

7. THE TASK OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH IN THE WORLD

7.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will examine the second side of the church's relation to its own mission: the calling of the missionary church in the world. Newbigin makes two critical distinctions that form the basis for this chapter: mission and missions, and missionary dimension and missionary intention. Mission is a comprehensive term that refers to the whole task the church has been given in the world. Closely related to this term is 'missionary dimension.' Since the church is defined by its witness to the kingdom of God, the whole of its life exhibits a missionary dimension. Missions refers to the task of the church to erect a witness to the kingdom where one does not exist. Missionary intention alludes to specific activities that cross the frontier between belief and unbelief.

The terms mission and missions cover the various tasks the missionary church is called to carry out in the world. In terms of mission, Newbigin emphasizes three responsibilities to which the church is commissioned: evangelism, social witness, and the calling of believers in culture. Newbigin does not list these together in a systematic way. Rather these three aspects of the church's mission are included in this chapter because these are the activities that Newbigin refers to most often when he speaks of the mission of the church in the world. Missions as the calling of the church to make known the gospel in places where it is not known also receives frequent attention in Newbigin's writings. Following a brief discussion of Newbigin's understanding of the nature of mission, these four dimensions of the church's mission are investigated: evangelism, social witness, the calling of the laity, and missions.

7.2. THE NATURE OF MISSION

Two important distinctions are foundational for Newbigin's understanding of the task of the church in the world: mission and missions; missionary intention and missionary dimension. Equally fundamental is his understanding of the purpose of mission. These three foundational matters are briefly noted in this first section.

7.2.1. Mission and Missions

Newbigin distinguishes between mission and missions. The importance of this distinction for Newbigin can be gauged by noting that Newbigin fought a major battle over the name of the International Review of Missions. While Newbigin was the editor, there was a move to remove the final 's' from missions. He refused, insisting that maintaining the 's' would distinguish the task of missions from the more comprehensive mission of the church. Mission is the all-embracing term which refers to "the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world" (1989e:121). About mission he says:

It includes the task of preaching the gospel, of healing the sick, of teaching, of service to men in all their needs. It includes or ought to include all the work of millions of Christian men and women in all the ordinary daily tasks, serving their fellow men for Christ's sake in all the multitudinous forms of work which the modern world requires. It includes the task of prophetic witness in the face of wrong, of declaring the will of God in regard to the life of men both in their personal and domestic affairs and also no less clearly in their corporate life as nations, in business, in politics, in culture, in religion. All this is included in the mission of the Church understood in its broadest sense... (1960g:60).

But there is a narrower use of the term, the plural or adjectival form 'missions.' This is a component part of the whole mission of the church and its specific task is *to make Christ known where He is not known*.

This brief summary provides structure for this section. Most of what Newbigin terms 'mission' can be summarized under the tasks of evangelism, social involvement, and the calling of believers in the world. Missions is also an important part of that mission. In this chapter we will treat the calling of all believers, evangelism, social concern, and missions.

7.2.2. *Missionary Dimension and Missionary Intention*

Another distinction that makes a similar point is between missionary dimension and missionary intention. In his important booklet *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (1958b) Newbigin introduces a distinction that has never left missionary theology (Bosch 1991:373). He distinguishes between missionary dimension and missionary intention. This distinction is similar to a distinction that Erik Nielson made at the IMC meeting at Ghana (1958) between missionary dimension and missionary concentration. Since the whole life of the Church is the visible means through which the Holy Spirit carries on his mission to the world, the whole of the church's life thus partakes of the character of witness. "The whole life of the Church thus has a missionary *dimension*, though not all of it has mission as its primary *intention*" (1958b:21). The church's missionary dimension will evoke specific, intentional acts and words that directly engage the unbelieving world with the gospel at missionary "points of concentration" (1958b:43). "While all the activities of the Church have a missionary *dimension*, there are needed specific activities which have the *intention* of crossing the frontier between faith and unbelief—and that frontier is no longer the old geographical one, but runs through every land" (1993d:155). While understanding the missionary dimension will lead to intentional efforts of missionary work, it is also true that "unless there is in the life of the Church a point of concentration for the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost" (1958b:43). This distinction enables the church to affirm the validity of missions as a distinct activity in the total mission of the church (1993d:155).

7.2.3. *The Goal of Mission*

Throughout the history of the church many goals for mission have been articulated: the

salvation of individuals (evangelicals); church planting (Pope Pius XII); church growth (Donald McGavran); indigenous churches (Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson); the formation of a Christian society (Gustav Warneck, A. A. Van Ruler, Social Gospel); justice and the change of societal macrostructures (WCC 1960s).¹ Gisbertus Voetius, founder of Utrecht University, articulated three goals: the conversion of the nations; the planting of churches; the glorification and manifestation of divine grace (Jongeneel 1997:83; Verkuyl 1978:184). Johan H. Bavinck adopted the same goals and stressed that they were three aspects of the same goal. He roots conversion, church planting, and the glory of God's grace in the coming of the kingdom: "It must be emphasized, however, that these three purposes are not distinct and separate but they are in fact three aspects of a single purpose of God: the coming and extension of the kingdom of God" (Bavinck 1964:155).

There are many resemblances between this last statement by Bavinck and Newbigin's thought. Throughout his writings Newbigin reiterates two goals. The first is the glory of God. Perhaps the text most often found throughout Newbigin's work next to John 20:21 is Isaiah 53:11: "He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." The ultimate goal of mission is that Jesus shall see the fruit of his suffering and be satisfied.

The second is conversion. "The calling of men and women to be converted, to follow Jesus, and to be part of his community is and must always be at the center of mission" (1978e:121). Conversion is the goal of evangelism (1994k:151), social action (1974b:92), and missions (1965a:149). Newbigin's comment on missions could stand for every part of the mission of the church: "... missions are concerned with the radical conversion that leads men to explicit allegiance to Jesus Christ" (1965a:149).

Newbigin's most detailed discussions of conversion occurred during the 1960s, when the issue was a hot topic in ecumenical circles (1966a; 1971a:147-148). During this period three different traditions advanced their own understanding of conversion. The evangelical understanding was primarily individualistic: conversion is the restoration of the individual to a new relationship with God. This view tended to undermine the visible church and the costly obedience associated with social, economic, and political issues. The ecumenical understanding of conversion emphasized conversion to our fellow human beings and the costly obedience that a pursuit of justice and peace involves. This tended to downplay the visible church and the conversion of people to God. The Orthodox understanding of conversion placed incorporation into the visible body of believers at the centre. Individual conversion to God and social obedience tended to be neglected. This forms the backdrop of Newbigin's threefold emphasis. Conversion "involves an inward relationship of faith, it involves a way of behaviour, and it involves a visible companionship" (1966a:33; cf. 1971a:147).

¹Johannes Verkuyl has provided an overview of many of these goals and purposes of mission in *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (1978), pp.176-204.

Newbigin does not simply list the three elements of conversion but roots them in an eschatological context (1965a:149). When Jesus began his ministry he announced the arrival of the kingdom of God and called for a radical repentance and conversion (1966a:31-33). This conversion was a return to God in repentance and the participation in a community of men that he bound to himself. At once he began to teach them what kind of behaviour was appropriate to this new relationship with God and life in the kingdom (1971a:147). It is precisely because conversion was the goal of Jesus' mission that it must now be the goal of the mission of His church.

The word conversion can be applied not only to the goal of mission toward individual people but also toward nations (1989e:198). Newbigin's famous essay that initiated the mission in western culture project was entitled 'Can the West Be Converted?' (1985a). The conversion of a nation "means to bring its whole corporate life, the whole *adat*² under the rule of God" (1974b:102). Even though this goal raises large issues—which will be treated in the next chapter—conversion remains the goal for the social life of the nation in which the church lives.

Newbigin's understanding of the goal of mission can be summarized in the following way. The mission of the church aims at conversion to the kingdom of God. This involves the conversion of individuals to God and to each other; the formation of a visible community that embodies the life of the kingdom; the struggle of that community as an agent of the kingdom to bring its life under the just and peaceable rule of God; all so that God may be glorified.

7.3. EVANGELISM

"God's saving power known and experienced in the life of a redeemed community has to issue in all kinds of witness and service to the world" (1951b:5). A summary of the specific content of the church's witness includes evangelism, deeds of justice and mercy, the callings of the church in culture, and missions.

Throughout his life Newbigin remained a strong advocate of the central importance of evangelism³ in the mission of the church. Interestingly, while he returned to the subject repeatedly, he gave little time to sustained theological reflection on the nature of evangelism. One must discern the contours that are revealed in the frequent scattered comments. An investigation of his writing on evangelism reveals the following five themes: evangelism is the verbal communication of the good news about Jesus and His kingdom; evangelism is an indispensable dimension of the church's mission; evangelism aims at conversion; evangelism is to be distinguished from proselytism; evangelism is always contextual.

²Customs and beliefs by which a people are bound together in community.

³Newbigin primarily spoke of evangelism rather than evangelization. He often simply referred to evangelism in terms of witness in word or a verbal witness. Jongeneel clarifies the differences between evangelism and evangelization (Jongeneel 1995:31-49).

7.3.1. *Evangelism as Verbal Communication of the Gospel*

Newbigin's consistent definition of evangelism is that it is "communication—by written or spoken word—of the good news about Jesus. In this definition there will be no evangelism unless the name of Jesus is named" (1982b:146; contrast Bosch 1991:420). This definition highlights an important aspect of Newbigin's understanding of evangelism: evangelism is *the verbal communication of a message*. Newbigin's participation in the ecumenical tradition constantly brought this theme to the forefront. Two examples bear this out.

The first example comes from Newbigin's time as general secretary of the IMC and director of the CWME of the WCC. He comments that "there was much less enthusiasm for the direct preaching of the Gospel and the building up of the Church than for technical assistance and political action" (1993h:194).

To feed the hungry and clothe the naked, to give help to the victims of disaster and technical assistance to those who need it—all this is an essential part of our discipleship, and it is of God's goodness that the churches are learning to do it together. But there is a need to beware lest the churches give the impression that they are not equally concerned to share the supreme riches of the grace of God in Jesus Christ (1963a:7).

During the WCC meeting in New Delhi (1961) Newbigin observed that "while very many of the participants visiting India for the first time were moved by the sight of so many people without bread, not many were apparently moved by the sight of so many without the gospel.... Half of this world is hungry, and we are learning to share our bread.... We have now also to learn... how to share that living bread with all who will receive him" (1962j:90, 94).

The gospel had become an embarrassment for many in the ecumenical tradition; they believed that technical assistance was "more humble, more realistic, more relevant" than "the presumption of trying to convert other people to one's own religion" (1965a:419). It is the duty of a faithful church to "denounce sharply" this tendency (1965a:418). Newbigin tenaciously clung to his conviction that the "preaching of the Gospel and the services of men's needs are equally authentic and essential parts of the Church's responsibility" (1965a:422). In 1962 he records a number of convictions that would "keep him on course during this difficult period" when his commitment was being challenged. The first conviction was: "That it matters supremely to bring more people to know Jesus as Saviour." The second: "That our responsibility in the political order arises out of the love command" (1993h:186). Both of these are aspects of the church's mission and neither can be substituted for the other. Over against many of his colleagues in the ecumenical tradition he maintained that no amount of service can substitute for explicit testimony to Christ and "no human deed can of itself take the place of the one deed by which the world is redeemed and to which we must direct men's eyes" (1965a:422).

During this time another important concept was developing in ecumenical circles that would downplay evangelism. This concept was captured in the phrase "Christian presence." Roger Bassham notes that "through its adoption in the *Church for Others*, the term became practically a slogan for ecumenical mission strategy" in the time

leading up to and including Uppsala (Bassham 1979:71). This understanding of mission emerged from the worker-priest movement in France in the middle of the century as these priests established solidarity with factory and mine workers by living and working with them. The term received widespread recognition when it was adopted by the WSCF and Max Warren (Yates 1994:138-143). The WSCF adopted this strategy as the most suitable way for Christians to be engaged in mission among students (Bassham 1979:72). The term pointed to a mission strategy in which Christians seek to identify with people in the world through a sympathetic solidarity and openness to dialogue about our mutual human condition.

Newbigin's response to this idea of mission was twofold. Positively, he supported the doctrine of Christian presence as right in what it affirms: before we can communicate the gospel verbally we must really be present; evangelism is not shouting from a distance but being incarnate in people's situation and sharing our lives with them. Newbigin concludes that by this standard much evangelism is actually a failure (1970a:212). Further, it is right in affirming that not every moment is the right moment for evangelism; sometimes as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, acts of love and compassion are all that is appropriate at the moment. Negatively, however, Newbigin insists that if the doctrine of presence leads us to the point where we do not speak the name of Jesus but trust our presence as an adequate substitute, we are on our way to betrayal (1967a:10; 1968c:130).

If the doctrine of Christian presence is taken to mean that the presence of the Christian Church is a substitute for the explicit proclamation of the name of Jesus and his saving work, then we have to reject it as a betrayal of the gospel. There can be no substitute for the name of Jesus. Men must have an opportunity to know him. And that means at least to know his name, and to know who he is and what he has done. In much of what is spoken and written by Christians one cannot feel but that there is a real danger of betrayal at this point. It is good to be modest about the Church, but it is not good to be modest about the name of Jesus (1970a:212).

Newbigin's definition of evangelism as verbal communication of the good news about Jesus implies another important element: evangelism is a verbal witness *to Jesus Christ and His kingdom* (cf. Bosch 1991:412-413). The stress is on what God has done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ. It is the events of redemptive history past, present, and future that form the content of the witness. Newbigin comments: "there will always be the need to point explicitly to the central reality by which the Church exists, to the central verities of the gospel, to Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, regnant at God's right hand and to the promise of his coming to judge the living and the dead. This preaching of the gospel can never be irrelevant" (1989e:139f.). In the gospels, these events are understood in the context of the kingdom of God. The first announcement of the gospel was the proclamation of the reign of God in Jesus. Current evangelism has shunned the category of the kingdom, creating a need to recover it for authentic evangelism in the present.

If I am not mistaken, our current evangelism hardly ever uses the category of the Kingdom of God. And yet the original preaching of the Gospel on the lips of Jesus was—precisely—the announcement of the coming of that Kingdom. I believe that we may recover a true evangelism for our day if we return to that original language (translated into the idiom of our own time and place) as the basic category for our

proclamation of the Gospel (1974b:67).

Mortimer Arias has raised the same issue. In a lengthy study of evangelism he came to the following conclusions (*inter alia*): the gospel of Jesus (the first evangelist) was a gospel of the Kingdom; the kingdom of God had disappeared from evangelistic discourse and the focus had been reduced to individual and personal salvation and the incorporation of converts into the institutional church; the kingdom of God theme is multidimensional and all-encompassing and the employment of this theme resolves a number of reductionist tensions. He concludes that if the church is to be faithful in following Jesus, it must return to the kingdom of God as a basic theme for evangelism. His book probes this theme (Arias 1984). Arias's conclusions demonstrate the continuing validity of Newbigin's observation.

7.3.2. *Evangelism as an Indispensable Dimension of the Church's Mission*

Evangelism is an indispensable dimension of the church's mission. There are two aspects to this statement that are significant.

First, evangelism is *indispensable* (cf. Bosch 1991:413-414).. The naming of Jesus cannot be replaced by presence, deeds, or a life. This was impressed on Newbigin early in his life. As mentioned earlier, before he became a believer, Newbigin spent a summer among the unemployed miners of Wales helping in a men's recreation club (1993h:11). His Christian friends were convinced that their work must be confined to social activity and that all preaching was proscribed. Yet it became clear that their social work was not meeting the deepest needs of these people. They needed more than food, recreation, and education; they needed hope. "Our social work programmes alone could not communicate that: it needed the word, the word about Jesus and his Cross" (1974b:94). This experience led to Newbigin's conversion that night (2.2.2.4.). This permanently engraved on Newbigin's mind the indispensability of the word of the gospel to accompany all social activity.

Second, evangelism is a *dimension* of the church's total mission (cf. Bosch 1991:411-412). Newbigin usually articulates the various elements of the church's witness in terms of word and deed rooted in the life of the congregation. He says: "By its [the church's] witness—in word and deed and common life—to the centrality of the work of Jesus in his ministry, death, and resurrection it offers to all people the possibility of understanding... the meaning and goal of history..." (1989e:129). This characterization of the church's mission is rooted in Jesus Christ. Since the mission of the church is to continue the kingdom mission of Jesus, the content of His ministry must govern and shape the church's mission: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." The ministry of Jesus was a life, from which flowed words and deeds that pointed to the kingdom of God, and so likewise will be the ministry of the church: "The thing that Jesus began to do must go on. He is the Messiah, and God's rule is what is manifested in his life and deeds and words, the rule of the one who is really in charge" (1972g:56). In terms of evangelism this means two things: evangelism cannot be separated from deeds of mercy and justice; evangelism must be authenticated by the life of a community that embodies the message (1994k:151-157). Since these two points are important in Newbigin's writings each will be elaborated.

7.3.2.1. Inseparability of Word and Deed

“This ministry is necessarily one in which deed and word go together. The presence of the reign of God will be attested by the works of power and the words which interpret them” (1983c:6; cf. Bosch 1991:418). This statement summarizes Newbigin’s view of the inseparability of evangelism as the verbal communication of the gospel and deeds of mercy and justice. There is a long tradition in the church, however, that insists that the word must have priority, while rendering everything else secondary or auxiliary. This appears to be supported by many New Testament passages that speak of the power of the word for salvation. Yet when one turns to the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, an indissoluble nexus between deeds and words is evident. A large part of the Gospels is occupied with Jesus’ acts—deeds of healing, of exorcism, of feeding the hungry, of raising the dead. The preaching of the arrival of the kingdom is an explanation of these deeds. The deeds do not explain themselves. They can be misunderstood. Nevertheless they were signs that the power of God’s kingdom was present in the world. This meaning had to be stated in plain words: “The kingdom of God has drawn near.” The deeds without the words were dumb. However, the preaching of the message of the kingdom without deeds is meaningless and empty: “... if nothing is happening no explanation is called for and the words are empty words. They do not answer any real question. They can be brushed aside as mere talk. They are only meaningful in the context of the mighty works. They presuppose that something is happening which calls for explanation” (1989e:132). The deeds of Jesus make people aware of a new reality, a new healing power in their midst, and the question arises: “What is this new reality?” The proclamation of the good news of the kingdom is the answer to that question. “The deed without the word is dumb, and the word without the deed is empty.... Both words and deeds point to the same reality—the presence of the kingdom of God” (1982b:146). In the ministry of Jesus words and deeds were inseparable; both the *presence* and the *proclamation* of the kingdom are manifest (1987b:10-13). When Jesus commissions his disciples to participate in his mission, he charges them to exorcise and heal, and only later to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom as explanation of their works (1982a:146; 1989e:132). This small group of disciples was also the nucleus of the community he prepared to continue his mission: they were to continue his mission *as* the Father had sent him (1989e:133; 1983c:6). This pattern of a new healing power present in life and deed, calling for verbal explanation, was to continue in the church. Word and deed are inextricably intertwined in the church’s mission. To “set word and deed, preaching and action against one another is absurd” (1989e:137). Both will be essential components in the church’s mission. On the one hand, “justice and peace in the world is not something which is secondary, marginal to the central task of evangelism” (1989e:137). On the other hand, there will always be the need for a verbal witness that explicitly names the name of Jesus: “There is a gospel to be proclaimed and we are not allowed to be silent about it. However much we may wish we could, we are not allowed to deceive ourselves into imagining that anything we are, or anything we do, can take the place of the name of Jesus. We are not allowed to be silent” (1968f:4).

Neither evangelism nor deeds of mercy and justice can have priority. They are both dimensions of the total task of the church and are thus inextricably interlinked.

There is not, and there cannot be any allocation of priority between word and deed.

Both are essential. The kingly power of God is present in mighty acts and in words that interpret those acts. Neither can be subordinated in principle to the other (1982b:146).

At one point, Newbigin does speak of evangelism as the church's "primary and constant duty" (1970a:206). But this statement, made in the context of an ecumenical gathering, cannot be interpreted in the way that evangelicals spoke of evangelism as 'primary' at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism (Lausanne Covenant 1974, paragraph 6; cf. also Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 21, 1982:24-25). In Lausanne, the word 'primary' was a carefully chosen word that addressed the issue of what is most important—evangelism or social action. In Newbigin's writings the two are constantly seen as dimensions of the church's full mission.

In speaking of the equal importance of word and deed, Newbigin affirms four further explanatory statements. First, not every word needs a deed attached to it and not every deed needs a word (1974b:94; cf. Lausanne 1982:20). Second, both word and deed are fully integrated into the full life and mission of the church (1974b:94;1982b:148f.). Third, both word and deed are the means by which *the Spirit* witnesses to the kingdom (1974b:94;1978c:304; 1982b:146-148). The ultimate witness is the Spirit and both words and deeds become the means for the Spirit's witness. Fourth, there are different gifts given to the body. While all must be ready for a word to account for their hope and all must be ready with a compassionate deed, it still remains true that some are gifted in evangelism, others in showing mercy, others in pursuing justice. The mark of a healthy witness is the recognition of the various gifts of the Spirit (1974b:94; 1978c:308f.; 1982b:148f.; 1989e:231; cf. Lausanne 1982:20-21).

Newbigin's strongest defence of the inseparability of word and deed came in response to the growing polarization between evangelicals and ecumenicals (cf. Bosch 1988). The politicization of the gospel in the 1960s and early 1970s led to an evangelical reaction that stressed evangelism over social action. In an earlier chapter we have traced that historical trajectory that led to a split between the evangelical and ecumenical traditions (3.6.2.1.). The ecumenical tradition stressed social involvement to the neglect of evangelism. This was the consequence of a view of salvation that stressed the social, present and this-worldly dimensions. Over against this distortion, evangelicals advocated the primacy of evangelism. This position was firmly rooted in an individualistic, futurist, and otherworldly understanding of salvation. Word and deed had become separated in the two primary missionary traditions of the Western church.

Newbigin believed that the conflict between these two traditions was "profoundly weakening the Church's witness" (1989e:136) and so he tirelessly attempted to heal the rift between these two traditions (1982b; 1987a:9-13; 1989e:128-140). His response to the loss of evangelism in the ecumenical tradition has been noted (and his words are harsh): social and political action divorced from evangelism is a *betrayal*. His words to the evangelical tradition who remove the deed from the word are equally harsh: a preaching the gospel that does not challenge the usurped dominion of Jesus Christ as it is embodied in the political and social order and that does not bear the wounds of that conflict is *false* (1982b:148). If the church proclaims the good news, inviting men and women to take refuge in Jesus without the call to challenge the dominion of evil in social structures "it becomes a countersign" (*ibid*). Church growth achieved by evangelistic methods that avoid social and political confrontation "is only providing fuel for hell (Jn. 15:1-6)" (*ibid*).

The way to heal the rift is to return to the central theme in Jesus' preaching—the good news about the kingdom (1980f:17). There were at least two problems that led to a misunderstanding of the kingdom of God and to the fatal split between the evangelical and ecumenical traditions. The first problem was the separation of the Kingdom from the person of Jesus. When this happens two distortions follow—distortions that can roughly be attributed to the ecumenical and evangelical traditions. On the one hand, there are those in the ecumenical tradition who emphasize the kingdom at the expense of Jesus. The kingdom is portrayed as something that transcends the person of Jesus. Consequently, the kingdom is identified with a particular political program or social plan. The kingdom becomes a program or an ideology but it is not the gospel (1980f:18). “The action of the church in respect of the evils in society becomes a mere ideological crusade, inviting men and women to put their trust in that which cannot satisfy. It is to betray people with false expectations. Worse than that, it is to deliver people into the hands of demonic powers, for whenever a particular political or social programme is identified with the kingdom of God, those who follow become victims of forces that they cannot control” (1987a:9). But the message of the gospel is that the kingdom has a name and a face, the name and face of Jesus (1980f:18; 1987a:7). On the other hand, there are those in the evangelical tradition who emphasize the name of Jesus but separate that from his message about the kingdom. When this happens, Jesus is preached as one who brings a religious experience of personal salvation without involving one in costly actions at points in public life where the power of Satan is contradicting the rule of God and bringing men and women under the power of evil. Such preaching of cheap grace, of a supposed personal salvation does not go the way of the cross, of an inward comfort without commitment to costly action for the doing of God's will in the world—this kind of evangelistic preaching is a distortion of the gospel. It is seductive, and we must be on our guard against it. A preaching of personal salvation that does not lead the hearers to challenge the monstrous injustices of our society is not mission in Christ's way. It is peddling cheap grace (1987a:9).

Newbiggin believed that the tragic split between the ecumenical and evangelical traditions could be traced to this misunderstanding. To separate Jesus from the kingdom by either proclaiming the kingdom without Jesus or Jesus without the kingdom “is to betray our generation and it is to divide and destroy the church” (1987a:10).

Newbiggin addresses a second problem that also manifested itself in the split between the evangelical and ecumenical traditions of the church: the loss of a Biblical vision of the future realization of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history (1993d). Purposeful action is only possible if one understands the story of which we are a part and if we know where that story is going. The New Testament writers think in terms of a real goal, a real end to history toward which the world is moving. When this future consummation fades from view there are only two substitutes available. The first is an evolutionary, progress-oriented vision of history: by human effort a future perfect human society can be realized. The second is a privatized eschatology that looks to a life of personal blessedness after death: this “fits well with the mood of a society which has lost faith in a meaningful future for the public life of the world” (1993d:9).

For Newbiggin a faithful witness required the combination of word and deed.

In the communication of the gospel, word and act belong together. The word is essential, because the name of Jesus cannot be replaced by anything else. But the deed

is equally essential because the gospel is the good news of the active presence of the reign of God, and because this presence is to be made manifest in a world that has fallen under the usurped dominion of the evil one (1982b:148).

7.3.2.2. Evangelism Authenticated by the Life of the Congregation

Newbigin's discussion of the evangelical/ecumenical conflict over word and deed opens up another important theme that remained constant in his ecclesiology. The deeper problem in this split is that both traditions have lost the understanding that mission is first of all an action of God (1989e:134-137). The witness to the gospel is first of all the witness of the Spirit; the witness of the church is secondary.

The true missionary dialogue, in other words, is not initiated by the Church. In a secondary sense it is initiated by the outsider who is drawn to ask: What is the secret of this new reality, this life of praise, of justice, and of peace? In the primary sense, however, it is initiated by the presence of the Spirit who is the *arrabon* of the kingdom, and whose presence leads people... to make this inquiry (1989e:134).

This statement has an important ecclesiological implication. It is precisely in the life of the congregation that the work of the Spirit becomes evident. Newbigin argues that "both parties in this dispute need to recover a fuller sense of the prior reality, the givenness, the ontological priority of the new reality which the work of Christ has brought into being" (1989e:136). This new reality is evident in the creation of a community which embodies the life of the Spirit. Thus word and deed arise out of this prior reality of a Spirit-filled community: "The central reality is neither word nor act, but the total life of a community enabled by the Spirit to live in Christ, sharing his passion and the power of his resurrection (1989e:137). Evangelism will be effective only if the life of the good news community conforms to the message of the gospel. There must be a visible embodiment and manifestation of the life of the gospel in the church if words of evangelism are to carry weight (cf. Bosch 1991:414). In Newbigin's words:

The purely verbal preaching of the story of Jesus crucified and risen would lose its power if those who heard it could not trace it back to some kind of community in which the message was being validated in a common way of life which is recognizable as embodying at least a hint and a foretaste of the blessedness for which all men long and which the Gospel promises.... It is in the life of a new kind of community that the saving power of the Gospel is known and tasted, and such a community—in however embryonic form—will always be the *locus* of that miracle by which the paradigm shift which we call conversion takes place (1980a:304).

This emphasis on the prior reality of a community that embodies the gospel was formed in the 1950s. Johannes Hoekendijk introduced three words to speak of the mission of the church—*koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *kerygma* (Jongeneel 1995:19; 1997:307-308). In the ecumenical tradition it had become customary to speak of these as three dimensions of the church's mission. Newbigin saw this as a mistake. The basic reality is the common life (*koinonia*) of the Spirit that is shared in the church. From this foundational new reality of life in the Spirit springs both service (*diakonia*) and

proclamation (*kerygma*) or witness (*marturia*).⁴ “The new reality—the active presence of the Holy Spirit among men—is the primary witness, anterior to all specific acts whether of service or of preaching” (1958b:20). The church gathered is the place where the Holy Spirit is visibly present in the fellowship of believers, the word and sacrament. Both *diakonia* (deeds of service) and *marturia* (verbal witness) must be seen to arise out of *koinonia* (the gathered fellowship of God’s people who share the new reality of the Spirit).

This theme becomes dominant in the latter decades of Newbigin’s life. As he pursued his ‘gospel and western culture’ project, he became increasingly concerned about the “advanced syncretism” in the western church. A church conformed to the idols of the world would muffle the announcement of the kingdom.

The preaching of the gospel can never be irrelevant. But if the Church which preaches it is not living corporately a life which corresponds with it, is living in comfortable cohabitation with the powers of this age, is failing to challenge the powers of darkness and to manifest in its life the power of the living Lord to help and to heal, then by its life it closes the doors which its preaching would open (1989e:140).

Paul in his letters does not urge the early church to be active in evangelism. He does, however, constantly warn them against any kind of syncretistic compromise with the idols of their culture. When there is such a faithful community “there will be a challenge by word and behaviour to the ruling powers. As a result there will be conflict and suffering for the Church. Out of that conflict and suffering will arise the questioning which the world puts to the Church” (1989e:136f.). Evangelism will be the answer given to these queries; evangelism will point to Christ as the source of the life that the Spirit gives in foretaste.

There is one more theme to note here. Evangelism must be closely connected to the local congregation. It must be clear that the gospel spoken be recognizable as a word that arises from the community that embodies that gospel. The various agencies, evangelists, training courses are all “auxiliary to the primary center of evangelism, which is the local congregation” (1994k:156; cf. 1989e:229).⁵

⁴Johannes Hoekendijk introduced the terms *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *kerygma*. Later *marturia* was substituted as an equivalent for *kerygma*.

⁵Newbigin makes this point most often in relation to agencies for social action rather than bodies formed for the purpose of evangelism. This is discussed more fully below (7.4.7.). The argument there holds for agencies and structures of evangelism as well.

7.3.3. *Conversion as the Aim of Evangelism*

The first evangelism was Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God had arrived. This proclamation was not simply religious news or values or information. It was an announcement about God's mighty acts for the world. Therefore the announcement "requires an immediate response in action" (1994k:151; cf. Bosch 1991:413). The response called for was repentance, a conversion and transformation of the mind and life of the respondent (1987a:2-3). Since the evangelism of the church is rooted in the evangelism of Jesus, so the church's evangelistic aim is conversion (1978e:121). Evangelism aims at conversion, baptism and church membership (1982b:149).

This theme is especially prominent in Newbigin's writing during the secular decade when many in the ecumenical tradition denied the validity of baptism, conversion, and church membership, and when, in response to this imbalance, the Church Growth school promoted these as the only goal of mission. Newbigin's response was to insist on the importance of conversion as a goal of evangelism, while rejecting the equally imbalanced position of Donald McGavran (1978e:121-124; McGavran 1970).

Over against the studied neglect of conversion in the ecumenical tradition Newbigin insisted:

The reality of any belief is tested by the extent to which the believer seeks to persuade others of its truth. It cannot be denied that Jesus called for radical repentance, conversion, the forsaking of all in order to follow Him. A movement which lacks these elements has no right to His name. Whether men hear or refuse to hear is not ours to decide. But we have the clear duty to bring to every man this call for radical decision (1965a:148).

Newbigin believed that this emphasis needed to be heard during the secular sixties. It was not popular but was nevertheless true that evangelism is "concerned with the radical conversion that leads men to explicit allegiance to Jesus Christ" (1965a:149).

Over against the reaction of Church Growth advocates, Newbigin maintained that conversion could not be reduced to individual salvation (cf. Bosch 1991:415). Nor could it be reduced to church membership or extension: "mission is not simply church extension... it involves something more radical, more paradoxical, more costly" (1965a:147). The focus of evangelism is not on the individual or the church but on the arrival of the kingdom of God. Since the announcement of the kingdom of God calls each person to repentance and conversion, and since it is the church that experiences this salvation of the kingdom which is comprehensive in scope, the call to personal conversion will not be disconnected from evangelism. While individual salvation and church growth cannot be the primary focus of evangelism, neither can evangelism be disconnected from these things. About conversion and the new reality of the kingdom, Newbigin writes,

It is not, *in the first place*, either saving one's own soul or joining a society. It is these things only secondarily, because the new reality is one in which every soul is precious, and because there is a society which is the first-fruit and sign of the new reality. If either of these things is put at the centre, distortion follows (1965a:149).

Equally, the conversion that evangelism aims at is a costly obedience (cf. Costas 1982:80). Newbigin comments:

It is notorious that the times and places from which successful evangelistic campaigns and mass conversions have been reported have often been marked by flagrant evils such as racism, militant sectarianism, and blind support of oppressive economic and political systems. How are we to evaluate a form of evangelism that produces baptized, communicant, Bible-reading, and zealous Christians who are committed to church growth but uncommitted to radical obedience to the plain teaching of the Bible on the issues of human dignity and social justice? And how can we defend a form of evangelism that has nothing to say about the big issues of public righteousness and talks only of questions of personal and domestic behaviour? Can we agree that the big ethical issues are secondary matters, which can be attended to after conversion? (1978e:134f).

Evangelism aims at conversion but conversion is not simply a turning to God and joining the church. It is the call to follow Jesus and that “includes both the inner reorientation of the heart and mind and the outward reorientation of conduct in all areas of life” (1978e:135). Conversion involves an inward turning of faith to God, a way of behaviour, and membership in a visible fellowship (1966a:30-34). While Church Growth advocates have rightly emphasized the first and third of these, they have neglected the second.

Newbigin immediately continues his discussion to argue that the danger in stressing conversion as a radical orientation of the life in ethical terms—as Biblical as this is—is that there is the danger of substituting the law for gospel. There is the threat of substituting the evangelist’s ethical agenda for the working of the Spirit through the gospel to transform the convert (1978e:135-138). Nevertheless evangelism aims at conversion which is a call to repent and enter the kingdom; this will mean a turn to God, a commitment to radical and costly obedience, and participation in the community that embodies the kingdom.

7.3.4. Evangelism Distinguished from Proselytism

At several points in his writings Newbigin distinguishes evangelism from proselytism (cf. Bosch 1991:414-415). In his fullest discussion he distinguishes between them at four points (1980a:159-160). First, in evangelism there is always an element of mystery and miracle about the way the Spirit uses the words and deeds of the church to bring about conversion, while in proselytism conversion is something that can be programmed and managed in the style of a military campaign or marketing promotion. Second, in evangelism conversion often takes place when the church is weak; a faithful word or act in Jesus’ name is the occasion of conversion. In contrast proselytism is the activity of a strong, confident group that relies on its own wisdom and strength to bring about results. Third, in the act of evangelizing the church will also be changed. The witness of the Spirit convicts the world (John 16:8) and teaches the church more about the gospel (John 16:13). The encounter between Peter and Cornelius illustrates this mutual growth (Acts 10, 11). On the other hand, the proselytizing group does not expect to be changed or learn from the encounter. It expects a growth in numbers but not a deepening understanding of its own message. Finally, since evangelism is clearly the witness of the Spirit, Jesus is glorified. In contrast the “successfully proselytising group is proud of its accomplishments and publishes them as evidence of its spiritual vitality” (1980a:160). The distinction between proselytism and evangelism is notoriously

difficult to make. Newbigin's reflections provide helpful insight on this difficult issue.

7.3.5. *Evangelism in Context*

The message of the good news of Jesus Christ that calls for a decision for or against Christ is not an abstract message proclaimed in a vacuum; evangelism is contextual (cf. Bosch 1991:417). This is one of the themes that characterized Hendrik Kraemer's writings which affected Newbigin's view of evangelism. Authentic evangelism presents the gospel in the context of concrete human experience. Since the gospel "is vitally related to all spheres and problems of life" (Kraemer 1938:304), evangelism will look for a point of contact in the living experience of those to whom the gospel is to be proclaimed. Evangelism that presents the gospel as a rigid formula resembles propaganda more than proclamation of good news.

During the 1960s, when the ongoing progress of technology, modernization, nation-building and 'rapid social change' captured the ecumenical imagination and dominated the WCC's agenda, evangelism was eclipsed. Newbigin frequently stressed the central importance of evangelism during this period. However, he also sought to bring the message of the gospel into close connection with the global events of the day. Newbigin attempted to demonstrate that all scientific and technological development in the West had its spiritual roots in the gospel. The evangelistic task of the church is to bear witness to the gospel precisely in the midst of the task of nation building. Evangelism witnesses that these gifts are the result of the penetration of the West with the gospel (1960n:24; 1963g:44). The title of an address given at this time captures his concern: 'Rapid Social Change and Evangelism' (1962i). In the context of the rapid social change that is sweeping the world, the church's evangelistic task is to understand and interpret the tremendous events of the day, so that a faithful verbal witness to the gospel can be given (1962i:3).

The importance, but also the limits, of evangelism in context is revealed in an exchange that Newbigin had at this time with M. M. Thomas. Their exchange finds its source in an earlier discussion between M. M. Thomas and Hendrikus Berkhof. Thomas affirms the importance of evangelism but as an aspect of the church's task of humanization (Loffler 1968:14-33). He says: "The Message *comes alive* at the cutting edge between the Gospel and the quest of modern man for a truly human existence... nobody knows the Message in a vacuum" (Loffler 1968:22-23). This statement was in keeping with the whole tenor of the Uppsala Assembly. The Assembly rejected the idea of "unevangelized areas" or "mission fields." In the traditional understanding of mission, the fact that people have not heard the gospel is sufficient reason for proclaiming the gospel to them. In contrast to this, Uppsala spoke of the obligation of the church to go to places where the gospel had some special relevance—mission points rather than mission fields (1969a:256). At this time of nation building, rapid social change, and the struggle for humanization the gospel was most relevant in those situations.

Newbigin responded to Thomas' statement (and the Uppsala emphasis) with a fourfold critique (1969a:260). First, the gospel certainly does come alive to different people in different ways at different times. However, the gospel is not an empty container into which one can pour new content that is relevant for the present time. The gospel has a content and that is Jesus Christ, his life, teaching, death, and resurrection.

Second, the gospel does not merely address human beings in their particular contexts but addresses human beings in every age, context, and cultural situation according to universal human needs and questions (cf. Kraemer 1938:203). Third, the way the gospel comes alive in various situations cannot be determined beforehand. It will be known uniquely in each person's situation as they encounter Jesus Christ. Finally, "even the most brilliant generalisations about what is happening to the human race cannot exhaustively fit every individual human being" (1969a:260). While these generalizations are helpful, people are related to the process of humanization in very different ways. We cannot limit how the gospel will come alive for each of these people. Newbigin concludes,

We do have an obligation to preach the Gospel to every human being, irrespective of the place he occupies in the struggle for full humanity. We cannot tell in advance how, where, and when this Gospel will "come alive". Our preaching of it does not depend on knowing this. We have Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit himself will be present to bring conviction to the world (Jn. 16:8) and we have seen that promise fulfilled in unexpected ways. The Gospel has its own radical originality, the sovereign originality of Jesus (:260f.).

In his book *Salvation and Humanisation*, Thomas takes issue with Newbigin's critique. He interprets Newbigin's four points of critique as a lack of concern for the particular context and situation of the hearer of the gospel. For Newbigin, the gospel is universally true and relevant to any and all situations. Therefore, the gospel creates its own relevance for each situation since the human predicament is universal. The stress on the universality of the gospel and the human predicament relieves the evangelist of concern for the particular situation of the hearer (Thomas 1971:46).

Newbigin responded to this critique in a book review of *Salvation and Humanisation* (1971c). Newbigin protests that he is not attempting to undermine the importance of the particular context by stressing the universality of the gospel and the human predicament. Rather he is concerned for a proper balance between the two (1971c:77). On the one hand, there is a desperate need for the evangelist to penetrate each particular human context with deep sympathy and understanding. "Simply to blast away with time-honoured slogans, without taking the time to listen to what are the hearer's real concerns, is a parody of evangelism" (*ibid*). In light of this, much contemporary evangelistic efforts must be criticized. On the other hand, he makes two points to keep this insight. First, "the gospel is greater than our grasp of it." Second, "the human situation is more varied and complex than any generalisation of ours can cover" (1971c:78). He then develops both of these points.

The gospel is much greater than what we can grasp of its significance and relevance. Christ may come to the hearer of the gospel in a way that is quite different and unexpected from the way that the evangelist anticipated. For example, missionaries to Africa were sure that the gospel was relevant primarily to polygamy. The hearers understood it in terms of its relevance to the issue of slavery. It affected the life of Africa in ways unexpected by the original evangelists. Newbigin concludes from this: "The bearer of the Gospel has both the right and duty to try to understand the way in which the Gospel bears upon the situation of the people to whom he goes. But in the end he has to stand aside and let the Gospel make its own impact" (1971c:78).

Human beings vary greatly in their particular needs. While a good generalization of

an era or situation may be fruitful it may fail to do justice to the particular situations of many people living in that era. Newbigin does not doubt that the struggle for humanization is part of the task of the church's mission. He resists, however, the identification of mission with a struggle for humanization. Rather the evangelistic work of the church must be carried out "within the context of a full participation in the struggle for humanization" (1971c:79).

Newbigin argues that identifying the missionary task of the church with humanization is in danger of moving from gospel to law. A constant struggle for humanization will lead to the crush of guilt that comes from our experience of dehumanization, or to hatred of those who are identified as the enemies of a true humanity. The believing community participates in these struggles in the joy and assurance of a victory already gained in Jesus Christ. Evangelism is the proclamation of that victory.

7.4. THE SOCIAL WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

In Newbigin's work we can distinguish four different forms of social witness. The first is corporate witness in which the local congregation together reaches out in service to its community and to the ends of the earth. This corporate witness may find its source in the local congregation or in various programs, committees, and institutions under the denominational umbrella or organized as para-church organizations. The second is an individual witness in which intentional deeds of mercy and justice are initiated and implemented by various members of the body. Third, the community of the church bears witness to Christ by modelling in its own corporate life the life of the kingdom as an alternative community. Newbigin even says that "the most important contribution which the Church can make to a new social order is to be itself a new social order" (1991h:85). The fourth is the witness of the various members in their various callings in culture—at home, in factory and office, in farm and hospital, in politics and neighbourhood and so forth. The communal witness of the church and the mission of the laity will be treated in detail elsewhere: the calling of the laity in the next section, and the church as alternative community in the next chapter. The remainder of the present section deals with the social witness of the church in general and the corporate and individual witness of the local congregation in particular.

7.4.1. Newbigin's Ministry Experience and the Social Mission of the Church

Newbigin's earliest Christian fellowship was with the ecumenical SCM. This involved him in concerns of mercy and justice from his first years as a Christian (2.2.2.4.). His missionary experience in India, where various institutions like schools, orphanages, and hospitals authenticated his street preaching and where there was the pervasive presence of poverty and social need, reinforced his commitment to the social witness of the church (2.3.2.3.). During his time in administrative leadership of the IMC and the CWME, the overwhelming attention given to social concerns in the secular decade moved Newbigin to deepening reflection on the nature of the social witness of the church (3.5.2.3.). It was, however, during his time in Madras that this aspect of the

church's mission dominated Newbigin's ministry (3.6.3.1.). This concern for the social mission of the church was fuelled by the continuing prominence given to this topic in ecumenical circles but, more importantly, by his office as bishop of a socially influential church in a flourishing third world city. The fruit of this extensive, life-long struggle with the issue is a wealth of reflection on the social witness of the church.

7.4.2. The Nature of Salvation: Foundational to Social Witness

Newbigin's soteriology is foundational to his understanding of the church's social witness. The context of Newbigin's reflections on salvation was the rift between ecumenicals and evangelicals on social action produced by different understandings of salvation. For evangelicals salvation is future, individualistic, and other-worldly. This leads to a misunderstanding of the church and its mission in the world. For ecumenicals salvation is present, social, and this-worldly. However, there is no place for judgement and death and so salvation is understood in terms of historical continuity. The ecumenical tradition lacked a coherent theology that distinguished between revolution and redemption, between the task of nation building and the mission of the church (1993h:186; cf. Bosch 1991:393-408).

In this context, Newbigin emphasizes three aspects of a Biblical view of salvation. First, as an eschatological reality, salvation is both a present reality and a future hope (1974b:106f.). This is a tension that must be kept if the church is to be faithful in its social mission. There is an interesting ambiguity in both the evangelical and ecumenical traditions that Newbigin recognizes. On the one hand, he often stresses that the evangelical tradition stresses salvation as a future reality; this leads to a lack of concern for social issues in the present. On the other hand, he chastises the evangelical churches in Madras for their preoccupation with salvation as a present reality. If the church stresses salvation as a present possession "there is little or no serious concern about the injustice and iniquity that reign all around him" (1974b:107). He refers to these evangelical "comfortable middle class congregations" of Madras as "private clubs designed to cater to the religious tastes of its members" (1974b:197; 1969c:111). In this situation, "the greatest task" facing the church is "to move from thinking of itself as a saved community to thinking of itself as a community which has been caught up into God's saving action for men" (1973e:10).

What was given as a mission to the world has been twisted into a privilege for ourselves. We have been more concerned that the church should be big and prosperous and strong than that God's will should be done in the world. We have sought our own aggrandizement rather than the fulfilment of the task for which we were called.... How often is the Christian church no more than a self-centred community only faintly concerned that God's will be done in the life of the world, only faintly interested in justice and mercy for this earth's exploited masses but passionately devoted to our own protection and advancement as a community and, if we are piously inclined, to assuring that after a comfortable passage through this life we can look forward to a guaranteed place in the foam-rubber-padded seats of heaven (1972f:102).

The same ambiguity is evident in the ecumenical tradition. On the one hand, the emphasis on the present nature of salvation leads the ecumenical church to throw itself into political, social, and economic issues with little concern for the future. On the other

hand, the focus on salvation as a future hope transforms mission into a desperate struggle against injustice and oppression that lacks the joy of salvation as a present reality to be shared (1974b:107).

A second aspect of Newbigin's understanding of salvation concerns both fellowship with God and social, political, economic, and ecological life. The CWME Conference in Bangkok on the theme 'Salvation Today' stimulated a great deal of discussion on the meaning of salvation and the result of the Biblical studies was that "in the Bible salvation concerns the whole man and the totality of his relationships. It includes... the political and social and economic" (1974b:105; cf. Bangkok Assembly 1973; Bassham 1979:97-98; Bosch 1991:395-397). The Old Testament vision of salvation, captured well in Micah 5, is clearly concerned with human social and economic life. Other parts of the Old Testament understand salvation in terms of a political struggle for oppressed peoples, happy family life, abundant economic prosperity, and civil peace. However, "the vision of salvation in the Old Testament is never a merely secular vision. It is never just a vision of political liberation or economic progress or social peace and justice" (1974b:106). The "true kernel of salvation" is fellowship with the living Lord (*ibid.*). Salvation is concerned with "man's fellowship with God at the very heart of his experience of being human and it also concerns his social life with other men and his experience with the world of nature" (*ibid.*). Salvation involves "commitment to the Purpose and communion with the Person. The lived and experienced reality of communion with the living God will have to be at the heart of our commitment to purposeful change" (1974c:27).

The implications for the ecumenical-evangelical debate are clear. On the one hand, for the evangelical community, an individualized view of salvation is one-sided and fatal for social concern. Newbigin writes: "Those Christians... [who] speak about being saved apparently use the phrase to refer to a purely inward experience between the individual soul and God, resulting in new feelings and intentions, but having nothing to do with actual deliverance from sickness or hunger or oppression or alienation. It is obvious that this is very remote from the biblical use of the word" (1972e:5). The church is an agent of the salvation of God's kingdom; it has been "put into the world to fight unremittingly against all the powers of evil". However, many have come to think of the church as a "place where we can enjoy the comforts of salvation here and hereafter" (1974b:107). In the Bible God thunders against a comfortable piety which thinks it can enjoy an individualized, present salvation as fellowship with God but not be concerned for social justice. Simply put, "the piety which can comfortably co-exist with flagrant social injustice is an abomination to the God.... Salvation is not a privilege which we can enjoy apart from our total commitment to God's battle with the powers of evil" (1974b:108). "It is a disastrous misunderstanding to think that we can enjoy salvation through Jesus Christ and at the same time regard action for justice in the world as a sort of optional extra—or even as an inferior substitute for the work of passing on the good news of salvation" (1972f:109). On the other hand, in ecumenical circles the social dimension of salvation is so prominent that it stifles any understanding of people being saved and renewed in their relation to God. The question 'Are you saved?' embarrasses them (1972d:5). When salvation is reduced to social justice, then the church is reduced to an instrument, and the church's mission is truncated. What is needed is an understanding of salvation that involves both a "commitment to the

Purpose and communion with the Person” (1974c:27).

A third and final aspect of Newbigin’s understanding of salvation is that it is comprehensive in scope and restorative in nature (cf. Wolters 1985). It is comprehensive in scope in that salvation is concerned not only with the individual but with human beings in the context of the whole creation. Salvation involves all of human life in the context of the non-human creation. Newbigin says: “God’s promise is of a wholly renewed creation, not just reborn individuals. It is a promise not only of new men, but of new heavens and a new earth” (1968b:22; cf. 1972f:93). It is also restorative in nature in that salvation is not salvation out of the world but salvation of the world; God is restoring his creation. Salvation is “the renewal of all things in Christ” (1968d:35; cf. 1969c:60f.). As Newbigin puts it elsewhere: “The emphasis of the New Testament teaching about last things is not upon our escaping out of this world into another one, but upon Christ’s returning to this world in glory... to reign... over a renewed and transformed creation” (1968b:22).

The end of the story is not escape into another world. It is the triumph of God in this world—a triumph that lies on the other side of death, of war and tumult and tribulation, of the shaking of all that is. It is life beyond death—not the immortality of souls liberated from this world but the resurrection of the body and the re-creation of all things (1970a:220).

The terms ‘renewal’ and ‘transformation’ highlight both continuity and discontinuity. Salvation is continuous because it is the restoration of the good creation. Redemption means discontinuity because sin has corrupted and polluted the creation and it is worthy only of judgement and death. How can this discontinuity be held with continuity? Newbigin uses three Biblical images that stress both continuity and discontinuity: the germination of a seed, the birth of a child, and the purification of fire. All of these images stress that life comes out of death, conflict, pain, and destruction. Perhaps the image of purifying fire best depicts the continuity and discontinuity. He says: “All things must pass through fire, a purifying fire, a fire which will destroy that which is unfit to endure. Some of our work will be destroyed; some of it, by God’s grace may pass the test. The point is that we ourselves hope for a personal future. It is that we hope that what we have done... may come through that fire cleansed and fit for a place in God’s new city” (1972f:95).

This view of salvation has important implications for the issue of social activity in the evangelical and ecumenical tradition. In the evangelical tradition, continuity and comprehensive restoration needs to be recovered; in the ecumenical tradition, discontinuity, judgement, and death (even otherworldliness! e.g., 1970d:6) need to be recaptured. For the church that has spiritualized salvation, there will be little motivation to be involved in the social, political, and economic life of the world. If salvation has to do with the whole created order then we will be deeply committed to battling evil wherever it manifests itself in human life. On the other hand, the discontinuity that comes as a result of God’s judgement on sin means that we cannot reduce salvation to programs of political, social, and economic improvement. All our social action is corrupted by sin and must be purified by fire. We cannot build God’s kingdom (1968b:24). “There is simply no direct road linking our activities with the consummation of God’s kingdom” (1970a:227; 1968b:24; cf. 1969e:119).

No theological question has more immediate practical implications than the one we are dealing with now. If our emphasis is placed on the transience of the world, then we shall be little interested in programs for its improvement, and much interested in what happens to the individual human person as he prepares or does not prepare for his eternal destiny. If, on the other hand, our emphasis is on the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth, we may be tempted to reduce the gospel to a program of social and political action in which the human person has no ultimate significance. That neither of these possibilities is a merely theoretical one, is a fact that does not need to be documented in any Christian gathering (1970a:216).

If the church understands salvation to be both a present reality and future hope, involving renewed fellowship with God and renewed harmony and justice among humans and between humanity and the non-human creation, to be comprehensive in scope and restorative in nature, to be both continuous and discontinuous with our present creational life, then the divide between the evangelical and ecumenical traditions of the church will be seen to be a false one based on a misunderstanding of salvation.

7.4.3. The Nature of Social Action

The nature of social action depends on the way one understands the relationship between the salvation of the kingdom and present history. There are two dangers in relating the two. The first is an identification of the salvation of the kingdom with history. This leads to an uncritical triumphalism wherein the church merely becomes an auxiliary to the social and political programs of the day. The second danger is to separate the salvation of the kingdom from history. This leads to a selfish withdrawal in which the church avoids all social responsibility. How is one to walk between these two extremes and properly relate the salvation of the kingdom to history? What are the implications of this relation for social action?

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the outpouring of His Spirit the kingdom of God has entered history. The church experiences a foretaste of that kingdom but the work of God's Spirit cannot be confined within the boundaries of the church. A number of questions arise: How does the inbreaking kingdom affect history? Can it be identified in such a way that history can be seen as a continuous line toward the consummated kingdom? Or will there be conflict between the power of the kingdom and the course of history? If the church is the bearer of this new life in some kind of concentrated way, how will the life of the church relate to the ongoing history around her? If the work of the Spirit works beyond the church how can we identify these "signs of the kingdom" and thus become involved?

The Bible offers us no hope that the kingdom will be realized in history this side of the return of Jesus Christ (1993h:186). The New Testament gives us a picture of the future that includes a deepening of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers. It speaks of the suffering of the church as the bearer of the new life of the kingdom that lives with a hope in the promise of a new world and by its suffering witnesses to that kingdom. Newbigin is not a triumphalist. History is not an incremental development that culminates in the consummated kingdom. It is, rather, deepening conflict, antithetical struggle, crisis, agony, and a suffering witness as signs of the

presence of God's kingdom, the end that God has promised (1967b:118; 1972g:68-70).

This means that we cannot build God's kingdom (1968b:24). There is no road of continuity from here in history to there in the consummated kingdom. There is no "smooth forward movement" (1972g:68) along the path of history to the end. Our social and political actions on behalf of the justice and peace of the kingdom are not the placing of building blocks of the kingdom that will ultimately lead to the completed kingdom.

What then is the nature of our social activity? If it does not build God's kingdom, does this not render all social, political, and economic activity futile or at least inferior to the more important task of preparing for the eternal kingdom? For Newbigin the answer to the question of the nature of deeds of justice and mercy comes in three points. First, our social activity has the character of witness to the presence and power of the kingdom. Newbigin expresses this a number of ways. The church's social activity is hope in action (1974h:38). It is an acted prayer for the coming of the kingdom. Action for justice and mercy is salvation in action (1974b:109).

It is a disastrous misunderstanding to think that we can enjoy salvation through Jesus Christ and at the same time regard action for justice in the world as a sort of optional extra—or even as an inferior substitute for the work of passing on the good news of salvation. Action for social justice *is* salvation in action. Of course it is true that no action of ours can do more than produce a *little* more justice in the world (1974b:109).

While it can only produce a little more justice in the world, these actions are the overflow of love (1993h:186) and as such function as signs and pointers to the kingdom that is coming.

The works of mercy, of healing, of liberation—all are part of the breaking in of a new reality. They are parts of it and therefore signs of it.... the deeds must not be separated from the new reality of which they are a part. They are part of the overflowing of God's grace. Jesus' deeds of love were not part of a contrived programme with some ulterior purpose: they were the overflowing of the love which filled his whole being. Just so, the Church's deeds of love ought to be—not contrived signs but natural and spontaneous signs of the new reality in which we have been made sharers through Christ" (1974b:93).

They are signs of the kingdom rather than instruments that establish God's kingdom: "They are not the *means* by which God establishes his kingdom. They are witnesses to its present reality" (1963g:43).

Second, social activity is aimed at conversion. Newbigin begins one of his talks to the clergy with a number of questions around the social work of the church.

What are we really doing? What do we hope to achieve by this work? It is, after all, only a drop in the bucket compared with the vast needs of this city of three million people. Why not leave this kind of work to the Corporation and Government? Why not? (1974b:91)

Newbigin does not believe that social work is bait that will make people swallow the preaching of the gospel. Our social action must have no ulterior motive; it must be performed from true love and compassion (cf. 1993h:186).

... the deeds of healing and liberation must not be separated from the new reality of which they are a part. They are part of the overflowing of God's grace. Jesus' deeds of love were not part of a contrived programme with some ulterior purpose: they were the overflowing of the love which filled his whole being. Just so, the Church's deeds of love ought to be—not contrived signs but natural and spontaneous signs of the new reality in which we have been made sharers through Christ. Those who have received so much cannot keep it to themselves. It must overflow in love to others (1974b:93).

Does this mean that we have no desire to convert people? Newbigin relates the story of one of the church workers in the slums when he was asked "Have you come here to convert us?" quite rightly answered "Yes." If conversion is seen simply as a switch from one religious community to another then conversion is not the aim. But if conversion means a meeting with Jesus Christ which changes the person and conditions that have created the slums, then the church aims at conversion. "We are agents of change who cannot be content unless others also join us in being agents of change. We are out to convert people, not just feed them" (1974b:93).

It follows that there must be words attached to the deeds. As he presses the question of the social witness of the church, Newbigin continues to argue what we have seen above (1974b:93-95). Words interpret the signs, and signs validate the words; not every word needs a deed and not every deed needs a word; there are many different gifts and callings; both the verbal witness from those gifted in evangelism and the act of justice and mercy from those gifted for that task must be seen to arise out of the "same reality—the reality of a new power, a new reign which has broken into the world" (1974b:94). The acts of mercy and justice must be recognizably connected to the community that believes and embodies the gospel of the kingdom. A close link between the deeds and the community that believes the gospel is essential.

A third answer to the question of the nature of the church's social witness is that God's saving work will spill over the bounds of the church even where Jesus is not acknowledged (1972g:71). The church's social action may thus have a salting impact on society. The church is an agent of God's kingdom. As such it struggles against all injustice that stands against the justice of God's kingdom (1974b:107). In this struggle there may be partial victories and there may be a measure of justice that results. In this way the church is salt in a decaying world. But that justice of the kingdom will be partial, shot through with sin, and incomplete. The justice of the kingdom will not be seen in fullness until the end. Yet the end victory is promised. Unfortunately, Newbigin does not elaborate this point.

7.4.4. Justice and Mercy

These deeds of love will be both deeds of mercy and justice. During the 1960s a recognition of the church's task to pursue justice and change social structures dominated the missiological agenda (Bosch 1991:402-403). This was the result of the growing participation of the churches from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the WCC (Duchrow 1991:556). Much emphasis was put on tackling the fundamental causes of humans suffering. There was a tendency to treat mercy with contempt, as mere ambulance service, since in the end it did not solve the root cause of the problem. Mercy

treated the symptoms and left the root disease untouched. Newbiggin addresses the issue of the relation between mercy and justice several times but most fully in a paper written for a consultation between the Christian Agency for Social Action (CASA) and leaders of the Indian churches (1973a). He was asked by the CASA what the churches should expect from the CASA.

Newbiggin notes that the CASA is responsible for both emergency relief (mercy) and community rehabilitation (justice). He recognizes that the emphasis of the day is on tackling the root causes of human suffering and not providing an ambulance service. "It is not enough to deploy Good Samaritans around the place; we must also guard the road" (1973a:546). Newbiggin recognizes that this is a valid concern. He is himself critical of many social programs that "have been perhaps to some extent instruments of charity, but not instruments of justice. I think our programmes in general have stopped short at the point where they could challenge the existing order" (1971b:257). He insists that the service of the church "involves not only the personal service that I may do for [my neighbour], but also those political actions which may be necessary to break structures of injustice, which dehumanise him, and to create new structures wherein a genuinely human social existence is possible." He regretfully admits that "Christians have too often taken a conservative attitude to political structures" (1972h:155). So Newbiggin is clear that part of the church's mission is the pursuit of justice. It is not a matter of 'either-or' but 'both-and'. One cannot leave the person dying at the side of the road while he or she goes to organize a police force. Therefore, mercy will always have a natural priority. While both are necessary it is acts of mercy that maintain "first priority."

If we allow ourselves to be persuaded that 'ambulance work' is something to be treated with contempt, we have surrendered the basic Christian position and left the field to those who destroy the human person for the sake of social planning. We must do both: we must care for the victim of disaster or injustice, and we must also undertake those measures of social engineering or revolution which are needed to prevent disaster and injustice from happening. But I submit that we have the whole Gospel with us when we say that the first priority goes to the direct response to human need (1973a:546).

7.4.5. *Justice and the 'Signs of the Times'*

To further elucidate the nature of the church's action for justice, Newbiggin raises two more issues. The first is how to read the signs of the times. This language is taken from Scripture (Matthew 16:3), entered theological discourse during the 1960s especially because of its use by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, and now pervades contemporary ecclesiastical discussion (Gomez 1989:365). Vatican II declared in *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), that to carry out its role as a servant "the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 4, Abbott 1962:201-202).

Newbiggin is heavily influenced by Berkhof's discussion (Berkhof 1966:197-205). According to Newbiggin, history forms a coherent whole and Christ is the clue for understanding this universal history. A narration of universal history can be done only by one who sees the point of the story and knows where the story is going. To speak of Christ as the clue to universal history is to say that history finds its meaning in the

revelation of Jesus Christ. Knowing that history will end in a redeemed and restored creation enables us to interpret history and also to participate in God's work.

The problem is a mass of depressing evidence that seems to indicate that the church cannot interpret history. Christians in the 1930s confidently interpreted the rise of the Nazis as God's action on behalf of the German people. Many others at the present time are interpreting the cultural, political, and technological revolutions of the time to be God's work. Newbigin points to a recent debate between H. H. Wolf (1966) and M. M. Thomas (1966). Wolf, drawing on his recent experience of German theological struggles when the church utterly misunderstood Naziism, questions Thomas' discernment of God's work in the renaissance of Asian religions and the modernization of India. Bosch adds many more examples of a misinterpretation of signs: benevolent colonialism, apartheid, national socialism, secularism, communist revolutions (1991:429; cf. Berkhof 1966:201-202).

Newbigin recognizes that there is cause for some caution; yet the question must be pressed: "how can we possibly *refuse* to try to interpret what God is doing in the secular events of our time?" (1969c:81; cf. Berkhof 1966:197-205; Bosch 1991:430). The prophetic message always interpreted the events of their times. Jesus exhorted his hearers to discern the signs of the times. "Whatever be the dangers of this enterprise, are we permitted to abandon it?" (*ibid*).

If one were to abandon interpreting what God is doing in history what would be the alternative? Indeed, if one is to be committed to taking part in the public life of the day it will be on the basis of some interpretation of what is going on. What are the crucial issues? What are the forces at work? To abandon our public duty is a dereliction of duty. One must commit oneself to action in the public realm and this means interpreting history from the standpoint of faith in Jesus Christ.

If history is not a meaningless jumble of events, if God is working out a purpose in it, it is necessary to try to interpret—even if only in very modest, tentative and provisional terms—what he is doing. If we are to know where to act, where to throw our weight, where to commit ourselves, we must have some provisional answer to the question: Where is God at work and where is the Devil? (1969c:82).

The great temptation will be to interpret all successful movements as the work of God. With the benefit of hindsight, however, we can see the error of this way. Many western Christians interpreted the spread of western power around the world as a sign of God's activity. However, this is ambiguous at best. Newbigin asks: What practical content can we give to the faith that God is working out his purpose in history and the clue to this purpose is to be found in Jesus Christ? How are we to interpret God's action in history and so learn to commit ourselves to obedient partnership?" (1969c:83).

Newbigin's answer is vague; it leaves many questions. This ambiguity arises in part from his weak development of the work of the Spirit in world history as noted in earlier chapters. The following quote summarizes the most concrete criteria he gives:

To one who has made that commitment [to Jesus Christ and his church], the disclosure of God in Jesus Christ is determinative of his interpretation of all the events of history. Wherever he sees men being set free for responsible sonship of God; wherever he sees the growth of mutual responsibility of man for man and of people for people; wherever he sees evidence of the character of Jesus Christ being reflected in the lives of men; there he will conclude that God is at work, and that he is summoned to be God's

fellow-worker, even where the Name of Christ is not acknowledged. By contrast, wherever he sees the reverse process at work, men being enslaved, mutual responsibility being denied, and the opposite of the character of Christ being produced in men; there he will recognize the work of the Devil and will know himself summoned to resist. Jesus Christ is the sole criterion (1969c:83-84).

Bosch offers an answer very similar to Newbigin. In fact, Bosch's whole discussion is very close to Newbigin's. Like Newbigin Bosch presses the question of *how* we might interpret the signs of the time (1991:428-431). Many events have been misread by the 20th century church to point of acute embarrassment to those who hailed these signs so enthusiastically. All events are ambiguous and so the gospel must be the *norma normans*, the norming norm. Bosch concludes: "There is not doubt, then. We *have* to interpret the 'signs of the times'" (1991:430). We may err and interpret the events incorrectly; yet we have been given a compass in the gospel. Bosch offers his criterion for interpretation:

We are given some crucial guidelines, some lodestars which indicate God's will and presence in the context. Where people are experiencing and working for justice, freedom, community, reconciliation, unity, and truth, in a spirit of love and selflessness, we may dare to see God at work. Wherever people are being enslaved, enmity between humans is fanned, and mutual accountability is denied in a spirit of individual or communal self-centrism, we may identify the counter-forces of God's reign at work... This enables us to take courage and make decisions, even if they remain relative in nature, ... since our judgements do not coincide with God's final judgement (1991:431).

Yet most events exhibit both tendencies at once. The generality of Bosch's and Newbigin's answers highlight the importance of the need for much more study in this area.

7.4.6. *Justice, Paternalism and Coercion*

In his autobiography, Newbigin relates that what forced him "to think very hard about the Christian approach to social justice" (1993d:211) was his confrontation with a western development worker who organized a small town community to coerce Newbigin to accede to their demands. With hindsight he grants that his pursuit of justice had been too paternalistic. Further, he was sure that "coercion is an inevitable element in securing justice" (*ibid*).

While this kind of coercion was inevitable in securing justice, the problem with the new method of community organization was that it did not link justice to reconciliation. Rather, the method continued to foment dissatisfaction and conflict between the powers and the masses.

This kind of coercion is one thing; the kind of coercion that radical groups in ecumenical circles had opened up was another. An increasingly radical approach to social justice characterized the WCC (Gill 1991:1055). The WCC had given a sum of \$200,000 to an organization that was fighting racism and was known to buy guns and bombs. This action of the WCC caused tremendous shock waves throughout the world. This action brought into sharp focus the important issue that Christians who struggle for social justice cannot evade (Gill 1991:1055-1058). Over the next decade the WCC

struggled with the issue and produced two major reports (WCC 1973; WCC 1983). Does a pursuit of justice require, permit, or forbid the use of violence directed against the established powers? (1971b:262)

The issue of coercion coming from “community organization” and “conscientization methods,” exacerbated by this radical action of the WCC, should have been a catalyst for a deepening reflection on the issue for Newbigin. One would expect to find further reflection on this issue in his writing. However, that is not the case. He reflects on this issue only a couple of times after this and does so quite briefly.

The main Christian tradition affirms that force cannot be used against the established order in the pursuit of justice. This creates the impression among those in need of justice that the church is on the side of the established order. The church is perceived to be a community which does not challenge the political, social, and economic powers. It stands on the side of the powers and will not give up power or challenge the powers on behalf of the victims. Newbigin believes that there is an ambiguity at the very heart of this tradition.

He explicates this ambiguity by comparing the Christian tradition in the area of social action to that of international affairs. Here the main Christian tradition has always supported the idea of a just war. This is because coercion is part of the very nature of political order. While there are good grounds for supporting the established order—even an unjust order is better than anarchy and chaos—questions may be raised when there is an unjust political order that is clearly tyrannical. He concludes:

It seems to me that the main Christian tradition is illogical if it sanctions the just war but refuses, under any circumstances, to sanction the just revolution. It seems to me that the possibility of a just revolution cannot be ruled out *a priori* on the grounds of the main Christian tradition (1971b:263).

Newbigin concludes that coercion and force *may* be a proper instrument in the pursuit of justice. However, he never moves beyond this to wrestle with the kind of circumstances that would justify revolutionary force and even violence (cf. Gill 1991; WCC 1973; WCC 1983).

7.4.7. Deeds of Mercy and Justice Connected to the Local Congregation

As noted above, Newbigin was concerned that deeds of mercy and justice be recognizable as actions of a community that believes and embodies the gospel. During the 1960s numerous ecclesiastical organizations, boards, committees, agencies, and programs—both denominational and inter-denominational—were formed to address burgeoning social needs. Existing alongside of these socially active institutions were bodies formed for church planting and missions. The problem was that these organizations were separated from the local congregations. The life of the ordinary congregation carried on, little affected by any of the agency’s activities (1977a:244). The dichotomy between ordinary congregational life and programs conducted by supra-congregational agencies was disastrous for both the local congregation and the institution’s social program. It was disastrous for the church because, when the life of the congregation is separated from what is done in the name of Christ for the world, the

church loses its self-understanding as a missionary body and reverts to being a community concerned with its own members. The local congregation does not ‘own’ the missional activity; it is the work of some distant agency which carries on the work supported by the offerings of the local churches (1971b:256). Mission is understood to be an activity that continues straight out from the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ into the street and the factory and the office where his righteousness and peace meet the powers of evil. It is not seen that one cannot be an authentic communicant without being committed to action in the world, that what is done in the sanctuary is not a private act for the benefit of the participants but the focus of a public action which is for the whole of society (1977a:244).

The dichotomy is equally disastrous for the social witness of the agency. The proper nature of acts of justice and mercy is blurred when these are not seen to arise out of the fellowship of believers. Deeds of compassion and justice “are nothing in themselves except signs pointing to that greater reality which can never be fully grasped in a programme of social action” (*ibid*). Their proper character as signs of the healing power of the gospel is effectively eliminated when they are cut off from their source in a community that embodies the good news. They become one more socially active program alongside of many others and are no longer a witness to the gospel. They can also “become expressions of a bad conscience and a sense of moral indignation rather than an outflow of the gospel” (*ibid*).

The problem is even more pronounced when the church co-operates with a state social agency. Newbigin believes that there should be co-operation between Christians and governmental agencies. However, if the mercy and compassion was to retain its proper character as a sign of the gospel, the “essential thing is that the congregation as such should be involved. People should be able to see that being a member of a Christian congregation means caring for your neighbours as surely as it means sharing in worship and in the ministry of the Word and sacraments—indeed the Word and sacraments of the gospel are emptied of their meaning if they are not part of the life of a caring congregation” (1994k:36).

In his capacity of bishop of Madras, Newbigin was constantly addressing social needs. He attempted to connect all deeds of mercy and justice to the local congregation. An example of this is evident in a talk given to one of those newly created supra-congregational agencies—the Christian Agency for Social Action (CASA) (1973a). The address unfolds the thesis that the ministry of the CASA should be “to bring about such a fundamental change in the life of the churches that *caring for the community as a whole* becomes an integral element in Church membership” (1973a:543). The task of the CASA is not to be an agency which carries out its task of caring for various social needs within India apart from the local church. Rather it is to co-ordinate the efforts of the local church so that they are recognizable as a body that cares for the *whole* community. The local congregations should be involved in the CASA in at least two ways: the local churches should participate in determining what programs should be developed; and their members should be trained in active caring, specifically as health care and emergency relief workers (1973a:544-545). Social agencies of the church are necessary for enabling the congregation to be more actively involved in the social needs of its neighbourhood. If the CASA replaces that involvement, it truncates the church’s social witness.

Newbigin insisted constantly that a congregation which is a faithful hermeneutic of the gospel “will be a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood” (1989e:229). The twofold relation of the church to God in Christ and to its place calls the church to mercy and justice for the place in which it is set.

With the development of powerful denominational structures, nationwide agencies for evangelism and social action, it can happen that these things are no longer seen as the direct responsibility of the local congregation except insofar as they are called on to support them financially. But if the local congregation is not perceived in its own neighborhood as the place from which good news overflows in good action, the programs for social and political action launched by the national agencies are apt to lose their integral relation to the good news and come to be seen as part of a moral crusade rather than the gospel (1989e:229).

7.4.8. *The Church as Servant Community*

While the image of sign, foretaste (sometimes first-fruit or deposit), and instrument (sometimes agent or task force) of the kingdom dominates Newbigin’s understanding of the church, the image of a ‘servant community’ can be found a number of times throughout his writings of this period (1971b). The image of the church as servant was intimated at Vatican II (1962-1965) but became more central in the years following that council. Similarly a servant ecclesiology marks many ecumenical statements since 1966 (Dulles 1987:92-93). Dulles has treated this ecclesiological model in detail (1987:89-102). Newbigin writes that the “fundamental form” (1968c:131) or “authentic nature” (1971b:261) of the church will always be the form of a servant. The images do not stand in opposition to one another. Rather it is as the congregation is a humble servant of Jesus for the sake of its neighbours that it fulfills its role as first-fruit, sign, and instrument of the reign of God (1974b:89). The primary context in which this image is found is the social task of the church.

Newbigin places before us two Biblical images of service. The first is of the prostitute who visits Jesus while he is a guest of a respectable and devout religious leader. She anoints Jesus’ feet with precious ointment as an overflow of gratitude because Jesus has forgiven and delivered her from sin and restored her to fellowship with God. “In this little picture one has a true image of what service means—the spontaneous overflow of a heart which has been broken and healed, uncalculated, extravagant love poured out at the feet of the Lord” (1972h:153). Service is the response of love to God who has forgiven us; other people are the “authorised representatives of the Master to receive that love” (1972h:154). The second is the well-known story of Jesus stripping, taking a towel and stooping to wash the disciples’ feet. “The church will prove its faithfulness to the Lord when it is seen in the same posture” (1972f:107; 1974b:95).

The church can be criticized for a number of ways it has failed to be a servant in the past. The social activity of the church has not evoked the costly sacrificial service of its ordinary members. Newbigin notes that very few churches have responded to his call to take up one of the slums as its responsibility. The church has sought prestige in society rather than humble service. The church’s social action has been an instrument of condescending charity in solidarity with the existing order rather than the pursuit of

justice in humble identification with the marginalized (1971b:259-260).

Being a servant church means solidarity with the poor and deeds of justice and mercy that flow from love on their behalf (1971b:260). And this is essential to the very nature of the church: "If we are faithful to the New Testament we shall recognize that the care of the poor belongs, along with the Word and the Sacraments, to the fundamental bases of the Church's life" (1969d:20; cf. 1971b:258).

What I am trying to stress is that we are dealing here with something which is not, as it were, one of the possible activities of the church. We cannot say: 'A Church may or may not be active in social service.' A congregation cannot say: 'This Church is not interested in social service: it is interested in something else.' It is not this kind of question we are dealing with. We are dealing with a question which concerns the integrity of the church itself, its fundamental character as a Church.... It is a question of whether the Church in its fundamental character is a servant Church; whether it is possible to have in any valid sense a Christian congregation, or a Christian liturgy, or a Christian ministry in which this concern for the poor is not integrally involved (1971b:260).

This is not a condescending, paternalistic charity. In the past the church has been involved in social work providing charity while entrenched in the established order. When the church is seen as part of the established order rather than on the side of the oppressed "it creates the impression of being a society which accepts, and is content to benefit from the established order, and at the same time to reach out the hand of charity as far as possible to those who are the victims of that order" (1971b:263). Therefore, the time has come when "we must somehow find ways by which the Church as a corporate body in its ordinary life, its liturgy, its ministry, its congregational fellowship can be recognisably a body which is on the side of the oppressed, the rural share-cropper, the coolie, shockingly exploited as he is in the present feudal structure of our village society" (1971b:264).

How can the church take on this servant nature to the exploited in the whole of its life? Newbigin points to the early church as an example. It was able to take solidarity with and justice for the poor into its very congregational life. He points to the office of the diaconate that was concerned for the care of the poor, widows, underprivileged, and marginalized. This brought compassion to the poor into "the very heart of the Church's ministerial life" (1971b:259). As a result of this, care for the poor "penetrated to the very heart of the liturgy" (*ibid.*). The deacon who was responsible throughout the week for the poor, sick and underprivileged stood up at the time of intercession to share the urgent concerns for prayer. He also brought this concern to the heart of the liturgy when, at the point of the Lord's Supper, he collected gifts for the poor and then was responsible for their distribution. The ministry of the deacon also led to a recognition of solidarity of the whole church with the poor. This was so evident, says Newbigin, that the question 'Where is the Church?' or 'Where is Christ actually met now?' was answered, not where the word is truly preached or the sacraments duly administered or where there is a ministry in valid succession from the apostles, but where the poor are served in Christ's name (1971b:260).

7.4.9. The Gathered Congregation and Social Witness: Structures, Leadership, and Worship

If the church is to be a servant church that pursues justice and mercy, there must be structures that enable this service to take place (1971b; 1974b:80f.), leadership that encourages, equips, and leads in deeds of justice and mercy (1974b:74-78, 80; 1971b:261), and a liturgy that nourishes a social vision (1968d:73; 1973b:6; 1974b:81, 98). It is not necessary to expand on these themes since they are taken up elsewhere (6.3, 6.4, 6.5). What is important here is to note that Newbigin links leadership, structures, and worship, on the one hand, with the social witness of the church on the other.

7.5. THE MISSIONARY CALLING OF THE LAITY

While Newbigin distinguishes four different forms of social witness, he did not view them as four equal components in the church's mission. From the earliest years of his ministry (cf. 1952a) until the end of his life (cf. 1995b), Newbigin insisted that the mission of believers in the world of culture is the primary place where the church's missionary engagement takes place (1989e:139). During his bishopric in Madras he expressed this conviction clearly:

I do not believe that the role of the Church in a secular society is primarily exercised in the corporate action of the churches as organized bodies in the political or cultural fields.... On the contrary, I believe that it is through the action of Christian lay people, playing their roles as citizens, workers, managers, legislators, etc., not wearing the label 'Christian' but deeply involved in the secular world in the faith that God is at work there in a way which is *not* that of the 'Christendom' pattern (1972a:127).

Newbigin's stress on the callings of individual believers in the world is not unique. He developed his position in the context of the ecumenical tradition's growing emphasis on the laity. J. H. Oldham and the Oxford World Conference on Church, Community, and State in 1937, the establishment of lay academies throughout Europe after 1945, the founding of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in 1946 led by Suzanne de Dietrich and Hendrick Kraemer, the establishment of WCC Department on the Laity in 1955 led by secretary Hans-Reudi Weber, and important books by Kraemer (1958) and Yves Congar (1957) on the laity and the church—all these are highlights in this growing concern for the laity that shaped Newbigin. The remainder of this section will be devoted to explicating Newbigin's understanding of the calling of believers in the world.

7.5.1. *Ecclesiological Foundations*

To speak of 'the missionary calling of the laity' as one of the sub-sections of 'the witness of the church' raises certain ecclesiological questions (Kraemer 1958:12, 155-160; Congar 1957). The church has been traditionally understood as a gathered community that engages in cultic or "religious" rituals, neglecting the fact that the majority of its life and work takes place outside the bounds of this institutional and gathered expression. Newbigin's understanding of the church goes a long way to healing this split.

Newbigin always places the church in an eschatological context. The gospel is a

gospel of the kingdom and the kingdom involves God's rule over all of creational life. His two most common ways of describing the church highlight that the church must be understood in the context of the kingdom. The most common way he describes the church is with the terms sign, instrument (or agent), and first fruit (sometimes deposit or foretaste) of the kingdom (5.2.3.). The formal definition that he often gives of the church points to the same thing even more clearly. "The church is the provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ" (5.2.2.; 1973c:111; 1994k:53).

Both of these descriptions of the church point to the fact that Newbigin does not understand the church simply as a religious community gathered to engage in certain religious rituals. Rather the church is the new humankind which already shares in the life of the kingdom of God and that life spans the whole of human affairs. He comments: "... the Holy Spirit is present in the believing congregation both gathered for praise and the offering up of spiritual sacrifice, and scattered throughout the community to bear the love of God into every secular happening and meeting" (1987b:4). The local congregation has two expressions—gathered and scattered.

Newbigin challenges the professionalization and clericalization of the Christendom church that understands the work of the church to be centred in the work of the clergy. Newbigin explains,

When men say 'The Church should go into educational work', they mean that the Church as an organized body should employ and pay teachers. But if thousands of Church members are teaching in the schools of the nation that is not regarded as 'Church work', we have largely lost the great Biblical conception of the Church as the Body of Christ through whose *entire* membership the Lord wills to do His will in the world. When we speak of the Church's evangelistic force, we generally mean its force of paid evangelists. But that is a caricature of the truth. The Church's evangelistic force is—or ought to be—its entire membership, nothing less (1952a: 185).

Yet Newbigin is not consistent with this insight. This can be highlighted by reference to the discussion of the church by New Testament scholar Herman Ridderbos and by James Skillen's critique of Newbigin's language of 'lay theology.' In Scripture the term *ecclesia* can refer to the community that is the new humankind and to an identifiable congregation that gathers for worship. The New Testament scholar Herman Ridderbos has noted that the word *ecclesia* is used in three different ways. The first refers to the new people of God in the totality of their lives as the re-constitution of humankind in Jesus Christ. As such its life comes to expression in the totality of its life and not only as it gathers for worship. The second use of 'church' refers to local identifiable congregations. These congregations are organized as communities and are recognizable as a human community in a certain place. The third use of the word *ecclesia* points to a community gathered for certain "religious" activities—worship, prayer, sacraments, and so forth (Ridderbos 1975:328-330). It is the first of these definitions of the church that the Evanston Assembly employs in an attempt to redefine the church as the new humankind over against long established patterns of ecclesial definition that reduce the church to a community that engages in cultic acts: "... the laity are not mere fragments of the church who are scattered about in the world and who come together again for worship, instruction, and specifically Christian fellowship on Sundays. They are the church's representatives, no matter where they are" (Evanston 1954:161). As the new humankind reconstituted in Jesus Christ, it comes to expression in the totality of their

lives not only when it gathers for worship, prayer, and fellowship. As such it is the church both when it is gathered and when it is scattered (Evanston 1954:161). It is this fundamental ecclesiological conviction that shapes Newbigin's commitment to the importance of the witness of believers in the totality of their lives as an important dimension of the missionary church. It may be asked, however, whether Newbigin is always consistent. Sometimes Newbigin follows the more traditional and common understanding and limits his use of the word church to the gathered local institutional expression and falls into the trap of seeing the laity as a fragment of the church scattered about in the world.

We find a clear example of the reduction of the church to the gathered, organized body in Newbigin's discussion about the laity. This comment is not simply an unfortunate statement that stands in tension with his normal use of the word 'church'; it highlights the way Newbigin often employed the term 'church.' He comments that the activities of believers in their individual callings are "in the line of God's will as revealed in Christ but... fall outside of the boundaries of that body explicitly committed to Christ by faith and baptism" (1967d:6). In this statement, the boundaries of the *ecclesia* do not extend to the church as it is scattered in the world of culture. Yet if the church is conceived as the new humankind, *ecclesia* is the people of God in the whole of life; no activity falls outside the boundaries of that body explicitly committed to Christ.

James Skillen is critical of Newbigin's use of the terms 'lay' men and women and 'lay' theology. He notes that when the apostle Paul addresses believers, he does so in their capacities as husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, or citizens who live under the authority of Jesus Christ in their various callings. He does not address them as 'lay men or women', implying that their "identity in those roles is as ecclesiastical non-professionals" (Skillen 1996:17). By contrast, Skillen believes that "the words 'lay person' should be a designation applied to church members who do not hold ecclesiastical office, and should not be used to describe the roles people have in nonecclesiastical areas of life" (:18). Skillen distinguishes between the church as an instituted local congregation and the church as the new humankind. He believes that Newbigin confuses these two by reference to 'lay' men and women, and 'lay' theology.⁶

It must be noted again that while this inconsistent use of the term 'church' and 'lay' person can confuse issues, Newbigin's primary ecclesiological thrust militates against defining the church merely as a gathered, organized religious institution. His emphasis on salvation as restorative in nature and comprehensive in scope, on the calling of the laity, and on the relationship of the church to the kingdom all finally prevent Newbigin's understanding of the church from being reduced to its gathered expression. While Newbigin may not always have been consistent with this theological insight concerning the church, it is clear that his primary understanding of the *ecclesia* is shaped by the broad scope of the coming kingdom. The believers at work in their

⁶Herman Ridderbos makes a similar point: "Today there is much discussion of the "neglected office" (i.e. the office of *all* believers and of the problem of the *laity*. There would be, in my view, less confusion on this issue if it were seen that this office of all believers is not confined within the limits of the institutional church but that it penetrates every area of life. And there would be less need to speak about the *problem* of the laity if the communal activity of the believers in the world were also viewed as an expression, *Gestaltung*, of the church" (1965:27).

various callings is the church at work.

7.5.2. *Mission of the Laity as Focal Point*

The mission of believers in the world is the focal point of the church's mission (Kraemer 1958:136-138). It is in the context of the various callings of each member of the body that "the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given" (1960b:28), because the "enormous preponderance of the Church's witness is the witness of the thousands of its members who work in field, home, office, mill or law court" (1951b:6; 1982e:2; cf. Moltmann 1975:66-67).

The primary mission of the laity is not to evangelize or even manifest the gospel in personal-ethical categories—although these are not excluded. It is much deeper than that: it is in the obedient exercise of their jobs in keeping with God's creational intent that they show themselves to be servants living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (1963g:57). The believer living under the Lordship of Christ in business or factory or government witnesses to "the true purpose for which God created [those structures]." To accept the existing structures as they are would be "to deny Christ's cosmic lordship" (1963g:57). We catch a glimpse of this in the sermon Newbigin delivered when he was installed as bishop of Madras. He reminded the church that "Christ is not just the Lord of Christians; he is Lord of all, absolutely and without qualification." Therefore, "the entire membership of the Church in their secular occupations are called to be signs of his lordship in every area of life" (1993h:203). Newbigin offers an example from Archbishop William Temple to illustrate this.

... a farmer who farms his land well but neglects to say his prayers will be certainly condemned by Christians as failing in his duty. But a farmer who says his prayers, and allows weeds, bad drainage, or soil erosion to spoil his land, is failing in his primary duty as a churchman. His primary ministry in the total life of the Body of Christ is to care rightly for the land entrusted to him. If he fails there, he fails in his primary Christian task (1952a:186).

Newbigin's concern for the calling of individual believers in the public square is a long standing one. As a student in Cambridge, his disappointment with the SCM's practice of simply emphasizing the ordained ministry as the primary place of Christian service led him to form a 'Christians in Business' society. This group was to provide a forum for Christians who were entering business to struggle with what it meant to be faithful to the gospel in that sector of life (1993h:17). As a newly appointed bishop he expressed the conviction that if the church in Asia was to become a missionary church it must attend to "the task of training Christian laymen to be effective Christians within their own special vocations." He continues, "We have to help the church member be a Christian *in his job*" (1950:144, italics his). A year later in his address to the diocese he outlined the four most pressing needs facing the church in India. Since the most important witness of the gospel will be done by believers in their various callings in the world— "the Church's front-line troops in her engagement with the world" (1951:6)—much more time must be given to equipping these people. As a veteran missionary he expressed the concern that the mission of the church in society had been reduced to the maintenance of educational, healing and service institutions. This narrow focus led to the "deep-seated and persistent failure of the churches to recognize that the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given, and can only be given, in

the ordinary secular work of lay men and women in business, in politics, in professional work, as farmers, factory workers and so on” (1960b:27f.; cf. 1965f:10). In response to the urging of Hendrik Kraemer, Newbigin established a study centre in Madurai whose task was *inter alia* to equip the church’s lay membership for its “secular witness” (1993h:118-119).

His time in Geneva coincided with a growing interest in the calling of believers in the world fuelled by the breakdown of the *corpus Christianum* and growing secularism. In 1954 the department of the laity had been established in the WCC. By the New Delhi assembly of the WCC in 1961 the laity had become a central issue (New Delhi 1962:18-19, 85-90, 202-207). This led to a deepening conviction on his part of the centrality of the witness of believers in the world. When he returned to India as bishop of Madras these deepening convictions begin to emerge and find expression. He describes his earlier understanding of mission as being “too narrowly ecclesiastical.” At his installation service he preached Christ as Lord of all of life insisting that “the entire membership of the Church in their secular occupations are called to be signs of this lordship in every area of public life” (1993h:203). As bishop he understood his task to equip believers for this task and, indeed, this continued to be a major preoccupation during this time. He urged structural reforms that would equip all believers for their calling (1952a:187-189).

His return to the West did not dampen this concern. In fact, a major pillar in his call for a missionary engagement with the public square of Western culture was the calling of individual believers (1983d:41f.; 1986e:141-144; 1989e:229-231; 1994k:156, 174). Newbigin continues to refer to this dimension of the church’s mission as “primary” (1994:154); “Here is where the real missionary encounter takes place” (1986e:143). And so he writes:

There is urgent need for the Church to give higher priority to the formation of groups of Christian men and women in particular sectors of public life. These would include education, industry, commerce, politics, drama, the arts, the natural and social sciences, and historical studies. The groups would explore ways in which a Christian perspective can be developed in these areas, and ways in which this perspective can challenge and redirect contemporary practice (1994k:174).

In the third lecture he gave at Western Seminary he outlines three concrete points to enable the church to “speak the truth to Caesar.” It is the third that many today in North America are emphasizing. His third point calls for the church to challenge the public life of Western culture by itself being an embodiment of the new order of the kingdom. The other two points have to do with the calling of individual believers in culture. First “... it must be the responsibility of the Church to equip its members for active and informed participation in public life in such a way that the Christian faith shapes that participation” (1991h:81). “Second, if such training were widely available we could look for a time when many of those holding responsible positions of leadership in public life were committed Christians equipped to raise the questions and make innovations in these areas which the gospel requires” (1991h:84).

7.5.3. *Callings in Culture: Faithfulness and Suffering*

When the Christian is faithful in living the story of the gospel in his or her calling,

suffering will be the result. How integral suffering is to the witness of the church can be seen in the following statement: “The closeness of our missionary thinking to the New Testament may perhaps be in part judged by the place which we accord to suffering in our understanding of the calling of the Church” (1964g:42). In the missionary encounter between the gospel and culture, there is a clash of fundamental assumptions. In any encounter with anti-Christian beliefs that shape a culture, there are three possibilities: withdrawal: “running away from real duties for fear of compromising”; accommodation: “acquiescing in the preventable evils because they appear to be part of the structure of the secular world”; or faithfulness and suffering (1952a:188).

This encounter with anti-Christian ideological or religious beliefs is especially acute in the public square where the believer works. In a series of Bible studies on 1 Peter, Newbigin contrasts the world of business driven by the profit motive with an understanding of business shaped by the gospel. He poses a number of questions to illustrate this antithesis in the realm of business. Does a Christian employee in a store persuade his customers to buy worthless products on orders from his employer or challenge the firm and risk his livelihood? Does a businessman challenge the whole standard of business ethics if it is wrong and risk status and livelihood? How does a businessman relate the sermon on the mount to the fiercely competitive market? All these examples differ but the point is the same: obedience to the Lord of economics and business will be costly. He comments, “... if we take seriously our duty as servants of God within the institutions of human society, we shall find plenty of opportunity to learn what it means to suffer for righteousness’ sake, and we shall learn that to suffer for righteousness’ sake is really a blessed thing” (1960b:112; cf. 1980d:10).

7.5.4. The Need for the Church Community

Newbigin’s emphasis on the work of the church as it is dispersed does not diminish the importance of the church as it is gathered as a community—in fact, it highlights its significance (1952a:188; cf. Congar 1957:309-332). The witness of believers in their callings in the world requires a faithful fellowship of believers. One can feel the passion of his concern in the following questions he poses to his fellow church leaders early in his first bishopric.

Are we taking seriously our duty to support them in their warfare? Do we seriously regard them as the front-line troops?... What about the scores of Christians working in offices and shops in that part of the city? Have we ever done anything seriously to strengthen their Christian witness, to help them in facing the very difficult ethical problems which they have to meet every day, to give them the assurance that the whole fellowship is behind them in their daily spiritual warfare? (1951b:6; cf. 1952a:187).

In his writings on the calling of individual believers we find at least four different ways that the local instituted church equips, supports, and nourishes the church in its task in the world.

The first is a fellowship that nourishes the life of Christ through the Word, sacraments, and prayer (1974b:79-81). This has been treated above.

The second is a fellowship that supports all believers in their callings (1952a:188). Those who dissent from the reigning plausibility structure in different sectors will run

risks. A “corollary” of the call for the mission of the laity is that there are ways “in which Christians can stand by one another and support one another in taking the risks that are involved in radically questioning the reigning assumptions that control the different sectors of our culture” (1994j:10). In his discussion of the believer engaged in business who joins the battle with powers that oppose the gospel he comments:

There are existential decisions which must be taken from time to time in the midst of the battle by those who are actually engaged in the battle and who will pay the price of the decision. But they are not decisions which ought to be taken in solitude. We ought not to ask each Christian in solitude to bear the burden of the real front line warfare.... the Church must find ways of expressing its solidarity with those who stand in these frontier situations, who have to make decisions that may cost not only their own livelihood but also that of their families (1960a:111).

He never spells out explicitly what forms of support this might take but the context of his discussions suggest that this would include at least encouragement, prayer, financial support, and insight (1952a:188).

The third are structures that equip the body of Christ for their tasks. In a lecture at the founding assembly of the EACC, Newbigin argues that if the church is to embody her missionary calling at least three bold structural experiments were urgent: in forms of ministry, in equipping lay members for their different “secular” callings, and in forms of congregational life (1960o:30-33). Bold experiments were necessary because existing congregational structures that dominated the western church were shaped in a time when Christianity had ceased to be a missionary religion (1966b:102).

During his early years as a missionary Newbigin points to three things. The first is what he calls a church meeting—a creative structural innovation to connect the worship life of the church with the missional calling of the laity in culture.⁷ The church or congregational meeting was a familiar gathering in the Indian church and was being revived in Britain and the U.S.A. at this time. Newbigin calls for a missional restructuring of this meeting. So conceived, a church meeting is “a gathering of God’s anointed people, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to find out together what witness and service He wants of them from week to week, as individuals and a body” (1951c:5). In each congregation once a month the communicant members should meet after Holy Communion *inter alia* to share experiences of God’s grace in their daily lives, to bring forward problems that various members face as they witness to Christ’s kingdom in the course of their daily callings, and to discuss areas in which the whole fellowship may give special witness (1951:5). The second was a study centre that would carry out research and training in social and political issues in light of the gospel. This missiological analysis of Indian culture would provide resources that would equip Christians in their callings in public life (1993h:119). Third, other initiatives were launched in the way of conferences and meetings that enabled “laymen” in different professions to consider together what God was calling them to do at the national and local level (1952a:187-189).

In his later bishopric in Madras, when the callings of the laity were the centre of attention and when Newbigin himself gave much more attention to the social calling of

⁷It is important to note that the discussion of the church meeting falls between sections entitled ‘The Only Source of the Church’s Life—the Gospel’ and ‘The Layman in the World.’

the church, suggestions of and experiments with structural features that would support believers in their individual callings increased. Newbigin recognized that in a highly differentiated society more is required than a parish church. He proposed different structures to equip believers: training leadership for industrial workers; 'Cottage Prayer Meetings' revamped to equip the laity; small group ecumenical Bible studies formed on the basis of specialized expertise; "frontier studies" i.e., discussion and study groups of people in particular callings such as those of lawyer, doctor, businessperson, government servant, teacher, professional administrator; small groups formed around a concern for action in some particular sector of public life; a Community Service Centre that co-ordinated and organized the task of training men and women for witness in their daily work (1974b:40, 76-77, 80-81, 90, 102-103).

This concern continued during the later years of Newbigin's life when he called for a missionary encounter with western culture. He continued to urge the church to search for structures that would equip the believer for his or her calling in the world (1980f:64-67; 1986e:143; 1994k:73, 154, 156, 174). "There is a need for 'frontier groups,' groups of Christians working in the same sectors of public life, meeting to thrash out the controversial issues of their business or profession in the light of their faith" (1989e:230-231). He went on to explain: "I am thinking of groups of men and women in—say—a particular profession, or a particular sector of commerce or industry or in one of the sectors of education or politics, who can wrestle on the basis of direct personal involvement with the claims of Christian obedience in particular situations, who can share experiences of the grace of God in this wrestling, who can pray and worship together out of the midst of these shared experiences. I believe that, in our kind of society, such groups will have to be the basic units of the church if it is to be a sign to the world of the reign of God in Jesus" (1980d:6). Closely related to this was Newbigin's persistent call for a "theology of secular work" (1952a:188), a "declericalized theology" (1985a:7; 1986e:141; 1994k:73), or "lay theology" (1994j:10). In 1952 Newbigin defined this as "corporate thinking of trained theologians and laymen in different areas of life" (1952a:188). The dualistic way of approaching Scripture had eroded any foundation upon which the mission of the laity could rest. This created an urgent need to struggle with Scripture's teaching on the calling of the laity.

The fourth aspect of the gathered church's life that supports the callings of the laity is a leadership that enables (1989e:231).

For the Christian layman who is really out in the world, really seeking to be subject for the Lord's sake to the human institutions about which we are speaking, the political order, the economic order and so forth, really seeking to face the desperate difficult decisions that this involves, seeking to bear on his heart the obligation of his participation in these orders, to keep his conscience both sharp and clear, this man knows that he needs one thing: he needs a true pastor (1960b:118f).

A leadership that equips believers for their tasks in the world is a frequent theme in Newbigin's writings (cf. Bosch 1991:472; Moltmann 1977:303). In the above section on leadership, we have noted that Newbigin suggested that ministers can support people in their daily callings with the word (interpreting God's purposes for that time; offer of forgiveness; cf. 1982e:2) and sacraments, through prayer (1960b:119; 1962h:5), and by providing space and structures for people to struggle together toward faithfulness. In his sermons to pastors, as bishop of Madras, Newbigin exhorts the presbyters under his care

to give high priority to training people in their congregations for their callings in the world. Only half of the pastor's work is to gather the people together for worship. "The other half is to send them back to their daily tasks equipped to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If we forget this second part, the other can be positively dangerous" (1974b:80). He exhorts the pastors, "we ought not to be content until we can honestly say that we are helping every member of the Church to fulfill his ministry in the secular world" (1974b:77).

At the most sophisticated level we have to think of our task in a city like Madras to train our lay members who are playing key roles in the life of government, business, and the professions to become ministers of Christ in these secular situations. All of this is involved in our calling and ordination. It is for this purpose that we have set up such institutions as the Community Service Centre, in order that there may be opportunities for Christians in various secular callings to learn how they can become effective ministers of Christ in their daily work (1974b:76).

7.6. MISSIONS: CREATING A WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL WHERE THERE IS NONE

One aspect of the all-embracing mission of the church is missions. Missions are intentional activities undertaken by the church to create a Christian presence in places where there is no such presence or no effective presence (1989e:121). Newbigin often used the phrase 'missionary enterprise' synonymously with missions. This section will examine this dimension of the church's mission.

7.6.1. *Missions in the 20th Century: Context for Newbigin's Reflections*

The missionary advance of the church during the 19th and 20th centuries was shaped by colonialism. The rise of Islam in the 7th century effectively encapsulated the Christian faith on the European sub-continent for 800 years, isolating Europe from Asia, Africa, and America. It was during this time that Christendom developed its characteristic forms of life and thought. The Christian faith became fused with political, cultural, social, economic, military, and religious elements in one theocratic system. It was in the Iberian peninsula in the 15th and 16th centuries that the Roman Catholic nations of Spain and Portugal gained enough strength to break out of the encircling power of Islam. Geographical expansion proceeded with the Spanish and Portuguese explorers, soldiers, political agents, merchants, and missionaries who saw themselves as representatives of one theocratic power. Missions were intertwined with this colonialist, expansionist enterprise. By the beginning of the 19th century the Protestant nations of northern Europe were ready to join the quest in earnest. In the intervening time the Enlightenment had swept Europe, eroding the foundations of Christendom and putting a more economic interpretation on colonial expansion. With the separation of church and state, mission societies replaced political authorities and the Pope as the primary initiator of missions. Missions continued, however, to proceed along the lines of economic power, cultural prestige, and political influence from the Christian nations of the West to the non-Christian nations in the rest of the world. During the 25-year period from 1878-1914 European countries seized more than 10 million square miles of land and subjugated a half billion people in Asia and Africa. Thus over a period of 400 years

the nations of western Europe, along with their overseas daughters, in effect imposed not only their political rule and commercial dominance, but also their religion on the rest of humankind. Missions in the minds of many church members continue to be associated with this unidirectional, expansionist enterprise.

Many factors have combined in the 20th century to make this understanding of mission obsolete. The first is decolonization. Beginning in 1947 on the Indian sub-continent and continuing through the next two decades, virtually every nation under European colonial rule gained its independence. Second, the growth of the third world church and the crisis of the church in the West challenged the unidirectional flow of mission from the Christian West to the non-Christian non-West. Third, the growth of global unity challenged the idea of a frontier that beckoned missionaries to regions beyond. Fourth, this global unity was shaped by the influence of western modernity. The division of this united global world into developed and undeveloped nations spawned the concept of development. Development projects replaced the traditional picture of the missionary sent to unknown lands to preach the gospel. Finally, the new situation in the Western 'sending' countries challenged traditional missions. As the Enlightenment permeated the West, three things resulted that eroded the missionary enterprise: the loss of confidence in the gospel, the dissolution of Christendom, and the chronic guilty conscience about years of imperialism.

At the Willingen conference of the IMC (1952) Max Warren told the assembly: "We have to be ready to see the day of missions, as we have known them, as having already come to an end" (Warren, in Goodall 1953:40). Speaking to the Ghana Assembly of the IMC (1958), Walter Freytag spoke of 'the lost directness' of missions (Freytag, in Orchard 1958:142-143). In the former paradigm missions was conceived as taking the gospel to nations who had not heard it. With the emergence of churches in every part of the world, missions could not be understood in the same way. A review of 20th-century ecumenical and mission history—especially from the middle of the century—reveals the western church attempting to come to terms with this new situation.

7.6.2. *Newbiggin's Involvement in 20th-Century Missions*

While Newbiggin was an author, Biblical expositor, theologian, ecumenical leader and statesman, as well as apologist, his most fundamental self-identity was that of a missionary (1993d:113; 1998d:x). For ten years (1936-1946) Newbiggin was a district missionary in Kanchipuram followed by a thirteen year tenure as bishop of Madurai in the CSI. During this time he was actively involved in global leadership for the missionary movement. His writings manifest a continuing reflection on the place of missions in the mission of the church (1933; 1945; 1950). His twenty-three years of missionary experience, his involvement in global leadership, and his reflection on missions placed Newbiggin in a favourable position to play a central role in the redefinition of missions for which the changing circumstances called. In 1959 he was called to be the General Secretary of the IMC and for the next six years, in that position and later as Director of the CMWE of the WCC, he provided global leadership for "missionary planning and policy" (1993h:158). Already in 1958 he authored the document *One Body, One Gospel, One World* that functioned as a manifesto in the

ecumenical tradition, consolidating the gains made in the theology of missions during the 20th century and offering missions a way forward that was untainted by the colonial paradigm. This document outlined a new vision for missions that not only shaped Newbiggin's views for the remainder of his life, but also heavily influenced the whole missionary tradition. As might be expected, it was during his years in the IMC and WCC that Newbiggin turned his attention to the problems of missions. While Newbiggin continued to uphold missions as an essential dimension of the church's missionary witness throughout his entire life, his most detailed reflection on missions takes place over this six-year period. This must be kept in mind as this section proceeds. While much of his reflection on missions is surprisingly relevant almost three decades later, his primary reflection on missions was done in the 1960s. He occasionally returned to the subject but other issues occupied his attention in later years (e.g., social mission in Madras; mission in Western culture and religious pluralism in Britain).

Newbiggin's oft-repeated dictum that "history is a conversation between the present and the past about the future" is certainly appropriate for the way he treated the subject of missions (1974b:129; 1977d). While many in the ecumenical family of the missionary tradition were quite ready to trash the past and the old as irrelevant, Newbiggin was concerned to preserve the faithfulness of a past generation and build on their insights for a new time (1962j:90). The loss of the past would mean conformity to new cultural spirits. His own assessment of the colonial past balances a critique of the distortions while firmly preserving the faithful legacy. The 19th century was both a time of "great achievements" and "unspeakable horrors" (1977d:210; 1962j:90; 1970c:173; 1993f:1-6).

7.6.3. New Symbol for Missions: One Body with One Gospel for the Whole World

With the colonialist paradigm of missions crumbling, the most urgent issue was the way forward. Newbiggin refers to two wrong courses (1958b:10f.; 1977d:210f.; 1986a:1f.). The first was the path that many in the ecumenical tradition were taking. These had become so embarrassed and ashamed of the arrogant imperialism of the earlier period that missions were replaced by ecumenism and interchurch aid, and missionaries by fraternal workers. The second was the path that many evangelicals were taking. An escape from the uncertainty was available by going backwards and recapturing the methods and attitudes of the 19th century. Over against the rejection of missions in the ecumenical tradition and the retrenchment of missions in the 19th century paradigm in the evangelical tradition, Newbiggin advocated a new pattern that is both founded on a biblical and theological foundation and takes account of the present reality (1958b:11-12; cf. Bassham 1979:44-45).

What is needed "above all" is "a vision, a symbol, a myth" of missions that is rooted in Scripture, that is in keeping with the present situation, and that evokes from Christians a faithful and obedient response to God's call to make the gospel known (1958b:12). The image of 'regions beyond,' graphically depicted in Livingstone's picture of the smoke of a thousand villages that had never heard the gospel, provided a fitting symbol for a world that was in the process of being opened up to Europe during the age of discovery. "The traditional picture of the missionary enterprise has been of the lonely pioneer going out from the secure citadel of Christendom into the world of

heathendom. Today the picture must be redrawn” (1994k:12; speech given in 1960). Newbigin offers the following symbol: “The whole Church, with one Gospel of reconciliation for the whole world” (1958b:12). Stated in another way, he says: “The first and fundamental thing that needs to be said about the pattern of the Christian missionary enterprise is that we must recover the sense that it is the enterprise of the whole Church of God in every land, directed towards the whole world in which it is put” (1994k:11).

There are two important facts that have led to this new formulation. First, the Christian church is no longer confined to one small part of the world but is global in its extension. Second, the Biblical truth has been rediscovered “that the mission is not a detachable part of the Church’s being, but is the central meaning of the Church’s being” (1994k:12). Thus both the ‘home base’ and the ‘mission field’ are everywhere.

This new symbol displays a number of facets. First, the missionary nature of the church means that the gospel has been entrusted to that community and must be communicated. Second, it is entrusted to the “whole church” not simply to some in that community who take it as their task to carry on the missionary enterprise. Third, since the gospel is universally valid—“one gospel of reconciliation for the whole world”—this task cannot be restricted simply to the neighbourhood in which the church is located but is to be “directed towards the whole world.” Fourth, since the church which is missionary by its nature is now “in every land”, this responsibility rests on the church in every place. Fifth, the task of communicating the gospel is the task of the “whole church” working together in partnership.

7.6.4. Fundamental Starting Point for Missions: The Church as Missionary

The starting point for Newbigin’s thinking about missions in a new time is the *missio Dei* and the missionary nature of the church (1958b:17-24; 1977d:213-215; 1994k:11f.).

Many of the themes that have been developed in the preceding chapters articulate the context in which Newbigin thinks about the missionary enterprise. Two are important in the present context. First, since the mission of the Triune God extends to the ends of the earth, so does the mission of the church. Second, since the church is by nature both local and ecumenical, its mission will be both in its own neighbourhood and to the ends of the earth. It is necessary in this context to articulate the implications of Newbigin’s missionary ecclesiology for a new vision of missions.

First, the church is mission; mission societies separate from the local eucharist community are not the primary missionary bodies. Second, each congregation is missionary by its very nature; thus each congregation has a share in the missionary task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Third, each of the younger churches is likewise missionary by its very nature; therefore each of these younger churches is responsible for participating in the missionary task to the ends of the earth. Fourth, each of the younger churches is responsible for being the mission for their particular neighbourhood; western missions may not bypass these churches but rather must work in partnership with them to carry out the missionary task.

7.6.5. Missions as an Indispensable Part of the Mission of the Church

In a day when mission defined everything the church did, Newbigin believed that it was essential “to identify and distinguish the specific foreign missionary task within the total mission of the Church” (1960i:23).

Four initial things may be said about Newbigin’s distinction. First, missions are *narrower* than mission. Mission is concerned with all that God has sent the church into the world to do, while missions are one part of that task. Second, missions are a *necessary* part of the total mission of the church. “This task is not the whole of the Church’s mission, but it is an essential part of it” (1960i:23). Third, the specific nature of missions is concerned with intentional activities to take the gospel to places where the gospel is not known. Reproducing a few of those definitions will clarify his understanding. “Missions must concentrate on the specifically missionary intention of bringing the Gospel to those who have not heard it and this must be directed to all six continents” (1993h:185). “The abiding factor in missions is the intention to go outside the existing areas of Christian belief in order to bear witness to Christ and invoke faith in Him where faith did not exist” (1960g:60). “Missions [are] particular enterprises within the total mission which have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective” (1982b:149). The operative word is “intention.” The whole of the life of the church has a missionary dimension, but there are intentional activities that aim at the communication of the gospel in places where it is not known. Fourth, missions are finished when an authentic witness to the gospel has been established (1977d:216). This does not mean that the total mission of the church has been accomplished. The mission of the church continues where missions has completed its work successfully.

Newbigin finds support for this understanding of missions in the book of Acts. The scattering of believers from the Jerusalem church under heavy persecution produced an enormous missionary expansion (Acts 8). There was, however, no missionary intention on the part of the church. In Acts 13:2, 3 we find something different. The church in Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and “sent them off” to preach the gospel among the gentiles. The missionary intention is fundamental and so this text constitutes “the central New Testament paradigm for missions” (1982b:150). The church in Antioch was a witnessing community growing by spontaneous expansion (Acts 11:19-26) with a life of compassion that embodied the gospel (Acts 11:27-30). However, the Spirit moved the church to set aside some men for the specific purpose of taking the gospel to a place where it was not known. The continuing story of Acts shows that when Paul has established an authentic witness to the gospel in a place, he moved on and, as it were, said “You are now the mission in this place.”

When the church was located predominantly in western countries, missions necessarily crossed a geographical or cultural frontier to make the gospel known. Today, however, the church exists in every part of the world and the *differentium* can no longer be exclusively geographical. The *differentium* that entitles an activity to be called missions does not lie in the crossing of a geographical frontier but it lies in crossing “the frontier between faith in Christ as Lord and unbelief” (1958b:29). Today missions must be defined as “activities directed to the task of bringing into existence an authentic witness to Christ in situations (whether defined geographically, ethnically, culturally, or otherwise) where such witness is absent” (1977d:216). An example that

Newbigin gives of missions that is not defined geographically is missions to industry. It is instructive to see how Newbigin compares the learning of the language and the *adat* of industry with the way a traditional missionary learned the language and culture of a people in a geographically distant area (1974b:100-102).

This does not mean that the geographical dimension is no longer important for missions. There are two fundamental reasons for this. First, the essence of the gospel is concerned with the ends of the earth and the end of the world. The gospel is not simply a local story concerned with one strand in the human story; rather it is concerned with the whole meaning and end of creation. Therefore, mission is rightly carried out when it is concerned with the ends of the earth and the end of the world. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). The mission of the church may not be confined to the immediate neighbourhood although it must begin there. Mission looks to the end of the world and the redemption of all nations. This must be the ultimate horizon of the church's mission. Therefore, foreign missions—the crossing of geographical boundaries to make Christ known—will always be part of the church's mission.

The significance of this can be seen in the distinction Newbigin makes in an address to the general assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (1960). He distinguishes between mission and missions; mission is concerned with everything that the church is sent into the world to do and missions is the concern that in places where there are no Christians there should be. But he continues:

And let us narrow the concern down still further and say that within the concept of missions there is still the narrower concern which we call—or used to call—Foreign Missions—which is the concern that Jesus should be acknowledged as Lord by the whole earth (1960i:23).

The horizon of the ends of the earth will be essential if the church is to be missionary (1958b:27). While "the church is mission, we still need 'missions' in order that it may be truly so.... this is not in order to relieve the rest of the church of missionary responsibility but to ensure that its whole life is missionary" (1982b:149).

This emphasis on the nature of missions as 'mission to the ends of the earth' plays a central role in Newbigin's understanding of mission. When missions is defined in this way, it is not simply another part of mission that stands alongside other parts. Missions is the ultimate horizon of the whole missionary task of the church. Mission begins in the neighbourhood of the local congregation but by the very nature of that missionary task it moves to the ends of the earth. Mission without missions is an emaciated and distorted concept. As Newbigin puts it: "The Church's mission is concerned with the ends of the earth. When that dimension is forgotten, the heart goes out of the whole business" (1958b:27). Missions is mission carried out faithfully toward its ultimate horizon—the ends of the earth.

The ends of the earth means something different today than it meant in the last century. When Christians were primarily congregated in western countries, the ends of the earth meant the 'regions beyond', in the non-West. With the development of the church into a world-wide fellowship this perspective is invalidated. Today when the home base is in every part of the world, the perspective must change to that of the

world-wide church. The ends of the earth must be seen from the standpoint of the local church wherever it is in the world (1958b:27-29). Missions will mean *to, from, and in* all six continents.

The second reason that the geographical dimension remains fundamental to missions is that it is of the very nature of the gospel that we must hear it from someone else and when the gospel is spoken out of another culture, it often comes with new and fresh power (1958b:30). There is always the danger that the gospel will be domesticated within a certain culture and lose its proper strangeness and power to question us. Faithfulness to the “universal, supranational, supracultural” nature of the gospel demands that the gospel cross cultural frontiers.

The affirmation that Jesus is *Lumen Gentium*, the light of the nations, is in danger of being mere words unless its value is being tested in actual encounters of the gospel with all the nations, so that the gospel comes back to us in the idiom of other cultures with power to question our understanding of it. In this sense the foreign missionary is an enduring necessity in the life of the universal Church, but of course, the missionary journeys have to be multidirectional and not—as in the former period—only from west to east and from north to south (1994k:115).

If missions is concerned with establishing a witnessing presence in places where there is none, then it follows that it will exclude much of what is done under that label by mission boards and will include other endeavours that are not normally included by those bodies (1977d:216). Colonial patterns defined mission in terms of a unidirectional movement of personnel and resources from the West to the third world. However, the large majority of the personnel and money designated ‘foreign missions’ is actually inter-church aid and does not foster a missionary advance into places where Christ is not known. Newbigin observes that “the majority of ordained missionaries engaged at the present time are engaged in the work of the life of the church—teaching, pastoral work, administration—and there are not many missionaries engaged in directly evangelistic work. This seems to be true in most parts of the world” (1962g:3). While Newbigin upholds the importance of ‘fraternal workers’ who are sent from the western church for pastoral and teaching work, he insists that this is not missions and these fraternal workers are not missionaries (1977d:216). These distinctions are not simply a matter of semantics but are important for clear thinking and holding before the church a dimension of the church’s mission that was being eclipsed (1960i:23).

The importance of maintaining missions as a distinct task within the mission of the church became urgent during the 1960s. During this period there was “the rapid expansion of interchurch aid into agricultural, medical, educational, and social projects of the churches in the southern hemisphere” (Gruber 1991:517). The United Nations named the decade of the 1960s the first Development Decade. Government funding and proliferating specialized agencies accelerated this program and it soon enveloped the CWME. Anxious to shake themselves free of old missionary paternalism and imperialism, many missions advocates embraced this new direction. Missions were being buried beneath all kinds of development projects and interchurch aid (1993h:158). “The dilemma with which I constantly wrestled was how to achieve a permeation of all activities of the Council with a missionary concern, and at the same time to preserve and sharpen a specific concern for missions as enterprises explicitly intended to cross the frontier between faith and no-faith” (1993h:189; cf. 1993h:159; 1962j:91).

Newbigin's resolution of the relationship between missions and interchurch aid can be summarized with three negative statements and two positive ones (1958b:40-43; 1970c:190; cf. Jongeneel 1997:315-316). Negatively: the distinction between missions and interchurch aid cannot be divided geographically with mission involved in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and inter-church aid devoted to Europe; the distinction cannot be made between evangelism and service; the terminology of missions cannot be dropped and absorbed into interchurch aid. Positively, in the first place, interchurch aid should always aim to equip the church for its mission. The problem is simply "the fact that we have corrupted the word 'Church' (and distorted the life of the churches) by constantly using it in a non-missionary sense. If it was always clear, both in our speech and in our ecclesiastical life, that the Church *is* the mission... then inter-church aid would always be aid-for-mission and nothing else" (1958b:42). Second, while both would "be working in a common field... each would have a distinct focus of concern" (1970a:190). Newbigin recalls the distinction between missionary intention and missionary dimension (1958b:43). Missions must be an intentional act to take the gospel across the frontier of unbelief. This aspect of the church's mission must never be surrendered.

Maintaining missions as an indispensable dimension of the church's total mission remained a concern for Newbigin to the end of his days. He feared that missions would be eclipsed in the WCC. His most explicit statement in this regard came in an exchange with Konrad Raiser (1994c). Newbigin comments that one of the most remarkable things about Raiser's *Ecumenism in Transition* is the "total amnesia" with the respect to the evangelistic and missionary task of the church.

One of the most important documents produced by the WCC in the past three decades was entitled "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation." This was developed during the years 1976-81, and was approved by the Central Committee in 1982. In his wide-ranging study of the work of the WCC, Raiser does not mention this document; it is briefly referred to in a quotation from the Roman Catholic ecumenist Thomas Stransky. Indeed this total amnesia in respect of the missionary and evangelistic work of the churches is (for me) the most remarkable feature of the book.... There is no sign of any concern about the fact that the great majority of the world's people have not made this confession and have not been baptized (1994c:5).

He continues: "I have to confess a deep personal concern here, for if the vision for the WCC that this book represents were to be realized, then the bringing of the International Missionary Council into the WCC would have to be judged as having been a mistake" (1994c:5). To allow the missionary and evangelistic task to disappear from the agenda of the WCC is more than a paradigm shift; it is a reversal. Missions must remain central to the church's existence.

Bryant Myers notes that "Christians are allocating only 1.2% of their mission funding and their foreign missionaries to the 1.1 billion people who live in the unevangelized world" (1996:48). He believes that there is enough money for Christian missions in every part of the world. However, the disproportionate allocation of monetary and human resources in missions is a "scandal." Bryant continues: "Something is wrong when over ninety percent of the church's mission force is working in that part of the world that calls itself Christian" (1996:55). In this situation Newbigin's distinction between mission and missions, and his insistence that taking the

gospel to places where there is no witnessing presence, remains an important issue.

7.6.6. Missions as the Responsibility of Every Local Congregation

If the church is missionary by its very nature and if missions is simply the church's mission extended toward its ultimate horizon, then it follows that missions is the responsibility of every congregation. "A true congregation of God anywhere in the world is at the same time part of God's mission to the ends of the earth" (1962j:89). Unfortunately, the foreign missionary movement grew up at a time when the church did not understand its missionary nature. Those who wanted to be faithful to the call of God to take the gospels to the ends of the earth had to form separate organizations to accomplish the missionary task. Missions were separated from church (1958b:25). When this happens the church "becomes an introverted body, concerned with its own welfare rather than with the Kingdom of God, and—even if successful missionary work is carried on by others—the Church will be no fit home for those who are gathered in" (1958b:26).

Today the missionary nature of the church has been recovered; however, the structural division between church and missions remains, reinforcing the dichotomy between church and its missionary calling in the thinking of many Christians. Newbigin's concern is to break this dichotomy and re-establish each local congregation as the body charged with the responsibility of mission in its own neighbourhood *and* to the ends of the earth. And so after arguing that the picture of missions must change to "be a picture of one universal family present in almost every land, possessing the secret of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ and offering that secret to all nations and peoples", he immediately goes on to draw the first consequence of this new image:

... every church, however small and weak, ought to have some share in the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Every church ought to be engaged in foreign missions. This is part of the integrity of the gospel. We do not adequately confess Christ as the Lord of all men if we seek to be his witnesses only among our neighbours. We must seek at the same time to confess him to the ends of the earth. The foreign missionary enterprise belongs to the integrity of our confession (1994k:13).

It is true, of course, that the primary responsibility of the local congregation is its own neighbourhood (1958b:23). Our thinking begins with the local manifestation of the church's mission. Yet it must move beyond that to consider the ultimate horizon of the missionary task—the ends of the earth. The question with which the church must be concerned is: What can be done in partnership at a local, regional, and international level to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth? In this concern we are not merely concerned with strategy, planning, and central organization, but with the integrity of the church's character and mission. The church is a fellowship that must be recognizable as a local body and a universal fellowship that offers the gospel to people nearby and far-off, indeed everywhere (1958b:50).

The task of mission nearby and missions nearby and far away is a task for which each member bears a measure of responsibility. In his address to the churches of East Asia Newbigin remarks: "The fact that we have to put before each member this responsibility for the evangelization of a distant part of the world is of great value for the development of the Church's sense of missionary responsibility. I covet for every

church this same privilege” (1950:145). How concretely can each member share in the task of missions?

... it is the duty and privilege of every part of the church everywhere to be involved not only in the missionary task at its own door, but also in some other part of the total world-wide task... and every Christian has the duty and privilege to take his proportionate share, whether in intercession, in dissemination of knowledge, in giving, or in actual life-service (1958b:31).

One factor that cripples the local congregations in the West in its discharge of the missions task was an obsolete picture of foreign missions that does not correspond to reality. “Unless I am much mistaken, the picture that is still projected on the screen when foreign missions are spoken about is largely a picture of the backward, the underprivileged, the underdeveloped, the sick, the blind, the uneducated, the ignorant. Consequently missions are able to appeal to the powerful motive of pity” (1994k:19). This misunderstanding left the churches in the West ill-prepared to make a significant and informed contribution to the missionary enterprise in a changing world. Newbiggin proposed that there be an effort to bring mature, highly competent and cultured members of the younger churches into intimate contact with the life of the older churches. In that way the picture they have of the ‘heathen’ would be found to be invalid, and therefore their erroneous concept of missions shattered. This would prepare the western churches for their missions task.

If the church is the primary agent of missions, the question arises as to the validity of missions boards and organizations. Newbiggin treats this question together with the issue regarding the place of the various social agencies that have arisen to carry out the mission of the church in public life. The argument has been detailed above. Here we can briefly state the position with respect to missions organizations. First, when missions boards are separated from the local church, it is fatal for both bodies (1980f:59-61). The local congregation becomes a body that is concerned with catering to the needs of its own members and not a body concerned with a mission to the whole world (1980d:6). The witness of the missions society is not seen to arise out of a community that embodies the gospel. Second, this does not mean that bodies created for a specific ministry are to be jettisoned. Rather it means that this particular body must facilitate the missionary task of the church by co-ordinating the efforts of local congregations to carry out their mission. Newbiggin points to the IMC as one of many parachurch organizations “for which no clear theological rationale can be given because they do not correspond to what are called ‘churches’ in the New Testament” (1985c:178). It did play a positive role, however, in the missions task of the church as it facilitated local cooperation in missions. The key for the integrity of these missions organizations is their anchorage in the local congregation both at home and abroad.

7.6.7. Missions as the Task of the Universal Church Together

With the rise of the church in every part of the world, the issue of partnership in mission became urgent. Three different factors pressed the urgency of this question. First, missions is the responsibility of each congregation. The ends of the earth is the horizon of each congregation’s mission. Indeed, Newbiggin regards as an absolute principle the

following: “No part of the Church ought to be denied the right to take such share in the total missionary task as it is capable of. It ought never to have to be said to any church which is eager to engage in foreign missionary work: ‘We do not need your help’” (1958b:36). The problem arises when there is a church in every part of the world. When there were ‘regions beyond’ which were totally unevangelized, the missions enterprises of churches could proceed uninhibited (1958b:31f.). When there is a church in the area that is responsible for the missionary task in that location, the question of partnership arises. What is the responsibility of the church desiring to engage in missions to the church in that geographical area? Early missions simply bypassed the indigenous church; the church was a container in which converts of missions were to be placed. This did irreparable harm to the young churches, however. When the missions organizations continued to take control of the missionary outreach in the area of the church, the young church drew the obvious conclusion: mission does not belong to the church’s nature (that is a task for mission societies) and the younger church becomes a body concerned only with its own maintenance. Recognition of this situation led the missionary movement to begin to speak of partnership between older and younger churches.

Partnership became a pressing issue for a second reason as well: there were tasks that could not be effectively tackled except by working together in ecumenical partnership. If missionary work proceeds in isolation, with different resources and methods, confusion will be the result. There is a need for collaboration and partnership to shoulder many of the larger and more difficult tasks. Newbigin gives three examples of tasks that demand ecumenical cooperation: the penetration of the great non-Christian cultures of Asia with the gospel; the encounter between the gospel and Islam; and urban mission in Africa (1994k:14-15).

A final reason that partnership in missions must be a priority is the nature of the church. The church is both local and ecumenical (1958b:23, 49). Structures of partnership “should be— universally and locally—recognizable as one reconciled fellowship offering to all men everywhere the secret of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ” (1958b:49). Regional and ecumenical structures of partnership express the ecumenical nature of the church.

The need for partnership grew throughout the 20th century. This was first given official articulation at the IMC conference in Whitby (1947) where the slogan ‘partnership in obedience’ was coined. Older and younger churches were to work together in equal partnership, each taking responsibility and contributing their God-given gifts for the task of mission. At this early date, however, partnership remained for the “non-Christian world” or “mission lands”; the partnership did not extend to the mission task in the North America or Europe (1970a:177; cf. Bosch 1991:379).

The need for partnership between the churches for the mission of the church was recognized. The problem was that true partnership was impossible to achieve with the structures that existed between western missions and the younger churches. The spiritual, financial, and administrative dominance of the older churches made it impossible for younger churches to achieve a sense of responsibility for the missionary task in their area or throughout the world. Newbigin records his own temptation to pray that all foreign money and foreign personnel be cut off from the church in India so they might be able to achieve a real spiritual freedom and sense of their missionary

obligation (1993k:16). However, in India only 3% of the population were Christians and 90% had never heard the gospel. With the evangelistic task so stupendous, the removal of missionaries and money would appear more like mission abandoned rather than mission completed (1993k:17). Newbigin summarizes the dilemma that existed at this time: “Is there a way that the strength of the older churches can be used for the task of world evangelization without spiritually weakening the younger churches?” (1993k:17).

The structures received from the colonial period were characterized by paternalism on the side of the sending countries and infantile dependence on the side of the younger churches (1960k:38). Neither the ‘three-selves’⁸ nor the process of ‘devolution’⁹ had resolved the problem. While the point had been reached where the younger churches were technically independent, a relationship of financial dependence remained between each of the younger churches and a single older church or missionary society (1958b:34). This resulted in two problems. First, this financial dependence led to one-track relationships between the younger church and one missionary board. Money flowed from one to the other, locking the two into an exclusive relationship. Second, a dilemma was established between dependence and independence. If the mission board withdrew funds, the church might develop independence but there were fewer resources for the missionary task in the area. If the mission boards continued to send funds, this perpetuated dependence in the younger churches. The money was used to prop up static churches and any missionary advance was hindered (1993h:126; Goodall 1953:17f.). There existed, therefore, a “growing conviction that great evangelistic advance cannot be expected while these partnerships are confined to the traditional relationships

⁸Self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending. This was the goal of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson for indigenous churches in Asia and Africa. It became a ‘famous trinity’ that was widely adopted in missions to promote the independence of younger churches (Jongeneel 1995:327-328; Verkuyll 1978:184-188). The Chinese church adopted this as a goal and it became known as the ‘Three-Self Movement’ (Jones 1971:599f.).

⁹Devolution is “the transfer of responsibility from a foreign missionary organization to the church in the country concerned which has come into being as a result of the preaching of the gospel” (Orchard and Neill 1971:164; see further Beyerhaus and Lefever 1964; Jongeneel 1997:198-199).

between a mission board and the daughter church which is the fruit of its work” (1963e:17). If there was to be true partnership, if there was to be further missionary advance in the third world, the structure of relationships had to be changed. Willigen articulated this conviction by declaring that new patterns of partnership were needed if there was to be a fresh missionary advance (1970a:180; Goodall 1953:17-18, 233, 236).

What was needed to break this pattern were structures that embodied three things. First, the structures must engender *interdependence*. “The true position of the church is neither dependence nor independence, but interdependence, a mutual interdependence of the different members of the one body that rests upon the absolute dependence of each upon God” (1993h:18). This was to be an interdependence of equals in which all share their unique gifts and strengths and all receive from one another. Second, the structures must replace the unilateral relations between the younger churches and missions bodies with multi-lateral relations. The one-track channels between the missions societies and the younger churches was the primary culprit that maintained the patterns of dependence. The younger churches must be brought into fellowship with their sister churches in Asia or Africa. The resources of the missions societies were invaluable but these bodies must be participating members offering their gifts as well as receiving in the context of fellowship. Third, the focus of the new relations and the use of funds must be missions. Willigen had noted that 90% of the mission funds were used for nurture in the third world rather than evangelism (Goodall 1953: 236). Newbigin had complained that the majority of funds propped up static churches rather than contributed to a missionary advance (1993h:126). Here was an answer to the dilemma. If this three-fold pattern was followed the western mission societies could contribute their resources without weakening the spiritual freedom and missionary consciousness of the younger churches. Partnership could lead to a fresh missionary advance.

The new pattern was hammered out during the early 1960s and became known as ‘Joint Action for Mission.’ Newbigin played an important role in forging this new pattern (Scott 1971:311). Joint Action for Mission was patterned after a statement on partnership in missions adopted at the EACC in Kuala Lumpur (1959). The statement on the missionary obligation of the Asian churches dealt with two issues: the reception of foreign missionaries to Asia and the sending of missionaries from Asia. The same conference also recognized that any fresh missionary advance in Asia would require the severance of one-track relations between the parent mission organization and daughter churches. The goal was a partnership of multi-lateral adult relationships between the churches and the missions bodies working together to accomplish the evangelistic task in a given geographical area. These proposals of the EACC. fired the imagination of the IMC staff who had been struggling with this issue. The fruit of their reflection was a document entitled ‘Joint Action for Mission’ that was presented to the New Delhi Assembly and endorsed Uppsala (1963e; New Delhi 1962:251f.; Bassham 1979:81). This joint action called, in the first place, for a survey by the churches and related missionary bodies of needs and opportunities facing them in a certain geographical area and of the resources available to meet these needs. Second, it called for a consultation between the missionary bodies and the churches to decide goals and the deployment of resources to meet those goals. Third, it called for the implementation of the agreed plan by the churches and missionary organizations acting together in a structure appropriate

to its operation.

With this plan for joint action in place, another question arose for Newbigin and the newly formed Division of World Mission and Evangelism (DWME) of the WCC. Should the DWME simply concentrate on stimulating and encouraging these joint actions in local situations? Or was there a need for new ecumenical missionary structures? Should the DWME initiate and manage missionary projects on an international scale? In other words, were the new missionary structures to be local or ecumenical or both? Some feared large centralized bureaucracies and other believed that the global world required international action. Newbigin's understanding of the local and ecumenical nature of the church led him to proceed in both directions, a move authorized by the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC (1961) (1970c:190-193).

Yet missions continued to be primarily from the West/North to the East/South. The two-fold conviction that 'the home base of mission is world-wide' and 'the mission field is world-wide' did not issue in a sustained discussion of missions to the West. During a speech given in 1933 Newbigin argued that "great as are the needs of our own land, the needs of the foreign mission field are very much greater" (1933:99). While there is no explicit statement to this effect thirty years later (1960s), he continued to stress the tremendous need in other parts of the world (1962g:2; 1960i:23; 1994k:17). When Newbigin returned from India, his tune began to change. He devoted himself to the problem of mission in western culture and frequently referred to the need for third world missionaries in the West (e.g., 1986e:147). During his pastorate in Birmingham (1980-1988), he worked with an Indian colleague whom he referred to as "a missionary sent to us by the Church of North India." He goes on to say that "England needs the witness of a Christian from India at least as much as India needs missionaries from the West" (1993k:115). Beyond these brief hints and references, however, Newbigin does not speak in detail of the missionary movement from the Third World to the West.

7.6.8. The Need for New Missionaries

Newbigin's treatment of missions begins with mission as the task of the local congregation, a task that stretches to the ends of the earth. Since there are local congregations in every part of the world and the home base is everywhere, there must be structures of partnership to express the ecumenical nature of the church in its mission. The emphasis is on mission as the task of the whole church for which every member bears a measure of responsibility (1958b:44). The issue of the role of missionary as particular agents of the church's missionary enterprise arises. Is there a place for the 'foreign missionary' in the new paradigm of mission? If so, how is it to be conceptualized?

Missionaries of the modern missionary movement have not followed the example of Paul who, leaving behind a community that was a witness to the gospel, moved on to new areas of evangelization. Missionaries have continued in places for decades and, when they hold positions of final responsibility, they impede the growth and maturity of the younger church. So from this perspective it would appear that the age of the foreign missionary is over. That is not the total picture, however. From the standpoint of the indigenous church it may appear better for the missionary to return home. From the standpoint of the country in which the church is located, a different picture emerges:

only a small fraction of the population is Christian. “If the missionary knows that his vocation is precisely a missionary vocation, knows that he is called to cross the frontiers of faith and make Christ known as Lord among those who are utterly strangers to that knowledge, then how can he leave?” (1958b:46). The dilemma is that from the vantage point of the indigenous church it is better for the foreign missionary to leave but in terms of the need in the area it is impossible to conceive of leaving.

“The solution to this dilemma can only be found at the point to which we have returned again and again in this discussion—the point where it is recognized that the Church *is* mission” (1958b:46). The missionary cannot bypass the local church but must offer himself or herself to the local church as an agent of help for the common missionary task in that area (1958b:46f.). In 1945 Newbigin recognized that the missionary calling was moving “more to collegueship than to pioneering, more to the patient task of helping a community to grow in love than to the task of pushing out on one’s own into new spheres and new schemes” (1945:94). From the late 1950s on, Newbigin continued to affirm this partnership but in light of the growing evidence that the majority of missions resources were being used in interchurch aid, he stressed more strongly the unfinished evangelistic task (1962g:2-3).

This new situation called for the consideration of new initiatives, methods and practices. Newbigin discusses the benefits and drawbacks of short-term service (1958b:47-48); the need for some kind of ecumenical order of missionaries who are devoted to a life service of missions (1958b:48-49; 1982b:150); and tentmakers in missions (1970c:179f., 191; 1962j:91f.; cf. Weerstra and Smith 1997).

7.7. CONCLUSION

Newbigin believes that the good news that God is restoring his rule over the entire creation in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit has been entrusted to the church to communicate to the world. Accordingly this gospel must be communicated by deeds of mercy and justice that signify, and words that announce, the arrival of the kingdom. The rule of Christ covers the whole of human life; therefore the primary point of missionary engagement will be where each member embodies the gospel in their various callings in life. This mission cannot be confined to the local neighbourhood but extends to the ends of the earth. Thus foreign missions will always be an essential dimension of the church’s mission. These are the four tasks of the church that are found most frequently in Newbigin’s writings—evangelism, social action, calling of the laity, and missions.

Newbigin’s discussion of these four aspects of the church’s missionary calling is rooted in an understanding of the comprehensive scope of the kingdom of God. This opens rich insight into many of the issues he discusses. It enables Newbigin to understand the nature of evangelism and the works of justice and mercy. In harmony with Mortimer Arias, Newbigin points to the basic category of the kingdom as the only means to recover an authentic evangelism that follows in the steps of Jesus (1974b:67; Arias1984:passim). Newbigin’s understanding of eschatology keeps him from being either triumphalistic or defeatist and enables him to illumine the precise nature of deeds of justice and mercy in the church’s mission: they are signs that point to the coming

kingdom. Further, approaching the ecumenical and evangelical divide between word and deed from the standpoint of the kingdom enabled Newbigin to offer a harmony of evangelism and social concern in the church's mission. Finally, the full scope of the salvation of the kingdom of God spurred Newbigin to emphasize the breadth of the church's mission in social, economic, and cultural life. The believer witnesses to the good news of the kingdom in all of life; thus Newbigin emphasizes the calling of each believer in culture as the focal point of mission.

Newbigin also connects each of these aspects of the church's calling in the world in the local congregation. First, evangelism is authenticated by the life of the local congregation. Further, evangelism and deeds of mercy must be recognizable as words and actions of a community that believes and embodies the gospel. All ecclesiastical bodies organized for special purposes— evangelism, social justice, mercy, and missions—must be connected to the church. A dichotomy between the two is harmful both for the church and the specialized agency. The church loses its missionary self-understanding as its task is overtaken by a specialized body; the words and deeds of the agency lose their proper character as signs that point to good news. Rooting the obligation for foreign missions in the local congregation is an important insight that bears much more scrutiny. Finally, the believer's calling in culture is supported and nourished by the life of the local congregation. Newbigin's discussion of each aspect of mission consistently highlights the importance of the ecclesial community.

Another positive feature of Newbigin's discussion of the various aspects of the church's mission is his insistence that each of them is indispensable to the total mission of the church. Newbigin upholds the essential task of evangelism over against ecumenical neglect in the 1960s and early 1970s fostered by social activism and the doctrine of Christian presence. He maintains the importance of both deeds of justice and mercy against an evangelicalism that advocated evangelism as the primary if not exclusive duty of the church and against an ecumenical stream that downplayed mercy (i.e., relief work) in pursuit of social justice and structural renewal. He maintains the importance of the calling of individual believers in the world of culture in spite of neglect due to a narrow view of salvation. Finally, he maintains the obligation of missions over against various movements that threatened the whole enterprise—interchurch aid, chronic guilty conscience in the wake of imperialism, and the urgency of social justice.

Finally, Newbigin's distinction between mission and missions, and missionary dimension and missionary intention remain significant. On the one hand, it enables the church to maintain the breadth of its mission while at the same time maintaining the specific focus of missions. On the other hand, it specifies the task of missions within the total mission of the church, and holds before God's people its unfinished task. In view of the "scandalous" allocation of missions resources, emphasis on missions as an activity that takes the gospel to places where there is no witnessing community remains critical (Bryant 1996:55).

Next to these positive features, several weaknesses must be noted. In the first place, Newbigin's understanding of the church is inconsistent. There is a long established tradition that reduces the church to a community that is organized to engage in cultic acts. Ridderbos challenges this narrow understanding by highlighting three uses of the word '*ecclesia*' in the New Testament: as the new humankind, as an organized local

congregation, and as a community gathered for certain “religious” activities (Ridderbos 1975:328-330). On the one hand, Newbigin recognizes that the church is much more than an identifiable local congregation that is gathered for prayer, worship, fellowship, and instruction. His understanding of the close connection between the kingdom of God and the church, along with his appreciation of the comprehensive scope of salvation, enable Newbigin to recognize that the church is the new humankind that lives under the authority of Christ’s rule beyond the boundaries of the instituted church. On the other hand, Newbigin’s language and ecclesiological formulations often betray a return to the older tradition of limiting the church to its gathered and instituted form. Even Newbigin’s stress on the mission of believers in culture sometimes gives the impression that they are “mere fragments of the church who are scattered about in the world and who come together again for worship, instruction, and specifically Christian fellowship on Sundays” (Evanston 1954:161). Newbigin’s use of the terms ‘laity’ and ‘lay theology’ also seems to point in this direction (Skillen 1996:13).

A second criticism concerns Newbigin’s discussion of the ‘signs of the times.’ In two previous chapters we have seen that Newbigin’s discussion of the work of the Father and Spirit in the world outside the bounds of the church is underdeveloped. This weakness comes home to roost at the point of his discussion of the social calling of the church in culture. Newbigin recognizes that the social calling of the church requires that the church interpret the ‘signs of the times.’ If the church—corporately, but even more so in its scattered form—is to be involved in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the world, it must know where the Spirit of God is at work. Yet history bears eloquent testimony that the church fails in its interpretation again and again. In light of this failure, it is essential to struggle with valid criteria that equips the church for its social task. Newbigin does not offer helpful guidance here; his underdeveloped Trinitarian basis contributes to a vague and ambiguous answer (Hoedemaker 1979:456).

Newbigin was a highly contextual thinker. His discussion of each of these aspects of the church’s mission was forged in the heat of pressing problems and issues. The need remains today to bring his insights to bear on different problems and new contexts.