

**The Missional Calling of Believers in the World:  
Lesslie Newbigin's Contribution**

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In one of the last articles that David Bosch wrote, he distinguishes five different traditions of the relationship of the church to civil authorities (Van Engen, et.al. 1993:89ff.): Constantinian, pietist, reformist, liberationist, and anabaptist. He dismisses the first two--Constantinian and pietist--as otherworldly. He sees the other three as "world-formative" and "much closer to each other than may appear at first glance" (:94). I believe we can broaden the scope of these categories to assess the relationship of the gospel to all of culture and not simply the civil authorities. If we do so, it is the anabaptist tradition – which Bosch also calls in other places the alternative community and countercultural model (Bosch 1982) – that has been gaining tremendous ground in the North American context especially among those who, following Newbigin, are calling for a missionary encounter with western culture. It is my contention that while this is a helpful and necessary corrective, valuable elements of the reformist tradition that were essential to Newbigin's understanding of mission in the public square are being neglected. Specifically the calling of believers in the world has received little attention. In this paper I propose to do three things. First, I will briefly sketch the anabaptist tradition as it is taking form in the North American context. Second, in the major part of the paper I will elaborate on this aspect of Newbigin's understanding of the calling of believers in the world, a theme neglected by the growing alternative community emphasis. Finally, I will close with a brief evaluative comment.

**The Alternative Community Model in North America**

Douglas John Hall begins his little book *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* by dividing church history into three primary eras: the early church, Christendom beginning with Constantine, and the present. There have been two major shifts that account for this division. The first was the shift under the Roman emperors Constantine and Theodosius when the church was officially established. The church moved from a marginal position to a dominant institution in

society; from being socially, politically, intellectually inferior to a position of power and superiority; from being economically weak and poor to a position of immense wealth; from being an oppressed minority to being an oppressive majority; from being an illegal religion to becoming the only religion of the state; from being resident aliens to a territorial understanding of the faith whereby the Roman empire is considered Christian. This official establishment characterized the position of the church throughout the remainder of the Roman empire and then in Europe. This pattern continued in North America even though the church was only temporarily established in some places. A functional Christendom prevailed in which the church's power is experienced in terms of a cultural establishment (Guder 1998:47-60).

The second major shift is the disestablishment of the church today that is taking place all across the western world. The church has lost the official power it has known for so many years and is again being pushed to the margins of society. This disestablishment is considered to be a positive development because now the church can recover its identity as shaped by the Scriptural story rather than the cultural story.

During the early years of its life, the church understood her identity as resident aliens. There was a redemptive tension between the church and her culture. The church understood itself to be an alternative community that was nourished by an alternative story. This contrast community was not a community that ignored the public life of society by being reshaped into a private institution that provided an otherworldly and spiritual salvation for its members. Rather it was publicly subversive by a life of radical discipleship that existed as a kind of antibody in society. However, with the Constantinian shift the story that governed the church's life and the story that governed cultural development were merged. The redemptive tension was lost as the church became part of the constellation of powers within the empire. Her identity was shaped by her place in culture rather than by the story of the kingdom of God. The end result was cultural captivity. This domestication continued in the modern period as the church took her place in culture as chaplain of society influencing the moral and private religious beliefs of the citizens.

When one sees how the church has been absorbed into culture and deeply compromised by Christendom, it is easy to see the compelling power of the alternative community model. The renewed stress on alternative emphasizes that the church is a community that is shaped by a different story than the dominant cultural story. The word community stresses that the mission of the church

is a communal affair; the church is to embody a social order that faithfully points to the coming kingdom.

I find the logic of this compelling. I also believe that most of what has been said could be found in the writings of Newbigin. Indeed, there are two events, which would suggest that Lesslie Newbigin would feel quite comfortable with this emphasis.

The first was a workshop given by Stephen Bevans at a Gospel and Our Culture Network meeting. After he had written his little book *Models of Contextual Theology* in which he outlines five models of contextualization, he outlines a sixth model (Bevans 1993). He named this model the "countercultural model" and included Newbigin along with Hauwerwas and Willimon as exponents. Bevans would include Newbigin in this growing shift to an alternative community model.

The second event was a colloquium held in Leeds, England during the summer of 1996. It was a dialogue between a number of scholars in the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition and Lesslie Newbigin on the topic of mission in the public life of western culture. In a paper given by the Dutch philosopher Sander Griffioen entitled *Newbigin's Philosophy of Culture* he makes a distinction between the negative Christian responsibility of critiquing sinful idolatry in culture and positive involvement as a steward participating in the cultural development of society. Griffioen believes that in Newbigin's discussion of contextualization "he pays virtually no attention to the gospel as an agent of inner reformation or cultural renewal. All the emphasis is on the critical and judging function of the Word" (Griffioen 1996:12f.). Griffioen too believes that Newbigin's stress is on the countercultural.

The point of these two illustrations is to show that Newbigin has strongly stressed the importance of the church as an alternative community living in a different story over against the idolatry of the prevailing culture. However, there is a stress in Newbigin's work that has been neglected, even eclipsed, in the writings of many in North America who advocate this counter-cultural model. Newbigin has maintained throughout his life that the task of believers in their various callings in culture is the primary place where a missionary encounter takes place. While this emphasis is not denied in the emerging alternative community emphasis, it is smothered by neglect and a studied indifference. The stress on alternative and on community does not seem to have a place for this "declericalized or lay theology" as Newbigin calls it. The recent stress of the alternative community model is to eschew power and simply impact the public life of culture through a corporate life. Perhaps this contrast can be seen most sharply by noting that at the same time Newbigin was calling

for the pursuit of a Christian society, Douglas John Hall made the statement that "it is wicked to seek a Christian society"! The tone in Newbigin's missiology and ecclesiology is quite different. Until the end of his life the calling of individual believers in the world remained a pillar in his understanding of the church's missionary encounter with culture and more specifically the public square.

In the remainder of the paper I will sketch Newbigin's position on the mission of individual believers in their callings and argue that it is only with this stress that the alternative community model can be authentic.

### **Newbigin's Understanding of the Mission of Individual Believers in the World**

Newbigin's stress on the callings of individual believers in the world is neither recent nor original. It is not recent; this has been a primary emphasis of Newbigin missionary thought and practice throughout his entire life. It is not original; he has 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 Department on the Laity in the WCC in 1955 led by secretary Hans-Reudi Weber, and books by Kraemer (1958) and Yves Congar (1957) on the laity and the church 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.

#### *Eschatological, Soteriological, and Christological Foundations*

There are at least three fundamental theological convictions that undergird Newbigin's commitment to the mission of the believer in his or her societal callings. The first is his understanding of the church in an eschatological context. The church has been traditionally understood from the aspect of a gathered community that engages in cultic or "religious" rituals while the fact that the majority of

its life and work takes place outside the bounds of this institutional and gathered expression has been largely neglected. Newbigin's understanding of the church goes a long way to healing this split.

Newbigin's understanding of the church is always in an eschatological context. The gospel is a gospel of the kingdom and the kingdom involves God's rule over all of creational life. The most common way he describes the church is with the terms sign, instrument (or agent), and firstfruit (sometimes deposit or foretaste) of the kingdom. As he comments:

Each of these three words is important. They are to be a *sign*, pointing men to something that is beyond their present horizon but can give guidance and hope now; an *instrument* (not the only one) that God can use for his work of healing, liberating, and blessing; and a *firstfruit*--a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for us all (1994:33).

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" (1973b:111; 1994:53).

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 who already shares in the life of the kingdom of God and that life spans the whole of human affairs.

The New Testament scholar Herman Ridderbos has noted that the word *ekklesia* is used in three different ways in the New Testament. The first is of the new people of God in the totality of their lives as the re-constitution of humankind in Jesus Christ. As such her life comes to expression in the totality of her life and not only as she gathers for worship. The second use of the word is of 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 *ekklesia* 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 of the WCC (1954) used in an attempt to redefine the church in terms of a new humankind over against long established patterns of ecclesial definition. "... the laity are not mere fragments of the church who are scattered about in the world and who come together again for worship, instruction, and

specifically Christian fellowship on Sundays. They are the church's representatives, no matter where they are."

It is 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 or not Newbigin was always consistent with this insight. 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. An example of this that is pertinent to our present topic is when he speaks of the activities of believers in their individual callings as "in the line of God's will as revealed in Christ but which fall outside of the boundaries of that body explicitly committed to Christ by faith and baptism" (1967:6).

While Newbigin may not have been consistent with this theological insight concerning the church, it is clear that his primary understanding of the *ekklesia* is shaped by the broad scope of the coming kingdom. The believers at work in their various callings is the church at work.

The second theological conviction foundational for Newbigin's "lay theology" is his understanding of the salvation of which the new humankind now has a foretaste. Salvation is comprehensive in scope and restorative in nature. Salvation is comprehensive in scope; it is not simply the salvation of a few individual souls but the restoration of the whole life of humankind in the context of a renewed creation. "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" (1968:22; cf. 1973a:93). Salvation is restorative in nature; it is not the salvation of souls out of this creation but the restoration of this creation including the whole life of humankind. "The end of the story is not escape into another world. It is the triumph of God in this world...not the immortality of souls liberated from this world but the resurrection of the body and the re-creation of all things" (1970:220; cf. 1968:22).

This renewal is not only future but is already present as foretaste, firstfruits, or deposit. If this salvation covers the whole spectrum of human life, then the witness of people of God as previews of the kingdom is equally comprehensive. The majority of the church's witness will take place in the work place, the market place, the neighbourhood, the public square.

The deepest grounding for Newbigin's convictions regarding the calling of the laity is rooted in Jesus Christ. A glimpse of the Christological foundation can be seen in the sermon he delivered

when he was installed as bishop of Madras. He reminded the Christians 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" (1993:203).

It is these three foundational theological assumptions that shape Newbigin's commitment to the importance of the callings of individual believers in any missional church. The church is the new humankind that shares in foretaste a salvation that is the restoration of its entire life in Jesus Christ. Witness to this eschatological salvation will find expression in the totality of life.

### *Focal Point of Mission*

In Newbigin we can distinguish three different forms of mission by the church. First, the community of the church bears witness to Christ by modelling in its own corporate life as an alternative community the life of the kingdom. In 1991 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" (1991:85). The second is corporate witness in which the local congregation together reaches out in service and evangelism to its community and to the ends of the earth. The third is the witness of the various members in their daily lives at home, work, neighbourhood and so forth. He expresses the conviction that it is in this third form of mission where we find 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" (1951:6).

This concern for the calling of individual believers in the public square is a long standing one for Newbigin. 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 (1993:17). As a newly appointed bishop he expressed the conviction that if the church in Asia was to become a missionary church they 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 that 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 farmer, factory workers and so on" (1960b:27f.). 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" (1993:118f.).

His time in Geneva coincided with a growing interest in the calling of believers in the world fueled by the breakdown of the *corpus Christianum* and growing secularism. In 1954 the department of the laity had been established in the WCC. At the New Delhi assembly of the WCC in 1961 the laity had become a central issue. 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" (1993:203). 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.

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 (1983:41f.; 1986:141-144; 1989:229-231; 1994:156, 174). Newbigin continues to refer to this dimension of the church's mission as primary (1994:154). 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 (1994:174).

In the third lecture he gave at Western Seminary published in *Truth To Tell* he outlines three concrete points to enable the church to "speak the truth to Caesar." It is the third that many in North America have emphasized. His third point calls for the church to impact the public life of western culture by itself being an embodiment of the new order of the kingdom. However, 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" (1991:81). "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" (:84).

### *Question of Power*

Newbigin recognizes that when we speak of power to shape the public life of a nation this clearly raises the spectre of theocracy and Christendom. He addresses this issue several times. His answer is as follows.

First, Newbigin does not believe that a purely privatized Christianity or a Christendom style theocracy are the only options available (1994:168). Newbigin acknowledges the contribution made by the synthesis of church and state that has shaped the life of Europe for over a thousand years. However, he does not wish to return to that synthesis (1986:124). He emphatically states: "What we are looking for is not a new `Christendom,= but a society in which those whose thought and practice set the tone and direction of the different sectors of public life include a large number of Christian men and women who have thought through the implications of the Christian faith for those areas of the life of society" (1994:173). On the other hand, he also wants to reject what he calls "the predominant note in contemporary answers" that takes a position over against society, emphasizes

protest, and renounces all power (1989:125). He advances a model he calls "committed pluralism." A committed pluralism follows the model which Michael Polanyi called "the republic of science." Scientists are free to differ from one another and argue. However, they are personally and responsibly committed to seeking the truth and publicly stating their findings. This model is meant to protect freedom yet a freedom which, while acknowledging differences, is willing to seek the truth (1991:56f.). If the church allows her faith to be privatized then the societal implication of the gospel will be seen as mere house rules for the Church rather than the law of the Creator that carries jurisdiction over the entire human family (1991:70).

Second, Newbigin leans on the Dutch tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd<sup>1</sup> to argue that the problem with Christendom is not that Christians exercised power but that the institutionalized church exercised power. Over against this ecclesiastical totalitarianism Newbigin advocates the neo-Calvinist notion of sphere sovereignty, the doctrine that God has given in the creation order a measure of autonomy to each of the various areas of human life such as art, science, politics, and so on. The institutionalized church has no direct authority over these spheres; rather it is shaped by God's law order discerned and implemented by those within that sphere. This avoids the post-Enlightenment notion of total autonomy of these spheres and the medieval understanding that each of these sphere is under the power of the church. So while the church as an organized body has no right to exercise power over these spheres, Christians with insight into these areas may exercise power (1986:143f.).

Third, it follows from this that it is incumbent on Christians to gain access to power if it is available to shape the public life of the nation with the gospel (1994:171). In a discussion of education he says

How is this world of assumptions formed? Obviously through all the means of education and communication existing in society. Who controls these means? The

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<sup>1</sup> Newbigin believed that the Kuyperian tradition as it has developed in the Netherlands was a rich resource for mission in the public square that had been untapped (1995:11). He commented following a colloquium with leading scholars in that tradition in Leeds during the summer of 1996 that while "the Gospel and Our Culture Network has hardly begun to answer the questions [of obedience in various spheres of public life]" the "Reformational, Kuyperian tradition has obviously been at work long ago spelling out concretely in the various spheres of society what it means to say 'Jesus is Lord.'" "Unfortunately," he said, "this Kuyperian tradition is almost unknown in Britain" but expressed the fervent wish that it "would become a powerful voice in the life of British Christianity" (1996).

question of power is inescapable. Whatever their pretensions, schools teach children to believe something and not something else. There is no "secular" neutrality. Christians cannot evade the responsibility which a democratic society gives to every citizen to seek access to the levers of power (1989:224; cf.1994:171).

Fourth, this power is not to be a coercive power in which the political power of the state and its institutions are at the service of the church (1994:170). Rather, power must be exercised in the way of the cross that eschews the identification of the gospel with political power and which opens the way for freedom. While Newbigin wants to steer clear of a refusal to exercise political power for the sake of the justice of the kingdom, he also wants to reject a triumphalist church. Illustrations abound in history where the victim of oppression dethrones the oppressor and takes his seat on the throne and employs the same instruments of oppression (1989:136f.). The way of the cross is a way that pursues justice and right with a firm resolve while leaving wide room for freedom to dissent. Even though an Enlightenment view of freedom is not Scriptural there was something gained at that time that cannot be lost. In keeping with this era of redemptive history and the nature of the gospel freedom must be safeguarded and there must be no coercion for its acceptance (1994:167). However, this coercive political power is to be distinguished from the power that a Christian exercises as citizen to shape the public life in keeping with the gospel (1994:171).

We come here to a dilemma that, as far as I know, Newbigin never resolved. If a Christian exercises political authority where does s/he allow room for freedom and dissent and where is there a required submission to the law that has been fashioned in light of the gospel?

Fifth, the victory of God's kingdom is not an intrahistorical victory (1994:204). The victory will come at the end when Christ returns. The use of power is not to usher in the kingdom of God but a faithful witness to, an acted prayer for the coming of that kingdom. The church may function as salt in society but the fullness of God's kingdom is at the end.

### *Challenge Leads to 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). Why is suffering the normal badge of faithful witness?

No human societies cohere except on the basis of some kind of common beliefs and customs. No society can permit these beliefs and practices to be threatened beyond a certain point without reacting in self-defense. The idea that we ought to be able to expect some kind of neutral secular political order, which presupposes no religious or ideological beliefs, and which holds the ring impartially for a plurality of religions to compete with one another, has no adequate foundation. The New Testament makes it plain that Christ's followers must expect suffering as the normal badge of their discipleship, and also as one of the characteristic forms of their witness (1964:42; cf. 1994:148-150).

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 given in Australia on 1 Peter in 1960 Newbigin contrasts the world of business driven by the profit motive with 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" (1960a:112).

### *Need for Communal Aspect*

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. 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? (1951:6)

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 and sacraments. No understanding of Newbigin's ecclesiology is adequate if it does not recognize the stress that he puts on the word, sacraments, and prayer. In an address given to the Diocesan Council he speaks of the "the only source of the church's life--the gospel." If the church is to fulfill her missionary calling she must experience the saving presence and power of God Himself. The word and sacraments of the gospel are the means by which this power is mediated to the church. He asks: "Are we placing these in the very centre of our church life?...Do we understand, do our congregations understand, that when the Word is truly preached and the sacraments duly administered, Christ Himself is present in the midst with all His saving power" (1951:4). There is much stress on word and sacraments in Newbigin's writing but the reason that this quote is taken from a speech given in 1951 is because the flow of his whole speech moves from the word and sacraments to the life of the laymen in the world. He sketches the situation of the church and outlines four main tasks that lie ahead if the church is to be a living, missionary church. The first task is to recover the presence and power of God in word and sacrament. The second task is to recover the congregation as the fundamental unit of the Christian church. He spends a large portion of this discussion on--indeed, entitles it--the "church meeting" as a structural feature that would equip members for their calling in the world (see below). The third most pressing need of the time is that God's saving power known and experienced in the

life of a redeemed community issue in a faithful witness of the thousands of its members who work in field, home, office, mill or law court (1951:5f.).

Along with the word and sacraments--and perhaps even more importantly!--Newbigin puts a high stress on prayer. I do not think that either Newbigin's life or his ecclesiology can be properly understood apart from the high priority he puts on prayer. Prayer is the primary means by which one is joined to Christ and the sap of the life of Christ flows to believers (1977:140ff.) equipping them for their task in the world.

The second is a fellowship that supports. In his discussion of the person 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 the discussion suggests that this would include at least encouragement, prayer, financial support, and insight.

The third are structures that equip. In a lecture at the founding assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference, 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 (1960b:30-33). Bold experiments were necessary because present congregational structures that dominated the Western church were shaped in a time when Christianity had ceased to be a missionary religion (1966:102).

At this early point in his ministry he points to three things. The first is what he calls a church meeting. 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, bring forward problems that various members face as they witness 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 study, research, and training on 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 (1993:119). 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.

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 the church, these structural features that would support believers in their individual callings increased. Newbigin believes that there have been at least two things that have prevented the local congregation from equipping individual believers for their tasks in the world. The first is size; local churches have become too big. The second is character; a highly differentiated society requires more than a parish church. Newbigin suggests different structures to equip believers: training leadership for industrial workers; small group ecumenical Bible studies formed on the basis of specialized expertise; "frontier studies", 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; Community Service Centre that co-ordinated and organized the task of training men and women for witness in their daily work (1977:76f.,80-81). This concern continues during the later years of Newbigin's life when he calls for a missionary encounter with western culture. He continues to urge the church to search for structures that will equip the believer for his or her calling in the world. "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" (1989:230f.)

The fourth is a leadership that enables (1989:231). A leadership that equips believers in their tasks in the world is a constant theme in Newbigin's writings. In his sermons to pastors as bishop of Madras published in *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* Newbigin exhorts pastors 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" (1977:80). And, 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" (1977:77).

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 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 (1977:76).

### **Brief Concluding Comment**

One of the enduring tensions of the missionary church is how to be in the world yet not of it. The new stress of the alternative community model drawing on the rich anabaptist tradition on not being of the world is an important corrective for the western church who lives in a state of cultural captivity or "an advanced case of syncretism" as Newbigin has said (1994:67) – thanks in large part to her Constantinian tradition. The further emphasis of the communal dimension is also important. However, this stress on the church as alternative community has led to a neglect of the fact that the primary place where a missionary encounter takes place is in the world, in the Monday to Saturday lives of believers. The result is that little has been done to challenge the local congregation in the way of structures and leadership to equip believers for their callings. Indeed, a stress on the calling of believers would not diminish the importance of institutional church but highlight the need for structures that equip the various members for mission.

Recently the Roman Catholic theologian William McConville has pointed to a danger in the growing tendency to take the image of alternative community as the primary model of the church. In his appreciative review of *Missional Church* he warns that alternative community can very easily

become parallel community--a separated community dissociated from any responsibility for cultural formation. I would add to this warning, that since the church cannot create a parallel community but must live in the world, talk of an alternative community could produce rhetoric that will inspire a commitment to being different (which in itself would be a good thing) but will not equip believers to live in an alternate story in the majority of their lives. What is needed is a missional ecclesiology that takes as one of its images "alternative community" but applies this to the church as the new humankind. In other words, alternative community must be an image not only for the church gathered as community but also dispersed in the world. It is this kind of ecclesiology that will lead to a ministerial leadership and ecclesial structures that will equip believers for their callings. In this, I believe Lesslie Newbigin has left us with a challenge and some direction.

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