church to the ordained ministry? Answering the question with the first of these options leads to clericalism, while choosing the second of these options downplays the importance of ministerial leadership. Both clericalism and egalitarianism

threaten the ordained leadership for ministry of the church. Indeed, leadership exercised in these ways, “instead of enabling others to follow it prevents them from doing so” (1982e:3).

Throughout his life Newbiggin resisted these two dangers. Clericalism makes a sharp distinction between the minister and the rest of the congregation. Newbiggin faced this threat during his time in India. He addresses two factors that fed this clericalism: Western forms of leadership transported to India, and a wrong understanding of ordination. On the first, he remarks that a Western style of “seminary training tends to create a professional *elite* separated from the ordinary membership. A theological seminary is seen as a sort of Sandhurst⁵ where an officer class is trained, thus creating a chasm between ‘clergy’ and ‘other ranks’” (1978i:4). On the second, he rejects “a false ontology [which] has led to the idea that something which is in the possession of the ordained is—in ordination—handed on (by bishop or presbytery) to the ordinand” (1983c:15). This “pipeline theory” creates a special class of elite within the church that possess something others do not have (1982e:8). The second misunderstanding that Newbiggin addresses is an egalitarian reaction against clericalism that began in the 1960s. Proper emphasis on the ministry and priesthood of the whole church “has been interpreted so as to imply that the Church has no real need for an ordained ministry, or that the latter is merely a secondary development from the primary ministry which is that of the whole church” (1983c:5). The importance of ministerial leadership is downplayed. Both clericalism and egalitarianism threaten the proper role of ministerial leadership in the missionary congregation.

How does Newbiggin uphold both the ministry and priesthood of the whole church and at the same time the important role of ministerial leadership? He starts with a basic insight regarding the commission of John 20: “those to whom these words are spoken are both the first ministers and the first members of the church” (1982e:1). To be forced to choose between an embryonic church and an embryonic ministry poses a false dilemma that arises “as a result of viewing the Church from a static, ‘Christendom’ perspective, rather than from a dynamic and missionary one” (1983c:9). In contrast to this false dilemma, the commission of John 20 is given to the apostles as *both* the embryonic church and the embryonic ministry.

On the one side, this commission is given to the whole church. The whole church is to be a royal priesthood and carry out a full-time ministry. Where and how is this ministerial priesthood to be offered? “It is to the entire membership immersed throughout the week in the secular business of the world—in field and factory, in office and shop, in home and hospital—that this ministry is given and it is in these places that the ministry is to be fulfilled” (1982e:2). When Scripture speak of the ministry of the whole church it is talking about “the faithfulness of men and women immersed in the business of the world who may well have no time at all for what we call ‘church activities’” (*ibid*). If the whole church is called to ministry, why do we need ministers?

⁵Sandhurst is a prestigious Royal Military Academy founded in 1799 in Berkshire, England.

Newbigin answers by pointing to the analogies of the sabbath and tithing. There is one day called the Lord's day that is set apart in order that all the days may be consecrated to the Lord. The tithe is a portion set apart to remind us that all of our monetary resources belong to God. In the same way some are set apart as ministers not to take ministry away from the rest but to enable them to fulfill their ministry—the ministry *of* the church *for* the world.

On the other side, this commission is given to the apostles as the first leaders in the church. The disciples are sent to embody and announce the reign of God in the way of the cross and by the power of the Spirit. The apostles are both themselves the embryonic church constituted as a missionary community and they are the first leaders of the church who are sent to call it into being (1983c:7). The disciples are called to follow Jesus; as such they are constituted as a missionary community. As a community of followers they are also called to lead others in following Jesus; as such they are leaders given the mandate to lead and enable others to follow. As others follow more faithfully they become leaders who lead and enable others to follow. There is not a static distinction between clergy and laity but a fluid boundary as those who follow Jesus lead others in faithful discipleship (1983c:8). Thus Newbigin offers his definition of the ordained ministry: “ministry in the Church is so following Jesus on the way of the cross that others are enabled to follow and to become themselves leaders of others in the same way” (1983c:9; cf., 1982e:4; 1990b:335; cf., Hanson 1975).

This understanding of church leadership is indebted to the compelling portrait of ministry offered by Anthony Hanson in his book *The Pioneer Ministry* (1975) (1974b:147). Hanson was a former colleague of Newbigin in the Church of South India; his understanding of leadership was formed from his missionary situation (Hanson 1975:158-162). Hanson has developed his understanding of leadership from sections of first and second Corinthians that are not normally utilized in discussions on the ministry (1975:57-88). He argues that the missionary situation of the New Testament shaped Paul's understanding of leadership. Accordingly Hanson's doctrine of ministry is closely tied to a missionary church; ministers lead the church by living example in bearing witness to the gospel. In his words:

Thus the ministry has a double relationship: it is related to Christ as responsible to him and as being the primary means by which his life is reproduced in the world. And it is related to the Church as serving the Church, and as leading the Church as a whole into the same life which itself is exhibiting. There is no suggestion here of the ministry doing anything which the Church as a whole cannot do: it is rather that the ministry is the pioneer in Christian living for the Church, as Christ was the pioneer for all of us (1975:62).

The apostolic ministry is the church in nucleus carrying out the mission of Jesus; it is the first church in a new area. As people gather into the church, the ministry pioneers in that mission leading others into the apostolic ministry of the church. Hanson describes the apostolic ministry in three stages :

There the ministry begins by being the Church, goes on to pioneer the life of Christ in the Church, and ends by helping the Church to carry out its apostolic function by itself, though never by dispensing with the ministry. The relation between ministry and Church in Paul is absolutely fundamental: one passes over into the other (1975:88).

Newbigin's recalls his missionary experience to confirm this view of leadership (cf.

Hanson 1975:158-162). The evangelists in the villages of India were the village people themselves. As these new converts learned the elements of the Christian faith, they were encouraged to share them with their neighbours. When Newbigin came, as a bishop, to confirm them, their next act—often the same evening—was to sponsor others in the village who were baptized. “Discipleship and leadership went together. As those learning to follow Christ, they were at the same time leading others. In a missionary situation that is how it is. And that is how it was in the first centuries of the Church. There was no class of what we call clergy” (1982e:6). The distinction between clergy and laity arose when Christianity became the established religion of the empire (1974b:75; Bosch 1991:469; Burrows 1981:38).

This approach relates the ordained minister to the missionary church in a dynamic and an organic way. Participation in the mission of the church and leading in that mission are two sides of the same coin. Leadership is a necessary component in the missionary community (cf. Moltmann 1977:302-304). With this formulation Newbigin provides the resources for a critique of both clericalism and egalitarianism. Over against a clericalism that makes a sharp distinction between the ministers and the rest of the church, this model presents a fluid boundary where followers are enabled to become leaders. Over against an egalitarianism that submerges the minister in the church in such a way that his or her important role is eclipsed, the indispensable significance of leadership in the church is maintained.

6.4.3. Lead and Equip: The Task of a Minister in a Missionary Church

What is the role of ministerial leadership in the missionary church? Newbigin answers that question with two fundamental words: lead and equip. Distinctive about Newbigin’s position is the way he relates these two words. Among the most fundamental words of the gospel is Jesus’ command to his disciples and to all leaders: ‘follow me.’ Beginning with the apostles, all leadership within the community begins with the response of obedient faith to that call (1983a:10; 1989e:240; 1990b:335). Leaders are those who follow hard after Jesus and make it possible for others to follow also (1990b:335).

This conception gives us a different picture than the one that is current in a Christendom model of pastoral leadership. Newbigin describes the Christendom model as follows:

The typical picture of the minister, at least in the Protestant tradition, has been that of a teacher. He faces the congregation as a teacher faces the class. They all, preacher and people alike, have their backs turned to the outside world. They face one another, and the minister encourages, exhorts, and teaches (1989e:240).

When the words ‘follow me’ are the starting point the minister “is not so much facing towards the Church as facing towards the Lord and his ministry is to encourage them to go the way he is going” (1990b:335).

This contrast between Christendom and missionary leadership is sharply portrayed in a paper written in 1983 for the Anglican-Reformed International Commission. Here he addresses the question, how should we understand the sacraments and ministry? This paper represents Newbigin’s most mature and detailed reflection on the issue of

ministerial leadership. In preparation for this meeting he read the New Testament through noting every text that had a bearing on either the sacraments or ministry. He concluded that both the Anglican and Reformed traditions of ministerial leadership stood in contrast with the New Testament. This contrast “arises from the fact that the New Testament assumes a missionary situation in which the Church is a small evangelizing movement in pagan society, while both of our traditions have been formed in the ‘Christendom’ era, in a society presumed to be Christian” (1983c:1). In the missionary setting of the New Testament, ministry is primarily leadership in mission, while in the Christendom setting, ministry is primarily the pastoral care of established communities. There are two contrasting pictures of the ministry: “In one, the minister is facing the people—gathering, teaching, feeding, comforting; in the other he is leading the people, going before them on the way of the cross to challenge the powers of this dark world” (1983c:2).

Newbigin’s description of the bishop makes the same point. He discusses various models of a bishop: lord, enabler, father, and manager. All of them can be co-opted into a Christendom understanding of the ministry. Newbigin believes a better model can be found when the bishop says with Paul: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” This model is also graphically depicted in the words of Mark 14:42: “Come on: let’s go” (1982a:160-161).

Two pictures graphically depict Newbigin’s understanding of leadership. The first is the biblical picture of Jesus in relation to his disciples as portrayed by Italian director Pasolini in the movie *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. It depicts Jesus as a commander leading his troops into battle. He goes ahead of his disciples leading them into mission, throwing words back over his shoulder to encourage, instruct, and challenge his disciples as they follow him in their missionary task.

He is not like a general who sits at headquarters and sends his troops into battle. He goes at their head and takes the brunt of the enemy attack. He enables and encourages them by leading them, not just by telling them. In this picture, the words of Jesus have a quite different force. They all find their meaning in the central keyword, “Follow me” (1989e:240).

The second picture that may help us grasp Newbigin’s image of leadership is a portrayal of his own leadership as described by Sundar Clarke, former bishop in Madras:

There had been heavy rains which had destroyed a number of houses, huts and school buildings. Without delay Lesslie rushed to these spots and found roofless schools and stunned, apathetic people. He called for a ladder, climbed it, asked the local people to pass him the leaves that had blown off, and began to thatch a shed to make into a school. It was a fascinating spectacle to see him so involved and exhibiting his faith and theology to a people who had lost not only their roofs but were also spiritually shattered. *He did it and he got them to do it!* (Clarke, in Yannoulatos 1990:88; italics mine).

It is significant that Newbigin consistently uses the term ‘leadership’ over against many others that are available. He observes that there are a great variety of metaphors used in the New Testament to characterize leaders in the church: shepherds, overseers, watchmen, stewards, ambassadors, evangelists, leaders, teachers, servants, and so forth. Some of these terms have become technical names for various forms of ministry such

as bishop, deacon, or pastor. The metaphor that has become dominant in church history is that of shepherd. The problem with this word, however, is that shepherd connotes a different image today than in Biblical culture. A shepherd was a king who governed his people and led them into battle. With the various choices, Newbigin chooses the term leadership because it best conveys New Testament leadership to contemporary people (1983c:5). While the term leader may be misunderstood as elitist, it also best conveys the combined image of leadership and discipleship found in the New Testament (1983c:6).

I have acknowledged that the term 'leadership' is an unfashionable one for several good reasons. It is not the term usually employed in discussions of the ministry. I use it both because it is implied in the most fundamental of the sayings of Jesus— "Follow me", and because it provides a framework in which both the unity and distinctness of the 'general' and 'special' ministries can be understood. Whereas the terms 'clergy' and 'laity' suggest a sharp distinction between two different classes of Christians, the language of leadership emphasises the fluidity of the boundary without surrendering to a fashionable kind of egalitarianism which denies the necessity for leadership. A good leader might almost be defined as one who does *not* draw a boundary to separate himself from others, but is only eager that others should follow so closely that they in turn become leaders for others (1983c:8).

As one who follows Jesus and leads others in that discipleship, the minister is called to equip others for that task. Throughout Newbigin's chapter 'Ministerial Leadership for a Missionary Congregation', we find a variety of verbs used to describe the task of the minister: serve, nourish, sustain, guide, enable, and encourage (1989e:234-241). The question is how is that task to be carried out in keeping with the image of leadership that the New Testament sketches. Newbigin proposes four ways that this task of enablement is carried out.

First, ministerial leadership is responsible for the ministry of the word and sacraments to the congregation. It will be recalled how tightly Newbigin ties the word and sacraments to the missionary task of the church. Christ is present in preaching and sacraments, giving his life to his followers through those channels. The minister will bring these means of grace to the congregation (1960b:119).

Second, ministers are called to uphold their people in prayer (1974b:143). The believer who attempts to be faithful to Christ in the public life of culture needs a minister "who will pray for him regularly, holding him up by name before God as he goes out into the world day by day to wrestle with principalities and powers" (1960b:119). It was during the secular decade when prayer was being eclipsed that Newbigin especially stressed that ministers should be "men of prayer"⁶ (1962h:5).

Third, ministers can provide "space" and structures in which training for ministry in culture takes place. Speaking of the task of the bishop in this regard, Newbigin writes:

Although bishops cannot be experts, and should not even aspire to be experts, in the different areas of public practice and teaching, it is part of their task to nourish in the Church the work of those who are, and to provide in the life of the Church the spaces where rigorous intellectual effort may be engaged in the task of bringing the light of the Gospel to bear upon the several sectors of public doctrine (1990b:338).

⁶And later in his life, women of prayer as well. For Newbigin's (brief) defense of women's ordination see 1983c:17, 18.

Speaking to the presbyters of the CSI in Madras Newbigin suggests that since there are “thousands of men and women working in every sector of the life of the city, who have knowledge and skill far beyond ours” ministers must be ‘enablers’ instead of ‘performers.’ “We have to liberate and mobilise the immense resources which lie latent in our congregations for the task of presenting every man mature in Christ.” He then mentions a number of structures that may be used to equip the members of the church for their callings in culture (1974b:80f.). These are primarily small groups with lay leadership which explore what it means to be faithful to the gospel in various sectors of cultural life.

Fourth, ministers must be deeply involved in ministry in the world. The first three methods of equipping could quite easily be carried out in the context of Christendom model of ministerial leadership. Even Ephesians 4:11-12, which Newbigin often quotes, could be used to uphold a false clericalism that “sees the church as an organisation to be run by a professional clergy, in which the lay members are simply there to be organised, taught and comforted” (1974b:75) or that views the minister like the Duke of Plaza Toro who leads the army from behind (1977a:246).

The ‘minister’ is not *just* a resource person who equips other people for a battle in which he is not himself engaged. He is not a ‘back-room boy’. He is not a sort of queen bee who remains at the centre of the hive while the worker bees go out into the world (1982e:3).

Newbigin observes that when Paul’s leadership was questioned Paul answered by pointing to the fact that he shared in the suffering that comes from missional engagement (1982e:3f.; Hanson 1975:60). Newbigin explains this requirement more clearly:

Ministerial leadership for a missionary congregation will require that the minister is directly engaged in the warfare of the kingdom against the powers which usurp the kingship. Of course the minister cannot be directly involved in each of the specific areas of secular life in which the members of the congregation have to fight their battles. But there will be situations where the minister must represent the whole Church in challenging the abuse of power, corruption, and selfishness in public life and take the blows that follow. As he or she does this, the way will be open for standing in solidarity with members of the congregation who have to face similar conflict (1989e:240).

Newbigin does not only mention missional engagement in social, political, and economic involvement, he also frequently stresses the role of the minister as an evangelist. Speaking of the bishop, he writes: “This means, I think, that the bishop should be ready himself to be engaged— as opportunity offers and calls—in direct evangelistic efforts or in pioneering movements of Christian action in the secular world” (1977a:246; cf., 1974b:58-62; 1990b:335-337; Hanson 1975).

6.4.4. Ministerial Order and the Missionary Church

If ministry is following Jesus on the way of the cross in such a manner that others are enabled to follow, then the question arises: Is there one order that best exemplifies this

view of ministerial leadership?

The New Testament reflects an immense fluidity and variety in the forms of ministry operative in the early church (1983c:9). While there are many attempts to demonstrate that a particular form of church government—papal, episcopal, presbyterial, congregational—can be irrefutably demonstrated from Scripture, Newbigin believes that the Bible does not furnish us with such a universally valid order of ministry (1973c:109; 1980f:65; 1983c:9). And so he poses the question: “Are we, then, left with no norms at all, no criteria for deciding what are and what are not legitimate developments in church order to meet the changing situations?” (1983a:8)?

An examination of Newbigin’s vast writings on ministerial leadership show that he employs at least six principles. The first is that ministerial order must be shaped by and appropriate to the missionary calling of the church: “The primacy of the missionary obligation [is] determinative of the forms of the Church’s life” (1963a:8). Forms of ministry must be shaped by the missionary calling of the church (cf. Bosch 1991:474; Burrows 1981:83, 112; Moltmann 1977:288-314). Throughout his life Newbigin’s constant refrain was the “question that has to be asked—and repeatedly asked—is whether the traditional forms of ministry which have been inherited from the ‘Christendom’ period are fully compatible with the faith that the Church is called to be a missionary community” (*ibid.*).

Second, forms of ministry must be flexible (1960n:30; 1962a:8; 1965e:479). Various cultural contexts and missional situations will demand different forms of leadership in order to carry out the missionary calling of the church.

Closely related is the third principle:

The Church does not try to demolish the forms of society (except in so far as they contradict the purpose of God for mankind as revealed in Christ), but rather accepts them as the provisional form in which the new humanity is to be made manifest. It is thus entirely congruous with the proper character of the Church that, from the very beginning, it took over into its own life the forms of social organism which it found in the society of which it was a part (1973c:114).

The eldership took over the forms of the Jewish synagogue; the episcopate took over forms of political leadership in the cities of the empire. This does not mean that ministerial forms are simply a response to the leadership structures prevailing in a given culture. Rather employment of societal forms for leadership is governed by the proper nature of the church which is the church *for* that place, the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ (1983a:9). Flexibility and re-formation according to varying cultures is not a surrender to relevancy but obedience to the gospel. The congregation, if it is to be missionary, will take on various structures and forms in keeping with its context. As such, “flexible patterns of congregational life will call for much more flexible and varied styles of ministry” (1980f:65).

Fourth, there must be “the right relationship at every level between personal and corporate elements” (1983c:10; cf. 1982e:9). The form must make room at every level—local, regional, universal—for a kind of leadership in which each person may take individual initiative and take responsibility for their actions. At the same time “there is the need of the fullest possible involvement of the whole community in discerning and doing the will of God in each situation under the guidance of the Spirit” (1983a:10).

Fifth, church order must include both settled and mobile forms of ministry. The New Testament speaks of elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons localized form of leadership permanently settled in the congregation. There were also mobile, non-localized ministries such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists (1983c:9). When the empire became Christian under Constantine, all ministerial leadership was concentrated in the local, settled ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. This resulted in the “practical elimination of the universal, travelling ministry of apostles, prophets, and evangelists” (1982e:8). The modern missionary and ecumenical movements have given the present-day church these mobile ministries back in the form of travelling evangelists, missionaries, and ecumenical secretaries. However, they have not been integrated into official ecclesiologies or theories of ministry (1983c:9; 1982e:8). A ministerial order that reflects Scripture will establish both of these forms of ministry.

Sixth, leadership structures must express the local and universal dimensions of the church. While the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Papal, Missionary-bureaucratic, or Ecumenical-bureaucratic forms of church order cannot be read off the pages of Scripture as blueprints, each of these structures is an attempt to express the universal nature of the church (1962b:27). It will be recalled that in the discussion of ecclesial structures, Newbigin argued that there must be a structure for each level of effective human grouping—local, regional, universal. It is precisely in the forms of church leadership that this is most visible. It is for this reason that Newbigin often insisted that any authentic scheme of reunion must include a universally recognized ministry.

6.4.5. Examples of Ministerial Leadership in a Missionary Church

Newbigin did not only theorize about ministerial leadership; he was deeply involved himself in establishing forms that were consistent with the missionary nature of the church. A full discussion would examine all the committees in which he participated in South India, in Britain, and in ecumenical circles; the ministerial formation in which he was involved as a bishop; his own ministry as a bishop; and the various experiments with ministerial leadership he employed primarily in India. For the purposes of this study, it will suffice to provide a few examples.

A constant theme in Newbigin’s earliest writings about ministerial leadership is the burden of western forms of leadership on the Indian church. There are three fundamental axioms of church leadership that issued from the western church shaped by Christendom: the ministry is a paid full-time profession; ministers are highly educated; and ministers should be supported by the gifts and donations of the people (1994k:24). None of these principles is derived from the New Testament. It was not the fundamental theological understanding of minister and congregation that governed South Indian churches but questions of pragmatic necessity that arose from maintaining a professional, paid, and educated clergy.

Newbigin advocated and implemented a plan for leadership in the CSI that called for four levels of pastoral work (1993h:117; Wingate 1983). First, there is a need to train many laymen and women for volunteer service in the church as preachers, evangelists, teachers and pastoral care workers. While “it must be our duty to train the whole congregation in each place to be a missionary team and to have a consistently missionary attitude toward its neighbourhood” there is the need for trained workers to

carry on a leadership ministry within the context of the local church (1950:144; 1951c:86). Secondly, each village should have an ordained Presbyterian. This presbyter would be a recognized leader in the ecclesial community. He would usually be the one who introduced the gospel to the village in the first place. Confident that the Holy Spirit is the one that has brought this community into existence and that God has chosen this person to be a leader, Newbigin proceeded to accept him as the leader for that place. All other forms of leadership must supplement this person's ministry; they must be seen as helpers and friends, not as controllers. This person would normally earn his living side by side with the rest of the villagers and enter into their lives. He must be trained to read and explain the Bible and lead the worship with understanding. Ministry of the word, sacraments, and pastoral care would occupy his time. Therefore, theological training would be necessary to equip this local presbyter. The third level of minister would be a peripatetic ministry of teachers. These folk would be both paid presbyters and unpaid workers. Their task would be to visit the churches and instruct the people in a systematic way. These leaders should supplement, not supplant the local presbyter's work. The fourth level would be a fully trained and paid ministry who would have the ultimate responsibility for the worship and teaching of the church. This would also include a much larger number of bishops than was present at the time. These were the men that were already carrying out the task of ministry alone. Newbigin did not want to reduce their numbers but rather shift the focus of their ministry. There was a need for an increase in the numbers of local presbyters and travelling teachers and these leaders would need training. This would enable regular teaching and pastoral care to continue in the absence of a trained and paid minister. It would at the same time enable the leadership to be more local and indigenous.

The development of this kind of leadership was referred to as the volunteer principle. It was only by carrying this volunteer principle beyond existing levels of participation that "the church [would] be rooted in the country and [would] Christianize the country through and through" (1993d:117). Over the next decade 300 volunteer leaders were trained and Newbigin comments: "it soon became clear to me that the congregations under this kind of leadership were more lively and more active in evangelism than those under the care of paid teachers" (1993h:118). He was convinced that these experiments had relevance, not only for India, but the highly industrialized West (1980f:66).

A second concrete experiment Newbigin initiated arose from his ecclesiological reflection on new congregational forms in various sectors of society. Above we discussed Newbigin's call for congregations in industry, education, hospitals, and businesses. These congregations should be equipped with a ministry and the sacraments to nourish the life of Christ that was to be manifested in the midst of that public place (1980d:8). This meant that ministerial leadership had to move beyond traditional forms. More "flexible patterns of congregational life will call for much more flexible and varied styles of ministry" (1980f:65). A lengthy quote fleshes this out:

This would mean that men and women who belong to the culture of industrial labour and earn their living on the shop-floor should at the same time be ordained to the full ministry of word and sacrament so that they can become leaders of Christian congregations which are truly part of that culture.

I know from experience that this proposal meets with strong resistance from those who cannot conceive of ministry in other terms than those which have been bequeathed to us by the 'Christendom' experience. But modern industrial society is

a highly complex organism of differentiated but overlapping communities in each of which men and women have to live their working lives, interact with others and take daily and hourly decisions on highly complex and difficult issues. The ministerial leadership of the Church in such communities must be part of their life, understanding its pressures and its complexities and its ethical ambiguities. Only with such leadership can there develop in each of these communities—be it factory, university, city council, professional association or whatever—living Christian cells which can function as a sign and foretaste of God's reign for those communities (1980f:67).

A third example of Newbigin's attempt to implement ministerial leadership appropriate for missionary congregations is the bishop (Hanson 1975:167-171). There are three reasons why it is valuable to look at the bishopric. First, Newbigin was a Presbyterian who played a key role in fashioning a church order in South India that joined together Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans. The sticking point was the role of the bishop. Newbigin articulated an understanding that was acceptable to both Anglicans and others who held to a non-episcopal church order. In the process Newbigin reflected long and hard on the role of a bishop in a missionary church. This fresh reflection on a church office makes this valuable. Second, the bishop was a traditional church office. While the former example showed the radical side of Newbigin's proposals, the way he formulated the bishopric shows how he dealt with church tradition. He believed that it was foolish simply to demolish old orders (1978i:6). The bishopric is an example of the way Newbigin transformed the office to be appropriate to a missionary church. Third, Newbigin himself was appointed a bishop. His memoirs in *A South India Diary* (1951c) exhibit the concrete ways he worked out his bishopric. Thus his theological reflection flows from his own attempts to conform the role of bishop to a missionary church.

In an early reflection on his task he remarks that "the challenge was to help each one of them [700 congregations] to be a living sign and foretaste of the kingdom. This is how I understood the job of a bishop" (1993h:99). He compares his task with the role the apostle Paul fulfilled in the early church. Paul's ministry was pastoral but was not exercised in a particular location. Paul was concerned to build up local congregations to be witnessing communities. Likewise Newbigin's practice and reflection in the bishopric was tied to his concern to establish missionary congregations.

How could this be done? Throughout the corpus of Newbigin's writings we find much space devoted to this issue. There is one article, however, that summarizes succinctly the task of a bishop—*Bishop in a United Church* (1982a). The key word is leader: the bishop is a leader in worship, evangelism, social and political engagement, teaching the faith, and pastoral work. Newbigin does not neglect the important work of administration and relating to councils. However, his main concern is that the bishop lead the presbyters and churches under his care. His primary image is not that of an enabler, or father in the faith, or efficient manager of a large diocese (although each of these contains some truth) but the image of Jesus who said to his disciples "Come on: let's go" and then led them as he went to the cross (1982a:161).

The unique role of the bishop is to be a focus of unity. "It is as leader in worship, in evangelism, in teaching, and in pastoral care that the bishop can be a focus of unity" (1982a:159). This distinctive task of the bishop of being a focus for unity is exercised at three levels. First, the bishop has a special role in unifying the varied and manifold life of the diocese. For example, there is no other office that can unify the worship life

of the church with the various programs of social and evangelistic outreach (1977a:243-245.). Second, the bishop can be a focus of unity for the various congregations within the diocese. Newbigin comments that “the continual visiting of each congregation by the bishop was the first way in which their unity [CSI] in one Church became a reality to them” (1982a:150). Third, the bishop can also be a demonstration of the unity of the church to the wider world.

Newbigin says much more about the calling of a bishop. In every case his primary concern is to view even the most mundane task in the light of the bishop’s role to nurture a missionary congregation.

6.4.6. Theological Education

If ministerial leadership was to be appropriate to the nourishment of a missionary congregation, then there would need to be radical changes in theological education (cf. Bosch 1991:489-498; Bosch 1982; Conn 1983; Conn and Rowen 1984). Newbigin’s reflection on theological education flowed from vast involvement in experiments in theological training. As bishop in Madurai Newbigin was committed “to the development of high-level training in Tamil” (1993h:136). In the midst of a society undergoing a renewal of Tamil culture, standard theological training was oriented to Europe. As chairman of the council for the Tamilnadu Theological College, Newbigin helped to establish a theological institution that gave high-level training to ministerial candidates. Newbigin’s bishopric in Madras and presidency of the Synod Ministerial Committee again afforded him the opportunity to be involved in the establishment of a theological institution. With the help of the Theological Education Fund (TEF), a seminary was established which offered a “ministerial training which was more truly appropriate to a missionary Church than anything I have known before or since” (1993h:216). As an ecumenical leader Newbigin was drawn into discussions of the TEF and the later Programme for Theological Education (PTE) (1963a:9; Pobe 1991:350). In an insightful paper written a couple of years after the launch of the PTE, Newbigin details criticisms in the areas of structure, method, and content that the Third World churches raise about traditional forms of theological education (1978i; cf. 1966b:102-103).

A detailed examination of Newbigin’s critique of western theological education and his proposals for training that more effectively trains ministers to be missionary leaders is beyond the scope of this section. The simple point to be made here is that Newbigin believed that if ministers were to be effectively trained as missionary pastors, then there needed to be vast changes in the structure, method, and content of theological education. The forms of education that were prominent in the West were shaped during Christendom when the church had ceased to be a missionary community. Western theological education trained pastors for institutional self-serving maintenance rather than mission.

6.4.7. The Task of Discipline

The subject of discipline is rare in Newbigin’s writings. The few references that are found show that he believed that this was a crucial element in the missionary church.

Newbigin describes the missionary church in a cultural environment that is clearly antithetical to the gospel. A church in this setting must take the task of discipline seriously; otherwise its witness becomes hopelessly compromised (1953d:7). The missionary church may not succumb to the danger of the national church. While the national church shaped in Christendom takes seriously its responsibility for its national community, it often fails to take seriously its call to be a separate, marked out community. A missionary church must make clear that it is a separate community, marked off from the pagan world around it.

In the memoirs of his bishopric, Newbigin describes a setting in which he had to exercise discipline. He attempts to demonstrate that there is a need for a firm discipline in love. Both love and discipline must go hand in hand. The exercise of discipline is

... in many ways the severest test of a church's Christianity. It is easy—fatally easy—for a congregation simply to shut its eyes to the sins of its members and to do nothing about them. It is also easy for it, under certain circumstances, to adopt a hard legalistic attitude which is without redemptive power (1951c:75f).

Consequently Newbigin took time as bishop of Madras to exhort his fellow presbyters to exercise pastoral discipline in love and firmness, with a concern for the witness to the gospel (1974b:50-53).

It is evident that Newbigin treats the subject of discipline, as with all the other subjects of this chapter, from the standpoint of a missionary church. The life of that disciple community must evidence the power of the gospel. A compromised life blurs the missionary witness of the church.

6.5. WORSHIP AND THE MISSIONARY CONGREGATION

The importance that Newbigin accords worship for the missionary congregation becomes evident in his discussion of the priorities he maintained for the church that he pastored in the inner city of Birmingham. A reviewer challenged Newbigin to show how the abstract reasoning of *Foolishness to the Greeks*, a book which called for a missionary encounter with Western culture, could be concretely applied to the local church in the city. He replies that the church has been chosen to be bearers of good news and that there is only one way this gospel will become credible: through the life of a congregation who believes and embodies the gospel. God's presence in the Spirit dwells in the congregation offering a demonstration of the good news as He makes the life of Christ real in the midst of the world. He continues: "The first priority, therefore, is the cherishing and nourishing of such a congregation in a life of worship, of teaching, and of mutual pastoral care so that the new life in Christ becomes more and more for them the great and controlling reality" (1987b:5).

The following section explicates this theme. It does not attempt to articulate everything that Newbigin said about worship. It confines itself to the importance of worship for the calling of the church to witness to the gospel of the kingdom.

6.5.1. *Two Simultaneous Duties of the Church—Inward and Outward*

Avery Dulles aptly expresses the importance of the inner and outer life of the church:

The Church's existence is a continual alternation between two phases. Like systole and diastole in the movement of the heart, like inhalation and exhalation in the process of breathing, assembly and mission succeed each other in the life of the Church. Discipleship would be stunted unless it included both the centripetal phase of worship and the centrifugal phase of mission (Dulles 1987:220).

Like Dulles, Newbigin believes that the "Church always has two simultaneous duties" (1950:142).⁷ The first is to nurture the new life in Christ in the regular congregational life which is centred in the weekly sacrament, the word, prayer, worship, and fellowship. The second is that "the Church has to involve itself and all its members more and more deeply in all the affairs of the world, to be engaged up to the hilt in all its temptations and sorrows, its shame and despair, its strife and labour, its struggle with disease, injustice and every manifestation of evil..." (1950:143).

Newbigin connects the inner worship life of the church with its social task. At other points he connects the inner life of the church with the evangelistic task (1950:143) and the calling of the laity in culture on Monday to Saturday (1958b:16f.). Of the latter, he says that Sunday is "the day on which the Church makes a necessary withdrawal from its engagement with the world in order to renew the inner springs of the divine life within her through word and sacrament" (1958b:17). The purpose of the church's inner life is to equip for mission: "True pastoral care, true training in the Christian life, and the true use of the means of grace will precisely be in and for the discharge of this missionary task" (1953d:167).

⁷Gerrit C. Berkouwer notes Karl Barth's criticism of Reformation and post-Reformation ecclesiologies in this regard. Barth spoke of a "gap" that existed because only one of these elements—the gathering—was emphasized at the expense of mission. In his words: "According to Barth... there is a 'gap' in the doctrine of the Church—also the Reformation and post-Reformation doctrine—due to the isolation of the idea (in itself correct) of the *coetus* [assembly] or *congregatio fidelium* [congregation of the faithful]. The error lies not in what is said, but in what is not said, with all the dangers of the Church as an 'institution of salvation.' The Protestant Church in the 16th and 17th centuries, according to Barth, had a 'pronounced lack of joy in mission'" (Berkouwer 1976:393, fn.5).

The danger is that “it is always relatively easy for the Church to do one of these things and neglect the other” (1950:143). With the pressing social concerns of his bishopric in Madras, Newbigin found it difficult to keep these two things together. He found it easy to “allow two things which belong together to fall apart—with consequences which are fatal for the witness of the church” (1975c:26). On the one hand, the church that isolates its preaching, sacraments and worship from the task of caring for its neighbours, or the church that focusses only on its own growth without an equal concern for its community, distorts its witness to the gospel. The danger is an introverted, self-serving maintenance. On the other hand, when social concern is separated from the worship life of the church, it becomes just another social effort that loses its character as witness to the kingdom. “It is precisely for the sake of the mission to the world that these two things must not be allowed to fall apart” (1975c:26). A faithful missionary church will “live in the tension of loyalty to both tasks, and in that place, in that tension, to bear witness to the gospel” (1950:143).

6.5.2. The Gospel: The Source of the Church's Life

During the 1960s Newbigin began to characterize the church's mission in a new way: “The mission of the Church is to reproduce the life of Jesus in the life of the world” (1970a:211). The church is called to embody the life of Christ as a witness to the kingdom. The source of the life of Christ is the gospel. Thus the life of the church is rooted in the gospel. If the church is to be faithful to its task of representing the life of Christ as a sign of the end, its whole life must flow from the gospel.

This commitment developed in Newbigin's thinking during the battles that were fought over the reunion of the church in South India during the 1940s. Newbigin wrote *The Reunion of the Church* to defend the scheme of reunion that eventually led to the formation of the Church of South India. Newbigin saw as his primary interlocutor the Anglican tradition which holds institutional continuity as an essential mark of the church. He did not oppose their claim that institutional continuity is important for the church; it is simply visible unity extended through time. What he did oppose was a stress on institutional continuity as an essential mark of the church, which eclipsed the fact that the church is a body that constantly lives out of the power of the gospel. The Anglican tradition views the church as related to the gospel of Christ by virtue of its historical origin. Jesus is the historical founder of the church and gives to that community the resources it needs to maintain itself through history especially in the gift of the ministerial office. The church possesses the law of its own development in itself through the historic transmission of office (1948d:56). The church is defined as an historically continuous society which has, among its many activities, the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

Newbigin countered this understanding of the church by arguing that the church is connected to Christ in two distinguishable ways. First, the church “is connected with Him by nineteen centuries of church history... as a... Society which Christ instituted and to which He entrusted His saving work.” Second, the church is also connected to Christ “as the living and ascended Lord” and Christ meets his people now in the word and sacraments of the gospel. Christ is “not merely the Founder who sent out His first Apostles nineteen centuries ago, but the living Lord, our contemporary, the same

yesterday, to-day and forever” (1948d:71).

Another way Newbigin formulated this twofold connection to Christ was to say that the church finds the source of its life in the gospel in two ways: historically and eschatologically. Historically, the church is rooted in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a central part of his ministry Jesus gathered a community of disciples. This disciple-community became the nucleus of the church. The church is a society that finds its origin in these fundamental events. Eschatologically, the church’s life is rooted in a continual incorporation in the present into what those events accomplished in communion with the living Christ. The stress here is not the historic connection with Jesus of Nazareth but the present connection with the ascended Christ. “The Church acts in her true character as a society constituted by the union of her members in faith with the ascended Christ” (1948d:162). Jesus Christ is not only an historical figure who gives origin to a new community but also the living Lord and giver of the life of the end-time kingdom in the present. Since the gospel of Jesus Christ is the source of the church’s life historically, this disciple community is an historically continuous institution rooted in the mission of Jesus. But the nature of the church cannot be reduced to this historical development. Since the gospel of Jesus Christ is the source of the church’s life eschatologically, that same community now lives by those events in fellowship with the living Lord through the Holy Spirit (1948d:134). The church’s nature cannot be exhausted in a “historically developing society” but must be found in “the eschatological dimension of the Church’s existence” (1948d:71; cf. :77-83). The “Church is related to the Gospel not merely by the fact that its historical origins are to be found in these facts. The Church now and always lives by the Gospel” (1948d:61-62).

Newbigin’s critique of his Anglican opponents—despite his clear appreciation for their affirmation of the importance of historical continuity—is often quite harsh. He believed that an ecclesiology that diminished the reality of the dependence of the church on the gospel in the present was dangerous. God’s mercy is new every morning.

Just as a man who regards his justification as an event in the past which now, because it has once happened, secures him against sin, is in fact fallen away from grace; so also a Church which thinks that it possesses the law of its own development and the resources of grace in itself, is fallen from grace.... The Church does not live by what it possesses and has inherited. It lives in the dynamic relationship of ever-new penitence and faith before the Cross of Jesus Christ, and its unity, its continuity, and all its spiritual gifts are the fruits of that (1948d:101-102).

The life of the church is found in a constant appropriation of the gospel. Or, the way Newbigin would often speak, our life flows from a continual appropriation of our incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Historical continuity is, like other spiritual gifts, the fruit of that life in Christ. The church which forgets that is in danger of falling from grace. His language is severe: the church that fails to understand itself in terms of a constant appropriation of the life of Christ found in the gospel is in danger of forfeiting its right to be called a church. “When a body of Christians claims to possess *in itself* the law of its own development and denies the possibility of any appeal beyond itself to its Lord, it has come perilously near to denying

its right to be called the Church” (1948d:79; italics mine).

This encounter with the Anglican tradition—a tradition about which he often spoke so positively—firmly planted this vital insight in the centre of his ecclesiology: the church is a community that lives out of the gospel. That is the source of its life and its mission.

6.5.3. *Nourishing the Life of Christ in the Gathered Church*

The significance of this ecclesiological perspective for the topic of worship can be seen in an address to the Diocesan Council in Madurai. Here Newbigin offers a fourfold challenge to the church if it is to be a faithful missionary church in the future. The first order of business is that it must recover the power of the gospel as the source of its life (1951b:4). Only then can the remaining tasks of the church—the mission of the local congregation, the layperson, and the evangelistic work of the trained volunteers—move forward. He entitles this first challenge “The only source of the Church’s Life—the Gospel.” “Essential and primary” to the nature of the church is the saving presence and power of God Himself in the midst of His people. The gospel is the mighty power of God that sets humanity free from sin and continues to give to them the life of Christ. Christ is present in this congregation in word and sacrament. Any understanding of the church that threatens the presence of the Living Christ in word and sacrament is to be rejected. The Anglican tradition is in danger of viewing the word and sacrament simply as two activities of an historically continuous society. Newbigin remarks:

We have, therefore, to condemn... the view which defines the Church as a historically continuous society which has, among its activities, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.... The Church lives by faith in Christ, and the Word and the Sacraments are the means whereby Christ offers Himself to men as the evoker of faith and as the creator and re-creator of the Church (1948d:102).

It is from this standpoint that Newbigin’s strong emphasis on worship, Scripture, prayer, and the sacraments for a missionary church can be understood. The church is sent into the world to make known the life of Christ. That life is not something given historically at the founding of the community and passed down through the ministerial office. It is a life that is appropriated day by day in living communion with Jesus Christ. God has given the means whereby that living encounter with Christ might take place: word, sacraments, worship, prayer, and fellowship in the communion of the saints. Thus communal worship is not, at best, simply a gathering of naturally gregarious creatures to give corporate expression to their religious devotion, or at worst, a hindrance to the mission of the church. Rather it is essential as the source and renewal of the new life they have in Christ. If the church is to be faithful in its missionary calling to embody, announce, and demonstrate the new life of Christ in the midst of the world its gathering will be essential. Any understanding of the church that neglects the centrality of the living Christ present in its midst through the gospel has seriously compromised a Biblical understanding of the church.

A favourite pericope of Newbigin in this regard is John 15:1-11 (1975a; 1974b:140-144). The intention of Jesus for the church is “that we may be consecrated in the truth and sent into the world as one body in that unity which is the life of the Triune God”

(1975a:141). That life of the Triune God is given in the dying of Jesus and we share in that life as we abide in Him. Abiding in Jesus involves following Jesus in His love and obedience. It involves continuing the mission of Jesus in life, word, and deed. Before this can be an outward following, however, it must be an interior act of devotion. That is, our life in Christ must be constantly renewed as we “make him the continual dwelling place of our hearts and minds, [and] turn constantly to him, to meditate on his words and deeds and let them have the formative and directive authority over us” (1975a:141). It is only if there is this interior redirection and reception of the life of Christ that we can “follow him resolutely along the road which He trod, gladly accepting and bearing whatever portion of the sorrow and sin of the world the Father may lay upon us” (*ibid*). The cultivation of the life of Christ in worship, prayer, word, and sacraments must have priority because thereby we are enabled to live a life of love and obedience.

The image of abiding in the vine vividly describes this process. As vines we receive the life-giving sap of Christ’s life “through a million tiny channels hidden behind the hard bark of the trunk and branches” (*ibid*). The fruit of the life of Christ takes form as the branch remains in Christ, availing itself of each of these channels.

6.5.4. *Channelling the Life of Christ*

What are those channels through which the life of Christ flows to his people? Newbigin alludes to a number throughout his writings. The most common elements that he identifies as crucial for the life of the church, if its life is to be centred in Jesus, are worship, the word, the sacraments, and prayer (1968d:91-92). The importance of these channels of life for Newbigin’s view of a missionary church cannot be overestimated.

6.5.4.1. Worship

Worship is, for Newbigin, an all-inclusive word which includes activities such as the proclamation of the word, the sacraments, and prayer. For Newbigin “the weekly gathering for worship is by far the most important thing we do” (1974b:37). The importance he gives to worship is highlighted in the following words:

Worship is the central work of the Church, and everything else in its life has meaning and value as it finds its focus in worship.... [Worship gives] to the whole life of the diocese its emotional and spiritual focus, its centre of meaning and direction. It is from such acts of worship that everything else flows, and in them all the multifarious activities of the diocese find their true end. Everything is offered to God as an acted prayer for his Kingdom... (1982a:156).

Accordingly worship heads the list in various features he gives of a thriving church. He lists several elements that are present in growing congregations, of which the first is “a believing, worshipping, and celebrating fellowship in which the Gospel [is] proclaimed in word and celebrated in sacrament and enjoyed in the life of a caring community” (1978c:308). Of the six characteristics of the congregation that is a true hermeneutic of the gospel, the first is that “it will be a community of praise. That is, perhaps, its most distinctive character” (1989e:227). In both cases involvement in mission follows from worship in which the church celebrates and nourishes its new life in Christ (1978c:308;

1989e:229-231). It is clear that in Newbiggin's understanding, mission and worship are closely tied. As he puts it: "the biblical people of God, chosen, called and sent into the world" is tied to the vision of the church as "a worshipping community where the word of God [is] truly heard and believed and where man's response of worship [is] offered (1967b:112).

A stress on the importance of worship for the missionary church remained an essential element in Newbiggin's ecclesiology throughout his entire life (1951b:4; 1990t, u, v, y). It is instructive especially to observe in particular Newbiggin's response to the eroding currents of the secular decade. During that time social activism undermined the gathered church and its worship. In this context Newbiggin emphasized this dimension of the church's life even more frequently and more strongly (e.g., 1960b:119f.; 1960e:1, 5; 1962a:8f.; 1962j:90f.; 1963a:14; 1963e:22; 1963f:85). In fact, the "necessary corollary of a secular society" is a deepened life of worship and prayer (1968d:79). The missionary dynamic is one of being gathered together and then being sent (1960g:59). "If there is a committed people as the sign and agent and foretaste of what God intends, it can only be insofar as their life is continually renewed through contact with God himself (1972f:112f.). The mission of the church is dependent on the renewing that takes place in the gathering together. The church exists in its primary mode on Monday to Saturday when all the members are dispersed throughout the world. On Sunday they withdraw to renew themselves for service (1960b:96f.). "All true vitality in the work of missions depends in the last analysis upon the secret springs of supernatural life which they know who give time to communion with God. All true witness... has its source in a life of adoration and intercession... (1963a:14).

Newbiggin acknowledges a proper concern of Johannes Hoekendijk, John A. T. Robinson, and many who followed them in disparaging the worship life of the church. They feared that worship would lead to escape to another world that left solidarity with the pain and sorrow of others in this life behind. Newbiggin appeals to Dietrich Bonhoeffer—the misunderstood patron saint of secular theology—who called for us as the church to move "beyond the traditional religious forms in which we can become enclosed, and which can become an escape from meeting with the living God, in order that we might be called to a more costly personal discipleship" (1968d:73). Following Bonhoeffer, Newbiggin rejects an otherworldly worship as false religion (1974b:98; 1968d:79). Alternatively, the church that becomes involved in and identifies with the world's sin, sorrow, and pain but leaves a life of worship and prayer behind has simply become part of this world with nothing to give it. It is only through a sustained life of worship and prayer that our mission in the world can be sustained.

Precisely because worship plays such a central role in the life of a faithful church, Newbiggin addresses various issues throughout his life: worship that is slovenly and mechanical routine (1974b:28); the need for spontaneity, variety, and joy (1974b: 32-37; 1980d:12;); the need for contextualization of worship using familiar cultural forms (1980d:12; 1974b:36); a self-centred consumerist approach that asks 'What do I get out of it?' (1990v:7); a trivial, chatty worship devoid of reverence (1990v:7); the need for wide congregational participation (1974b:34; 1990v:7); the scandal of a "dry mass"⁸

⁸The dry mass (*Missa Sicca*) refers to an abbreviated form of the mass in which there was the ministry of the Word without the sacraments. This developed during the late Middle Ages, especially in France, and became the common practice of the Reformers.

that eliminates the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper (1974b:33; 1990v:7).

6.5.4.2. Proclamation of the Word

Newbigin's earliest writings emphasize the importance of the Word and Sacrament for the missionary church. Anything that threatens the "true preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments" must be expelled from the life of the church (1948d:106). Emphasis on the word and sacrament is rooted in the fact that this is the way that Christ makes his presence known. He writes: "The supernatural, saving power of God is mediated to us in the word and sacraments of the gospel." He asks: "Do we understand, do our congregations understand, that when the Word is truly preached and the sacraments duly administered, Christ Himself is present in the midst in all His saving power?" (1951c:4).

This life-giving word of God is the power by which the Church lives. The Church is created and constantly renewed by the word of God. The word is given to us in two forms—the word spoken in the reading and exposition of Scripture, and the word acted in the sacraments. The same word is active in these two different modes. In both it is active through the Spirit. Without the quickening of the Spirit, bread and wine are just bread and wine, and words are just words. But the words of Jesus, which are spirit and life, are the source of continually renewed life in the Church. The Church does not live by its organisations and its programmes: it lives by the word of God given to it as the word spoken and the word acted (1974b:23).

Thus, "are we placing these in the very centre of our Church's life? Are we jealous that nothing shall displace them?" (1951c:4). Since these are the two fundamental channels whereby the life of Christ is mediated to his people, he feels "impelled to put these questions in the forefront, and to call upon every member of the Church to do the same" (*ibid*).

A fair generalization of Newbigin's thought is that in the early part of his ministry the Word received more emphasis than the sacraments in keeping with his Reformed and Presbyterian heritage. In the latter part of his life, however, while his commitment to the Word as a life-giving channel did not waver, emphasis on the sacraments—especially the Eucharist—increased dramatically and took centre stage. Writing the year after the reunion of the CSI about the contribution of the Presbyterian tradition, he notes appreciatively that in worship "the most characteristic emphasis has been upon the sermon" (1948c:54). He stresses that the sermon is not something that occurs during worship but is itself an act of worship. When the sermon is reduced to doctrinal instruction or moral exhortation, preaching ceases to be a part of worship. The meeting of the church with Christ as Redeemer and Lord is the real meaning of preaching. "Its essence is to be the means whereby Christ the Word is Himself present to speak to those who hear" (*ibid*). "We go to the Bible to meet Christ, our present and Living Lord" (1948d:131). The fundamental pattern of preaching is "the proclamation of the event of God's work in Christ" in which Christ Himself comes to His people in saving power (1948d:132).

There are at least two fatal identifications that can eclipse the saving power of the gospel. First, the gospel must be distinguished from the ecclesiastical traditions that bear the gospel. In his discussion of the contribution of his own Presbyterian tradition to the

newly united church in South India he comments: “Traditions which are good in themselves are evil when they are put into the place which belongs to the Gospel itself” (1948c:53). Traditions can stifle the power of the gospel in the church’s life when it leads to pride (1948d:103) or when it leaves the church as a petrified fossil with the doctrinal form but devoid of the life of the gospel (1948d:142). A second fatal identification is to confuse the gospel with theology. Positively, “the whole of Christian theology is the effort to explicate that confession [that Jesus is Lord]” (1953b:515). Negatively, “dogmatic statements are for the purpose of protecting the statement of this fact [Christ on the cross] from distortion by various tendencies of human thought.” The problem comes when theology replaces the gospel: “The danger inherent in all the (necessary) work of theological statement is that it may go beyond the task of protecting the gospel and become a series of additions to the gospel” (1948d:16).

The importance of the gospel as the presence of the life-giving power of Christ in the church led Newbigin to emphasize the importance of the preaching ministry (1948c:54; 1974b:23-27). He writes to his fellow presbyters that “the business of the sermon is to bring the hearers face to face with Jesus Christ as he really is” (1974b:24). This preaching is closely connected to and essential for the mission of the church in the world:

True preaching of Christ springs out of action and leads into action. The word which we preach was made flesh, became part of history. If you and your congregation are really involved in tackling the trouble and pain and sin in the world around you, in the slums around your church, in the lives of your members; if you are standing beside your members in their battles with the world and in their trials and problems, then the words you speak in the pulpit will not be empty words. They will be a part of the obedience of you and your congregation to the living Lord. And they will lead your people into further action (1974b:26-27).

6.5.4.3. Sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist

It has been noted above that Newbigin views the sacraments as one of the primary channels by which the life of Christ flows to the believing community. It is not necessary to articulate in detail Newbigin’s view of the sacraments as he shares much in common with the whole Christian tradition. It is important to draw attention to the significance of the sacraments for the mission of the church.

A good point to begin is his brief discussion of the sacraments as “pledges of faithfulness” in a series of articles that he describes as his “nearest approach to a dogmatics” (cf. 1990o, u). He begins his discussion of the sacraments with the mission of the church: the church is the body launched into the world to continue the mission of Jesus. The church is not constituted by adherence to a written text but as a company that is gathered “to be with him and to be sent out” (Mark 3:14; 1990u:18). Before his death he institutes a supper that would “become the centre of their new life” (*ibid*). Through this supper they learn that this communion meal would be the means by which they become partners in his death and risen life. As partners of Jesus, they are incorporated into his mission. The people who share in this supper are those who are committed to Christ in baptism. In Jesus’ baptism he commits himself to his mission by way of the cross.

Those whom Jesus calls to follow him are invited to go the same way. Baptism is the act through which we are committed to follow Jesus on the way of the cross. The supper is the act in which that same commitment is continually renewed. Each time we share in the Lord's Supper we re-affirm our baptism.... To be a Christian is to be part of a visible human community marked by these two visible acts. As God's word had to be spoken in the flesh and blood of a human being, so our incorporation into his life involves these visible acts (*ibid*).

Newbigin's stress on the sacraments as an incorporation into Christ is, of course, widely shared. Not so widely shared is his stress on the eschatological and missionary dimensions of the sacraments. In the Christendom understanding of the church there is a loss of eschatology and mission. When this becomes dominant the church views as its fundamental duty the administration of the sacraments and pastoral care for its own members. When the sacraments and pastoral care are detached from mission, the individual believer becomes a passive recipient of the means of grace (1953g:166-167).

The eschatological and missionary import of both sacraments is evident in Newbigin's contribution to discussions concerning baptism in the ecumenical tradition in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The issue at stake was how the younger churches on the former "mission fields" should treat baptism. There was mounting criticism of baptism as foundational to the church's life (e.g., Duraisingh 1972; Taylor 1972; Thomas 1972), for three reasons. First, baptism was viewed as a Western rite whereby non-Western people were incorporated into a Western institution. Appeal was made to the New Testament accounts in which circumcision, as a Jewish symbol that incorporated Gentiles into a Jewish form of the church, was discarded when the church entered the classical world. Analogously, baptism should be considered a Western rite and consequently discarded in the younger churches. Second, baptism was considered to be a rite that promoted a highly introverted view of the church. Baptism had become a rite of separation where the person baptized was cut off from his culture and became part of a foreign institution. There was a third reason, however, that seemed to operative at a foundational level in these discussions. It was closely tied to a current in ecumenical circles at that time which tended to minimize the importance of the visible church. This attack on baptism led Newbigin to say that the labour to "recover the meaning of baptism" must be "one of the most urgent tasks" of our day. "We shall not overcome the introversion and selfishness of the Church by dispensing with baptism. It is an illusion to suppose that we can. What is needed is something much more difficult and costly" (1973b:10-11). That difficult and costly task is twofold: recover the true Biblical meaning of baptism, and then conform our lives to our baptism (1973b:10, 11).

Newbigin articulates his understanding of baptism in this context. We must bear in mind that baptism is a rich symbol and in this context he makes no attempt to give us a systematic elaboration of all of the Bible's teaching on the subject. His formulations are occasional and addressed to this historical situation. In particular he addresses Duraisingh's dismissal of baptism, arguing for three things: baptism is not a Western rite; it is a rite of incorporation into the kingdom and thus into the church as the first fruits of that kingdom; and baptism should not lead to selfish introversion but costly identification with the sorrow and pain of the world in the discharge of its mission (1973b:8-12).

We are baptized because Jesus is baptized. This baptism was the starting point for all that Jesus began to do and teach, not simply in a chronological way, but as the initial

act which contained the whole of Jesus' work in a seed form. Jesus received the baptism of John which was a water baptism of the cleansing of sin. In this baptism Jesus accepted that which could be completed only at the cross—the cleansing from sin. That is why Jesus speaks of his death as a baptism which he had to undergo. In baptism Jesus totally identified and immersed himself with humankind in their sin, sorrow, and misery. This solidarity was initiated at his Jordan baptism, continued in his public ministry, and was consummated with his death on the cross.

John also spoke of a baptism with the Spirit and fire to which his baptism pointed. This referred to the traditional messianic baptism of fire, judgement, wrath, and catastrophe. However, Jesus fulfilled this baptism in an unexpected way. He accepted the wrath and judgement of God and took the catastrophe upon Himself. After this we speak of one baptism, a baptism of the Spirit and water. There are not two baptisms—one of water and one of the Spirit. There is one baptism—against Christopher Duraisingh and Alfred C. Krass. To speak of two baptisms is to undo the incarnation (1973b:9). Our baptism is a baptism of water in which we share in the Spirit and total baptism of Jesus that he completed on the cross.

Baptism is ultimately an eschatological sign, a rite of entry into the kingdom. It means entry into the church that shares in foretaste in the life of the kingdom. It is a sign that we share in the kingdom mission of Jesus. As such it is an act which involves total identification and radical separation. It involves identification in that as we identify with Christ, “we are committed to accepting as our own all the concerns of men, their sin and their sorrow, as well as their triumphs and their joys” (1973b:11). Yet it is an act of identification in which, like Jesus, we are not conformed to the world but separate from it. That means baptism marks off a community that is “both identified with the world and separate from the world,” that shares a life which is “love for the world without being conformed to the world” (*ibid*).

So baptism, far from being a Western rite, is a rite of entry into the kingdom and the community that enjoys a foretaste of that life. Further, baptism, far from being a rite that separates the community from the world's life, struggles, sin, and pain, is a rite of identification that means taking as our own all the concerns of men. “And if the company of the baptised has become a selfish clique interested only in its own safety (here and hereafter) then it is our task to break open this ecclesiastical shell so that the Church may recover its true life, a life with all men for all men in the name of Jesus” (1973b:12). This will happen, not by discarding baptism, but only by properly understanding it and conforming our lives to it. Baptism marks off and forms a visible community in any place that is called to continue the mission of Jesus through a total identification with and a radical separation from the world in which it lives.

In this discussion Newbigin attempts to resuscitate an eschatological and a missionary understanding of baptism over against a Christendom appropriation of baptism in the Western church that has been transported to the younger churches in Africa and Asia. In a later paper, he contrasts a New Testament understanding of baptism with a Christendom approach that has been characteristic of the Reformed and Anglican traditions. The New Testament assumed a missionary situation where the church was a small evangelizing community in the midst of the pagan Roman empire. The Reformed and Anglican traditions on the other hand formulated their understanding of baptism in the context of Christendom. As a result the Reformed and Anglican

doctrines envisaged baptism as a *rite de passage* into a settled institution. In the New Testament baptism is the sign of commitment to the mission of Jesus (1983c:1). He formulates his understanding of the significance of baptism: "... it is our incorporation into the one baptism which is for the salvation of the world. To accept baptism, therefore, is to be committed to be with Christ in his ministry for all men" (1977d:217).

A similar argument for the missionary thrust of the sacrament is also made for the Lord's Supper (e.g., 1983c:3, 4). On this subject, however, Newbigin entered no substantial debates. Nevertheless his discussions of the Lord's Supper continually emphasized both the eschatological and the missionary aspects. The eucharist is an act by which we share in the eschatological life of the kingdom and the means by which we are continually incorporated into the mission of Jesus.

The Church can only be defined in terms of Jesus Christ and his mission. Jesus announced the reign of God, and called those whom he chose to follow him, to be with him and to be sent out with the same announcement.... The promise is that all nations will be gathered to the messianic feast, and this promise will be fulfilled through his atoning death. Of this his resurrection is the assurance and the Spirit given to the community of those whom he has called as the witness. At the heart of this community is the Eucharist feast which is both a sacramental participation in his atoning death, and a foretaste of the messianic banquet (1976a:330).

In Christendom the eucharist is simply the feeding of the bread of life to passive recipients. In a missionary understanding the Lord's supper is a continual participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and as such a constant renewal of the commitment to participate in Jesus' mission to the world (1983c:1). In the breaking of bread Jesus is present to communicate to his people his risen life constituting them as his witnesses (1979d:1). In the Christendom understanding, receiving the life of Christ is separated from the missionary calling of the church. Newbigin's stress is that our incorporation into the risen life of Christ cannot be separated from the call to be his witnesses

6.5.4.4. Prayer

Newbigin placed a high priority on prayer in his own life and missionary calling, so it is not surprising to hear him assert that "our life of intercession is quite central to our discipleship" (1983f:6). Prayer takes a privileged place in Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology (1980d:10).

The life of prayer is rooted in Jesus Christ. We are called to follow Jesus. His life did not go directly from his baptism to death and neither will ours. Between his baptism and his death lay the crowded months and years of his ministry. During this time we see Jesus labouring and agonizing, deeply involved in the lives of people. He labours that they might recognize the presence of the kingdom in their midst and respond to his call to become its agents and messengers. But we never see this labour and ministry apart from a life of prayer (1972f:121). Jesus does not only work for God's kingdom; he prays that it will come.

If prayer was essential to the kingdom mission of Jesus it must be essential to the church who follows Him. Following Jesus the church must not only labour that signs of the presence of God's kingdom might be made manifest but also fervently pray for

its coming. Prayer is not a distraction from the missionary calling of the church, but integral and essential to it. Indeed, we might have “conferences and evangelistic campaigns and programmes of social action” but if we are not bound to Jesus Christ “by a multitude of hidden channels through which the life-giving sap can flow”—including public and private prayer—then “it may add up to zero” (1974b:141).

Perhaps Newbigin’s strongest statements on prayer occur during the secular 1960s when prayer was marginalized. The passion that grips Newbigin on this subject is palpable:

All we say about unity and mission, about drawing nations into the one household of God, about being Christ’s witnesses and servants to the ends of the earth, remains mere clap-trap—except on one condition: that there is at the heart of it all a supernatural life lived here in the 20th century in the Holy Spirit, a life which has its roots deep down in a discipline of prayer (1960e:5).

Why is it we have created in so many situations a picture of the work of missions which seems to be centred more in the office than in the sanctuary, more in the program than in prayer, more in administering than in ministering? Why do the typewriter and duplicator seem to bulk so much more largely than the bible and the kneeling mat? (1962a:8)

All true vitality in the work of missions depends in the last analysis upon the secret springs of supernatural life which they know who give time to communion with God. All true witness... has its source in a life of adoration and intercession... (1963a:14).

It is surprising that Newbigin does not speak often about the *corporate* nature of prayer but restricts himself primarily to the prayer of individual believers. Almost every time he addresses this issue, however, individual prayer is tied to corporate worship and prayer as it equips the church for its mission (1974b:140; 1980d:12; 1990y:7). In an article summarizing the role of the church in the world, Newbigin takes hold of the image of a ‘holy priesthood’ from I Peter 2:4-9 to elaborate the church’s calling in the world. The priesthood of the church is not primarily an affair of Sunday but of Monday through Saturday in the working place. Believers are to make visible the hidden rule of God in the midst of the world. On the Lord’s Day the church gathers to renew its membership in the body of Christ. The Lord’s Day is set aside for the whole body to strengthen and enable it in its task. “In our public worship we offer up the whole life of the world to God through Jesus, and we go out to our daily work to make manifest his blessed rule to the whole world” (1990y:7). He closes his article—the last in the series of his “dogmatics”—with the following impassioned plea for prayer:

And if we are to be in truth a holy priesthood, we need a secret altar, a place in our innermost life where, day by day, we offer to God through Jesus Christ every bit of our lives, our most secret thoughts and our most public actions, and where we receive afresh through Christ God’s ever-new gift of grace and mercy. We need also the time together on the Lord’s Day when he can take us as a whole community and renew us for his priestly service in the world. But this corporate and public worship can become lifeless if it is not constantly fructified by the time we spend each day alone to keep fresh and clean the channels of love and obedience to God and of his grace and mercy to us (*ibid*).

6.5.5. *Worship as Witness*

The primary focus of Newbigin's discussion of worship is the enabling, empowering, and equipping task for the task of the missionary church in the world. He expresses it thus: "If we are truly leading our people in the worship of the living God, there will be men and women who can go out from the church every Sunday with that testimony on their lips and in their hearts" (1974b:31). Newbigin's continual persistence on this theme yields many fruitful insights. Jongeneel calls attention to other ways the term 'missionary worship' can be used (Jongeneel 1997:241-247). He refers to the connection between liturgy and the missionary task of the church in the world that is characteristic of Newbigin (1997:243). However, he also indicates that this has also been applied to worship as "a missionary act of proclamation" (:245). The apostle Paul also speaks of worship as an act of witness not only the equipping for witness (I Corinthians 14:24-25). Surprisingly this aspect of worship is rarely found in Newbigin's writing. His own missionary experience testified to this witnessing aspect of worship; the church of Indian often had no buildings and their worship was conducted in public places. That worship was a witness to the gospel and drew people to Christ (1961e:24). Newbigin does occasionally state that "all Christian worship has an evangelistic dimension" (1974b:31). On a number of occasions he points to the church in Russia who bears witness to the gospel in worship. In his words:

The Russian Church has lived for more than half a century under extreme pressure. One of the most powerful governments in the world has deliberately sought to destroy it. Every kind of outward activity in teaching, preaching or service has been forbidden. The one corporate activity which is left to the Church is its worship. Into that worship the faithful of Russia throw everything they have. Because of that worship the Russian Church is still a living reality, continuing to draw men and women to faith in God, even in the midst of an aggressively atheistic culture (1974b:37).

Yet this insight is never worked out. Debates in North America over "seeker-sensitive" worship services would have been greatly enriched by a discussion of worship as witness by Newbigin who stood firmly in the liturgical tradition of the church yet recognized the witness function of worship.

6.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has surveyed Newbigin's attempts throughout his ministry to give visible manifestation and institutional form to the missionary church. If mission gives identity to the church and is not merely one of its tasks among many, then it cannot but shape its congregational structures, its ministerial leadership, and its worship, enabling the people of God to manifest the life of Christ in the midst of the world.

The structure of Berkhof's ecclesiology offers a helpful framework to assess the significance of Newbigin's contributions on church structures, leadership, and worship. Berkhof speaks of the threefold character of the church. The church is an institution in which a number of ministries and activities are organized into a societal structure. Those ministries and activities include various aspects of worship, fellowship, ministerial leadership, and church order. The church is also a community. The congregation is more than a sum total of the activities and structures that constitute the institutional church; we are ourselves the communion of saints, a community of believers that form a network of personal relationships in Christ. However, these two characteristics do not

exhaust the nature of the church. The church exists for the sake of the world; the renewal of all things is the goal of the church's existence. Thus an orientation toward the world is not an addition to but an essential dimension of the church. Indeed ecclesiology is distorted when this dimension does not pervade the whole.

This third aspect of the church's existence has received the attention that it deserves only since the Second World War, primarily as a result of the unceasing work of Hendrik Kraemer and others in the missionary tradition (Berkhof 1979:345, 411, 412). Yet this essential dimension of ecclesiology has not been recognized in most mainline theological discourse. With the exception of Karl Barth, "the theological reflection by those concerned with missions... did not penetrate to the 'official' theology" (Berkhof 1979:411). Berkhof comments further:

It is remarkable that the great monographs on the church show little or no awareness of this aspect; also in Kung's monumental work it remains limited to the Epilogue. Apparently much of the study of the faith is still done from the standpoint of an introvert-ecclesiastical situation (Berkhof 1979:345).

Berkhof believes that ecclesiology as a whole needs to be rethought from the standpoint of the church's orientation to the world. This observation highlights the significance of Newbigin's contribution. While Newbigin is not an academic theologian, like Kraemer he has taken the lead in rethinking many traditional ecclesiological themes from the standpoint of its apostolary turning to the world. He does not engage in this re-thinking in the first place as an academic but as a missionary, a bishop, a pastor, and an ecumenical leader who is concerned about the contradiction between the theological affirmation of the missionary nature of the church and the ecclesial realities he faced in India and Britain. Each of the subjects that has been addressed is clearly a partial treatment. Newbigin never undertook to articulate a systematic understanding of worship, the sacraments, the ministry, ecclesial structures, or any other subject in this chapter. His writing is *ad hoc*; it addresses issues in the crucible of missionary engagement. He engages the burning issues of the day always with an eye to the faithful witness of the gospel. Herein lies both the strength and weakness of his reflection on structures, leadership, and worship. Negatively, he does not treat any of these issues in a comprehensive way but leaves many questions unanswered and many issues untouched. This is most evident in the fact that he does not dialogue with other ecclesiastical traditions. A scholarly treatment of each of these themes would provide enrichment that comes through conversation with a breadth of confessional traditions; Newbigin interacts primarily—almost exclusively—with the literature produced within the ecumenical tradition.

Newbigin's lack of engagement with the vast literature on Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in Latin America on the subjects of ecclesial structures and ministerial leadership provides us with an example of the need for wider dialogue. Rene Padilla believes that the emerging ecclesiology in Latin America will become "the most powerful challenge to the church of Jesus Christ everywhere else in the next few years" (Padilla 1987:162). These BECs have experimented widely in congregational structures and forms of leadership, and the literature on BECs have analyzed these experiments in great detail. On the one hand, these BECs embody much of what Newbigin too believes to be important for a missionary congregation: small size, flexibility, non-

professional ministry, ecumenical horizon, close interpersonal relations with accountability, rootedness in Scripture, prayer and joyful worship, concern for mission, social involvement. On the other hand, these BECs have also struggled to avoid the very things Newbigin believes threaten the missionary congregation: introversion, detraditioning, i.e., losing connection with ecclesial tradition, and disconnection from the broader body of Christ (cf. Cook 1984, 1985, 1986; Escobar 1986, 1987; Hewitt 1986, 1988; Libanio 1986, 1987; Marins 1979; Padilla 1987; Schlabach 1989; Torres and Eagleson 1988; Welsh 1986). The concrete experiments of these BECs, and theological reflection on them provide models which, if engaged, would have enabled Newbigin to move from general principles to more specific proposals.

Yet Newbigin's reflection on structures, leadership, and worship remain valuable; his own discussions of each of these issues is grounded in a vast and wide missionary experience and breathes a missionary spirit. A missionary orientation to the world consistently gives form to his reflection on many traditional ecclesiological themes. Newbigin's discussion of ecclesial structures becomes more systematic and detailed at the end of the 1960s. He had long been interested in structures for the missionary congregation and church; however, he believed that the ecumenical study on 'the missionary structure of the congregation' would address this need. When the study failed to address this issue in a way satisfactory to Newbigin, he picked up the task himself. His unswerving adherence to the missionary nature of the church informs his entire discussion of ecclesial structures. A number of insights continue to be relevant for the ongoing discussion. First, Newbigin is concerned to maintain a close tie between all creative ecclesial forms and the local Eucharistic congregation. He believes that the separation of program agencies, sector ministries, or parachurch organizations from the local church damages the witness of each. Second, Newbigin offers valuable criteria for structural renewal: faithfulness to the missionary nature of the church and relevance to the local context. These are not to be viewed as contradictory; the nature of the church is to be a community that embodies good news *for that place*. Thus the church's structure must embody good news in structures familiar to that place. There is a need for much flexibility in keeping with the gospel and nature of the church. Accordingly Newbigin calls for a morphological radicalism wedded to an evangelical fundamentalism. Third, Newbigin believes that both the size and character of existing structures are barriers to a missionary congregation. The effective units of congregations are too large to enable the church to be a missionary congregation. Further, the differentiation of society requires structures in keeping with the growing diversity. Newbigin advocates neighbourhood, work, frontier, and action groups. His suggestions are not new; what is significant is his insistence that the missionary nature of the church shape these smaller, contextualized structures and that these effective units not simply be 'parachurch' bodies but Eucharistic communities with their own pastoral leadership. Mission must not turn into action groups; they must maintain a visible connection to the gospel embodied in the congregation. Fourth, Newbigin's concern for renewed ecumenical structures also flow from his convictions about the missionary nature of the church. Since the church is good news for a particular place, church structures must correspond to effective units of human life. On a critical note, two comments must be made. On the one hand, Newbigin's discussion of structures that were shaped by Christendom continue to show the same ambivalence that he manifests toward Christendom in general. These structures *may* be appropriate to the medieval time period, to the pre-modern South Indian village, and to some areas of the Pacific Islands. Yet he is critical of those structures for different reasons: sometimes because they are

out of keeping with Scripture and the missionary nature of the church, at other times because these older structures are inadequate for the contemporary situation. On the other hand, a basic inconsistency remains in Newbigin's understanding of the structure of the missionary church. Two different and inconsistent images lie side by side: the church formed in the undifferentiated villages of India, and the new flexible structures necessary for the differentiated society of the West. The image of the church of the undifferentiated Indian village was etched on his mind (1994k:55). Here the structure is shaped by a society in which there is "one total world that embraces the whole life of its people" (1980d:6). He recognized that this structure "still works well in an Indian village, but not in an English city" (*ibid*). His recognition of differentiation did not bear mature fruit (Vandervelde 1996:12-13). The communal image of a church in a undifferentiated village continued to play an important role in shaping his ecclesiology.

The same commitment to the missionary nature of the church shapes Newbigin's discussion of ministerial leadership: the only way a church can be an effective hermeneutic of the gospel is with faithful leadership. Four implications of this commitment are relevant to the contemporary situation. First, Newbigin resists clericalism and egalitarianism. He defines leadership as "so following Jesus on the way of the cross so that others are enabled to follow and to become themselves leaders in the same way." This unique approach to ministerial leadership challenges alike the clerical and egalitarian dangers—both of which cripple a missionary congregation (1983c:9). Second, Newbigin's description of the task of the ministerial leader as 'leading' and 'equipping' are both shaped by a missionary commitment: 'leading' means personal involvement in the missionary task of the church; it means going ahead of the congregation while throwing words back over one's shoulder; 'equipping' means directing all the task of the minister—preaching, prayer, sacraments, administration of ministries—toward the mission of the church. Third, forms of leadership must be flexible but in keeping with a number of Biblical norms. The six norms that Newbigin articulates all are infused with a missionary concern: they must be appropriate to the missionary calling of the church, be flexible, be shaped by context, must balance corporate and personal elements, and give room for mobile forms of leadership. This last norm is worthy of attention: mobile forms of leadership do find expression in church orders shaped by Christendom. Out of necessity these mobile forms of ministry—missionaries—have arisen and been organized outside the church. Finally, theological education must be revamped to enable leaders of missionary congregations to develop. Each of these themes within Newbigin's writings are relevant for the contemporary church. Yet his observations remain incomplete and beg systematic development by theologians committed to the missionary nature of the church.

Newbigin's commitment to the church's orientation to the world also brings a fresh discussion of many aspects of the church's worship. Newbigin consistently links the outward task of the church in the world to its inner life of worship and prayer and thereby offers new perspectives on preaching, the sacraments, and prayer. While Newbigin stresses preaching in the earlier part of his ministry, the sacraments receive more attention in his later years. Baptism is a rite whereby we are incorporated into the mission of Jesus; the Lord's Supper is a rite whereby we are continually incorporated into that same mission. It is unfortunate that Newbigin did not expand on the theme of 'worship as witness.' With Newbigin's missionary concern it is surprising that this aspect of worship does not find a large place.

The strength of Newbigin's formulations on structures, leadership, and worship are

his continual insistence that each be understood in terms of a missionary congregation. His weakness is evident in the fact that he left many questions unanswered and many issues unresolved. Newbigin has provided leadership in bringing the apostolary orientation of the church to bear on many traditional ecclesiological themes; it remains for others to work this out in a more systematic and comprehensive way both in theory and practice.