

Ut Omnes Unum Sint: The Case for Visible Church Reunion in the Ecclesiology of
Bishop J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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Abstract

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Ut Omnes Unum Sint: The Case for Visible Church Reunion in the Ecclesiology of Bishop J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

This dissertation examines Lesslie Newbigin's case for the visible reunion of the Christian church. Newbigin's reunion ecclesiology grows out of his convictions as an *evangelical ecumenical*. As an *evangelical* he was deeply committed to the authority of scripture, the necessity of the atonement through the cross and evangelism that sought to bring about spiritual conversion. As an *ecumenical* he was devoted to the visible reunion of the church. He came to believe that the historic episcopate was a unique and necessary instrument for Christian unity, eventually becoming a bishop in the Church of South India (CSI). Newbigin was a critical force in bringing about the evangelical–catholic theological synthesis that enabled Anglican and Free Church leaders to come together behind the CSI scheme of union in 1947.

He came to seriously diverge from the direction of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as it moved away from visible and organic unity towards models of conciliarity or “reconciled diversity.” He embraced the 1961 WCC New Delhi commitment to a local vision for unity where “all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship.” From the time of the 1952 Willingen conference he embraced the *missio Dei* and began to develop a more fully Trinitarian—though nonetheless Christocentric—missionary ecclesiology. The emphasis was on the church's vocation, continuing the mission of Jesus, making known the Father's reign and bearing the eschatological witness of the Spirit in the world. The church is the *ecclesia tou Theou*—the assembled people of God in each place making known (as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's reign) the life of God's eschatological future in the present. His writings set forth a post-Christendom reunion ecclesiology that is *Reformed, eschatological, and missional*.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed..... (candidate)

Date.....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

Signed..... (candidate)

Date.....

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the summary to be made available to outside organizations.

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Acknowledgements

The seeds for this project were sown over twenty years ago during a lunch conversation with T.F. Torrance in the Princeton Seminary cafeteria. After I plied him with ecclesiological questions for an hour or more, he directed me to Lesslie Newbigin's *The Household of God* and when I read it everything changed. Because I believe in the communion of the saints I have no hesitancy in saying now, "thank you, Professor Torrance!"

I have many colleagues to thank. My close friend Craig Higgins and I have shared theological ideas with one another for nearly thirty years. To Craig I owe an invaluable debt for years of "iron sharpening iron" (Proverbs 27:17) and this dissertation would not be possible without his influence on my life. My co-laborers in San Francisco, Fred Harrell and Mike Hayes, have been wonderfully supportive of my doctoral studies for the past five years and have had an immeasurable influence on my thinking about mission. My friend, Chuck DeGroat, was kind enough to proofread the text and give many helpful comments and encouragements along the way. Years before we met he thought of writing a dissertation on a very similar topic. I am so glad he changed his mind.

I am grateful to Intown Community Church in Atlanta and City Church San Francisco for their support in this long process. I am also grateful to be part of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). It has been a delight to read the stories of RCA missionaries in India and their contributions for the formation of the Church of South

India. I have experienced the Christian church to be, as I once heard Eugene Peterson describe it, “equal parts mystery and mess.” But I can also say that my experience of the RCA has been “equal parts missional and ecumenical.” It would not be true to Newbigin to profess a love for the shantytown of denominationalism, but I think he would approve of my RCA pride. It comes from being in a community that acknowledges the tragedy of the church’s unhappy divisions and has committed itself to the costly journey towards unity.

I wish to thank Professor D.P. Davies for shepherding me through this project with rapid responses and the seasoned advice of someone who knows how to encourage research. The staff of the Postgraduate office at the University of Wales, Lampeter are truly remarkable and have always been willing to go the extra mile to accommodate the needs of this international student. I shall miss receiving mail partially written in Welsh.

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Lastly I want to thank my wife, Catherine, and our four sons: John, Ben, James, and David. They have all been supportive of this adventure, even going on vacation without me this past summer so that I could finish! The teenagers have served several times as my IT department and the younger boys have helped more than they know by asking me to explain repeatedly “what did Newbigin do?” My wife has always believed that I am meant to teach and write. Her undying devotion to “us,” to our family and to our calling in ministry makes it all possible. This work is dedicated to her.

I have devoted my life to the service of Jesus Christ and his church. This study has deepened that devotion and increased my hope for the ecumenical future. The reasons for the church's divisions are complex, but the best explanation I have come across thus far is from Monsignor Ronald Knox, "The good wine Christ has given us—it is only natural, in an imperfect world, that there should be some confusion about the labels" (Knox 1963: 231).

Scot Sherman

San Francisco, CA, USA

February 2010

Abbreviations

CDCP	Council for the Defence of Church Principles
CIBC	Church of India, Burma and Ceylon (Anglican)
CICCU	Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union
CCU	Council on Christian Unity (Disciples of Christ)
CSI	Church of South India
ESV	English Revised Version (of the Bible)
HTB	Holy Trinity Brompton (Anglican Parish)
IMC	International Missionary Council
LMS	London Missionary Society
NCC	National Council of Churches (USA)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SIUC	South India United Church
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
SVM	Student Volunteer Movement
RCA	Reformed Church in America
RSV	Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
URC	United Reformed Church
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WSCF	World Christian Student Federation

Introduction

The study of Lesslie Newbigin presents an opportunity to engage with a life-story of unfolding dramatic interest while surveying an impressive literary oeuvre spanning nearly six decades. A dynamic missionary, caring pastor, visionary bishop and passionate ecumenist, he was also a prolific theological and missiological writer who weighed in on most of the great ecclesial questions of his times. An ecclesiastical polymath, he was as highly regarded as a church leader as he was as a theologian. He described himself as “a theological and philosophical magpie,” explaining, “I take bits from here and there and feather my nest” (*Seattle Pacific University* 1998).

Geoffrey Wainwright, his longtime friend and biographer, compares him to the great Fathers of the church, deeming him “an ineluctable presence in his era” (Wainwright 2000b: v). Michael Green, advisor in evangelism to the archbishops of Canterbury and York, says of Newbigin: “he was universally recognized as the premier apologist of our age” (Green 2001: 218), who “knew more about other religions than anyone I have ever known.”¹ The Dalit theologian and recently retired bishop of Newbigin’s own diocese of Madras, the Rt. Rev. Masilamani Azariah, regards him as “the greatest Christian, the greatest man I have ever known.”²

This dissertation is a work of historical theology, which, simply defined is “the study of the views of theologians, and of the Christian Church, in their historical context” (McKim 1996: 129). It has required the interfacing of multiple disciplines—systematic

¹ From a personal interview with the Rev. Canon Michael Green, at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University, January 16, 2003.

² From a personal interview with the Rt. Rev. Masilamani Azariah at Christchurch Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia on March 15, 2004.

theology (Reformed, Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic), ecclesiology, missiology, ecumenism and modern church history. It is not a comprehensive intellectual biography of Lesslie Newbigin and neither is it a full setting-forth of his ecclesiology. The intention of this study is to isolate a particular strand of his ecclesial thought, trace out its theological and socio-cultural underpinnings, describe its development throughout his lifetime and evaluate its relevance for the contemporary church. The particular strand of thought is his case for the visible reunion of the Christian church. By “case” I mean his life’s work of arguing and endeavoring for a visibly reunited Christian church.

To properly examine his case for visible reunion, one must examine both the “arguing” and the “endeavoring.” Newbigin was an important writer and thinker but he was an equally important actor on the ecumenical stage. His arguments are incomprehensible apart from a historical understanding of the issues and controversies that he engaged. He has been aptly described as an “*ad hoc*” theologian (Goheen 2000:6), i.e. his writings were invariably addressed to the pressing issues of the day. The method of research for this dissertation, therefore, involves historical survey of Newbigin’s life as well as examination of his writings, the context from which his ecclesiology took shape. Each chapter deals with a particular period of his life, giving a biographical overview and identifying the important factors of the times. Relevant schools of thought and important theological developments are highlighted. Attention is paid to all his principle influences, both allies and opponents, along with their related writings or personal correspondence with Newbigin. The method of research also includes analysis of Newbigin’s principle works relevant to the “visible reunion” theme. His case for visible reunion is therefore given both historical and systematic analysis.

Chapter 1, “The Making of an Evangelical Ecumenical,” explores the formative years of Newbigin’s life (1909-1939), his childhood, conversion experience, early involvement with the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and his theological training at Westminster College, Cambridge. This chapter surveys his childhood, his loss of faith while away at boarding school and his conversion experience as a student at Queens’ College, Cambridge. Consideration will be given to the way that shifts in Protestant missionary thinking influenced him, especially the Tambaram Conference of 1938. By the time Newbigin arrives in India as a Church of Scotland missionary in 1939 he can be fairly described as an “evangelical ecumenical.”

Chapter 2, “Evangelical Ecumenism in South India” focuses on Newbigin’s early years in India (1939-1947) and the background and story of the formation of the CSI. Through the process of union negotiations, reunion, and life in the CSI his core convictions as an evangelical ecumenical deepened even as new ideas took root. He would come to believe that the historic episcopate was a unique and necessary instrument for Christian unity, eventually becoming a bishop in the united church and the principal apologist for the scheme of union.

Chapter 3, “The Church and the Gospel” examines Newbigin’s early contribution to the reunion debates in his role as convener of the union committee of the SIUC. The essays he edited and published in 1944 on behalf of the committee along with his own influential essay “The Church and the Gospel” will be assessed. This chapter will establish that Newbigin was a critical force in bringing about the evangelical–catholic theological synthesis that enabled Anglicans and Free Church leaders to come together behind the scheme of union in 1947.

Chapter 4, “Defending the Scheme” focuses on Newbigin’s role as a reunion negotiator and apologist. The first section profiles his principal opponents, English Anglo-Catholic critics of the scheme, examining their theological concerns and Newbigin’s response. The next section analyzes his most important work addressing the South India scheme, *The Reunion of the Church* (1948). The final section summarizes and analyzes his developing ecclesiology, suggesting three defining characteristics: it is *Reformed*, *eschatological*, and *missional*.

Chapter 5, “An Outward, Visible, and United Society” surveys Newbigin’s advocacy of visible reunion during the years immediately following the formation of the CSI in 1947 until his death in 1998. His role as general secretary of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and his leadership in integrating the IMC into the World Council of Churches (WCC), eventually becoming director of the WCC division of world mission and evangelism, is considered in light of the shifting paradigm of ecumenical missions at the time. This chapter analyzes his important ecclesiological works during this period, especially *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953) and *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (1958). The developing contours of his reunion ecclesiology during this period show that he remained essentially an evangelical ecumenical and his ecclesiology Reformed, eschatological, and missional. Until the end of his life he believed that that the church was called to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. The only way for the church to be a sign of the eschatological unity of the future would be through visible unity in the present. He never wavered from the convictions he articulated for the WCC New Delhi Assembly of 1961: the churches are called to move

towards visible reunion, all in each place. In his later years he came to believe that the future of ecumenism lay with the full participation of evangelicals, Pentecostals and other Christian groups that had historically been outside the movement.

Chapter 6, “The Relevance of Newbigin’s Reunion Ecclesiology for the Ecumenical Future” is the final conclusion of the dissertation. It considers the significance of Newbigin’s reunion ecclesiology in terms of recent developments in global ecumenism and concludes by offering a final theological evaluation of his contribution.

The dissertation title is a quotation from John 17:20, Christ’s high priestly prayer for his disciples: “that all may be one.” This was the title chosen for the American version of *A South India Diary (1952)*, Newbigin’s memoir of his early years as missionary bishop in the Church of South India (CSI). The Latin version of the text, *ut omnes unum sint*, is the motto of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). It was one such ecumenical student ministry, the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which was the organization of signal influence on the young Newbigin. The verse articulates the hope that was at the heart of Newbigin’s role as negotiator and defender of the reunion of the churches that formed the CSI, and which remained at the center of his life, a life lived in an abiding faith that Jesus’ prayer would and must be answered in the affirmative.

The dissertation makes use of both in-text citations and footnotes. Ordinarily sources are cited in the text with the author or editor’s last name, date and page number in parentheses. Further citations of the same source within the chapter contain only the date and page number in parentheses, though I have used discretion in sometimes repeating

the author's name for the sake of clarity. Footnotes are used for additional comments and information, to reference Newbigin's personal correspondence, or to reference original sources cited from a secondary source. When the same source is cited more than once in a paragraph, a parenthetical citation is placed after the last reference, usually at the end of the paragraph or block quote.

The writer of this dissertation has a point of view, as do all writers. As one historian has noted, "objectivity is not neutrality" (Haskell 1998: title page). I greatly admire Lesslie Newbigin, but have sought to evaluate his ideas objectively and fairly-mindedly. What emerges is a personal evaluation of those ideas that stands itself as a work of theology. As Geoffrey Bromiley has written, "Historical theology is not just a history of Christian theology but is itself theology...the observer ceases to be a mere observer and becomes a participant" (Bromiley 1978:xxv).

1. THE MAKING OF AN EVANGELICAL ECUMENICAL (1909-1939)

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the early and spiritually formative years of Newbigin's life (1909-1939). His childhood is surveyed, especially his loss of faith while away at boarding school and his conversion experience as a student at Queens' College, Cambridge. Consideration will be given to the formative influence of the nascent ecumenical movement upon him, particularly the SCM, and the circumstances that led to his decision to enter the Christian ministry. I will look at his preparatory years at Westminster College, Cambridge, paying special attention to some of his early student papers. I will also look at the significance of the Tambaram conference of 1938 and the theology of Hendrik Kraemer. I will demonstrate that by the time Newbigin arrived in India as a Church of Scotland missionary in 1939 he could be fairly described as an "evangelical ecumenical."

1.2. EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Newbigin is a common English name meaning "new building." One could hardly find a better moniker for a man who would spend most of his life in service to what he believed was God's new building, the Christian church. Lesslie Newbigin was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, Northumbria, on December 8, 1909. In his memoirs, he describes his childhood as wonderfully idyllic: "my earliest memories are almost all happy ones"

(Newbigin 1993k:1). The foundations for a life of biblical faith and deep social concern were laid in a loving Christian home.

His father was in the shipping trade, and ardently involved in liberal politics as a matter of deep conviction. He is described as a “devout and deeply thoughtful Christian,” who struggled to apply his faith to every area of his life, whether his family or his business life or his politics. Writing as an older man, Newbigin still referred to his father affectionately as “Daddy” (1993k:3).

He adored his mother, a devoted Christian, whom he remembered as “loving and quiet,” and a remarkably gifted pianist. Newbigin’s earliest memories were of a home flooded with beautiful music as well her love and devotion to her children. Again, writing late in life he said of his mother’s love, “I still live by its strength and constancy” (1993k:3).

The spiritual foundations of his early years were all brought into question when he was sent at age 8 to boarding school, Leighton Park, the Quaker public school in Reading, Berkshire. He was to remain there until he was 18. Being sent away from his happy home was one of the most painful events in his entire life:

I was totally unprepared for the sudden, overwhelming, desolating knowledge that I was alone. Never before, and never again afterwards, have I known such utter desolation. As I remember it now, I wonder how I survived it, and how countless other children can go through and survive that desolation. There is no way of describing it, for it is just darkness with no light at all (1993k: 4).

This temporary loss of the deep relationships of his home and childhood had serious spiritual consequences. By the end of his schooldays at Leighton Park, Newbigin had abandoned the Christian beliefs and assumptions of his parents. He found scripture lessons boring, while his chemistry teacher engaged him with the idea that “life is a

disease of matter.” From his reading in historical geography he gained a broadly deterministic view of history. For the precocious eighteen year old, “ ‘God’ was no longer a tenable hypothesis” (1993k: 5).

While at home during the summer before his freshman year at Cambridge Newbigin noticed one of his father’s books: William James’ *The Will to Believe*. The title struck him as an absurdity: How could wishing to believe be anything other than a formula for self-delusion? But James’ essay had a powerful influence on his thinking. An important intellectual threshold was crossed, for he no longer viewed religious belief as irrational. Shortly thereafter, Herbert Gray, a well-known Presbyterian minister and family friend, was visiting the Newbigin home and gave Leslie a copy of one of own recently published devotional books.³ While it was not persuasive, it was a lucid and reasonable exposition of the Christian faith, and it strengthened the idea developing in Newbigin’s mind that Christianity was not an unreasonable faith (1993k: 6).

1.3. THE CLUE OF THE CROSS

It would be the following year, during his first year at Queens’ College, Cambridge, that he would slowly become attracted to Christianity, especially as his friends in the Student Christian Movement (SCM) practiced it. He decided to ask one of his friends what to do: “if I were to become a Christian, how would I begin?” Without hesitation his friend replied, “buy an alarm clock” (1993k: 10).

With this challenge he decided to rise every morning to read his Bible and pray as a seeker. His journey to personal faith would come through the influence of Arthur

³ Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that the book was most likely Gray’s 1927 work *With Christ as Guide: An Apprehension of Christianity* (Wainwright 2000b: 411).

Watkins, an older student who was the captain of the Queen's College Rugby team.

Newbigin saw simply that "at the center of his life was a profound devotion to Christ...Prayer was his deepest being, and it made me want to pray" (1993k: 10).

During the summer after his freshman year at Cambridge, Newbigin worked in a Quaker social service center at Trealaw, in the Rhondda valley of South Wales. The ministry involved outreach to street children and to impoverished miners who had been "rotting for years in hopeless unemployment and destitution." He desperately wanted to relieve the despair he saw in the lives of these people, but the Quaker program was secular and did not allow any religious emphasis in the work. He came to believe that the men needed more than "draughts and ping pong." They needed the truth of the Christian gospel (1993k: 11).

During the last week the ministry took sixty men on a camping trip near the sea at Llanwit Major. One night, someone managed to find strong drink for the group. The miners became inebriated and soon fights began to break out all over the camp. By the time things settled down, it was late and Newbigin went to bed in despair. He felt he had nothing to offer the situation. As he lay awake, he had a vision, inspired by something he had read by William Temple:

It was a vision of the cross, but it was a vision of the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world. I saw it as something which reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory. I was sure that night, in a way I have never been before, that this was the clue that I must follow if I were to make any kind of sense of the world. From that moment I would always know how to take bearings when I was lost. I would know where to begin again when I had come to the end of all my resources of understanding or courage (1993k: 11).

1.3.1. *Ecumenical Clues*

Newbigin followed the clue immediately and his newfound faith was missional⁴ and ecumenical from the beginning. As a second year undergraduate he became a reader of the journal *International Review of Missions*. He went to the Anglican service of Evensong in the college chapel, while attending church on Sundays at St. Columba's Presbyterian. He did not initially care for the Evensong liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, but he did value the fact that Evensong was the one time that the two distinctively Christian groups on campus, the SCM and the CICCUCU (Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union: pronounced "kick you"), would actually pray together. This was no small thing since "the official view" of the conservative evangelical CICCUCU was that "the SCM members were unbelievers"(1993k: 13). The divisions were made absurdly visible to all when the Apostles' Creed was said: the SCM members faced East, while the CICCUCU members faced one another (1993k: 14).

Newbigin became a member of a society called the Madingley Group, whose members walked from Cambridge to the village of Madingley to pray in the parish church for the cause of Christian unity. He was passionate about all things ecumenical, although at the time he was not actually a member of a church. He took instruction and was confirmed at St. Columba's Presbyterian during his second year at Cambridge (1993k: 14).

⁴ This is a term coined and used by the *Gospel and Our Culture Network* (GOCN) started by Newbigin. "Missional" emphasizes the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people. (Cf. Guder 1998:1-12).

It seemed that everyone he knew who was serious about the Christian faith was preparing for ordination. Newbigin planned all along to join his Father's shipping business and actually formed a society for SCM members who were planning not to enter vocational ministry. His Father even came to Cambridge to speak to the "Christians in Business Society," but shortly thereafter he attended the 1930 Swanwick SCM conference. At the conclusion Willie Tyndal, the SCM National Study-Secretary, challenged him to consider a career in missions. He accepted on the spot, though he was troubled enough with the prospect of abandoning the cause of "Christians in business" that he wrote a lengthy letter to John R. Mott, who was himself a layman. Mott responded with a lengthy letter sympathetic to Newbigin's concerns, but advised the young man that the Christian ministry was "the most highly multiplying form of Christian service" (1993k: 16).

This passionate concern for lay ministry did not abate. In 1938, while serving the Church of Scotland as a Candidates Secretary for the Foreign Missions Committee, Newbigin would write to members of the church that, while their missionaries were important, "the success or failure of the Church depends supremely upon the witness to Christ of the ordinary lay member" (Newbigin 1938b: 58).

From 1931 to 1933 Newbigin served as student secretary of the SCM for three campuses in Glasgow, Scotland. One of his colleagues was Helen Henderson, a child of Irish Presbyterian missionaries to India. They fell in love immediately and would marry six years later.

Helen accompanied him to the Edinburgh Quadrennial of January 1933, a student missionary conference that brought several thousand students together from over fifty

nations. It fell to Newbigin to give the traditional challenge for students to consider missionary service. He based his address on the message of the International Missionary Council (IMC) conference held in Jerusalem in 1928, “We Believe in a Christ-like World” (1993k: 25).

Newbigin grounded his challenge to mission service in a frank acknowledgment of the sad state of affairs for the churches of Europe. The situation was dire: “the very existence of the organized church ...seems to be at stake.” Would it be wiser for the church to cut back on foreign missions and focus its energy on the challenges at home? Newbigin answered a resounding “No.” To turn away from the needs of the world was unconscionable and un-Christ-like:

In so far as this desire to concentrate on our own problems is born of fear for the preservation of the life of the church here as we know it, it is something less than Christ-like, for it will be the mark of a Christ-like Church that, spending its life to save others, it will not be concerned to save itself (Newbigin 1933: 98).

Newbigin linked the commitment to mission with the commitment to unity. The love of Christ demanded that Churches embrace one another globally. The very credibility of the Church was at stake:

Is it not true that we ought to cut down on the work of foreign missions and concentrate our best powers on the problems that confront us at home? I believe that answer is No...because of the very nature of the Christian Church...because it is the body of Christ, whose members are members one of another; because it is the community of people who love one another, who can save the world because that love can overleap every human barrier of race or nation or economic status and draw all men into one. Because the Church is this, a church which is not extending hands of mutual help and friendship across oceans and across frontiers is as much a contradiction in terms as a church whose ministry is corrupt, or whose members are selfish and dishonest. In so far as the church is not truly and deeply one the world over, demonstrating to the world a unity that can transcend all sectional aims, however lofty, it is not merely failing to take account of the plain facts of the world as it is today, it is also to that extent denying its own true nature and contradicting its own true witness (1933: 97-98)

Newbiggin's commitment to mission and ecumenism was absolute. The Edinburgh SVMU address was his first published writing. He was twenty-three years old.

From 1933 to 1936 Newbiggin undertook his theological studies at Westminster College, Cambridge, while Helen went on to study at St. Colm's Missionary College in Edinburgh. He was elected SCM President for the 1934-1935 term. His first priority was to attempt some practical ecumenism on campus by bringing together the divided factions of the CICCUC and the SCM. There was to be a celebration of the jubilee of the "Cambridge Seven," the famous group whose offer for missionary service was the catalyst for the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) and the Student Volunteer Movement Union (SVMU).⁵ Newbiggin pleaded with the President of CICCUC that the SCM be allowed to be part of the celebrations, but the refusal was absolute. "The SCM was regarded as no part of the legitimate Christian scene" (1993k: 31).

For Newbiggin, the "clue of the cross" meant that God in Christ was gathering people to himself and, therefore, to one another. He refused to follow the liberal tendency to exclude evangelicals, or the evangelical tendency to exclude liberals. He viewed the two as separated halves of something that should be a single whole. Throughout his life he had passionate social concern and felt that evangelicals were weak in this area. But he also had a profound belief in the necessity of the atonement, of the need for personal conversion and of the trustworthiness of the Bible. These two campus groups perfectly illustrated the division of the broader church. The SCM was deeply

⁵ The SVM was the division of the American YMCA that recruited students for missionary service. The SVMU was a union of university mission groups with the same basis as the SVM; however, the SVMU later became a part of the SCM (cf. 1993k: 273-274).

shaped by political and social concerns, but lacked passion for evangelism. The CICCU was deeply committed to evangelism, but distrusted talk of social action (Green 2001: 217).⁶

Newbigin took steps to overcome this division. As SCM President he reached out to CICCU, though without success. He also had what he termed a “brilliant idea” to launch a mission in July of 1935 that brought students from both camps, those who volunteered for work camps helping the needy along with students who usually signed on for evangelistic missions. This large group of students spent eight hours a day with picks and shovels building a playground for needy children in a village near Swanwick. Then they spent several hours each night preaching the gospel in street meetings. “There was, as always a certain tension between those who were keen on direct evangelism and those who were concerned about social justice” (1993k: 33).⁷ That tension did not exist for Lesslie Newbigin and for the rest of his life he would do all he could to bring conservatives and liberals together (2001: 218).

Newbigin’s vision did not have enduring significance within the SCM. During the 1930s the ministry in the United Kingdom reached an all-time high of 11,500 students out of a total student population of 72,000. According to former general secretary, David L. Edwards, the SCM in those days was “influenced by the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth in a return to the Bible and by the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr.” There were several decades in which the ministry flourished, but by the 1960s the SCM went into

⁶ CICCU is older than SCM. The two affiliated in 1893 but disaffiliated in 1910, the year of the Edinburgh Conference (Boyd 2007: 3).

⁷ Fifty three years later this act was still remembered at Cambridge. Newbigin’s obituary from Queen’s College notes that he was “SCM President and unsuccessfully sought reconciliation with CICCU” (*Queens’ Record*).

rapid decline, characterized by “participation in progressive causes of the day” and “a shallowness of religion” (Edwards 2002: 150).

The CICCUC, like most Evangelical churches and organizations in the United Kingdom since the Keele Congress of 1967, would eventually embrace an agenda of social concern. The Intercollegiate student union is currently the largest student organization in the United Kingdom with a membership of around 15,000 students (2001: 218). The SCM has dwindled to just a few staff members; the majority of former chapters are defunct and the membership numbers are in the low hundreds. David Edwards attributes the success of the Evangelical student movement to the fact that it “kept the assets which the SCM largely lost in the 1960s: fascinations with the Bible and Christ” (2002: 151). During Newbigin’s tenure with the SCM, those twin fascinations characterized his leadership.

1.3.2. Evangelical Clues

The Cambridge years were significant for Newbigin’s formation as a Christian characterized as both Ecumenical and Evangelical, as one who refused to choose one identity over the other. The Ecumenical influences were primarily through the SCM and the constant stream of movement leaders who flowed through Cambridge. Newbigin came to know such distinguished ecumenists as John R. Mott, William Temple, Hendrik Kraemer, John Mackay and J.H. Oldham. He was invited to visit Temple at Bishopthorpe and spent a long evening listening to the Archbishop “unfolding his vision

for the Ecumenical movement,” notably the idea of some kind of worldwide organization of churches to be formed in the future (1993k: 31).

Newbigin’s Evangelical shape began with a life-changing study of the letter to the Romans, while a student at Westminster College, Cambridge. His experience with the SCM had filled his mind with questions for which he had no answers. He decided that Paul’s letter to the Romans was as concise a statement of the Christian gospel as could be found, so he set about an intensive study from the Greek text working with numerous commentaries for a period of several months:

This was a turning point in my theological journey. I began the study as a typical liberal. I ended it with a strong conviction about “the finished work of Christ”, about the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on Calvary. The decisive agent in the shift was James Denney. His commentary on Romans carried the day as far as I was concerned. Barth I found incomprehensible. C.H. Dodd seemed to have made the epistle palatable by removing its toughest parts – the parts where I found strong meat. His “demythologizing” of the wrath of God seemed to me effectively to remove the love of God, for if “wrath” was only an anthropomorphic way of describing the consequences of sin, then “love” would have to be explained along the same lines. At the end of the exercise I was much more of an evangelical than a liberal (1993k: 29)

His developing ideas concerning the cross and atonement are seen in a paper⁸ he wrote at Westminster College for Professor W.A. L. Elmslie on the Hebrew text of Exodus 30:11-16.⁹ The focus of the paper concerns the idea of atonement in the Old Testament. Newbigin rejects the idea that the concept of atonement originated as a merely human convention; rather, it was “provided by God himself for his people, as part

⁸ Newbigin’s unpublished papers are available for research as part of the official collection. The "Lesslie Newbigin Papers", held in care of the Orchard Learning Resources Centre, Information Services, The University of Birmingham, Hamilton Drive, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6QW, U.K.
⁹ “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/3/1/7. Typescript essay dated on the covering title page “Westminster College, November 1935.” Not paginated, marked and annotated 'Approved W. A. L. Elmslie, Jan., 1936.'

of the gracious act by which He redeems them out of bondage and makes them his children.” God is the gracious redeemer who provides the way to remove the things that stand between himself and his people. Yet God is also the holy judge and the problem of sin and the reality of God’s wrath must be taken seriously:

Guilt is not something which can be simply removed as one wipes a dirty mark off the face of a child; no mere act of omnipotence can remove it from without, unless it is to destroy our moral responsibility. And we part company with the biblical conception of God if we do not allow room in our understanding of Him for wrath against the sinful. It is true that the Bible uniformly refuses to pretend that man can appease God’s wrath, but it is certainly very far from the idea of a God who cannot be angry with sinful men. God in the Bible speaks to men in living converse according to their condition; He does not merely emit a stream of “unchanging love” like a wireless broadcasting station which continues to radiate its programme according to a predetermined plan irrespective of what listeners there be and what they think of the programme. Such a conception of love is abstract and unreal and is certainly not biblical.... Forgiveness is not merely the washing away of defilement, physically conceived: it is a transaction between God and the guilty soul, and it is apparently regarded as delayed until certain sacrifices have been made by men in accordance with God’s instruction (Newbigin 1935).

The blood of sacrifice expresses the “blend of tenderness and wrath which is redemptive love.” The provision of sacrifice in the cult of Israel prefigures the perfect sacrifice Christ offers on the cross for the sins of the world:

What we see in the full light of the Cross is the perfection of that of which the ritual system was the dim outline—at once the gulf that sunders man from God and the graciousness of God who stretches out a redeeming hand even across that gulf. But because love must be known in deeds and not only in symbols, that perfect sacrifice had to be the sacrifice of Himself (1935)

Newbigin was also shaped at this time by the influence of Professor H.H. Farmer. When Farmer came to Westminster College he introduced the practice of “quiet days,” set times when students were encouraged to set aside time for meditation and prayer. Newbigin felt that his interior life was enriched by this practice and he was particularly

drawn to Farmer as a professor whose lectures were as “spiritually delightful” as they were lucid and brilliant (1993k: 30).

During his last year at Westminster, Newbigin wrote a paper for Farmer on the subject of “revelation.”¹⁰ In the first few pages of the paper he lays out some foundational principles that are consistent with those of an Ecumenical Christian with Evangelical leanings.

He delineates two central beliefs about the world and human beings that underlie the concept of divine revelation. First, the world must be understood to be personal, i.e. it is the creation of a personal God who is the source of meaning within the creation and who gives the creation meaning. Science, with its experimental method and innate skepticism, is not capable of rendering the meaning or purpose of the world. One can only know a person’s will or purpose by listening to that person (and then only if they choose to reveal themselves). God’s revelation in Christ and in scripture is the self-disclosure of God’s purpose and will for the creation (Newbigin 1936: 2).

The second foundational principle is that human life is lived in community, within fellowship. If this were not the case, every person would receive direct revelation from God. The implications of our communal nature are that revelation must come to us through the community:

That revelation which is the key to our blessedness does not descend to us straight from heaven, but has to reach us passed from hand to hand of our fellow men along the chain of a historic community (1936: 2).

¹⁰ “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/3/1/2. “Revelation.” Typescript essay dated by hand 1935-6, 36pp.

Revelation is therefore a doctrine about a personal God who can be known because this God has revealed himself. It is also a doctrine about the church, because that self-disclosure is given to the community and that community is the bearer of this revelation for the sake of all the rest of the world. These themes would continue to resonate in Newbigin's writings throughout his career.

These student papers reveal that when Newbigin described himself as "more of an evangelical than a liberal" he was identifying with some distinctively evangelical ideas about the nature of the atonement and of biblical revelation. What is equally clear is that even during these early years both areas of doctrine have profound ecclesial significance for him. The cross makes it possible for God to remove the barriers between himself and his people; biblical revelation is given to the church and is to be taken by the church to the world.

1.4. MISSIONARY TO INDIA

In July of 1936 Newbigin was ordained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh. He and Helen had been approved by the Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland and assigned to the Madras Mission in South India. They were married in August, and in September the newlyweds set sail on the "City of Cairo" for the four-week journey from Liverpool to Madras. Upon arrival they located in the village of Chingleput and began formal study of Tamil. The following March they moved to Kodaikanal for more intensive language study (1993k: 34-42)

After language exams were passed in June of 1937, the couple learned that they were assigned to Kanchipuram, one of the seven sacred cities of Hinduism. Before departure, Newbigin planned a trip to visit a rapidly growing Methodist church in the Dharapuram area, hoping to observe their evangelistic methods. The journey was complex and involved trains and buses. One of the buses he took was a rustic vehicle, a chassis with wooden benches mounted on top with no protection on the front or sides. The driver had an accident and crashed the bus into a large iron gate. Newbigin was sitting in the front of the bus and one of his legs was crushed. He was taken to a hospital in Madura and then on to Madras. He endured nine operations over the next several months and in October, exactly one year after his arrival in India, he and Helen returned to Edinburgh for the tenth and final operation (1993k: 40-43).

The lengthy recovery from late 1937 until 1939 enabled Newbigin to focus even more on language study and to deepen his reading and thinking about the growing ecumenical movement. He served as Candidates Secretary for the Foreign Missions Board, assigned to recruit new missionaries from Universities and Divinity Halls throughout Scotland. It was during this recuperation and time of limited activity that one of the most formative events of his life took place, the conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) held in Tambaram, a suburb of Madras. Newbigin would not be able to attend, but many of the ideas of Tambaram would shape his theology for the rest of his life.

1.5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TAMBARAM INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY CONFERENCE (1938)

The missiology of the previous few years had been dominated by a collection of essays edited by Harvard professor W.E. Hocking entitled *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After 100 Years* (1933). The essays proposed a missionary theology that displaced the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ, except as a religious teacher and “exemplar of the supreme style of life.” It presented a pluralistic theology that envisioned the great religions of the world on a common and equally valid path to salvation. The ensuing debate provoked J.H. Oldham and others to commission Hendrik Kraemer to write a book for Tambaram that would address the question of Jesus Christ in relation to other faiths (Newbigin 1988a: 327).

Hendrik Kraemer was a Dutch Reformed missiologist, linguist and missionary to Indonesia. His book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938), profoundly influenced events at Tambaram and the life of Lesslie Newbigin. He does not comment on the conference in his memoir but he did share some reflections later in life. In 1988 he was invited by the WCC to return to India for the fiftieth celebration of the conference. The event was a small consultation on the relationship between inter-faith dialogue and mission. Preaching at the opening of the consultation in the chapel of Madras Christian College, Newbigin reflected on the significance of Kraemer's book and the Tambaram 1938 conference. What had made a particular impression on him as a young man was that the cultural optimism of Hocking was indistinguishable from the “broad ideals of democratic capitalism.” *Rethinking Missions* was little more than an

attempt to domesticate the gospel by assimilating it to Western, European and American values. Kraemer's book was a repudiation of such syncretism:

It was an affirmation of the uniqueness, the decisiveness, the sufficiency of the gospel – of those mighty acts of God, which have their centre and climax in the incarnation, ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Kraemer did not claim uniqueness for Christianity, which is a changing, variegated and ambiguous human phenomenon; he claimed uniqueness for the events that form the substance of the gospel. In Kraemer's favourite phrase, these events are *sui generis*. There may be ideas, stories, myths, legends that reflect the same motives, but if we are talking about history, about what has actually happened as distinct from what people have thought and dreamed, there is nothing to be put alongside this story. The gospel is, strictly, *sui generis*, unique. Therefore we have no business trying to domesticate it within our cultures, our national projects and programmes, no business to confuse it with the so-called Christian civilization of the west. The gospel is unique, sovereign, unbound. Our business is to bear witness to it (Newbigin 1988a: 327).

Newbigin saw Kraemer joining with Karl Barth in a rejection of liberal European Protestantism, which was “Religion as Unbelief.” Barth had boldly challenged the syncretistic confusion of Christianity with national identity in Germany and with pagan ideology in Nazism. But Kraemer was going further, asserting that the gospel could not encompass Western value systems at all. Missions could no longer be understood as the establishment of colonial outposts reflecting one version of Christendom or another. What was required was nothing less than a unified family of churches “challenged by the gospel itself to make, in each cultural context, the proper response which the gospel invites.” Kraemer did not claim uniqueness for Christianity understood as “a changing, variegated and ambiguous human phenomenon,” but “the events that form the substance of the gospel” were utterly unique among the world religions. For Newbigin, this was nothing less than a “turning point in the history of world mission”:

If we are speaking about religious ideas, or about religious experiences, then certainly to claim uniqueness and finality for one's own is intolerable arrogance.

Kraemer's whole point is that we are not; we are talking about facts of history. If, in fact, it is true that almighty God, creator and sustainer of all that exists in heaven and on earth, has – at a known time and place in human history – so humbled himself as to become part of our sinful humanity and to suffer and die a shameful death to take away our sin and to rise from the dead as the first-fruit of a new creation; if this is a fact, then to affirm it is not arrogance. To remain quiet about it is treason to our fellow human beings. If it is really true, as it is, that "the Son of God loved me and gave himself up for me," how can I agree that this amazing act of matchless grace should merely become part of a syllabus for the "comparative study of religions"? One can, of course, deny the story. One can say that it is not fact but legend. But if it is fact it cannot be slotted into some way of understanding the world based on other pre-suppositions; it can only be the starting-point, the pre-supposition of all our struggle to understand the world, including our struggle to understand the world of the religions (1988a: 328).

Newbigin considered Kraemer's message to be a liberation from what he called "the great betrayal" which had "bracketed the gospel with all sorts of causes and interests." Newbigin concluded the sermon by quoting the final statement of the Tambaram conference:¹¹

The world mission of the Church... is inherent in the very nature of Christianity. Today the Church to a greater degree than formerly stands in a missionary relationship to the whole world... In no land is the cause won. Christians standing in humility with their fellow men under God's judgement see all mankind as the object of the Father's grace. They are thus under divine compulsion to proclaim the mercy of God who so loved the world that he gave his only son that men might be saved: and the Church can only be obedient to the will of the Good Shepherd if it goes out to all men regardless of creed, or caste, or colour, to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to call people of all faiths by word and deed into the life of the Beloved Community (1988a: 330-331).

William Richey Hogg, a historian of the IMC, has pointed out that Tambaram made it preeminently clear that mission is at the heart of the church's existence. "Mission is not a segment of the church's life. On the contrary, the church exists to fulfill a divinely ordained mission..." (Hogg 1953: 298). The ecclesial vision of Tambaram

¹¹ (IMC 1938:55).

remained with Newbigin for the rest of his life. He was fond of quoting Emil Brunner's dictum¹², "the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning" (Newbigin 1953e: 142).

1.6. CONCLUSION: AN EVANGELICAL ECUMENICAL

When Newbigin returned to India in September 1939 he had a distinct spiritual identity. He had come to Evangelical convictions about "the finished work of Christ", about the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on the cross. He had a passion for evangelism and for proclamation of the "fact" of the gospel as public truth. He believed that the church existed for this mission and was also called to live out the reality of the message through ministries of social justice. He saw the Ecumenical movement as essential because it was only through visible reunion that the church could fully experience and testify to the reconciling love of Christ.

Newbigin's early ministry in India demonstrates this commitment to Ecumenism. He became a representative of the South India United Church (SIUC), a denomination Presbyterian and Congregationalist in origin that was to unite with Methodists and Anglicans to form the Church of South India (CSI). His role in the negotiations and his ordination as a CSI bishop at the age of thirty seven were to cement his place in the pantheon of great twentieth century ecumenists.

Newbigin was not simply an ecumenical negotiator. He was a committed churchman who was equally committed to preaching an evangelical message of faith and repentance. In India, he regularly engaged in street preaching and distributed mass-

¹² (Brunner 1931: 108).

produced paperback copies of the gospels. He saw no tension between ministry that emphasized personal conversion and that also was made credible through concerns for social justice. Newbigin described his ministry as having an equal emphasis on the social and the evangelistic:

I do not think that the street preaching of wandering strangers is likely to bear much fruit in a place like this: but when men have earned their right to be heard by their service to the city in a school or hospital, their public testimony will carry weight... Thus the institutional work gives weight to the preaching, and the preaching gives point to the institutional work. What matters is that word and deed are not separated. What matters more is that they are seen to flow from a center where Jesus Christ is confessed and worshipped (1993k: 53).

Preaching would be “disembodied words” without the credibility of loving deeds, which “put some flesh on it.” Part and parcel of that credibility was the love between Christians that should be shown in visible union, “the center where Jesus Christ is confessed and worshipped.” His ministry in India was marked by a commitment to evangelistic preaching, to establish ministries of social justice, and by seeking the visible reunion of the divided Protestant denominations (1993k: 49-78). It is clear that Newbigin was not content with the limited visions of his earlier experiences with the SCM and CICCUC. He was now an evangelical ecumenical.

It is apparent that Newbigin was committed to ecumenism throughout his lifetime. Qualifying his self-description as “more of an evangelical than a liberal” is more difficult. His student papers and his preaching ministry reveal his distinctive theological shape with many evangelical doctrines. Yet many groups broadly use the term “evangelical.” The term was used at the time of the Reformation to identify all Protestants, especially as they held to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and the supreme authority

of the Bible (the material and formal principles of Reformed Theology). The term has, subsequently, taken on a narrower definition:

[It refers to those who have] espoused and experienced justification and scriptural authority in an intensified way: personal conversion and a rigorous moral life, on the one hand, and concentrated attention on the Bible as a guide to conviction and behavior on the other, with a special zeal for the dissemination of Christian faith so conceived... Today evangelical continues as an adjective in the names of some Protestant denominations and is also used in theology to identify Reformation doctrine... but it is more generally associated with the aforementioned subsidiary meaning of interiorization and intensification as in ‘born-again Christianity’. (Fackre 1983a: 191).

In what sense was the young Newbigin an evangelical? Categorizing him as an “evangelical” in the modern sense of the word would be inaccurate, but it is equally misleading simply to describe him as an “ecumenical.” These terms are appropriate designations for him only inasmuch as they complement one another.

John R.W. Stott has offered a three-fold Trinitarian rubric to broadly define evangelical identity - “the authority of God through scripture, the majesty of Jesus Christ in and through the cross, and the Lordship of the Holy Spirit in and through his manifold ministries” (Stott 1999: 25). There are other distinctives as well: “the necessity of conversion (a direct encounter with God effected by God alone); the priority of evangelism (witness being an expression of worship); and the importance of fellowship (the church being essentially a living community of believers).”¹³

Within the community of those describing themselves as “evangelicals” there is great variety of emphasis on these distinctives. Stott names several distinct groupings of evangelicals, the last being “evangelical ecumenicals,” those who adhere to the

¹³ These six were originally described by J.I. Packer and later expounded by Alistair McGrath (Packer 1978: 6-7; McGrath 1995: 55-56). Stott does not see these as six distinct principles, but views the second three as a subset of the first three.

distinctives of evangelicalism and are also committed to ecumenism, though they sometimes find themselves to be critical of the movement (Stott 1999: 22).

Gabriel Fackre has describes this sub-group as follows:

With evangelicals today, an evangelical ecumenical affirms the experiential appropriation of justification and Scripture with its overflow in evangelization. The gospel is a word that warms the heart and opens the mouth. An evangelical ecumenical is one who joins these commitments to a classical Trinitarian faith, as transmitted in creedal, liturgical, and sacramental traditions, and who vigorously participates in an ecumenical movement that both seeks ecclesial unity and is deeply immersed in today's struggles for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation...the adjective *ecumenical* means an openness to connect and to associate with those in the formally designated ecumenical movement, including Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox believers as well as Reformation heirs. (Fackre 1993: ix).

Given these parameters, the young missionary who arrived in India in 1939 may fairly be described as an “evangelical ecumenical.” He was deeply committed to the authority of scripture, the necessity of the atonement through the cross and of the vital spiritual life that comes from personal communion with God. He was an evangelist who sought to bring about spiritual conversion in his hearers. He devoted himself to the visible reunion of the church and applied himself to that task for the rest of his life; however, his ecumenism cannot be rightly understood apart from his evangelical convictions.

2. EVANGELICAL ECUMENISM IN SOUTH INDIA

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines Newbigin's early ministry in India (1939-1947) and the background and story of the formation of the Church of South India. I will show that ecumenism in South India was an outgrowth of the evangelistic vision of evangelical Protestant missionaries and their increasing desire to cooperate in mission. That it was such "unintentional ecumenists" who would lay the groundwork for the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century in general and in South India in particular. I will describe how Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists came together to form the South India United Church (SIUC) and consider the extraordinary obstacles that had to be overcome before the Anglicans could become part of a united church with them. The ideas of the church Conferences at Tranquebar 1919 and Lambeth 1920 will be explored as well as the distinctives of the scheme of church union that eventually led to the formation of the CSI in 1947. I will pay particular attention to the development of the pledge that enabled churches to enter the union with standing differences but with a commitment to grow into a deeper spiritual unity through the years. I will consider the impact of the entire experience of union negotiations, reunion and life in the CSI on Lesslie Newbigin. Through the process his core convictions as an evangelical ecumenical deepened even as new ideas took root. He would come to believe that the historic episcopate was a unique and necessary instrument for Christian unity, eventually

becoming a bishop in the united church and the principal theological defender of the South India scheme.

2.2. BACK TO INDIA (1939 – 1947)

2.2.1. *The War Years (1939-1945)*

In the spring of 1939 Newbigin was released from the nursing home in Edinburgh where he had been convalescing after his bus accident in India two years earlier. He had endured ten surgeries and was still experiencing serious pain when walking. He and Helen welcomed their first child, Margaret, in June and by late Summer Newbigin had recovered enough to be able to walk. The family planned to set sail for India in August, but the trip was cancelled when Britain declared war on Germany. A naval blockade was initiated making sea travel dangerous but within a few days they were allowed to rebook their passage. They set sail in September and arrived back in Kanchipuram in October (1993k: 47).

During the war years Newbigin served as district missionary in Kanchipuram. The family grew during these years with the birth of Alison in 1941, Janet in 1944, and John in 1947. He taught English in the local High School, continued his studies in Tamil, and busied himself leading various evangelistic efforts in the city. He also began for the first time to explore Hinduism in depth. Every week Hindu scholars would gather at the monastery of the Ramakrishna Mission for theological study and reflection. Newbigin was invited to share in the leadership of this group alongside the senior Hindu teacher.

The group alternated texts weekly; one week the Swami would read the Svetesvara Upanishad in Sanskrit; the next week they would listen to the gospel of John read aloud in Greek and expounded by Newbigin in Tamil. These weekly visits would have a profound impact on his thinking. He came to respect “the profound rationality” of the Hindu belief system but also became convinced that there was a lack of any concept of redemption within its worldview (1993k: 48-56).

He was also involved in ministry to the surrounding villages spending time in the outlying settlements where “untouchables” lived in seclusion from mainstream Hindu society. He trained leaders within these settlements to teach and catechize new Christians and developed a training curriculum for them. This resulted in the annual publication of *The Village Workers’ Almanack* a booklet that provided weekly material for teachers and catechists who had little or no theological education (1993k: 64).

Newbigin was a minister of the Church of Scotland and a member of the Madras Presbytery. The dual allegiance would eventually prove problematic. A public dispute arose between one of Newbigin’s fellow missionaries and an Indian pastor of the SIUC. The missionary refused to answer the charges brought against him within the context of the SIUC. He argued that his membership was within the Madras Presbytery of the Church of Scotland and that the Indian Church had no jurisdiction in the matter. Newbigin and two other missionaries found the situation intolerable and wrote to Edinburgh to have their names removed from the roles of Presbytery in order to be responsible to the Indian Church alone. The Presbytery granted their request and in 1942 the missionaries were placed under the jurisdiction of the SIUC (1993k: 67). A few years later Newbigin would argue that missionaries should cease functioning as behind the

scenes administrators and should serve side by side with the Indians in parish ministry and be willing to become junior members rather than leaders.

The minister should work as a member of the church of India and as its servant... The principle of identification with those to whom we are sent, a principle which derives its sanction from the Incarnation itself, surely forbids us to stop short of this step. Comradeship with the Indian Church cannot be complete so long as the missionary cannot accept, along with his Indian fellow-minister, the spiritual authority of the Church which he is himself committed to build up (Newbigin 1945: 88).

2.2.2. Union Negotiator and Defender (1942-1947)

Newbigin was now responsible to the SIUC. He became immediately involved in discussions about the vision for church union in South India. In 1942 he was elected as convener of the union committee of the Madras Church Council. This committee worked to bring about ecclesiastical unity between Anglicans (the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon - CIBC), Methodists (of British missionary origin) and the SIUC. Established in 1908 the SIUC was a union church between Presbyterians and Congregationalists and also included a number of congregations sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission. The Madras Church Council was an association of the SIUC, the Anglicans, the Methodists and missionaries from the Arcot mission of the Reformed Church in America (Newbigin 1944a; 1993k: 68-69; Wainwright 2000b: 84-85).

When Newbigin first became involved with the union committee of the Madras Church Council the ecumenical process in the SIUC was at its nadir. It had been nearly a quarter century since the first union proposals at Tranquebar (1919). Most of the original pioneers had either retired or died and the process had stalled. Newbigin recalled

that many of his colleagues considered the whole enterprise to be “a waste of time and a diversion of energy from the real business of a missionary” (1993k: 69).

Newbigin entered the process as an evangelical ecumenical fully committed to both mission and unity. In 1943 he was elected the convener of the union committee of the SIUC. For the next three years he helped design the plan that would successfully lead to the formation of the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947. He was joined by a new wave of young leaders from the other representative church groups. Prominent among them were the Methodist leader, A.M. Ward, and the newly appointed Anglican bishop of Madras, A.M. Hollis (Sundkler 1954: 301-303). Among the new leaders Newbigin stood out:

During the ‘forties there was an interesting and highly competent group of new men in the delegations. They gave a fresh impetus particularly to the theological debate. Among the S.I.U.C. representatives J.E.L. Newbigin was outstanding. With a background of solid Scottish theology and experience as a Student Christian Movement secretary, he became in India an expert Tamil linguist and evangelist. An exceptionally happy blend of youth, mature judgement and spiritual authority made his contribution unique (1954: 302).

Newbigin handled his task with “eminent skill” and was ably assisted by the committee secretary, J.S.M. Hooper, a British Methodist whom Sundkler would call the “pilot of South India Union” (1954: 324, 339).

Newbigin led the committee for two years, but in 1946, the year that the decisive vote for union was taken he returned to Britain on furlough. He was not, however, “on furlough” from the struggle for church union. In Scotland he tirelessly defended the scheme throughout the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church. He especially focused his efforts in responding to the fierce criticism of the scheme that came from Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England, “The Council for the Defence of

Church Principles.” The CDCP members went so far as to advocate excommunication of any Anglicans who entered the CSI. In April 1947 Newbigin was given permission to devote the rest of his furlough to reply to the critics of the scheme. His response would be published as *The Reunion of the Church* in January 1948, four months after the new church was formed (1993k: 79-92).

Newbigin and a group of younger leaders brought the nearly impossible task of reunion to a successful end in a relatively short period of time. But what they finished was a work that had been in progress since the early nineteenth century. The long road that finally led to visible unity would traverse the ground of some of the most significant divisions in Protestantism.

2.3. A VISION FOR UNITY IN SOUTH INDIA

2.3.1. *William Carey: A Missionary with a Dream*

It was the Calvinistic Baptist missionary William Carey who first proposed the idea of church union in South India. The cobbler turned missionary had arrived in India in 1793 and went on to plant churches, build schools, establish India’s first newspaper, and oversee the translation of the Bible into over forty languages and dialects. Before going to India he had been of the opinion that denominations should work separately: “If...intermingled... their private discords might throw a damp upon their spirits, and

much retard their public usefulness.”¹⁴ The school he established in Serampore was interdenominational, although all the teachers were required to embrace evangelical distinctives such as the deity of Christ and substitutionary atonement. He worked closely with non-Baptist evangelicals including the Anglican missionary Henry Martyn (George 2004: 10). Carey eventually began to realize the strategic connection between unity and mission and was the first to propose an interdenominational coordinated strategy for world evangelization. In May of 1806 he wrote from Calcutta to Andrew Fuller, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society:

Would it be possible to have a general association of all denominations of Christians, from the four quarters of the world, held once in about ten years? I earnestly recommend this plan, let the first meetings be in the year 1810, or 1812 at the furthest. I have no doubt but that it would be attended with many important effects; we could understand one another better, and more entirely enter into one another’s views by two hours conversation than by two or three years of epistolary correspondence.¹⁵

Carey suggested that the first conference should be held in Capetown since the Cape of Good Hope was securely within English hands, but Fuller was not interested. He believed that real unity would be impossible in such an assembly and no gathering was ever to be held (Latourette 1967: 355).

2.3.2. 19th Century Evangelical Protestant Missionaries: Unintentional Ecumenists

Exactly one hundred years after Carey’s first proposed conference, when Lesslie Newbigin was just six months old, the first international missionary conference met in

¹⁴ (Carey 1792: 84; cited in Rouse 1967b: 311-312).

¹⁵ Letter of William Carey to Andrew Fuller, 15 May, 1806 (cited in George 1991: 163).

Edinburgh in 1910. This is not to say that the first ecumenical conference was directly connected to Carey's proposal. The organizers saw themselves in succession to a movement that had begun with meetings in New York and London in 1854, continued in Liverpool in 1860, in London in 1878 and 1888, and especially in New York in 1900 (1967: 355). But the ecumenical movement can be linked to Carey in that these mid-nineteenth century conferences were a direct result of the evangelical awakening between 1790 and 1820 and the vast growth of Protestant missionary activity around the world. The ecumenical movement in general and in India in particular was the result of this evangelical missionary movement. The driving force behind the movement was a passion for evangelism, which brought about an explosion of societies, voluntary organizations and associations in which Christians of different churches and nations banded together to "win the world for Christ." These societies and movements were the pioneers of the movement for Christian unity. As Ruth Rouse has written, "they were pioneers, albeit unconscious pioneers":

They were not ecumenical in objective. Each had some specific aim of its own – missionary work or social reform – but, though not ecumenical in aim, they were ecumenical in result. They were not called into existence to promote Christian unity as such; they were built on no theory of Christian unity; but they created a consciousness of that unity, a "sense of togetherness" amongst Christians of different Churches. Though rarely formulated, the fundamental conception of Christian unity which lay beneath their common striving was that all true Christians share the life in Christ, that they are one by virtue of that sharing, and that this oneness is essential to Christian unity (Rouse 1967b: 309-310).

According to Henry P. Van Dusen the "first axiom of ecumenical history" was that Protestant missionary effort was "the precursor and progenitor of the effort for Christian Unity" (Van Dusen 1972: 440). Newbiggin agreed, arguing that of the varied

movements that led to the formation of the WCC, the “central thrust came from the experience of the mission fields”:

It was here that the conviction was born that disunity among the Churches is not merely unfortunate but intolerable. It was here that deep mutual trust was born, leading on to a vast amount of practical co-operation. The movement for Faith and Order was a direct product of this, because it became obvious that trust withers and cooperation is frustrated if the underlying issues of division are not tackled (Newbigin 1976a: 323).¹⁶

The evangelical revival that led to the missionary movement had multiple sources in various countries. In America it can be traced to the powerful preaching of ministers such as Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent and Francis Makemie. In Britain, the rise of Methodism was led by the efforts of John and Charles Wesley in England, and Daniel Rowland and Howell Harris in Wales. In Germany, the revival can be traced to Pietism in the Lutheran Church and the leadership of Hermann Franke and Philip Spener. Franke made the University of Halle a center for missionary training, sending the first Protestant missionaries to India in 1705, and also becoming the impetus for the Moravian settlement in Herrnhut. Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf was the leader of the settlement and was one of the first to see the essential connection between Christian mission and church unity. W.A. Visser't Hooft points out that it was Zinzendorf who first used the word *Oikoumene* in the sense of the world-wide Christian Church (Visser 't Hooft 1953: 18).

The movement towards unity began with Protestant missionaries of an evangelical persuasion seeking to increase cooperation in mission. For these missionaries the questions of faith and order which divided their respective churches were of little

¹⁶ A response to John Macquarrie's *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* (Macquarrie 1975).

consequence when compared to the task of evangelism (Newbiggin 1991p: 1160).¹⁷

Disunity weakened their effectiveness in proclaiming the Christian message. Throughout the nineteenth century at countless missionary conferences pioneer missionaries from different denominations expressed their earnest and growing desire for closer fellowship and partnership in mission.

2.3.3. *Edinburgh 1910*

Bridges between churches had also been built through the founding of international student movements. The World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF) was founded with a missionary purpose in 1895. Among the leaders was John R. Mott who would become the driving force in the global student missionary movement. Over the next 20 years university students by the thousands would be swept up into missionary service. Just as in the case of Protestant missions the student movement would also begin to make the connection between effective evangelism and church unity.¹⁸ Edinburgh 1910 was the culmination of a decades-long process within this energized missions community of an increased awareness of and desire for closer cooperation and visible unity:

While we may differ from one another in our conception of what unity involves and requires, we agree in believing that our Lord intended that we be one in a visible fellowship, and we desire to express our wholehearted agreement... in

¹⁷ Evangelicals were a force to be reckoned with in 19th Century India. William Dalrymple has shown that Evangelical missionary activity and the conversion of prominent Hindus to Christianity was a major factor in the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion in Delhi (Dalrymple 2007: 126-179).

¹⁸ So much so that Hans-Ruedi Weber refers to the founding of the WSCF as “the historic event where the modern ecumenical movement was born” (Weber 1966: 56).

holding that the ideal object of missionary work is to plant in every non-Christian nation one united Church of Christ (Edinburgh 1910: 131).

The missionaries gathered for the world missionary conference in Edinburgh were committed to searching for practical ways to achieve union in the mission field. The vision was focused on the “non-Christian” nations but also encompassed the Churches of the West. The “most glorious reward” of the missionary labors of Christendom would be if “the church in the mission field points the way to a healing of [the churches] divisions and to the attainment of that unity for which our Lord prayed” (Edinburgh 1910: 131). The evangelical ecumenism that had begun unintentionally had now become intentional and explicit. Willem Visser’t Hooft called this intentional shift within the ecumenical movement the “rediscovery of the church.” After Edinburgh 1910 and especially with the ecumenical conferences of the 1920s and 30s the mission and unity of *the church* would be of primary importance (Visser ’t Hooft 1967: 697-701).

2.4. THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

2.4.1. *Indian Presbyterians Form a United Synod*

The movement toward church union in India had begun in earnest in the last year of the nineteenth century. In 1899 Scottish missionaries in Madras saw something in the annual report of the Foreign Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland that caught their attention and captured their imagination. It stated that a union had taken place in Fukien province on the Southwest coast of China between Dutch Reformed and

English Presbyterian missions. The resonance came from the fact that the immediate neighbors of the Free Church Scots in Madras were missionaries from the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) and the Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America (Dutch). It only took a few months before meetings began taking place between the three groups seeking to follow the Chinese example. They drew up a constitution based on a yet another Reformed union from the East, the Church of Christ in Japan. Within two years a basis of union was agreed upon and sent home to the parent churches. The Church of Scotland refused to ratify the agreement,¹⁹ but the Free Church and the Reformed Church gave their assent and the United Church was formed at a provisional synod held at Vellore in October 1901. The new synod was called the “South India United Church” (SIUC) and comprised a membership of over 12,000 people (1954: 36-37; Newbigin 1951a: 7-8).

2.4.2. The Congregationalists unite and join the Presbyterians: The formation of the SIUC General Assembly

The new church deliberately chose a broad and inclusive name in the hope of uniting with the non-Presbyterian churches in South India. No one was more optimistic about the potential of the SIUC than J.H. MacLean, the Church of Scotland missionary who was Newbigin’s predecessor in Kanchipuram. He would serve in and around

¹⁹ The Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland withheld its approval because of concern over the effects that would come from amalgamating multiple foreign mission agencies. The Church of Scotland Mission was accepted into full membership of the SIUC at the third General Assembly in 1911 (Manshardt 1926: 618-620).

Kanchi for over forty years, but even as a young missionary he saw the promise of the newly named church. Writing in 1903 he defended the seemingly pretentious title:

It is the only church that has actually been formed as the result of a union and it is not beyond the limits of possibility that ere long its boundaries may be so largely extended as to make the name more appropriate (1954: 38).

Presbyterians in North India were inspired by what they saw in the South. There had been an alliance between Presbyterian missions in North India since 1875. In 1901 at a Council meeting in Allahabad thirteen different Reformed missions came together and decided to form one Presbyterian Church for all of India. In 1904 the first general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in India was held. The synod of the SIUC decided to join, but only on the condition that it be free to enter into broader union with other churches in South India if the opportunity arose (1954: 38; Newbigin 1951a: 8). That opportunity came quickly and in 1907 the SIUC synod withdrew “with much regret” (1954: 43).

The next union partner in the South would be the Congregationalists. The churches were comprised of two groups: affiliates of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) and Congregationalists of the American Board in South India and Jaffna. In 1905 a Presbyterian style “general assembly” was held as the two Congregationalist groups formed The General Union of United Churches of South India with a total membership comprising over 133,000. Conversations between the SIUC Presbyterians and the Congregationalists had begun informally at the Decennial Missionary Conference in Madras in 1902. By the time of the second Congregationalist general assembly a proposed plan for organic union was adopted. It was to this invitation that the SIUC synod responded in the affirmative. The new union church would now be predominantly

Congregationalist. With a membership now totaling over 142,000 only one-tenth were Presbyterian or Reformed (1954: 39-44).

The first general assembly of the South India United Church met in Madras in July 1908. J.P. Cotelingham, the President of the General Union, opened the assembly by declaring the new union duly constituted and with a clear purpose:

To bind the Churches together into one body with a view of developing a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating Indian Church, which shall present a united living testimony to Christ, and worthily represent to the world the Christian ideal (SIUC 1908: 4)

The new church attempted to combine what was perceived to be the best of Congregational and Presbyterian polities and so committed itself to “administer its affairs through Local Churches, Church Councils, and a General Assembly” (SIUC 1908: 5-7). Local church autonomy was preserved but provision was made for care and oversight by Presbytery. The general assembly was not given the power of a traditional Presbyterian general assembly but more than is usually exercised by a Congregational council.²⁰ The confession of faith was not nearly as detailed as typical Reformed confessions but more detailed than a typical Congregational confession. While a general confessional subscription was required it was not to “every word or phrase” since such a confession was only “a human instrument” (SIUC 1908: 4). The scheme showed careful attention to preserve and include what was precious to each group but also to create something new. In his address to the assembly, J.H. MacLean recounted the history of the union and described the compromises:

²⁰ The General Assembly’s role was carefully balanced. Ordinarily its role would be to “advise” but it could “decide” on “matters referred to it by Church Councils.” The constitution defined the General Assembly as: “the representative body of the South India United Church, and its counselor. It assumes no authority *per se* over the Churches; but will consider references that come to it through and with the approval of the Church Councils” (SIUC 1908: 6).

[We] found that each side would have to give up something. The Presbyterians would have to be content with a simpler, and, to some minds at least, less adequate expression of their faith, and to a less centralized form of government. On the other hand the Congregationalists found that union was impossible unless they allowed to the body representing the Church (the Church Council) an amount of authority incompatible with Congregationalism. In most cases the sacrifice was gladly made; and indeed some on both sides felt that the new basis was more suitable for the Indian Church than either of the systems it replaced (SIUC 1908: 20-21)

J.S. Chandler, a missionary from Madura, spoke shortly after MacLean on the subject of “lessons to be learned from recent movements towards church union in America.” He reminded the delegates that the prime condition of church union is a mutual recognition of “the riches of the inheritance of every other body.” He concluded his remarks by quoting the great American Congregational Ecumenist Newman P. Smyth: “Church unity, when accomplished, will be the supremacy of the whole over the parts, and not the supremacy of any part over the whole” (SIUC 1908: 31).

2.4.3. Federalism

At the SIUC general assembly of 1909 a momentous decision was made: all further union schemes would be by means of “federation” (1951a: 9) While it had been possible for Congregationalists and Presbyterians to unite formally giving their strong theological affinity it was a different matter altogether to seek union with groups who were ecclesially dissimilar. The recommendation for federation came from the Committee on Union, the same committee that Newbigin would come to chair when he succeeded J.H. MacLean in 1942. MacLean was the first convener of the committee and served on it throughout all his long years in India. In 1909 he was particularly interested

in building a bridge to the large Wesleyan Methodist community that had replied favorably on the condition that the union be through federation. The Committee on Union called on the assembly to form a “Federation of Churches in India.” No creeds of individual churches would be changed or interfered with in any way. What was required was mutual recognition of membership, ministry, and sacraments (1954: 44-45). The assembly approved the recommendation and the Federation was formed that same year with six additional groups joining. The newly constituted federal union was structured with eight regional councils that would be allowed to function with a high degree of independence (Neill 1967: 474).

In mission circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term “comity” was also used to describe the federal relationship between churches of different denominations. When missionaries from different denominations overlapped in a village it became apparent that it was necessary to extend courtesy to one another, to avoid proselytism, and to generally foster social harmony. While this spirit of cooperation was a welcome alternative to one of opposition or disdain, nonetheless it failed to address the fundamental issues of faith and order. Ecumenical historian, Ruth Rouse, has called comity “the thorniest problem in relation to co-operative action” on the mission field:

[Comity] assumes the essential interchangeability of denominations; here a Methodist Church is to disappear, there a Presbyterian. In this sense denominational sovereignty is diminished, and in the last analysis this poses an issue ultimately of faith and order for Churches which feel that they must assert their confessional distinctiveness. Accommodation at this point differs from accommodation in the general range of co-operation, where no issue of ecclesiastical principle is involved. Thus comity...confronts definite limitations (Rouse 1967a: 633-634).

The SIUC leaders established comity with the Methodists by creating “The Federation of Churches in India.” Newbigin would later write: “for ten years the subject of union was practically shelved. They had to learn by experience that federation leaves the essential problem untouched” (1951a: 9).

The Federation model did allow the different groups to maintain their separate identities and still come together for shared activities and concerns. Conciliar decision-making would prove extremely difficult but at least there would be some possibility for communication and cooperation (Wainwright 1991: 418). At the base of that cooperation was a shared commitment to evangelism as well as a mutual recognition of ministerial orders and sacraments. It was clearly understood that no church would be invited into the federation that had scruples over such mutual recognition (1954: 45).

2.4.4 The Anglicans Take the Initiative

SIUC leaders were understandably reticent to invite Anglicans into union discussions. Surprisingly the initiative came from the Anglican side in an overture from the Bishop of Madras. Henry Whitehead²¹ was an unwavering Oxford Tractarian who in 1899 had been appointed Bishop of the staunchly evangelical diocese of Madras. Alongside his high church principles he also held a deep commitment to evangelism. In the years prior to coming to Madras he served as Superior of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta and was grieved that in the 25 years of the College’s existence not a single person had converted to Christianity. As he inspected his new diocese he became

²¹ Bishop Whitehead was the brother of the famous Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (Neill 1960: 57).

convinced that the church was being given an historic evangelistic opportunity. He envisioned millions of Indians being brought into the church over the next 25 years and he was practical enough to know that the Anglican Church could not handle the awesome task alone. It would require cooperation and Christian unity (1954: 51-52).

Whitehead was an opponent of federation but passionately committed to comprehensive church union. He wrote two articles in the Madras Diocesan Magazine in 1911 outlining a proposal for union between the Anglican and SIUC churches on the basis of the Lambeth Quadrilateral (1951a: 10). This Anglican proposal for unity had its origins in a resolution of the House of Bishops of the American Episcopal Church meeting in Chicago in 1886 that was later adopted by the third Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion. It would become the Anglican standard for church reunion. It stated:

...in the opinion of this Conference, the following Articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord — ministered with unfailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church (Brandreth 1967: 264-265).

Whitehead gave a major address on the topic at the national Conference of Missionaries in Calcutta the following year and began to preach sermons on the issue (1951a: 10). His efforts were bolstered by other Anglican leaders of equal stature, most notably V.S. Azariah, the bishop of Dornekal, and E.J. Palmer, the bishop of Bombay.

Azariah had given an impassioned address at Edinburgh 1910 in which he criticized the unequal partnership between Western missionaries and indigenous church leadership. When he was consecrated in 1912 he was the first Indian to become a bishop in the Anglican Communion (van der Bent 1991: 73). Though he did not live to see the final reunion, dying two years before in 1945, Azariah was a tireless promoter of Church unity and would go on to advocate the South Indian scheme at the Lambeth Conferences of 1920 and 1930, as well as the International Faith and Order Conferences in Lausanne in 1927 and Edinburgh in 1937 (Harper 2000: 236-237). Palmer would assume Whitehead's mantle and become the primary leader of church union in India. When considering the long process that resulted in the formation of the CSI in 1947, Bengt Sundkler would call him the church's "main architect... his was without any question the greatest theological mind applied to the South India union problem" (1954: 115,117).

2.4.5. Tranquebar 1919

In April of 1919, Azariah was attending the National Missionary Council of Jubbalpore, an Indian ministers' conference sponsored by the Evangelistic Forward Movement. The conference theme was "Personal Evangelism: The Greatest Work of the World" (1954: 99). Azariah and a few fellow delegates conceived the idea of a conference for Indian ministers to consider the question of union²². The meeting took place a month later in Tranquebar, a small town Danish colony on the Southeast coast

²² The SIUC saw growth in indigenous Indian leadership throughout the years of the union negotiations. In their official greeting in 1933 the Board of Foreign Missions for the Reformed Church in America expressed their delight with "certain evidence of the establishment of an indigenous church in India" in that both the President and Secretary of the SIUC were both Indian ministers (SIUC Minutes 1933: 22-23).

and one with historic significance for Christianity in India. It was here that in July 1706 the first Protestant missionaries had arrived, German Lutherans sent by the King of Denmark. Now the Christians in leadership were primarily Indian not European. There were thirty three delegates who attended the Tranquebar conference, all but two of whom were Indian (Neill 1967: 473). The Great War was over and the leaders of the world were meeting in Versailles to form the League of Nations. The atmosphere was right to consider how the churches might also unite.²³

Those present were members of the SIUC, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran (Church of Sweden) churches (1951a: 10). The text Bishop Azariah selected for the conference theme was John 17:21 “that they may be one.” The goal was to explore the possibilities for church union and to increase effectiveness in mission. Bishop Palmer would later write that “their immediate motive was the evangelistic motive” (Palmer 1944: 1).

As convener Azariah sent out questions in advance to the representatives:

1. What do you think to be the distinctive features of the organization and religious teaching and practice of your own church?
2. Should a united Indian church come into being, what do you consider to be the features that ought to be your contribution to that church, and which, in fairness to your tradition, you ought not to give up, without serious loss to the full life of the church?
3. What is the attitude of your church towards union with other churches? (1954: 99-100).

²³ The charter for the League of Nations was adopted in April 1919. A few months earlier the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople inspired by work of the Peace Conference issued an invitation to “all Christian churches” for a “league of churches.” Willem Visser ’t Hooft credits this as the first official call for an ecumenical council. In the same month as the Tranquebar Conference Archbishop Söderblom of Sweden issued his proposal for an ecumenical council (Visser ’t Hooft 1982: 1-20).

The Lutherans stated their opposition to any scheme of organic union other than one based on Lutheran doctrine. At the conclusion of the conference it was only the members of the SIUC and the Anglicans who believed that a solid basis for union existed between them. They stayed an extra half-day to draft a declaration that afterward would become known as the “Tranquebar Manifesto.” It outlined a plan of union along the lines of the Lambeth Quadrilateral and pledged the signatories to work towards that end (1951a: 10). It further stated:

We believe that the union is the will of God, even as our Lord prayed that we might be one, that the world might believe... We believe that the challenge of the present hour in the period of reconstruction after the war, in the gathering together of the nations, and the present critical situation in India, calls us to mourn our past divisions and turn to our Lord Jesus Christ to seek in Him the unity of the body expressed in one visible Church. We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ – one-fifth of the human race. Yet, confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions – divisions for which we were not responsible, and which have been, as it were, imposed upon us from without: divisions which we did not create, and which we do not desire to perpetuate.²⁴

The Anglican members of the assembly expressed commitment to the historic Episcopate and asked acceptance of “the fact of episcopacy and not any theory as to its character.” The SIUC members made as a condition of union the recognition of a principle of spiritual equality of their ministers. By accepting the historic fact of episcopacy the members eschewed any official theory of the origin or doctrine of episcopacy. The terms of union would not require either community to disown its past or question the validity of each other’s orders (Bell 1924: 280). All the basic elements of

²⁴ *Statement drawn up by Thirty-Three Ministers of the Anglican and South India United Churches at Tranquebar, May 1 and 2, 1919* (cited in Bell 1924: 278-279).

the union plan that would be adopted 28 years later in the formation of the CSI were contained in the Declaration of Tranquebar (1951a: 10).

2.4.6. Lambeth 1920

Both sides set to work and appointed representatives to deliberate on the proposals. Shortly thereafter the Anglican bishops were summoned to the Lambeth Conference of 1920. Church union was a major theme of the Conference and the bishops released a letter on the topic entitled *An Appeal to All Christian People*. The union the Anglicans proposed was organic church reunion along the lines of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. While they saw no dividing issues amongst Protestants in terms of orthodox faith, questions of order were another matter:

The vision that arises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all ‘who profess and call themselves Christians’, within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian Communion now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled²⁵

There was a clear desire to broaden and include the spiritual practices of the wider church. The language of the Quadrilateral regarding the episcopate was softened. What was needed was “a ministry²⁶ acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing

²⁵ *An Appeal to All Christian People* From the Bishops Assembled in the Lambeth Conference of 1920 (cited in Bell 1924: 2-3).

²⁶ For the greater part of the twentieth century the term “ministry” was used in ecumenical circles as a reference to ordained office in the church. There has been a shift in language since the Faith and Order Commission meeting in Lima, Peru in 1982. The ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, (also known as “the Lima text”) articulates a difference between “ministry” and “ordained ministry.”

not only the inward calling of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.” The episcopate was proposed as “one means of providing such a ministry” (cited in Bell 1924: 4).

The *Appeal* and the initiatives that would follow would be central to unity discussions within the ecumenical community for the next forty years. The proposal of the episcopate as a means of providing and restoring unity to the divided churches was, in Newbigin’s words, “both its strength and the stone of stumbling for churches not episcopally ordered” (Newbigin 1991p: 1160).

The bishops did go so far as to recognize the “spiritual reality” of the ministries of non-Episcopal churches. Their ministries were “manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as an effective means of grace.” But the Episcopate was the “best instrument” for maintaining unity and continuity in a church. The “grace which is pledged in the apostolic rite of the laying-on of hands” would ward off any “doubtfulness of mind” about the grace offered through the eucharist. What was proposed was a scheme of “mutual deference to one another’s consciences” by means of mutual commissioning and recognition of the validity of one another’s ministries. The Anglicans ministers should accept a commission from the non-Anglicans that would confer legitimacy and recognition within the congregations of the non-Episcopal churches. It was hoped that this willingness to accept a commissioning would be reciprocated by the other side (1924: 3-4).

“Ministry” indicates “the service to which the whole people of God [are] called whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church.” “Ordained Ministry refers to persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands”(BEM 1982: 7).

On close examination what this really meant was that all of the non-Episcopal ministers would be required to receive ordination by a bishop. Implicit within the “mutual commissioning” was a clear rejection of the idea of complete equality of the ministry that the SIUC had stipulated. This was further clarified by a warning that Anglicans were not to be involved in any “general schemes of intercommunion” with non-Episcopal churches. Ministers who were not episcopally ordained were not to celebrate Holy Communion in Anglican churches and Anglican communicants were under no circumstances to receive Holy Communion from their hands (1924: 7).

In South India the impact of the *Appeal* was devastating. When the defeated Indian bishops returned from Lambeth they could scarcely see any reason for continuing the conversation. But the SIUC leaders were persistent and after several rounds of correspondence the joint committee reconvened in December of 1920 to begin the arduous task of moving the project forward (1951a: 11). It would be nine years before *The Scheme of Church Union in South India* would be published and it would undergo minor changes requiring eight separate editions. It would be another eighteen years before the final scheme was inaugurated.

Bishop Stephen Neill colorfully described the challenges of the joint committee’s labors during these years:

The little group of men and women which met year by year in South India knew that they were like performers in the ring, lighted up by powerful searchlights, their every movement watched by a vast and unseen cloud of witnesses in every country of the world (Neill 1947: 96).

Their confidence came from a certain conviction that church union was God's will.

Though the problems seemed insurmountable they had an abiding faith in God's

guidance and help. In the words of the SIUC Union committee:

The problem before us [is] the discovery of a basis of union on which there can be built a Church which will be in full communion with both the Church of England and with the great Free churches of the world. We believe that, though the problems may be extremely difficult, it must be possible to find a solution if we commit ourselves fully to the leadership of the Holy Spirit during our negotiations and have complete faith in Him as the Guide of the united Church (SIUC 1923: 28).

2.4.7. The Pledge

The church that was formed in South India in 1947 was utterly unique. For the first time in history a church that had maintained the succession of the historic episcopate had entered into union with a non-episcopal church. The accomplishment was extraordinary given the fundamental differences between the respective parties on the nature of the Ministry, a matter as essential to the church as any question of faith. The union leaders understood that the idea of orders was fundamental to the story and identity of any church. A.M. Hollis, the Anglican bishop of Madras, would reflect 20 years after the union, "no church exists invertebrate. It has from the beginning a ministry, within its life and necessary for its life...They cannot exist apart" (Hollis 1966: 52). Union required not so much a reconciliation of two irreconcilable views of the Ministry so much as an accommodation of both views that enabled each to move forward together in mission. The Anglicans needed the SIUC to accept Episcopal ordination; the SIUC needed assurance that their orders were not considered defective. What followed was a

protracted process of Anglican proposals for supplemental or conditional ordination, all of which would be carefully considered and rejected.

The scheme that prevailed provided a context wherein organic unity could develop over time. What was envisioned was not a finalized reunion plan with all conflicts between the churches resolved; rather, the scheme saw union as the beginning of a process of growing into the union. The “act of union” would “initiate a process of growing together in one life and of advance towards complete spiritual unity” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 18). Bishop Palmer considered this idea of “corporate union as a means to spiritual unity” the “most striking characteristic of the scheme” (Palmer 1944: 4). The Lambeth Conference of 1930 considered the approach “novel”:

We observe as a novel feature of the South India Scheme, that a complete agreement between the uniting Churches on certain points of doctrine and practice is not expected to be reached before the inauguration of the union; but the promoters of the scheme believe that will be reached gradually and more securely by the interaction of the different elements of the united Church upon one another. It is only when the unification resulting from that interaction is complete that a final judgement can be pronounced on the effect of the present proposals. Without attempting, therefore to pronounce such judgement now, we express to our brethren in India our strong desire that, as soon as the negotiations are successfully completed, the venture should be made and the union inaugurated²⁷.

The plan took into consideration the sensibilities of the various parties especially as it pertained to the question of orders. It was decided that beginning at the time of union all future ordinations would be carried out by bishops with the assistance of presbyters; however, all who were ministers prior to the reunion should be fully accepted on an equal basis. In effect, during this “interim period” of unification, there would be three types of minister in the church: those episcopally ordained before the union, those

²⁷ The Lambeth Conference of 1930 *Resolutions on the Unity of the Church* (cited in Bell 1948: 4).

episcopally ordained after the union, and those non-episcopally ordained before the union (1954: 168-173). The uniting churches agreed that it was their intention that eventually “every minister exercising a permanent ministry in the united Church will be an episcopally ordained minister.” It was proposed that there be a thirty year period in which non-episcopally ordained ministers might still be received into the united Church on the basis of assenting to the basic principles of the union and the constitution of the church. The particular concern was for ministers and missionaries from the churches that had founded the different missions in India now seeking to unite. These ministers especially should be able to be received into the united Church. The proposal was for the church to wait until thirty years has passed before deciding whether or not to continue to allow these exceptions to episcopal ordination (*Proposed Scheme* 1929: 11).

At the heart of the scheme was a safeguard preventing congregations from being forced to accept a minister that they could not receive in good conscience.²⁸ This was the contribution of the Methodist Church in South India who entered the negotiations in 1925 (1954: 166, 396n.). At the joint committee meeting of 1929 their delegation proposed a resolution that dealt practically with the union process. The means to solve the tensions between the opposing principles of Ministry would not be through “the framing of detailed regulations” but by giving and receiving assurances “in a spirit of mutual confidence and love.” These assurances would be written into the constitution in what would eventually be called “the pledge”:

[the churches] therefore pledge themselves and fully trust each other that in the united church no arrangements with regard to churches, congregations or ministers will knowingly be made, either generally, or in particular cases, which

²⁸ The congregations in question were those that were formerly Anglican but which retained strong Catholic principles. These congregations would object to a non-episcopally ordained minister.

would offend the conscientious convictions of any persons directly concerned, or which would hinder the development of complete unity within the church or imperil its subsequent progress towards union with other Churches (*Proposed Scheme* 1929: 10)

The committee found that there was still a sticking point on the application of the pledge. Some Anglicans viewed it as a promise that no minister ordained in the SIUC would ever be appointed to a congregation that had been Anglican prior to union. This interpretation proved to be highly offensive to the SIUC churches. In 1934 the joint committee decided to issue an interpretation of the point to clarify their intentions. They reiterated the ultimate goal which was full communion and mutual recognition of all ministers in all churches:

This pledge applies to the period following the inauguration of the Union when the members of the three Churches, then united in one Church, will be growing together; and the united Church in its advance towards complete spiritual unity, and towards the time when all the members of the united church will be willing and able to receive communion equally in all its churches (1948: 230).

In the interim period there would be respect for a congregation with conscientious objection to a non-episcopally ordained minister but it would not preclude an appointment if the congregation were agreeable:

No congregation shall be deprived of forms of worship or ministry to which it has been accustomed, but every honest endeavor will be made by the authorities of the united Church that neither forms of worship or ritual, nor a ministry to which they have not been accustomed or to which they conscientiously object, shall be imposed upon any congregation. But the Committee does not understand the Pledge to imply that the fact that a minister of the united Church has previously been a minister of either an Episcopal or a non-episcopal Church will itself debar him from appointment to or working in any congregation of the united Church where the congregation desires it (1948: 230).

2.4.8. *The “Fresh Impetus” of New Leadership*

The 1941 the joint committee issued what it decided would be the “final” and “definitive” edition of the scheme. They had done their work and it was time for the churches to make a decision:

We give thanks to God for the many signs that our churches are nearer to union than they have ever been before. We believe that the time has come to decide whether on the basis of the Scheme as it now stands... these Churches will enter into corporate union with one another. We therefore earnestly request that the three Churches will agree that the time for negotiation by way of criticism and amendment of the Scheme is now past, and that they will proceed at the earliest possible opportunity to decide, through the responsible Church bodies, whether they are prepared to unite on the basis of the Scheme... as now submitted by the Joint Committee. In view of the grievous and urgent need of the world for reconciliation, we affectionately suggest, where necessary, power be sought to convene extraordinary meetings of councils and synods with a view to their reaching a definitive decision by the spring of 1944 (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: iii).²⁹

The committee did not meet again for another three years. During those years most of the previous generation of leadership had either died or were no longer in India. When the committee met again in 1944 it would have what Bengt Sundkler called the “fresh impetus” of new leadership: Bishop A.M. Hollis, A.M. Ward, and Lesslie Newbigin as convener supported by J.S.M. Hooper as secretary (1954: 301-302).

Newbigin bristled at first with the scheme’s required acceptance of the historic episcopate. For him the church “was constituted by the Gospel, communicated in word and sacrament evoking the response of faith.” After serious study of Michael Ramsey’s *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* his views broadened. He came to believe that the

²⁹ The Seventh Edition of 1941 was reprinted in 1947 with additional material pertaining to the interpretation of the pledge (p.22) and an order of service for the inauguration of the union (pp.90-96).

episcopate was actually given by God as the means of unity (1993k: 70).³⁰ Ramsey's book was the "first bridge of understanding" which enabled him "to enter into the Catholic understanding of the Church" (Newbigin 1975d: 172). He came to see episcopacy as something to be "received and prized as a gift and a fact rather than a doctrine":

[Ramsey] convinced me that one could not define the Church solely in terms of word and sacraments; that a given society existing in unbroken continuity through history was central to Christianity; and that the ministry of bishops in continuity with the ministry of the apostolic Church was something significant for the life in Christ today. I came to believe that this ministry was part of God's intention for the Church – not merely because the stubborn insistence upon it of my Anglican friends made reunion on other terms impossible, but because it represented one element in the proper form of the Church as a single society continuing through the centuries... seen this way, the historic episcopate could be seen as a magnet which could draw the scattered parts of the Church into unity, not as a touchstone by which to judge between the true Church and its counterfeit (Newbigin n.d.-a: 1).³¹

Ironically and despite all of their sensitivities it would be the Anglicans that would break the final impasse to union. In 1945 the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon (CIBC) voted to allow the four dioceses of South India to enter the union. Two years later under the leadership of Bishop Hollis of Madras the CIBC affirmed the interpretation of the pledge put forth earlier by the joint committee. The pledge was intended to protect congregations from the imposition of a minister against their will but it did not disallow such an appointment in any and all circumstances. This important legislation was preceded by a bold personal move on the part of Bishop Hollis and four

³⁰ Newbigin was particularly interested in Ramsey's interaction with the Protestant reformers (Ramsey 1990: 181-203).

³¹ "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/5/1/16. The paper is undated but contained in the box dated "circa 1952-1991", labeled "Addresses, sermons, and research papers relating to unity, ministry and sacraments."

other South Indian bishops who in September 1946 published a joint statement pledging their personal willingness to receive communion from any Presbyterian of the United Church. They further promised:

All who have the status of Presbyters in the United Church are capable of performing all the functions assigned to Presbyters in the United Church by the Constitution of that Church in every congregation in the United Church; that no Presbyterian of the United Church will exercise his ministry in a congregation where members conscientiously object to his ministrations, and that no member of the United Church can 'conscientiously object' ... to the ministrations of any Presbyterian ordained within the United Church. The suitability of a Presbyterian for a particular congregation is another question and will have to be considered in all cases by the appointing authority (cited in Sundkler 1954: 321).

It is understood that during the period of unification congregations will ordinarily continue to be served by the ministries to which they were accustomed, except where pastoral needs obviously demand other arrangements. The duly constituted authority within the United Church shall be the sole judge of the urgency of such pastoral needs (cited in Newbigin 1993k: 82).

The Indian Anglicans were in fact championing the idea that episcopacy was of the *bene esse* of the church but not of its *esse*. It was important for the wellbeing of the church but it was not constitutive or essential for a valid ministry. In the final analysis, they were recognizing the validity of the orders of the non-episcopally ordained ministers of the SIUC. Newbigin regarded this bold move by Bishop Hollis to be the key to the final success of the scheme: “[he] completely transformed the situation... Michael Hollis was one among the bishops with the clarity of mind to know that the time for decision had come. It was his courage that removed the last block on the road to unity” (1993k: 83).³²

³² When Newbigin published the Kerr Lectures, *The Household of God* (1953), he dedicated the book to Michael Hollis “in gratitude and affection” (Newbigin 1953e: dedication page).

2.4.9. *The Union*

On September 27, 1947 the Church of South India was inaugurated by a special ceremony held in St. George's Cathedral, Madras. The C.S.I., with Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist and Anglican roots would be episcopally ordered while recognizing the validity of the orders of those free church clergy ordained prior to the union. Five Anglican bishops were re-elected and nine new bishops were elected and consecrated. Newbigin was consecrated as bishop for the newly formed diocese of Madurai³³ and Ramnad. He had allowed his name to be put forward not expecting to be elected. He was notified by cable with the simple message: "You are appointed bishop Church of South India Madura. We pray God's blessing." He would later write, "the prayer was comforting but the news was shattering" (1993k: 85).

A congregation of 2500 gathered for the inauguration ceremony. At the communion the congregation was served by a large group of ministers from the uniting churches. Prior to that moment many were forbidden to communicate with one another. Now the walls were down. Newbigin had to fight back the tears:

As one saw the great multitude of people, so absolutely rapt and intent, and their faces so full of joy; and the servers moving about to see that all were served; the

³³ Madurai is the oldest city in the Indian peninsula (Keay 2000: 120-123), and the cultural center of the state of Tamil Nadu (1993:93). Before independence it was spelled "Madura" but "Madurai" is the correct transliteration of the Tamil (1993:104). William Dalrymple wonderfully evokes the sense of its flourishing ancient civilization: "The temple at Madurai is contemporary with those of ancient Greece and Egypt, yet while the gods of Thebes and the Parthenon have been dead and forgotten for millennia, the gods and temples of Hindu India are now more revered than ever. Hindu civilization is the only great classical culture to survive intact from the ancient world, and at temples such as Madurai one can still catch glimpses of festivals and practices that were seen by Greek visitors to India long before the rise of ancient Rome...First noted in the West in the fourth century BC...Madurai was a major terminus of the Spice Route, linking the pepper groves of India with the groaning tables of the Mediterranean" (Dalrymple 1998: 193).

thought uppermost in my mind was: Never again will I say that a thing which I believe is God's will is impossible (1993k: 91).

Stephen Neill would lament that the years after the union did not usher in an outbreak of evangelism or increased spiritual vitality within the CSI. Churches in many rural areas in South India ignored the union altogether and disputes continued unabated within the church. But this did not detract from the wonder of what had happened:

The great importance of the Church of South India lies in the fact that it exists. Previously insurmountable barriers had been surmounted or broken down. A workable plan has been found for the union of churches which had remained in separation for centuries (Neill 1970: 154).

Robert T. Handy stated the significance of the union succinctly: "a million Christians were brought into one, new, independent, indigenous community"³⁴ (Walker 1970: 544).

Newbigin noticed a significant change in the churches in their approach to mission after the union. In the diocese of Madras the problems and concerns of the city became the concerns of the churches in the city:

My impression of the churches in Madras as I knew them before 1947 was that they were separate congregations each concerned about its own affairs; I do not remember getting any impression of a coherent body of people concerned about the City as a whole. It was not 'the Church for others'.

I do not want to draw a romanticized picture of things as they are now, but I am bound to say that the 'feel' is different. I have found people willing to think about the needs of the City as a whole. I have seen the churches deeply and effectively involved, along with Government and other agencies, in meeting the problems of the slums, of the beggars with leprosy, of the pre-school children who have nowhere to go when their parents are at work, of the old and of the despairing. Of course there is still much congregational introversion. There are still plenty of churches where (as an elder of one of them said to me the other day) it is felt to be enough if 'the Church caters for the needs of its members'. But no one could live through the experience that I have had, from 1936 to 1947, and

³⁴ The CSI currently has 3.8 million members (CSI 2009).

from 1965 to last year, without being conscious of the difference (Newbigin 1975c: 25).

In the broader context of a nation in the throes of partition³⁵ and outbreaks of religious violence the CSI existed as a sign of hope. In his sermon at the inaugural service J.S.M. Hooper reminded the congregation of the significance of what had happened:

God has matched us with His hour; the Church of South India has an unparalleled opportunity. The reconciliation between our divergent elements... enables us with fresh conviction and force to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation to all the clashing elements in this nation's life (1954: 339).³⁶

2.5. CONCLUSION

Newbigin was actively involved on the joint committee throughout the union negotiations and would become one of the first bishops of the CSI. He would also become known as the principal theological defender of the scheme. The experience of union negotiations, reunion and his new life in the CSI had developed and sharpened his ecclesial convictions (Ward 1953: 153). In the following chapter I will examine his defense of the scheme and his theological case for the visible reunion of the church in his

³⁵ There were major riots when India and Pakistan were partitioned into two nations in 1947. An estimated six million people were displaced and as many as one million died or were killed as a result of riots between Muslims and Hindus. South India remained relatively unaffected by the unrest, which was primarily in the North. The Christian community played an important humanitarian role in caring for victims (Heideman 2001: 595).

³⁶ There was concern after partition whether or not Indian Christians and missionaries would have freedom to evangelize and whether a right to conversion would be recognized. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution settled the issue: "Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice, and propagate religion" (cited in Smith 1963: 102,135). In 1948 India signed the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" which states "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance" (cited in Heideman 2001: 599).

work as convener of the union committee of the SIUC, particularly in his role as editor of the essay collection *The Church and Union* and in his essay, “The Church and the Gospel.”

3. The Church and the Gospel

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the issue of supplemental ordination in the union negotiations between Anglicans and the SIUC. Although he only participated for the final few years, Newbigin made a significant contribution to the debates in his role as convener of the union committee of the SIUC. The essays he edited and published in 1944 on behalf of the committee along with his own influential essay “The Church and the Gospel” will be assessed in this chapter. After surveying the historical background of the controversies, an analysis is provided of the principal theologians and church leaders contributing to the debates. It will be shown that Newbigin was a critical theological force in bringing about the theological synthesis that enabled Anglicans and Free Church leaders to reject supplemental ordination and come together behind the scheme of union in 1947. That theological synthesis brought together seemingly contradictory ideas from evangelical and catholic theology. Newbigin started with an evangelical and Reformed understanding of the church as *simul justus et peccator* (a community of sinners who by grace are considered by God to be righteous) and added to it a catholic understanding of the church as a community united by visible episcopal leadership in historical continuity with the early church. But his evangelicalism was foundational for his catholicism and not the other way around. Continuity in church office was not the guarantee of validity of orders. The importance of continuity and unity were found in the fact that they were the only proper responses to the gospel of grace.

3.2. CONVENER OF UNION COMMITTEES

By 1942 Newbigin had left the jurisdiction of the Edinburgh Presbytery and become responsible to the SIUC. He became immediately involved in deliberations about church union in South India and was soon elected as convener of the union committee of the Madras Church Council, a local group working to bring about unity between the SIUC, Anglicans, Methodists and the Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Newbigin noted that speeches given before the council supporting union were always in English while speeches opposing union were always in Tamil. One of his unique contributions was to be a proponent of union who gave all his speeches in Tamil (Newbigin 1993k: 70).

In 1943 he was elected as convener of the union committee of the SIUC, the committee that shepherded the union process to a successful conclusion with the formation of the CSI. In the following year he engaged the debate through the publication of a committee symposium, *The Church and Union* (1944). Five different church leaders from varied church backgrounds with the SIUC offered arguments for and against the scheme. Newbigin wrote the foreword and the final chapter entitled “The Church and the Gospel” (Newbigin 1944a, 1944b). The key issue of debate was whether or not the scheme should include a rite of mutual commissioning or supplemental ordination in order to guarantee the validity and mutual acceptance of all orders within the united church.

3.3. SUPPLEMENTAL ORDINATION

3.3.1. *Tranquebar 1919 and the Lambeth Appeal of 1920*

The method for reunion at the heart of the scheme of union consisted of “the pledge” and the “thirty years interim period.” The pledge guaranteed congregations that “neither forms of worship or ritual, nor a ministry, to which they have not been accustomed or to which they conscientiously object, will be imposed.” The goal was to do nothing that would “hinder complete unity” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 19). During the interim period ministers of any of the constituent bodies that formed the united Church would be received simply on the basis of their acceptance of the basis of union, i.e. assent to the governing principles of the Church. The expectation was that eventually every minister “exercising a permanent ministry in the united Church [would be] an episcopally ordained minister” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 17). At the end of the thirty-year period the united church would determine whether or not to continue making exceptions to the rule that its ministry was to be episcopally ordained. When the time came to make the decision the church pledged itself to give equal weight to two principles:

there shall be a fully unified ministry within the Church, and... the united Church should maintain and extend full communion and fellowship with those Churches with which the uniting Churches now severally have such fellowship (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 18).

In the 1940s as the time for the vote drew nearer there was increasing pressure to avoid the thirty years of interim period and the uncertainty that it left in terms of relations to other Christian bodies. Many Anglo-Catholics in England were anxious that at the end

there would be a church in their communion that recognized non-episcopal ministers and eucharists on the same footing as those “of the apostolic ministry” (Williams 1930: 38-39). One solution to the problem of equality of ministry was to resolve it through some method of mutual commissioning or rite of “supplemental ordination.” The idea had first been surfaced at Tranquebar in 1919 in a meeting between two Anglican bishops, V.S. Azariah and E.H. Waller, and two SIUC missionaries, L.R. Scudder from the Reformed Church in America and A.W. Brough from the London Missionary Society. The bishops suggested that at the time of union a “service of commission” could take place involving a mutual laying-on of hands by both bishops and ordained ministers of the other uniting churches. Azariah wrote to Bishop Whitehead’s wife and told of the anguish the idea had caused Scudder, though he was willing to accept the commissioning. Scudder told Azariah,

I have prayed about this matter, and if it comes to it at the last moment I suppose I would submit to it for the sake of the Indian Church. But should you require this of me? After forty years of ministry? Within the United Church where we would accept the Episcopacy and granted that hereafter all ordination shall be by Bishops—could you not license us as authorized to celebrate in any Church ... where the pastor or local church may invite me? (Cited in Heideman 2001: 588).

The theological implications of supplemental ordination would continue to cause anguish in the SIUC and the Anglican Communion for many years to come.

The Lambeth Appeal of 1920 formally offered the proposal of mutual commissioning as a way forward for union with non-Anglicans. Free church ministers were invited to give to Anglican priests “a form of commission or recognition” which would commend their ministry to the free church congregations but which would also

incline the free church ministers “to accept a commission through Episcopal ordination” (cited in Bell 1924: 3-4).

Bishop Azariah was a strong supporter of various mutual commissioning or supplemental ordination proposals over the years. He was concerned that the South India scheme with its method of pledge and interim period would only leave the church with what he described as a “dual ministry... two ministries side by side.” He thought that mutual commissioning provided a sounder way forward for union with equality of ministries and was encouraged by schemes being developed in the 1940s in church union negotiations in America, Australia, and Iran. Writing in *Church Union News and Views*, the official organ of the Joint Committee on Church Union, he lauded the union scheme that had been proposed between Presbyterians and Anglicans in Iran. This scheme did not propose supplemental ordination as such, but a unifying rite that would function “as an extension of ministerial authority which is conferred on all concerned by the fact of union.” Azariah hoped that the Iran scheme would help South India “to wipe off the Pledge.”³⁷

Azariah went on to publish his proposal for a “commissioning for wider service” in the September 1943 issue of the *S.I.U.C. Herald*. Two months later the continuation committee of the SIUC sent a resolution to the joint committee:

All the initial presbyterate of the united church should be commissioned by the united church, without the laying on of hands, for the exercise of the ministry of the word and sacraments throughout the united church (1954: 307).

³⁷ *Church Union News and Views*, July-August 1943, pp.3-4; September 1943, p.13 (cited in Sundkler 1954: 306).

3.3.2. *Mutual Commissioning: G.C. Hubback's Proposal*

While the joint committee was working on the resolution the Anglicans moved in a different direction. At their general council meeting in Nagpur in February 1944 they embraced a new proposal by G.C. Hubback, the Bishop of Assam. It argued for a rite of supplemental ordination but with a view that both Anglicans and Free Church ministers were in need of it. "The division of the church had made all ministries defective," the bishops wrote. "The ministries of all separated communions are by the fact of separation imperfect and limited in authority" (1954: 309). Hubback's fellow Bishop, E.J. Palmer of Bombay, spoke in support of a similar idea at the Lambeth Conference of 1920 and cited as precedent the example of St. Chad of Litchfield who, in the seventh century, had submitted to re-consecration. Now retired, Palmer along with Bishop Western of Tinnevely joined Bishop Azariah as an enthusiastic supporter of Hubback's proposal (1954: 385).

3.3.1.1. O.C. Quick

According to Newbigin the key influence behind the Hubback proposal was the book written in 1927 by O.C. Quick, Canon of Carlisle Cathedral, entitled *The Christian Sacraments* (1993k: 71). Quick's ecclesiology admitted to the possibility that the one Church could in fact be divided and had been. Therefore all ordinations lacked full authorization for ministry to the whole church. All orders were defective because they lacked the "universal authorization" of the church. His proposal was for church reunion secured through a rite of "mutual authorization" involving prayer and the laying on of

hands. While ordinations performed in the divided Churches of Christendom were not invalid they were all in need of perfecting. For Quick, ordination had principally to do with authorization and all orders were in need of broader authorization:

When the communion of the whole Church is divided, the representation of the whole Church in each congregation for these purposes is no longer a reality; the will of Christ is hindered; and something essential to the very thing signified in ordination is no longer present. Once admit that part of the essence of Orders consists in an authority conferred in such a manner as to implicate the whole body of the Church as one, and in a divided Church the validity of Orders becomes inevitably a matter of degree (Quick 1927: 145).

The visible Church was “manifestly divided” and “all bodies professing Christianity belong to it imperfectly and in varying degrees”:

The one visible Catholic Church still exists upon earth, but it does not exist completely or exclusively in any one of the its divided fragments. Perhaps God has concluded all under the sin of schism that he may in the end have mercy upon all through the grace of union (1927: 147).

For Canon Quick, supplemental ordination was more than a means of perfecting orders—it could actually lead to the healing of the principal schisms of the Church.

3.3.1.2. Gerald Broomfield

The other signal influence in the supplemental ordination discussion was Canon Gerald Broomfield, an executive committee member of the missionary council of the Church of England, an Anglo-Catholic with close ties to the “younger churches” in India and Africa. He was greatly moved by Tambaram 1938 and the appeal from the “younger churches” to the “older churches” to “lead in the path of union” (Broomfield 1942: 1-15). He wrote a major work describing his vision for the way forward entitled *Revelation and*

Reunion: A Response to Tambaram (1942). The path of union as he envisioned it would involve the kind of thinking that recognized the human element in the formation of beliefs. The beliefs of all should be appreciated and respected, and all should admit to imperfection in their own beliefs. He saw the need for a process of comprehensive mutual engagement that would lead not so much to compromise on doctrinal questions as much as to a “coalescence of beliefs once thought to be opposed” (1942: 216).

He specifically made the case for supplemental ordination in his *Anglican and Free Church Ministries* (1944). Like Quick he viewed ordination as a form of authorization, the rite being essentially a commission to perform certain functions in the church. Since various churches expect different things from their clergy, authorization of their ordination does not refer exactly to the same set of responsibilities. For ordination to have full meaning in the life of a united church “all ministers sharing in the functions of that Church need to have received due authorization to perform them” (Broomfield 1944: 15). He cited the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 and its call for some rite of mutual recognition but chided the bishops for not using the language of ordination for both Free Church and Anglican clergy (1944: 16-17). Episcopal ordination would enable Free Church ministers and churches to be integrated with a ministry and church that had retained an unbroken identity since the time of the apostles. Free Church ordination would enable Anglicans to “add to the inheritance of themselves and their Churches” all that God had “granted to the Free Churches” (1944: 18).

In Broomfield’s view, all of the different Christian traditions had a claim to being “a medium of God’s working” but were also “disfigured by human sin.” There was no

reason preventing all from being brought into the “same rich stream of united Christian life in the one Body of Christ:”

For my part—looking on the matter along the matters I have suggested, and “terms of union having been otherwise satisfactorily adjusted” (to quote Lambeth 1920)—I should love to become a Free Church minister. I could not assent to everything for which Free Church leaders and saints have stood—any more that I can myself justify some actions taken by Anglican bishops or even by the Anglican Church as a whole in the course of its history—but I should count it a privilege to be linked, outwardly, as well as inwardly, with the corporate lives of other Communion which have manifestly been spheres of divine activity (1944: 18).

This statement had a powerful effect on the supplemental ordination debate. An Anglo-Catholic said the near impossible: “I should love to become a Free Church minister.” Several important SIUC leaders and Methodists were moved by this and other arguments and came alongside the Anglicans to support the idea of supplemental ordination (1993k: 71). But the seeming unity was based on the fact that the different groups interpreted the proposal in divergent ways. For the SIUC, Methodist, Reformed and Anglican supporters it was a means of simply extending full authorization to all ministers. For the Anglo-Catholics it was nothing less than re-ordination. The fundamental theological differences were not resolved by the supposed solution.

3.3.3. Archbishop William Temple

The dynamic leadership of William Temple, who ascended to the throne of St. Augustine in 1942, would significantly affect the tone of the union negotiations of the 1940s. There were many turbulent issues that he would have to weather during his brief

wartime primacy but the South India scheme presented the most serious theological controversy. Anglo-Catholics in England became frantic as the scheme came closer to becoming a reality and in January 1943 a deputation came to warn the new Archbishop that the South India scheme was not only a mistake but would bring schism to the Anglican Communion. Led by Lord Quickswood, a Tory Member of Parliament who famously detested nonconformists³⁸, the deputation included some of the shrillest voices in the controversy, among them the American modernist poet T.S. Eliot. For his part Temple had the forethought to have the former bishop of Bombay, E.J. Palmer, present to respond. To his astonishment some of the participants had not read the South India Scheme or the Lambeth resolutions concerning it. Temple spoke of the “urge toward unity” in South India and pointed out his duty to withhold judgment until he had time and opportunity to review all the opinions laid out before him. He found their threat of schism to be “profoundly shocking—morally and spiritually” (Iremonger 1948: 589-591).

The issue was important enough to be the central theme of his first presidential address to the Convocation of Canterbury in May 1943. According to Temple, Anglicans needed to see themselves as “trustees for certain truths” which they alone could “bring to the united Church of the future as its treasure.”³⁹ He reminded the delegates of what had already been stated in the Lambeth Appeal of 1920. Anglicans had not called into question the “spiritual reality” of churches without Episcopal orders. They had acknowledged that these “ministries have been blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as

³⁸ In 1938 Lord Quickswood objected to Unitarian Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's advising the Crown on the appointment of Anglican bishops musing that "if we lived in the reign of King Henry VIII, a Unitarian would not be in Downing Street. He would be burned at Smithfield" (Milestones 1956).

³⁹ *Christian Unity and Church Reunion: The Presidential Address Delivered in Full Synod to the Convocation of Canterbury on Tuesday, May 25th, 1943* (Temple 1944b: 12).

effective means of grace” (Temple 1944b: 19). But this acknowledgment had to be understood in the light of the intentions of these churches to accept episcopacy:

We have our own grounds for complete assurance that the Ministry which we have received is from God. We must at least be very cautious how we conclude that where those grounds of assurance are lacking, the Ministry which lacks them is not of God. We should rightly refuse to accept them for ourselves so long as there is no effective intention to heal the breach and restore the universally acknowledged Ministry on the basis of what we know as ground of complete assurance. In other words, we cannot in practice recognize what we must regard as irregular ministries, however effective within their own spheres, until there is an operative decision to be united in a way that ends the irregularity (1944b: 21).

The historic episcopate was a treasure held in trust for the rest of the church. Lambeth 1930 had encouraged the CIBC to move forward with the Scheme. The pledge had been interpreted as guaranteeing that a non-episcopally ordained minister would only be appointed to a formerly Anglican church in rare circumstances. The Archbishop made no mention of the joint committee’s clarification of 1934 that ordination prior to the union would not “debar” any minister from appointment anywhere within the united church “where the congregation desires it.” The pledge was a “gentlemen’s agreement” that there would be no imposition on a congregation that violated principle or conscience. “A ministry to which they have not been accustomed or to which they conscientiously object, shall not be imposed upon any congregation” (1948: 230).

Temple was concerned that if the churches were not fully united with an episcopal ministry there would be chaos as far as pastoral care was concerned. It was essential that worshippers be able to move from church to church, from region to region and communicate freely regardless of the former status of the member churches:

When an Anglican convert goes from Madras to a Methodist district in Mysore, is he to continue in his sacramental practice or to abandon it? He is, perhaps, a simple and unsophisticated person. If he can join fully with Christian

congregation where he lives, he will grow in discipleship as the years pass; but if he has in any way to hold aloof, and that for reasons which must be obscure to him, he is likely to relapse into the Hinduism which surrounds him with its peculiar power of suction (1944b: 23).

The threat of Hinduism notwithstanding, as far as the archbishop was concerned, if the problem of episcopacy was not resolved and with it the question of intercommunion, Anglicans would be “giving away” their “principles with both hands” (1944b: 23). The call for Anglicans was, on the one hand, to “safeguard” episcopacy for themselves and for the future; on the other hand, not to hold it “as to make difficult the access of others to it.” Anglicans needed to “make easy the way of entering into participation” but should take care not to “dissipate or squander” their inherited treasure (1944b: 26). The goal to be sought was “true union for the future without surrender or betrayal of God’s gifts to us in the past” (Temple 1944a: iv).

In the address to the Synod at Canterbury the Archbishop articulated a concern he has spoken of earlier and would come to again. The gift and treasure of the historic Episcopate could not be squandered. At the opening sermon for the Second Conference for Faith and Order 1937 he maintained:

I speak as a member of one of those Churches which still maintain barriers against completeness of union at the Table of the Lord. I believe from my heart that we of that tradition are trustees for an element of truth concerning the nature of the Church which requires that exclusiveness as a consequence, until this element of truth be incorporated with others into a fuller and worthier conception of the Church than any of us hold today.⁴⁰

At the Canterbury Diocesan Conference in the Summer of 1943 he warned that Anglicans must take care never to have “squandered the treasure” that they “hold in trust

⁴⁰ Sermon preached at St. Giles’s, Edinburgh, on August 3rd, 1937, at the opening service of the Second World Conference on Faith and Order (Temple 1958: 155-156).

for the united Church of future days.” Building on St. Paul’s analogy of the church as a body (I Corinthians 12), Temple offered that those who have “the treasure” of “the succession in the Ministry” are like the spinal system in a person’s body:

We become aware at once that a healthy man thinks very little about his spine: it is true that its importance cannot be exaggerated but as long as it is functioning properly he hardly gives it a thought: his attention can be given to the purpose which the body and all its members exist to serve. So some of our attention has been diverted from the service of God, which it is the Church’s function to render, to a concern about this ministerial spine of our system. It would be much wholesomer if we could take it for granted; but that will be impossible until it is universally accepted.⁴¹

Writing in 1944 to Foss Westcott, the Metropolitan of the CIBC, the Archbishop stated in no uncertain terms that full communion was not a possibility until the issues of episcopal ordination were resolved.⁴² In reply to the Metropolitan’s question “would the Province of Canterbury break communion with the CIBC on the ground of its action in allowing the Scheme to go forward”—the answer was a definite “no.” The reply to the Metropolitan’s second question was more nuanced. “Would the Province of Canterbury refuse to be in communion with the Church of South India”? Citing the Encyclical Letter from Lambeth 1930 Temple described the relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Church of South India as one of “very real intercommunion ... though for a time that intercommunion will be limited” (1948: 226). In his statement made in the Upper House of the Convocation at Lambeth in January 1944 he elucidated his concept of “restricted intercommunion.” What he envisioned was “something intermediate”:

⁴¹ *The Background of the Reunion Problem*, An address delivered to the Canterbury Diocesan Conference on Monday, July 19th, 1943 (Temple 1944b: 29-30).

⁴² Letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Metropolitan of the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon January 21, 1944 (cited in Bell 1948: 225-228).

While I desire with all my soul to maintain intact the faith and tradition of the Anglican Communion, I also hold that in the distressful circumstances of the modern world there is need of something intermediate between either organic union or full communion, such as the Churches of the Anglican Communion enjoy with one another, and total lack of any communion *in sacris*" (cited in Rawlinson 1951: 55)

The free churches were an interesting case. They were neither "fully qualified" nor "totally unqualified" to be called "churches" in the catholic sense of the word. Comparing the church to a vine, Temple surmised that non-episcopal churches were like branches in a vine in which some strands were severed (no episcopal ministry) while others were vibrant (scripture and sacraments). "The life of the Vine truly flows in those Branches, and certainly none can deny that they bring forth fruit" (cited in Iremonger 1948: 586). Temple tried to lead Anglicans to a qualified concept of communion that took seriously both the positive and negative realities of the situation.

3.3.4. *Reaction in South India*

The Archbishop may not have intended to be provocative but his comments elicited a fierce reaction from the churches whose orders he had described as "irregular." He had attempted to steer the communion along a *via media*, on the one hand preserving Catholic principles, but being innovative and open to new ideas for the sake of ecumenism. His attempts to build a bridge resulted in building a high wall. Newbigin wrote to William Paton in exasperation, "the archbishop has thrown a bombshell into the works."⁴³

⁴³ Letter from Lesslie Newbigin to William Patton, June 6, 1943 (cited in Sundkler 1954: 317).

Neither Archbishop Temple nor Bishop Azariah would live to see the outcome of the South India Scheme. Temple died suddenly in October 1944 and Azariah on New Year's Day 1945 (Turner 1991: 976-977; van der Bent 1991: 73-74). The general council of the CIBC met in the wake of Azariah's death and resolved to accept the Scheme of Union and permit the dioceses of Madras, Travancore and Cochin, Tinnevely, and Dornekal to "carry out their practically unanimous desire to enter into union with the Methodist and South India United Churches."⁴⁴ In a meeting called later that June they made it clear that the action in January did not in any way imply an acceptance of equality of all ministries in the uniting church. They had adhered to the basic principles of Lambeth 1930 but did not embrace the joint committee's 1934 interpretation of the pledge:

The House of Bishops is not concerned to assert that, except in cases of extreme pastoral urgency, an ex-Anglican congregation is, under the Pledge, prevented by long-established tradition from being placed in the charge of a non-episcopally ordained minister (1954: 319).

3.4. THE CHURCH AND UNION

The SIUC churches were deeply stirred by the Anglican statements. The joint committee under the leadership of Newbigin engaged the issue of supplemental ordination by publishing a symposium entitled *The Church and Union*. Five leading SIUC leaders were asked to contribute essays setting forth their views of the "the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry." The book was written in light of the approaching "hour

⁴⁴ The General Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon. Resolution of Acceptance, January 1945 (cited in Bell 1948: 228).

of decision” with an awareness that “great issues for the future of Christendom hang upon the decision of these matters in South India” (Newbigin 1944a).⁴⁵

3.4.1. Adolph Streckeisen

The first essay was by A. Streckeisen of the Basel Mission in Malabar. For years he had resisted the union vision based on the ideals of the first four centuries of the church’s history. A student of the great missiologist Karl Hartenstein, Streckeisen was committed to the Neo-orthodox Reformed theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. He strongly believed that Reformation principles needed to be maintained in the united church, particularly the principle of *sola scriptura* (1954: 278-283).

His essay, entitled “The Church in the South India Union Scheme” is a passionate appeal for union but written in opposition to supplemental ordination. According to Streckeisen the Reformed churches were right to insist that apostolic succession should be understood as “the continuity of the apostolic witness to the crucified and risen Lord” (Streckeisen 1944: 5). The emphasis should be laid on “historic continuity with the teaching of the apostles, without tying the church down to a special type of organization” (1944: 6). The ministry is not “the necessary uniform basis of the church.” Christ alone is the all-sufficient high priest and under him “all are brethren.” The historic episcopate is “valuable” but “stands on the same level as other forms of organization”:

Christ can make use of the episcopal as well as the non-episcopal type of organization. Thus according to its name true catholicity can only be on an

⁴⁵ From the foreword which is without pagination.

evangelical basis, rejecting any sectarian interpretation, whether it bears the name of Rome, or any other designation (1944: 7).

Streckeisen supported the basis of union as it stood without any kind of supplemental ordination. This approach to union was consonant with the core values of his Reformed theology. The fact the non-episcopally ordained ministers could join without being episcopally ordained demonstrated that all were “already in apostolic succession.” The “apostolicity of each in its witness to Christ [was] recognized.” This Reformed theology of apostolicity was further emphasized by the promise that the new church would maintain fellowship with all the branches originally connected to the uniting churches. True church unity was thus not to be found in order but in a commitment to “correct and reform ... according to the scriptures.” True unity was found in “the principle of continuous reformation towards a deeper understanding of and surrender to the Lordship of Christ” (1944: 8-9).

The fact that a Reformed stalwart like Streckeisen could embrace episcopacy demonstrates the reality of what Temple described as the “urge towards union” in South India as well as the extraordinary theological breadth of the uniting church. Most were prepared to accept the “fact of episcopacy” without settling on “any theory as to its character.” Some viewed episcopacy as divinely appointed and as the only guarantor of valid sacraments. Others viewed it as a historic form of government that was expedient for the time, while many held to various views mediating between these two. There were also those who adamantly opposed any form of episcopacy. The latter was the view of the writer of the second essay, A.M Devasahayam.

3.4.2. *A.M. Devasahayam*

Devasahayam was a layman from Travancore who had been elected to the SIUC joint committee in 1935 as an ardent opponent of the scheme (1954: 192). His essay, “The Church of Christ,” argued that the scheme was out of accord with both ecumenical and evangelical principles. He cited the World Conference on Faith and Order held in Lausanne in 1927 that was influential on the 1929 version. The Lausanne Report on the Ministry advocated the integration of Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational systems. While the South India Scheme spoke of such comprehensiveness, nevertheless, Episcopal ordination was held forth as the ultimate means to “secure the unification of the ministry” (Devasahayam 1944: 23).

Mutual supplemental ordination was nothing but an Anglican ruse. There was “no real mutuality of need or desire” for validation of Anglican orders among the SIUC churches. This was only a concern for the Anglicans themselves. Such “persistently differing and unreconciled attitudes” demonstrated that “contradictory views of the nature of the Church” were at work (1944: 23). He thundered against the proposal for supplemental ordination. If it were accepted “evangelical Christianity would be completely betrayed” (1944: 24):

The conception of the Church for which the Anglican and other ‘Catholic’ churches stand is an extraordinary phenomenon in religious history. It is based on the indispensability of the priest for the Sacraments for salvation, in the indispensability of the priest and the indispensability of apostolic succession for the efficacy of the functions of the episcopacy. Christ is conceived as carrying on the work of redemption through His representatives or officers in the Church (the bishops) in due apostolic succession, who delegate this redemptive work to the priests in ordination to be mediated through the sacraments. Indian religion may be ritual-ridden and priest-ridden, but offers no parallel to this extraordinary sacerdotal edifice (1944: 25).

3.4.3. *H.V. Martin*

Another critic of the scheme was H.V. Martin, a former Congregationalist associated with the London Missionary Society (LMS) and an influential missionary within the Telugu church council of the SIUC. The LMS councils of Travancore, North Tamil, and Telugu were consistently opposed to union with the Anglicans. They asserted the validity and equality of their orders in no uncertain terms: “as far as the validity of the ministry is concerned we come in as equals with the equally certain validity of our ministry expressly accepted, or not at all” (cited in Sundkler 1954: 266). Martin published his own scheme of union in 1943 envisioning a comprehensive church in which members “agreed on principles of faith” and were “allowed wide freedom of opinion in all other matters”. His scheme never gained much of a following and the Telugu council voted for the South India Scheme in September 1946 (1954: 324-325).

Martin deemed himself a pragmatist. Since there were such “deep, fundamental differences born of centuries of tradition” between the various parties the first solution was to go to the Holy Scriptures which all accepted as having authority. For most issues moving forward what was needed was “readiness to deal pragmatically with problems not resolved” by the Bible (Martin 1944: 36).

Martin had a surprising list of issues that he considered to be “not resolved” by the Bible and therefore issues on which there should be no dogmatic stance taken. As far as he was concerned there was no biblical basis for “any ecclesiastical organization.” There was no New Testament record of ordination and therefore any basis for a separate order of the clergy (1944: 42). Water baptism had been fulfilled and superseded by Spirit

baptism. There was “not a shred of evidence in the New Testament that water-baptism was essential to joining the Apostolic Church” (1944: 43). Early Christian communion services only had a rite of “the breaking of the bread.” In all the New Testament references to communion there was no “hint of wine-drinking being part of the ceremony” (1944: 44-45).

His ecumenical views were no less unusual. Organic unity or disunity had absolutely no effect on the basic spiritual unity of the church. Church union discussions needed to be clear that the unity issue was pragmatic and that outward unity of organization had absolutely nothing to do with the fundamental spiritual unity of the church. He thundered against ecumenists: “the false exegesis of John 17:21 used by advocates of Church union is sickening to any serious student of the Scriptures” (1944: 38).

The key to successful union negotiations for Martin was found in this pragmatic approach to faith and order. If the churches would stop the “false stress” on ecclesiastical rites like baptism and the Lord’s supper and the “false connection” between these rites and a separate class of ordained ministers then the union discussions would move to “successful fruition” (1944: 46).

Martin did not speak specifically for or against supplemental ordination in his essay, but in his own union plan he proposed mutual commissioning by way of laying-on of hands.⁴⁶ Newbigin was amazed that “the redoubtable anti-union leader of the Telegu Church Council” had become an “unexpected convert to the idea” (1993k: 71). One can only hazard a guess as to how supplemental ordination fitted into his distinctive

⁴⁶ H.V. Martin, *Scheme of Church Union*, printed sheet, Anantapur, 1943 (cited in Sundkler 1954: 414).

ecclesiology and its rejection of the rite of ordination. It may be that he shared Bishop Azariah's basic concern with "two classes" of ministers within the united church. With mutual commissioning there would no longer be two classes of ministers—episcopally ordained and non-episcopally ordained. Perhaps having one class of minister appealed to Martin's pragmatism. At the very least it would mean that all ministers would have jurisdiction for ministry within all the congregations of the united church.

3.4.4. C.B. Firth

The next essay was also by a former Congregationalist associated with the London Missionary Society (LMS), C.B. Firth. Firth trained at Cambridge and taught theology at the seminary in Bellary, but in the late 1930s he became increasingly interested in liturgy and Anglican theology, especially that of O.C. Quick, William Temple and Evelyn Underhill. He was a SIUC Congregationalist who had moved in a "Catholic" direction (1954: 282).

Firth's essay, "The Christian Ministry," shows the influence of O.C. Quick. Ordination is viewed primarily as a form of authorization. It commissions a minister to serve within a particular organization. But the divisions of the church limit the authority of the minister:

No separate Church can give a man authority to minister in another. A universal authority could be given only by a united Universal Church acting through its accredited representatives. Thus the Ministry, in any of the forms we know, has both a universal and a local aspect. In so far as it is of God, it is universal; but in so far as it is of a particular Church in separation from other parts of the Church, it is local (Firth 1944: 31-32).

Firth considered the question of validity of orders an important one and not just a “catholic” issue. Every denomination required some test of validity at least in that ministers had to be “chosen, trained, and ordained in the manner that the Church lays down as regular.” The only “completely valid ministry’ would be that which was recognized throughout the whole church. In the divided church “none can claim universal recognition in fact, whatever it may claim in theory.” There can only be a completely valid ministry when the church is fully united.

When... different branches of the Church are seeking to unite, it behoves each of them not to defend the full and perfect validity of its own ministry in separation, but to admit that each is defective in so far as it lacks universal recognition, and to seek from the others such additional recognition or validation as they can give, remembering that even then perfect validity will not have been attained. To do this involves no denial of any grace that separate Churches believe their ministries to have received; it recognizes, however, the distortion of the whole matter which has been brought about by disunion in the Church, and opens up a way of reconciliation (1944: 33).

Firth saw a theological issue that went deeper than the pragmatic concerns for jurisdiction raised by H.V. Martin. Ordination conveyed authorization but it also included a distinctive “character” as an “accredited representative of God and of the Church.” Such a character was by definition “universal in nature” (1944: 31). He concluded the essay with an appeal that revealed his conviction that union was a theological necessity: “It is better, while not denying what we have, to be willing to receive more, than to insist stubbornly that we already have everything and are in need of nothing” (1944: 36).

3.5. NEWBIGIN: THE CHURCH AND THE GOSPEL

3.5.1. *The Paradox of the Church: Body of Christ and Human Organization*

Newbigin's essay rooted the fundamental question of union in the gospel message of the cross. "The Church and the Gospel" was the first major statement of his reunion ecclesiology and it laid out many of the basic ideas that would be developed in *The Reunion of the Church* (1948), *The Household of God* (1953) and other writings.

The essay is devoted to the theological task of demonstrating the ecclesial implications of the gospel message of the cross. Newbigin the evangelical ecumenical follows the clue of the cross to its logical implications for the church. The essay is built around answering a basic question: "Is it the will of God that the Church should be a visible, closely knit, clearly defined, historically continuous institution?" That was the question frankly that had been raised by all the other essays in the volume. Newbigin begins with the simple answer that "nothing is more clear than that Christ intended his disciples to be bound together in love as they were bound to Him in love" (1944c: 46). This unity is most strongly expressed in St. Paul's metaphor for the church—"the body of Christ." This did not refer to some idealized, invisible, spiritual fellowship loosely associated together in various ways. St. Paul's language referred to the actual churches in Rome, Corinth and Philippi to whom he was writing:

His fullest teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ (Romans 12, I Corinthians 11-13, and Ephesians 4) is precisely called out by and directed to the necessity of securing orderly arrangements in the Churches, proper relations between pastors, elders, teachers, and others, and orderly administration of the Lord's Supper. Nowhere does he speak of the Church as the Body of Christ except in relation to practical 'pragmatic' problems of Church life and order, and

nowhere does he offer advice about practical Church matters except on the basis of his ultimate beliefs about the Church as the Body of Christ. To separate the two is precisely to contradict the whole message (1944c: 47).

Newbigin explores the paradox that lay behind the idea of a group of ordinary, imperfect and sinful people being called “the body of Christ.” It is problematic to identify any human institution as a perfect expression of God’s presence and will. But it is equally troubling to say that St. Paul’s “body of Christ” language describes an invisible spiritual church that has no point of contact with the actual congregations whom the Apostle addressed. He examines four pairs of terms that seek to resolve the paradox behind a community that is simultaneously “the body of Christ” and a human organization.

3.5.1.1. Visible and Invisible

The classic Protestant resolution of the problem is to distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of the church. To describe the church as invisible is to acknowledge “that the bond by which the church is constituted is an invisible thing, the gracious election of God and the human response of faith.” The visible church describes the membership of all the churches as seen by human eyes and which, theoretically, contains some who are not part of the invisible church, the tares among the wheat. While Newbigin does not deny this distinction he is concerned that it not be used to justify the subjugation of the visible to the invisible. They are both essential for the biblical idea of the church (1944c: 47-48). For the “last word” on the relationship

between the visible and invisible church Newbigin quotes St. John: “he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen” (I John 4:20).

The invisible bond of faith alone toward God is the constitutive fact; but the visible bond of love and fellowship with my brother is the necessary expression of that constitutive fact. If you separate the two, there is a falsehood somewhere. That which constitutes the Church is an invisible fact: but that fact, if it be really there, will be constantly expressing itself in the visible fellowship of brethren dwelling together in unity. In so far as that visible fellowship is not coming into being, we must doubt whether the invisible bond is really there... You cannot set the invisible Church over against the visible Churches. There is only one Church—constituted by the secret bond of election and faith; visible and also concealed in those companies which we call Churches (1944c: 48).

3.5.1.2. Spiritual and Material

Newbigin engages those who question the importance of visible unity but emphasize the “spiritual unity of the church.” He appreciates two important reminders these advocates give. First, they rightly remind the church that it is constituted by God’s election and call. The church is “not made with human hands”—its constitution is “an inward and spiritual fact.” Second, they remind the church of the fact that “God is not bound by any human institution.” The institutional church cannot manipulate God. It is not empowered to compel or limit his grace (1944c: 50).

While Newbigin affirms election and absolute divine freedom he nonetheless asserts that “the spiritual, if it is real, will express itself through the material.” In biblical religion the spiritual comes to humans through the material:

God, according to the Bible, chose to reveal Himself through a small and stiffnecked tribe in an obscure corner of the world, and to crown that revelation in a man who was hanged on a gibbet. This is as offensive to the sophisticated European and the spiritual Brahmin as it was to Greek and Jew in the days of Paul. Like Naaman the Syrian we all resent the fact that God should have linked His gift of healing with something so odd and unpopular as the Jewish race, or so

scandalous as a crucified convict. We are all inclined to say, 'Why should I have to go there, or do that, in order to receive God's grace? Cannot God deal with me direct instead of by this roundabout and arbitrary way? Why can I not find him in my own soul, in the culture or religion of my own tradition? Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?' The answer to all this is, of course, that the purely inward and spiritual may be purely private and selfish. What is needed to break through the pride which is the fundamental form of sin, is something that comes to us from outside, the fact or the person who, being outside of us, cannot be adjusted to suit us, or confused with the motions of our own spirit (1944c: 51).

Newbigin saw that in much contemporary spirituality there was a tendency toward mysticism and private experience with a desire to escape concrete particularity. He viewed this spirituality as "self-centred." It is in material particularity that spiritual reality is experienced. Many will profess love for "humanity" but this falls short of love for an actual "neighbor", a "concrete person outside us" such as a "beggar in the street." Love for humanity does not take us "a hair's breadth beyond the circle of our own self-hood." Love is given to real people in actual places. The Christian gospel presents a God that comes to humans at a particular time and place. There is a "particular book" and a "particular fellowship" which has maintained itself through history as a "visible organization with visible tests of membership, with officers, rules and ceremonies." There is no other way to experience the gospel of Christ. The visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual, and inward and the outward are always given together (1944c: 51-52).

3.5.1.3. Proleptic and Pragmatic

Another way to understand the church as both “body of Christ” and “community of sinners” is by the terms “proleptic and pragmatic.”⁴⁷ The church is a proleptic community in that it experiences the future life of the kingdom of God in the present. It has “tasted the...powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5), and can be described as a “colony of heaven” (Philippians 3:20). The irony is that these words describe the very congregations that would receive apostolic rebukes for being divisive, quarrelsome, and sinful. “Pragmatic” describes a practical and matter-of-fact perspective on the visibly organized communities of believers in all their imperfection.

We are in the paradoxical position of being both a colony of heaven, and also, very obviously, still a sinful and worldly society. We cannot deny either of these facts. To identify this Church as we know it with the perfect Body of Christ, would be to ignore the fact of sin: but to separate them completely would be precisely to ignore the gospel (1944c: 52).

3.5.1.4. *Simul Justus et Peccator*

Newbigin proposes that the paradox is “unresolvable” but can be better understood when one realizes that the same paradox runs through all Christian theology. “Is there not a paradox even in the very idea of the infinite dealing with the finite, or the holy receiving the sinful?” It is the paradox at the heart of the great concern of the Protestant Reformation, namely, the perplexing question of how a just God can come to

⁴⁷ In Newbigin’s major ecclesiological works *The Reunion of the Church* (1948) and *The Household of God* (1953) the terms “proleptic and pragmatic” are replaced with “eschatological and historical.”

accept and pardon sinners. Martin Luther interpreted St. Paul's theology so as to say that one who was still a sinner could nonetheless be forgiven and at peace with God. He saw in Romans chapters 7 and 8 a portrait of a man who knew himself to be both a helpless sinner and at the same time an accepted child of God, or as Luther put it, *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time a righteous person and also a sinner. Newbigin saw that within this paradox of individual Christian identity lay the clue to understanding the paradox of the church (1944c: 52-53).

This paradox is at the heart of the message of the cross, which enigmatically pronounces judgment and yet offers total mercy and a right standing with God. The new status is not based on moral effort but solely on the mercy of God in Christ:

The attempt to achieve conformity to God's will, to 'get ourselves right with God', by our own efforts is bound to fail, because it is selfish. God has made us for love, and the attempt to achieve righteousness for ourselves is loveless and therefore disastrous. The gospel with its burning focus in the Cross, is a word of judgement and of mercy on all this attempt. Of judgment because when we see the Cross, we see that all our human nature—even its noblest efforts in culture, statesmanship and religion—is really a murderous treason against God's love; of mercy because in that terrible moment when our whole foundation is taken from under us, we meet a love that was willing to go gladly to the Cross for our sakes. What happens when we see this is that the whole idea of righteousness as a possession of our own is shattered, and instead we are offered the miracle of God's acceptance here and now, 'the righteousness which is of God by faith'. Our standing-ground, the thing we rely on, can no longer be our own moral or spiritual achievement: any attempt to go back to that standing-ground would be an unthinkable betrayal. The only ground of confidence is the knowledge 'Christ had died for me'. So the Christian is the man who is in this position, so utterly paradoxical from the point of view of human morality: he is a sinner—still that same miserable bundle of selfish and blind motives that crucified Christ; never can he forget or blink that fact; and yet at the same time he is 'right with God', given even now that peace and joy and serenity which come from being at one with God (1944c: 52-53).

Newbigin saw a powerful spiritual dynamism in this "double word" of judgment and mercy. Simple mercy without judgment could easily lead to a spiritual state of

complacency and self-satisfaction and ultimately to the fatal error of antinomianism.

Simple judgment without mercy leads to the opposite error of legalism expressing itself through self-assertion and pride. Rightly understood the word of judgment has the effect of enabling one to truly have self-knowledge as a sinner and to desperately seek spiritual refreshment in God's loving word of mercy in Christ:

Only when I thus stand always under the Gospel, knowing myself ever afresh to be a sinner, and learning ever afresh of the love that accepts me even as I am; only so am I in the relationship with God which Christ has come to give. This relationship, dynamic because paradoxical, is the bond between the Christian and God (1944c: 54).

The words of judgment and mercy are therefore “inextricably blended.” In the cross of Christ there is a clear message of mercy—moral effort cannot secure acceptance by God because acceptance by God is a gift of grace. The cross rightly understood does not lead to antinomianism but rather it drives the Christian to go to the teachings of Christ, notably the Sermon on the Mount, and with gratitude to live the truth of those teachings. But the Sermon on the Mount sets an extraordinary standard for holiness and love and all will fall short. The Christian is therefore driven back to the cross to seek God's mercy and forgiveness in the wake of failure and grace for continued spiritual growth, “and so [the Christian's] life will be ever fruitful of new holiness.” Security in one's relationship with God is not found in having right doctrine, or an excellent moral record, or even deep religious experiences, all of which are evidence of the pride of legalism. Security is found only in ongoing reliance upon the cross and in the double word of judgment and mercy (1944c: 55).

What follows next is one of Newbigin's single most important and original theological insights: *what is true for the Christian is also true for the church*. The

paradox of an individual Christian's life is also the paradox of the church's life. There is not one church that is invisible, proleptic and spiritual and another that is visible, pragmatic and material. There is only one church and it is both the holy body of Christ and "a very doubtful human institution, full of sin and division." The two realities cannot be separated. "The Church is always and everywhere both at the same time"(1944c: 55). Just as it is for the individual Christian so it is with the church corporate: *simul justus et peccator*.

The church corporate is also threatened in its spiritual health by the pathologies of legalism or antinomianism. Newbigin sees these as the "characteristic sins" of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism respectively. Rome "violates the paradoxical nature of the bond which constitutes the Church" by falling into a legalism of privilege. The church itself is seen as the sole possessor of the means of grace. Salvation is guaranteed simply by adherence to its rites and rules. Protestantism, on the other hand, falls into the error of antinomianism, thinking that since salvation is a gift given directly by God therefore the human institution of the church may be regarded as of little importance. Little wonder then that Protestantism has disastrously split into innumerable sects "each reflecting more of the personal, cultural and economic interests of its members than the Gospel" (1944c: 56).

The "true church" rejects the false solutions of the paradox found in legalism and antinomianism. It is "constituted by the invisible bond of election and faith" and "stands only and always under the judgment and mercy of the gospel." This is why John

Calvin⁴⁸ insisted that the only test of validity for a true church was that the word be rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. The word and sacraments are the means by which “the Gospel is perpetually represented to the Church.” A true church centers its life in the gospel through word and sacrament. The “essence of churchmanship is obedience to them”:

A Reformed Church, according to the meaning of the word, is a Church which is perpetually reforming itself according to the Word of God, which lives always at the post of duty ready for God’s judgment and God’s mercy. A Church which, even though it had once been reformed, is content to accept its own traditions and its ancient slogans and practices as its final standard of judgment, is not truly a reformed Church: it is a Church which had deserted its post for the dug-out of legalism. At the same time a Church which truly stands under the Word of God will not take shelter in the other dug-out of antinomianism. It will know that though we cannot be saved by membership in a Church, yet we who have received the gift of salvation are bound to labour for the building up of the fellowship in love, and cannot treat the visible and institutional Church as a matter of secondary importance (1944c: 56)

The church is a living paradox of the gospel. These theological concepts—visible and invisible, spiritual and material, pragmatic and proleptic, *simul justus et peccator*—are attempts to explore the paradox that that lies at the heart of the church. For Newbigin, this paradox is the first principle for understanding why the gospel of grace requires a visibly united church. Sinful people in actual congregations experience the eschatological and heavenly reality of communion with God. This reality demands nothing less than total commitment to live out the implications of the prolepsis. The life of the future kingdom has been made a reality for sinful people in the present. Those

⁴⁸ Calvin writes in the *Institutes*: “From this the face of the church comes forth and and becomes visible to our eyes. Whenever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists” (Calvin: 4.1.9).

who have been made one in Christ by grace must live out that oneness in real time and in the corporate structures of the church.

3.5.2. Institutional Unity and Continuity

In the third and final segment of the essay Newbigin turns his argument to address the original question that was posed at the beginning: “is it the will of God that the Church should be a visible, closely defined, historically continuous institution?” Many Christians answer the question in the affirmative and can also agree that something has gone wrong when division occurs in the church. The points of difference are reflected in what Newbigin views as two opposite “extremes”: those who claim unbroken and historical continuity with the early church and see such continuity as the essence of what constitutes the church, and those who are indifferent to questions of continuity and succession. The latter see the issue as unimportant, while the former see it as a first-order question. Newbigin sets out to explain where the truth lies between the two extremes and to address the theme expressed in the essay’s title, namely, the relationship between the gospel and the institutional unity and continuity of the church (1944c: 57). He makes six propositions that he believes explicate the truth of relationship, three that are negative and three that are positive.

In the negative: first, historical continuity is not of the essence of the church. The church begins as a response to the event of the resurrection and is, for Newbigin, grounded in the relationship between humans and God established by the gospel

message. Second, God's grace is not bound to the institutional church and it cannot simply claim to be the body of Christ. The church is a "sinful human institution needing constant repentance." When the truth of the church's sinfulness is denied then the church "as an institution may become a terrible embodiment of sheer unrepentant human pride." Third, no definite form of church government is presented in the New Testament, such as Congregational, Presbyterian or Episcopal. "There is no evidence that either Christ or the apostle fixed a certain institutional structure for the Church" (1944c: 57).

Then follow three positive points: first, the work of Christ is to draw people to himself in a new community. "The Church, with its visible institutional unity, is the proper and necessary fruit of the gospel." Second, this new community that is the fruit of the gospel is the means by which others are brought to faith. "Its life, its preaching and its sacraments are the visible means by which the Gospel is ever anew set forth." Third, as a visible human institution the church expresses and maintains its unity by means of appointed officers. "Continuity of succession is only unity expressed in the dimension of time... this continuous succession is a witness to the Gospel" (1944c: 58-59).

In these six brief points Newbigin presents the basic theology that would shape the ecclesial paradigm of the CSI and that he would advocate for the rest of his life. It is rooted in the "clue of the cross"—the double word of judgment and mercy, the paradox of sinners called holy, the good news of the kingdom of God. It seeks to avoid the twin dangers of institutional legalism and individualistic antinomianism. It takes historical continuity seriously but does not consider it constitutive of the church. Continuity, especially in terms of the historic episcopate, is of the "*bene esse*" of the church but not

the “*esse*.” Continuity is valued as a “sign” of the gospel that alone is constitutive of the church.

3.5.3. *Unity: the “fruit” and “means” of the Gospel*

At the time of his first published address, the sermon given at the 1933 Edinburgh Quadrennial, Newbigin argued that the church’s unity needed to “transcend all sectional claims, however lofty.” Whenever the church was found shirking the ecumenical task of visible reunion it was “denying its own true nature”(Newbigin 1933: 98). In the 1944 essay he calls the “true nature” of the church the “proper and necessary fruit of the gospel” (1944c: 58). By 1948 he enriches the imagery to that of “first fruits,” a harvest metaphor employed in the Pauline letters (cf. Romans 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; I Corinthians 15:20, 23; 16:15). The church is the “first fruits” of a “new humanity... made one in Christ... and restored to that life of communion for which mankind was created” (Newbigin 1948d: 28). For Newbigin the term is eschatological. The church in its God-given unity is a first fruit of the kingdom of God, “a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for all” (Newbigin 1994a: 33). He also uses the eschatological language of “foretaste” or “deposit” (translations of the Greek word *arrabon*).⁴⁹ Because the church is the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit it is “a foretaste of another reality” (1994a: 60).

In the 1944 essay Newbigin also points out that the church is “the means by which the gospel reaches every individual.” (1944c: 58). He later uses the language of

⁴⁹ cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14.

“instrument” (1948d: 28). The church’s instrumentality in the task of evangelism and spiritual renewal in the world is ultimately effective because of the eschatological realities experienced in its life as a fruit, first-fruit, foretaste, and deposit of the life of God. “Precisely because the Church is here and now a real foretaste of heaven, she can be the witness and instrument of the kingdom of heaven. It is precisely because she is not *merely* instrumental that she can be instrumental” (Newbigin 1953e: 148). In the Kerr Lectures, later published as *The Household of God*, Newbigin sets forth a threefold description of the church as foretaste, instrument and “sign” (1953e: 145). By “sign” he means that the church points people to something real even though it cannot yet be seen. The eschatological life of the Spirit experienced in the church points people to the reality of the kingdom of God, thus making the church itself instrumental in drawing people into its communion (1994a: 63). In his mature years Newbigin came to believe that the church’s efficacy as a sign and instrument was found in the spiritual reality of the foretaste, the *arrabon*. Life in the church involves “communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.” In one sense this could be said to be “the true end of life itself.” But in another sense it is only provisional because God’s desire is for *all* people to share in this rich communion. Ever the missionary theologian, Newbigin draws attention to the fullness of God’s invitation. The church “is neither an end in itself, nor merely an instrument.” It is the “first fruit of God’s purpose in Christ. Only as such is it a sign and instrument” (Newbigin 1973e: 113):

I think our most urgent task is to discover those changes in the life of the Church which will transform it from a self-regarding, self-seeking clique into an open fellowship of those who are committed to Christ’s saving work for all men (Newbigin 1972i: 7).

There is development in Newbigin's thinking over the years but the trajectory is clear in the essay of 1944. As he looked at the opportunity that lay before the SIUC he passionately argues for a compromise that would embrace the continuity of episcopacy but that would not enslave the church to an ideology of orders that would root validity in anything other than the gospel. That vision was born out of his convictions as an evangelical ecumenical that the church in its visible unity was itself to be a sign and first fruit of the good news of Christ and also an instrument of bringing that good news to the world.

3.5.4. *Embracing Episcopacy: The Influence of Michael Ramsey*

The conclusion of the essay reflects Newbigin's new understanding of the place of the historic episcopate as a gift and true sign of the gospel. Years after the formation of the CSI Bishop Newbigin remembered that this essay contained "the results of a good deal of theological wrestling." He had long held that the church was essentially constituted by means of the gospel message "communicated in word and sacrament and evoking the response of faith." Questions about orders and their validity did not rise to the same level of importance. Anglican insistence upon the historic episcopate as a necessary prerequisite for union caused him "serious difficulties" (1993k: 70).

His mind changed after reading Michael Ramsey's *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936). He was drawn to Ramsey's theology of orders because it "did not contravene but rested upon the biblical doctrine of justification by grace through faith." Some Anglo-Catholic theologians wanted to make the historic episcopate the "*conditio*

sine qua non of the fullness of grace” which Newbigin would never support. But Ramsey enabled him to embrace the historic episcopate as a gift, as “something given by the grace of God to be the means of unity” (1993k: 70).

Ramsey saw evangelical and missional significance in the Catholic order of the church. Only “apostolic order” and its attendant expression of the church’s unity could serve as an adequate witness to the crucified and risen Lord. Christ’s death was the beginning of a new community of selflessness, a community that would be one in self-giving love just as God is one. “The eternal love of Father and Son is uttered in Christ’s self-negation unto death, to the end that men may make it their own and be made one” (Ramsey 1990: 26). The unity of the church is therefore grounded in Christ’s sacrifice of himself —“the love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.”⁵⁰ The church is united by the historical events of Jesus’ death and resurrection, events that are grounded in the reality of the eternal unity of God. There is an inseparable union of the spiritual truth of God’s unity and the historical reality of the work of Christ. “Thus the inward and outward are inseparable, and the church’s inward meaning is expressed in the church’s shape and structure” (1990: 50). The impact of the Jesus’ life and death leads to the structure of the church: “the only appeal back to Jesus which is logically and spiritually coherent is an appeal to the gospel of God uttered in the one Body by its whole structure” (1990: 66).

Ramsey’s case for the episcopate is rooted in the basic gospel idea of “one body” brought about by the death of Jesus. The apostles were sent to bear witness to the gospel message of Christ but also served as officers of the church, the one body of Christ. They

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

uniquely represented the one body of Christ in mission. After the death of the apostles it follows that this representative function is still needed in the church. The episcopate became the post-apostolic expression of the “unity of the one Body”, the “organ of the one people of God before and behind all that is local or sectional” (1990: 84-85).

Newbigin embraced Ramsey’s basic thesis that catholic order is a sign of the gospel. In the “The Church and the Gospel” Newbigin does not directly address the issue of supplemental ordination in South India though he gives it serious attention in *The Reunion of the Church* (1948d: 110-114). In the essay his method is less direct. He undermines the Anglo-Catholic theology of orders that is the *raison d’être* for supplemental ordination in the first place. He explains his new views of episcopacy making clear his rejection of any notion that apostolic succession ensures “a validity which would otherwise be lacking.” For Newbigin the only essential element determining validity is “the presence of Christ in the word and sacraments of the Gospel.” Historical continuity in church office does not guarantee validity but it is important “evangelically” in that “unity and continuity” are the “proper response to the Gospel of the mercy and judgment of God in Christ” (1944c: 58-59).

The continuity of the historic episcopal succession is gospel unity “expressed in the dimension of time”:

Where this unity is maintained over long periods, there will be continuous succession in this office. The continuous succession is a witness to the gospel, as all unity is. Where the body is rent by division, there the continuous succession of the ministry will be broken. This means that... the truth of the Gospel is obscured by human failure to respond to and express the love of God. Thus the evangelical importance of what is called ‘apostolic succession’ in the ministry of the Church is... that it witnesses to the central truth of the Gospel that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (1944c: 58-59).

Newbigin sees in the historic succession a gift for the church in as much as it is a sign of unity and reconciliation. He would never come to see it as anything more, anything constitutive of the church or a *sine qua non* of church order. He especially resists the idea of supplemental ordination as a mediating structure to bring Anglicans and other Protestant churches together. In reality it was a proposal for re-ordination for non-Anglicans.

In *The Reunion of the Church* (1948) Newbigin clearly articulates his objections to the proposal. For all the talk of “extending authorization” for Anglican ministers into other churches the fact remained that Anglican orders were already fully and completely recognized in those churches. The problem, as he saw it, was that the Anglo-Catholics were working from a theological position that linked the “lineal descent” of bishops “to the being of the Church”:

If such lineal descent is essential, then non-episcopal ministries require re-ordination, but have nothing to give in return; if it is not essential, but as I have argued, normative and expressive, then the proper method of reunion is that of the Scheme. This method is, briefly, first, the recognition of the fact that God has graciously accepted our ministries in spite of our sins of schism, and of the fact that God’s acceptance does not require our further validation; secondly, the act of obedience to His will by entering in to organic union, in which union alone can the full sharing of our several inheritances take place; thirdly, the accepting and carrying forward of that holy order which, having been received from the undivided Church, and resting upon the largest possible area of authority in the whole Church, is the means whereby God’s will may be accomplished that there may be a ministry accepted and fully effective throughout the whole Church (1948d: 112).

The other problem with the proposal was that it was shortsighted. What would happen in the future when other churches wanted to join the CSI? Would the entire ministry have to undergo the rite of supplemental ordination over and over again? He

wryly observed “one cannot but think that a Church whose ministers found themselves receiving the rite of supplemental ordination several times in a lifetime would find it difficult to attach to ordination the values which the Church has always attached” (1948d: 112-113).

Newbigin saw the mistake of seeking to solve the problem of authorization through something as sacred as the rite of ordination. What had been lacking in authorization and recognition of ministries would be addressed by the constitutional acts of the united church in the act of union and by the fact of the church’s existence (1948d: 114). Newbigin essentially saw in supplemental ordination a confusion of ordination with authorization, a de facto re-ordination of those already ordained, and a fundamental devaluation of the significance of ordination.

3.6. CONCLUSION

When Newbigin reflected on his own ministry as a bishop in the CSI he continued to emphasize the practical importance of the episcopate because it represented the truest form of the Church as a single society continuing through the centuries. Rejecting the Anglo-Catholic vision of the episcopate as the “touchstone by which to judge between the true Church and its counterfeit, ” he saw it instead as a “gift and a fact rather than a doctrine.” Episcopacy was a “magnet which could draw the scattered parts of the Church

into unity.”⁵¹ This was what he believed because it was what he had experienced in South India.

In 1944 Newbigin was given the opportunity to steer the ship of unity for the SIUC. In his role as convener of the union committee he could have focused on polity, process and politics, but instead he created a symposium that gave voice to all the factions in the debate. The diversity of the voices is breathtaking. H.V. Martin not only opposed episcopacy but also questioned the very idea of church office and the sacrament of baptism. D.M. Devasahayam viewed the scheme as a betrayal of evangelical Christianity. C.B. Firth was a passionate advocate of the Anglican proposals for the scheme but only because of the essential ingredient of supplemental ordination. Only Streckeisen’s Reformed view came close to Newbigin’s own.

The booklet was cheaply and easily published as a mass-market paperback and had a “wide circulation” through all the councils of the SIUC (1993k: 70). Newbigin personally sent copies to friends. Referring to it as “our SIUC rag-bag on Union” he sent a copy to J.S. M. Hooper with the hope that it would be “reviewed mercifully.”⁵² There was strong support for Bishop Hubback’s supplemental ordination proposal among most Anglicans and many Methodists. But there was strong opposition in all communities of the church, especially the Congregationalists. Just a few months after the publication of *The Church and the Gospel* the joint committee of the SIUC met to consider whether or not to recommend the Anglican proposal to the churches. There was a day and a half of intense and sometimes rancorous debate. Bishop Hubback flew in to personally present

⁵¹ “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/5/1/16. From an undated and unpublished paper entitled “Reflections on the Ministry of a Bishop.”

⁵² Lesslie Newbigin to J.S.M Hooper, September 23, 1944. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/4/53.

the proposal that had inspired the CIBC in Nagpur a few months earlier. The issue came to a head with the formation of an alliance between Devasahayam, Streckeisen and R. Robertson, the Congregationalist leader of the powerful North Tamil Council. Their opposition came in the form of an ultimatum: “supplemental ordination will break church union” (1954: 314-315).

The pressure was too great and the proposal was laid aside. The committee could not reach a “common mind,” therefore it could not make a recommendation to the churches (1954: 315). When the churches took the final vote in 1946 a surprising majority decided to follow along in the adventure and support the scheme. The only guidelines were the basis of union, the pledge, and the interim period—all basic elements that had been part of the Declaration of Tranquebar twenty-eight years earlier (Newbigin 1951a: 10). In “The Church and the Gospel” Newbigin invited his fellow members of the SIUC to support the scheme “as one of those acts of adventurous obedience to the Gospel which must be the characteristic of a truly reformed Church.” The imperative for unity they obeyed was found in the gospel itself: “we do this... to express more fully than we have done in our separation our response to the love of God in Christ” (1944c: 59).

4. Defending the Scheme

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Newbigin's role as a reunion negotiator and apologist. The first section profiles his principal opponents, English Anglo-Catholic critics of the scheme, examining their theological concerns and Newbigin's response to them. The following section surveys and analyzes his most important work addressing the South India scheme, *The Reunion of the Church* (1948). The final section summarizes and analyzes his developing ecclesiology, suggesting three defining characteristics: it is *Reformed*, *eschatological*, and *missional*.

4.2 ENGLISH CRITICS OF THE SCHEME

Newbigin led the union committee of the SIUC for two years, but in 1946, the year that the decisive vote for union was taken, he returned to the United Kingdom on missionary furlough. He and his family returned to postwar Britain and eventually settled in Edinburgh where he worked as the candidates secretary for the foreign missions committee of the Church of Scotland. He visited churches and universities all over Scotland as part of his deputation. In the wake of the devastation of Europe he engaged churches to get involved in relief efforts. The first project involved reuniting German missionary families whose members had been divided between different internment

camps in Japan and India. He then began a subscription campaign to raise funds for the impoverished families of German pastors (Newbigin 1993k: 80-81).

There was interest in the South India scheme in Scotland and Newbigin had occasion to discuss the issues with both Scottish Episcopal priests and Church of Scotland ministers. He was aware that there was some uproar over the scheme among Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England but had no idea of its intensity. In July he visited London and astonished by what he found:

I went to a bookshop which stocked ‘Catholic’ publications and came away with an armful of books and pamphlets. I was staggered by the violence of their tone and by the misinterpretations of what was happening in South India (1993k: 81).

4.2.1 The Council for the Defence of Church Principles

The fiercest criticism came from an Anglo-Catholic organization called “The Council for the Defence of Church Principles.”⁵³ For the CDCP the South India scheme represented extreme danger to the Anglican communion. The books and pamphlets Newbigin found in the bookshop were published by the CDCP in 1943-46 by authors such as T.S. Eliot, A.G. Hebert, and E.L. Mascall.⁵⁴

Eliot’s pamphlet was the most combative and the joint committee considered it particularly “unfair”⁵⁵ in its characterization of the scheme. The great poet was a

⁵³ While the CDCP adamantly opposed the South India scheme there was considerable theological breadth within the Anglo-Catholic party and it was very influential in the Church of England during the period between World Wars I and II. Anglo-Catholic Congresses were held in 1921, 1923, 1927, 1930, and 1933. For more moderate voices in support of reunion schemes, see Arthur C. Headlam, *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion* (1920). Also, H.L. Goudge, *The Church of England and Reunion* (1938).

⁵⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Reunion By Destruction* (1943); A.G. Hebert, *The Apostolicity of the Church* (1946); E.L. Mascall, *Priesthood and South India* (1946).

⁵⁵ Cyril Firth to Lesslie Newbigin, January 8, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers”, finding number DA29/2/5/2.

dedicated Anglican layman with ardent Catholic principles. He had been a member the deputation that in January 1943 warned the newly enthroned Archbishop Temple that acceptance of the South India scheme would bring certain schism to the communion. E.J. Palmer, the former bishop of Bombay, was at the meeting and was astonished to learn that Eliot and the others had not actually read the scheme they were denouncing. The archbishop found the experience “profoundly shocking—morally and spiritually” (Iremonger 1948: 589-591). Eliot did eventually read the proposed scheme and judged it a proposal for “reunion by destruction” (Eliot 1943: 1). For him, the fatal flaw was found in the “no particular theory” provision concerning episcopacy. Either episcopacy was “by divine appointment” or it was not and as such it could not be treated as a matter of indifference. The constitutional provision concerning episcopacy necessarily introduced a principle of doctrinal indifference into the church. While the Church of England contained both evangelicals and catholics it had not yet taken the dramatic step of writing into the constitution that the two parties “agree to disagree.” The practice of each party was to “defend its own doctrine in the conviction... that it is the true doctrine of the Church of England.” The scheme would therefore hollow out and destroy the true church, leaving only a “shell,” a church without doctrinal convictions, a “pantomime horse” offering only a “spectral unity”(1943: 20-21).

In August Newbigin received a phone call from Michael Bruce, an old friend and colleague from the SCM staff at Cambridge now involved with the CDCP. He informed him that the CDCP had plans to send a delegation to India to oppose approval of the scheme. Newbigin managed to convince him that such a trip would create all sorts of negative publicity for Christians in India. Bruce then wrote requesting that Newbigin,

“Hooper, and one or two other Free churchmen” come for a in-depth meeting with “the key people” opposing the scheme.⁵⁶ At first Newbigin refused to meet with the group he viewed as “organizing a campaign of disloyalty to the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon.”⁵⁷ Bruce persisted and Newbigin agreed to the meeting after getting approval from the joint committee and the CIBC. Bishop Stephen Neill had met with the CDCP representatives eighteen months earlier and encouraged Newbigin to meet with them, but he cautioned that it should be clear that both sides were meeting as individuals and not as representatives of their respective church bodies. His opinion of the other side was not flattering:

I am interested to know of the proposal that you meet with some of the tigers on the other side...I think that...nothing but good could come of your meeting. You will find them friendly, but extraordinarily ill-informed and unwilling to understand points of view other than their own. They are also terrified, because they realize that their view is shared by only a small minority in the Church of England, that if the scheme is accepted by the Church, that is tantamount to a formal repudiation by the Church of their point of view, and that their position in the Church may thereupon become intolerable. One cannot but sympathize with them; the importance of the S.I. scheme is that it has made it impossible any longer to evade the question whether the Anglo-Catholic position is the right one or not.⁵⁸

Newbigin originally wanted a meeting with “the extreme Anglo-Catholic critics of the scheme” but not with the CDCP. Their “campaign...against the Anglican Church in India” was “unscrupulous.” He finally relented to Bruce’s requests on practical grounds:

⁵⁶ Michael Bruce to Lesslie Newbigin, August 29, 1946. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/3/1-4.

⁵⁷ In his second letter to Newbigin (written on the same day as the first letter), Bruce quotes this phrase as something Newbigin said to him in a telephone conversation. Michael Bruce to Lesslie Newbigin, August 29, 1946. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/4/1.

⁵⁸ Stephen Neill to Lesslie Newbigin, September 11, 1946. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/8.

I feel myself, that it will be useful to have such a meeting for I think that if there were this basis of personal knowledge, it would not be possible for the CDCP to publish the outrageous stuff which they have been publishing.⁵⁹

The meeting occurred October 5 and 6 at the home of the Cowley Fathers in Oxford. All the representatives from South India were non-Anglicans: Henry Lefever, Cyril Firth, A.M. Ward, and Newbigin. The Anglican representatives were Dom Gregory Dix of Nashdom Abbey, W.G. O'Brien and W.O. Fitch of the Cowley Fathers, and G.B. Bentley, A.G. Blood, and Michael Bruce of the CDCP. It was decided beforehand that the proponents of the scheme would each focus on a key area of controversy. Firth was to discuss "the standards of the faith—scripture and creeds," Lefever "the apostolic ministry," Ward "the sacraments," with Newbigin focusing on "the nature of the church's unity and continuity."⁶⁰

Newbigin had "very great hesitation" about taking part in the conversations since Anglicans that would have defended the scheme were excluded. Afterwards he felt that the discussions had been completely dominated by Dix, whom he found "charming, brilliant, and totally unconvincing." The two of them "clashed vigorously at every session" (1993k: 81-82). The fundamental disagreement centered around Newbigin's presentation on "the nature of church's unity and continuity and apostolicity, and the relation of this apostolicity to that of the ministry."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lesslie Newbigin to Michael Hollis, September 24, 1946. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/19.

⁶⁰ Lesslie Newbigin to W.B. O'Brien, October 11, 1946. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/28.

⁶¹ Lesslie Newbigin to Dom Gregory Dix, December 16, 1946. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/43.

4.2.2. Dom Gregory Dix

Dix had become the principal voice for Anglo-Catholic opposition to the South India scheme. He distinguished himself as an influential liturgical scholar with the publication of his best-known work *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Dix 1945). A true Anglo-Catholic, he defended catholic principles against Anglican critics and with the same vigor defended Anglicanism to its Roman Catholic critics. In his *The Question of Anglican Orders* (1944) he argued that the Anglican church was in fact *the* catholic church in England:

For three centuries the C. of E. taught the essentials of the Catholic Faith and ministered the essential Catholic Sacraments to the ordinary English people, when no one else could, or would have been allowed by the state to do. That is her title to exist (Dix 1944: 91).

The South India scheme had to be opposed because it put Anglican-Roman Catholic reunion and the very validity of Anglicanism in jeopardy:

If these proposals were to be put into practice, the whole ground for believing in the Church of England which I have outlined would have ceased to exist (1944: 92).⁶²

Dix wrote to Newbigin after the Oxford meeting acknowledging that their differences “cut fairly deep.” But he saw some common ground between them and wanted to meet again:

What I am not sure about is whether in fact what I tried to say is not a clumsy attempt to include what you were getting at along with some other things in the

⁶² One result of Dix’s advocacy was a book of essays entitled *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy* (1946), edited by Kenneth Kirk, then Bishop of Oxford, which included an essay by Dix.

primitive “wholeness” (which is the “Catholicity” of the true Christ) which can no more be left out than the individual’s response to grace. Anyhow, I think it was worthwhile, even to have got only so far as we did.⁶³

A second meeting was held in January 1947 but Newbigin had to cancel at the last minute when his children contracted the measles. Cyril Firth wrote him the week afterwards and summarized the conference:

Dom Gregory had much to say about the necessity of making an attempt to ‘bridge the rift that opened in the 16th century’ by getting back to, and starting afresh from, ‘the primitive apostolic pattern’ rather than making some compromise between the points of view which have subsequently been known as ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant,’ each of which has become distorted through being in isolation. I think he is genuinely keen about this, and his main objection to the scheme seems to be that instead of treating the problem on this level, and while trying to be non-committal to controversial matters (e.g. the doctrine implied in the acceptance of episcopacy), it in fact comes down on the ‘Protestant’ side. It was realized of course that nothing can be done now to alter the scheme before union and that nothing can prevent its coming into force; the tendency was rather to look forward and think how the new church can order its affairs and grow together in such a way as to avoid precipitating a crisis in the Anglican communion. We on our part recognized that the scheme is not perfect in all respects, and that its justification will ultimately lie in its leading to a church which will be a real province in the ‘Universal Church’ and not just a new sect.⁶⁴

4.2.3. *The Catholicity Report*

During the same month a study report commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury was issued addressing the crisis entitled *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West*. In November 1945 Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher invited Dix to convene a group of Anglo-Catholics to examine the causes of the deadlock

⁶³ Dom Gregory Dix to Lesslie Newbigin, November 10, 1946. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/39.

⁶⁴ Cyril Firth to Lesslie Newbigin, February 2, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/66/1-2.

and consider whether “any synthesis between Catholicism and Protestantism is possible.” Michael Ramsey, the Canon of Durham and future Archbishop of Canterbury whose writings had persuaded Newbigin to embrace episcopacy, was elected chair of the committee (*Catholicity* 1947: 8). The report acknowledged that there were catholic and Protestant elements that coexisted within Anglicanism. It argued that continued unity depended on “the constancy of these things in one single pattern.” Because many viewed the catholic elements as of the *esse* of the church then anything that undermined that faith would rupture the communion (*Catholicity* 1947: 56).

The report acknowledged that there had been “movements towards synthesis which have been truly constructive” though it did not mention the ones to which it was referring. Union schemes such as the one in South India were dangerous because they failed to understand that Protestant and catholic traditions were in conflict. These schemes urged Christians of different traditions to “sink their differences” and “close their ranks based on their common Christianity”:

To ‘sink the differences’ is to tear up the remaining roots and to provide no new single root in their places. The notion that ‘differences do not matter’ leads church people to think it is unimportant whether they are confirmed or not, and whether they go to a jolly Civic Service or a P.S.A., or to the Holy Communion... ‘Sinking our differences’ lightly means tearing up the roots; and ‘closing our ranks’ too readily means abandoning the elements of dogma which remain in the various traditions and substituting a vague and undogmatic faith which is at the mercy of those very secular notions which Christians are uniting to combat (*Catholicity* 1947: 46-47).

Michael Hollis, the Bishop of Madras, found the missing element of dogma located in the theology of the Anglo-Catholics writing the report. The report had roundly condemned the Protestant understanding of justification by faith as “the radical error of

Luther” (*Catholicity* 1947: 25). Writing to Newbigin he focused his concern on Dix and his understanding of justification by faith:

Dix and a number of others have put out a report to the Archbishop called ‘Catholicity.’ It seems to me to have much of real value in it but to be radically bad over Justification by Faith. Surely ‘sola fide’ never occurs in any intelligent presentation except in connection with ‘sola gratia’ & if so it is essentially scriptural. They do not know what justification means, I think.⁶⁵

Hollis had a long-standing mistrust of Dix and it centered on this key issue of justification:

Dix I used to know a bit & I have read some of his work. I don’t think he’s really reliable though he’s clever. He used not to know what truth was, if he could make people listen to him –or that was my feeling. Also I suspect he has not understood what St. Paul means by justification by faith—and that is an almost fatal handicap to theological thought.⁶⁶

It is to be remembered that Bishop Hollis served on the joint committee with Newbigin and was the leader responsible for breaking the impasse on the interpretation of the pledge. He and four other bishops issued a statement in September 1946 making it clear that in the united church all presbyters would be treated equally whether or not they had been episcopally ordained. According to Newbigin it was Hollis who “completely transformed the situation” and “removed the last block on the road to unity.” On January 22, 1947 the CIBC accepted the joint committee’s interpretation of the pledge thereby ensuring that union would take place (1993k: 82-83). The importance of his leadership and influence can also be seen in the fact that he was elected as the first moderator of the CSI (1954: 344).

⁶⁵ Michael Hollis to Lesslie Newbigin, July 2, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/93.

⁶⁶ Michael Hollis to Lesslie Newbigin, August 12, 1946. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/46.

4.2.4 *The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*

The South India controversy was raging in England. Tension was high and rooted in deeply felt theological differences. As has been seen, evangelicals and Protestants did not trust the Anglo-Catholics particularly where the doctrine of justification by faith was concerned. Among Anglo-Catholics and high church Anglicans of various sorts there was concern that apostolic succession and high sacramental theology would be watered down in a union with non-Anglicans. A.E. J. Rawlinson, the Bishop of Derby, recounts the story of a rumor among Anglo-Catholics in England at the time that a Congregationalist unbaptized minister who had no intention of being baptized would be one of the new bishops of the united church. The CSI constitution was quite clear that a person had to be baptized to be a member of the church,⁶⁷ which necessitates that it would be required for anyone serving as a bishop. Rawlinson's point was that very few people had any knowledge of what was in the constitution of the CSI (Rawlinson 1951: 56). Hollis was perplexed by the intensity of feelings and lack of information that characterized audiences whom he met in England:

There is a hard core of people who hate all talk of Reunion or any real recognition of non-episcopal persons as Christians at all! But the more they put their views forward in all their nakedness the more I think people revolt.⁶⁸

English Anglo-Catholic threats of disruption finally took shape when the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) appointed an advisory group for the purpose of

⁶⁷ *Draft Constitution of the Church of South India*, II.4; III.1 (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 24,41).

⁶⁸ Michael Hollis to Lesslie Newbigin, July 2, 1947. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/93.

reconsidering the relationship of the society to the South India scheme. The majority recommended that the society continue its support of missionaries and national workers as long as Anglican formularies and standards were not compromised. A minority report proposed that all support cease and that the possibility be explored for continuing the SPG's work in South India "in friendly association and fellowship with the new body." The SPG would end its support for missionaries in the united church and set about plans to begin work in India independently. At the SPG standing committee meeting of March 8, 1947 the minority report was successfully adopted. The result was that all the SPG missionaries and national workers who had loyally supported the CIBC bishops in the move toward union were rewarded with immediate termination of service with one year's salary as severance compensation (1993k: 83).

The driving force behind the minority report was none other than Michael Bruce of the CDCP. He immediately wrote Newbigin with an idea he and Dix had conceived that promised to "strengthen the union" of churches in South India. The joint committee should invite the SPG to send a missionary bishop to South India to initiate new works "outside the union but in fellowship with it." If Newbigin could persuade the joint committee Bruce was sure that he and Dix "could swing Catholic opinion." It all depended on the other side being able to say, "welcome."⁶⁹

Newbigin vented his wrath in his response. The committee's proposed mission was being undertaken against the "practically unanimous wish" of the SPG representatives in South India. Large majorities in all four diocesan councils of the CIBC had adopted the scheme. All the bishops in South India would refuse to have anything to

⁶⁹ Michael Bruce to Lesslie Newbigin, May 25, 1947. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/17.

do with the SPG proposal. As to finding support for the proposal among priests and congregations, Newbigin's sarcasm was evident:

As regards the priests of the present Anglican communion in South India (European, Anglo-Indian, and Indian) you will doubtless know that every one of these was asked individually, on the instruction of the Metropolitan, whether he had any conscientious objection to entering the united Church. In the whole of South India only three answered affirmatively. Of these one is an extreme Protestant and might therefore conceivably be willing to join the body you set up. One was found at the time to be requiring the assistance of a psychiatrist. He has however been successfully treated. The third, so far as I know, may still be available. This gives you your available starting team for the priesthood. As regards the laity I do not know what your proposals are. Do you propose to seek to detach congregations as bodies from their dioceses, or to disrupt individual congregations by seeking to persuade some members to join the new organization? I have no doubt you could make something of it, for there are in almost all congregations a few glad of opportunities to disown lawful authority. I do not think, however, that you would have any success in seeking to win over whole congregations.

The bottom line for Newbigin was that this proposal was driven by concerns in England not in South India. And it fundamentally undermined all that he had done over the last 28 years:

I think I can say with complete confidence that there is not one Indian Christian of any standing who would not oppose the proposal... The basis of your whole proposal is that "there is a large body of Anglicans who are conscientiously unable to support" the union. I am prepared to believe you that there is such a body in England. There is no such body in South India. It will have to be created. You will hardly expect the Church to provide facilities for its creation.⁷⁰

There were plenty of Anglo-Catholics in India who supported the union. They had been a part of a lengthy process and had finally decided in large numbers to move forward towards union. It was Anglo-Catholics in England who were acting in desperation and were now proposing to work outside of the church and effectively

⁷⁰ Lesslie Newbigin to Michael Bruce, May 28, 1947. "Lesslie Newbigin Papers," finding number DA29/2/5/68.

against it. According to A.R. “Jack” Booth, the general secretary of the SCM, the recent action of the SPG was “unchristian and immoral”:

It is quite possible that a person can disagree with the South India scheme and yet to deplore the line the SPG has taken. As a matter of fact, what has happened is to throw into high relief the fact that there is a wing of the Anglo-Catholics so occupied with their principles as to forget their ethics. This tendency has been apparent for a long time, but nothing has demonstrated it so clearly as this and I believe that we have now been given an opportunity to drive a wedge between the right-headed and the wrong-headed types of Anglo-Catholics, which must be done if there is to be any future for the Anglican Church.⁷¹

Newbigin urged non-Anglicans to stay out of the controversy. The one opportunity the crisis presented was that it would “compel Ecclesia Anglicana to face the issue” of union with non-Anglicans. This was an issue that needed to be “thrashed out at Lambeth.”⁷²

It was in fact the Archbishop of Canterbury who brought about a resolution to the issue. He proposed to the standing committee the idea of a special SPG fund for the existing missionaries, the South India Separate Account. This would enable missionaries working with the CSI to keep their jobs. Newbigin, Michael Hollis, and Arnold Legg—three who were to become bishops in the united church—met with SPG representatives Michael Bruce and Bishop Basil Roberts, secretary of the SPG, in London July 10th. They agreed it would be appropriate for the CSI to invite the SPG to send a commission to South India to begin a separate work (1993k: 85).

Newbigin significantly underestimated the number of conscience-stricken Indian Anglo-Catholics with objections to the scheme. The bishop in Tranvancore for the SPG

⁷¹ A.R. Booth to Lesslie Newbigin, June 3, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/73.

⁷² A.R. Booth to Lesslie Newbigin, June 5, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/72.

asked to be allowed to take up special mission work outside of the reunited church.⁷³

Twenty priests in the Nandyal Archdeaconry of the former Diocese of Dornekal⁷⁴ refused to join the CSI. At least 25,000 out of a total of 44,000 Anglicans would follow the priests who called themselves “continuing Anglicans” in their refusal to join the united church (1954: 345).

4.3. THE REUNION OF THE CHURCH

The CDCP pamphlets provided Newbigin with what he described as a “liberal education in ecclesiastical polemics.” He was outraged by what he read and was enflamed with a desire to respond, likening himself to the prophet Jeremiah, as one “with the fire shut up in the bones”⁷⁵ (Newbigin 1960t: ix). In April 1947 Newbigin was given permission to lay aside his candidate’s secretary duties and devote the rest of his furlough to reply to these and other critics of the scheme. His jeremiad would be published as *The Reunion of the Church* in January 1948, four months after the new church was formed.

The Reunion of the Church tackles the fundamental issue of the nature of the church’s unity as a means of searching for solutions to its tragic disunity. There were two different ecclesial traditions concerned about the issues in South India. They each had a distinct ecclesiology and differing accounts of the causes of disunity. But in one

⁷³ *Conversations on South India*, minutes of the informal meeting between representatives of the South India Church and the SPG, July 10, 1947. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/5/95.

⁷⁴ Ironically, the diocese of Bishop Azariah.

⁷⁵ Jeremiah 20:9.

thing they were united: they both vigorously disapproved of the South India scheme as a solution.

One tradition was that of the Free Churches. Newbigin refers to this as “Protestantism” but he does not focus on ecumenical Protestantism in the study. The Free Churches emphasized the spiritual unity of the church. Corporeal unity and historical continuity were not constitutive of the church; rather, the church was a community of the Holy Spirit constituted by faith in Christ. For the Free Churches reunion was a pragmatic exercise that strengthened relations between churches and therefore the church’s witness.

The other tradition featured in the study is that of Anglo-Catholicism. According to Anglo-Catholics the essence of the church is to be found in historical apostolic continuity and visible unity. Reunion would only be possible if those who had fallen away from the historic apostolic churches were willing to be brought back in, either by episcopal ordination or another supplemental rite.

Newbigin thought that each tradition reflected important biblical truths but also failed to grasp the truth of the other perspective. *The Reunion of the Church* sets forth an ecclesiology that demonstrates the value of each tradition. Further, it seeks to demonstrate that the South India scheme joins the best insights of both traditions.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one consists of a short chapter explaining the South India context and the proposed basis of union. Part two focuses on the nature of the church’s unity and continuity, and at six chapters is the longest section of the book. Part three details the three “heads of agreement” in the new church, and defends the distinctive approach taken to creeds, the ministry, and the sacraments. Part

four consists of a single chapter looking at the significance of South India for the ecumenical movement.

4.3.1 The Basis of Union

Newbigin begins by explaining the missional context of the ecumenical movement. The movement for unity received its “chief impulse” from “the mission field.” The “younger churches” challenged the “astounding complacency” of the churches of the West and their denominational divisions, “a situation which plainly and ostentatiously flouts the will of the Church’s Lord” (Newbigin 1948d: 9). The arrangements under mission comity gave the first taste of what it would be like to be a reunited church. Generations of Indian Christians were nurtured in a system where there was but one church in any given village, where there was a simple choice given between “Christ and no-Christ, unconfused by conflicting interpretations of what to be ‘in Christ’ means.” The proper connection between the church and the gospel was “properly preserved” (1948d: 11-12). Comity created a process of “simplification” for the mission societies, “a stripping away of things which are not of the essence of the Gospel itself in order that the Gospel may be apprehended afresh in all its simplicity.” The church is not ultimately founded on “some work of man—some system of ideas or some tradition of practice or piety.” In its true nature the church is founded on “the Gospel alone, because the Gospel is not a human construction but the news of what God has done” (1948d: 18).

As Protestant Christianity in South India grew it very well could have followed the example of the older churches and created a full range of denominational options in

every village. To do so would have been a rejection of the “great illumination” given by the missionary expansion of the church and the principle of comity:

To the multitude in India, weary of everlasting division and distrust and turning longing eyes to the Church as the place where men of all castes and classes can be made one, it would be a plain announcement that they will look to the Church in vain (1948d: 21).

Newbigin admits that the scheme is “certainly very imperfect.” It bears the “marks” of “hasty preparation” and the “scars” of having been passed through innumerable committee meetings. But what were the alternatives to the scheme? Historically it was a plan of action that flowed out of the experience of comity; theologically it was an act of obedience to Jesus’ commission to his disciples, “as the Father hath sent me, so send I you” (1948d: 22).⁷⁶

The first short chapter of this section is entitled, “The Problem,” the issue under consideration being the disunity of the church and the excuses made for it. Two traditions are addressed: first, the Roman Catholic—a means to address the Anglo-Catholic critics of the scheme; second, the Protestant—but really an appeal to Free Church opponents of reunion.

The Catholic approach to the problem is to argue that the church is not divided. Protestant sects are not considered to be churches in the truest sense. The path towards reunion is simply that these members who have fallen away should return to the Catholic Church. The Protestant approach argues that all churches have a “spiritual unity” and as such need not bother with outward organizational unity. The Holy Spirit mediates Christ’s relationship to the church through the instrument of faith (1948d: 24-25).

⁷⁶ John 20:21 ERV.

The South India scheme was often criticized as an “unworthy compromise” between these typical Protestant and Catholic positions. Newbigin believes that each of these traditions “does justice to one aspect of the New Testament teaching about the Church” though both fall short of doing justice to “the effect of sin in severing the two things that God has joined” (1948d: 25). He sees them as corresponding generally to St. Paul’s adversaries in Galatia and Corinth—Catholics resembling the Galatians in their desire to find identify in outward realities, Protestants resembling the Corinthians and their confidence in the possession of the Spirit.

Newbigin sets out to demonstrate that the scheme does justice to the truth found in both perspectives while avoiding their errors. The next two chapters of the book set forth a distinctive understanding and appreciation for the spiritual unity of the church and also for its continuous historic order (1948d: 26).

The chapter entitled “The Israel of God” (1948d: 27-43) addresses Anglo-Catholic concerns. The starting point for the discussion is the fundamental question, “what is the church”? For the answer Newbigin turns to the Bible, because it “is the story of the people of God” (1948d: 29). Beginning with the call of Abraham, tracing the story of Israel, examining the life and work of Jesus Christ, and finally looking at the theology of St. Paul in Galatians and Romans, Newbigin argues that the Bible is clear throughout that participation in the people of God is not simply a matter of just being part of the historical community. The church is engrafted into the people of God, the “Israel of God”, not by circumcision but by faith. “Faith has always been in fact—from the human side—the constitutive fact of Israel’s existence as the people of God...faith is the human condition of membership in the Israel of God” (1948d: 33-34).

In the next chapter, “The Spirit, The Body, and The Flesh” (1948d: 44-54) Newbigin engages with Free Church ecclesiology. While Romans and Galatians may address the controversies tied to circumcision and incorporation into a historical continuous community, 1 Corinthians is addressed to a group that glories in its possession of the Spirit and of spiritual gifts so much that the visible unity of the church is being destroyed. St. Paul calls this supposedly “spiritual” group “carnal.” There is one Spirit and therefore one body. Where the Spirit is there is unity. Visible unity is the natural fruit of the Spirit working through love (1948d: 51-54).

Three key truths about the unity of the church emerge in these chapters: the unity of the church is essential, spiritual, and corporeal.

4.3.2. The Essential Unity of the Church

Newbigin follows the “clue of the cross” in his theology of the essential unity of the church. He roots his argument in a case study, St. Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthian church because of its party spirit and factionalism. Newbigin’s method is to “understand the truth of the matter by looking at ... a polemic against a perversion of the truth” (1948d: 44). In Corinth rival groups had appeared in the congregation, each boasting the name of a revered leader and taking pride in their distinctive spiritual gifts. “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” were their slogans. Because of this the apostle calls them “carnal” or “people of the flesh.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ I Corinthians 3:1 ERV.

The term “flesh” is a direct contrast with the idea of “Spirit.” By their divisions the Corinthians had rejected the work of the Holy Spirit and gloried in their own achievements and distinctions. They had ceased to put “the word of the cross” at their center of their lives and because of this had become nothing more than “a carnal association” (1948d: 48):

Life in the Spirit is life in faith—“the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”⁷⁸ It is life built on this confidence alone, that Christ died for our sins and rose again. It has no ground of glorying save in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In so far as the Church permits any other ground of confidence to displace this, whether it be confidence in a great leader, or a great preacher, in some tradition of spirituality, or learning, or of order, it becomes simply a human association, not spiritual but carnal, not the nucleus of regenerate humanity, but an ordinary human society (1948d: 48-49).

St. Paul’s argument is powerfully implied in his rhetorical question: “Is Christ divided?”⁷⁹ Since there is only one Lord Jesus Christ there can be only one church. Christ cannot be divided and he “was lifted up to draw all men to himself.”⁸⁰ Christians cannot draw near to Christ “unless we draw near to all others whom He draws”:

The things which divide us from one another and make it impossible for us to live as members of one family are precisely the marks of the old man, the rebel against God who is to be crucified with Christ. In the new man, reborn and raised up with Him, there can be no place for such divisions (1948d: 52).

4.3.3. *The Spiritual Unity of the Church*

The church’s spiritual unity is the second key theme of these two chapters. This is the first stated principle of unity in the scheme’s Basis of Union:

⁷⁸ Galatians 2:20 ERV.

⁷⁹ I Corinthians 1:13 ERV.

⁸⁰ John 12:32 ERV.

The uniting Churches believe that the unity of his Church for which Christ prayed is a unity in Him and in the Father through the Holy Spirit, and is therefore fundamentally a reality of the spiritual realm (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 1).

For Newbigin the reality of the spiritual realm is first seen in the “personal decision of faith” that accepts the gift of redemption (1948d: 52). This initial decision necessarily leads to the decision to trust, love, and serve one’s brothers and sisters in the faith. This second decision is spiritual in nature, entirely a matter of the heart, an “intention...to love.” But the moment this intention is put into effect it becomes “mixed up inextricably with the world of things, acts, organizations and the like” (1948d: 50).

Christian spirituality has an “indestructible element of solitariness at its heart.” Faith is a personal decision and so is an act of obedience to God. Faith in Christ generates a commitment to association with others who believe and empowers the believer to engage in the responsibilities of personal encounter. The life of faith is a life of fellowship:

The Church’s unity exists not in that place where a group of people agree that “we” hold such and such views as opposed to “them” who hold others; it exists where men bring their whole common life consciously and steadily into the presence of Christ, and under the judgment and mercy of the word of the Cross, and then as reborn men learn to deal with one another in love, forgiving one another as Christ forgave them, facing without evasion the tensions of differing views and rival interests, content to live for the task of building one another up in love (1948d: 53).

4.3.4. The Corporeal Unity of the Church

The church’s unity is both a spiritual and a corporeal reality. “Corporeal” designates that that church’s life is lived out in actual relationships that must reflect the

essential unity of the Spirit. This was the second part of the first principle of the Basis of Union:

This unity of the Spirit must find expression in the faith and order of the Church in its worship, in its organization and in its whole life, so that, as the Body of Christ, it may be a fit instrument for carrying out His gracious purposes in the world (1947a:1).

Newbigin acknowledges that the relationship between the spiritual and corporeal unity of the church is “not simple.” He is attempting to view two things together “which Catholicism and Protestantism have viewed separately, and thereby distorted” (1948d: 39). Again, Newbigin traces the doctrine he is after to the clue of the cross and builds his case on one of St. Paul’s polemics against a perversion of the truth. In both Galatians and Romans the apostle recognizes the church as the “Israel of God.”⁸¹ But he is adamantly opposed to any requirements for membership in the church other than faith in Christ. He is especially opposed to any requirement of circumcision for gentiles. Such an insistence on outward and institutional continuity with Israel denied the church’s true nature. The church is not “Israel after the flesh” but Israel after the Spirit” and the authentic mark of membership in “Israel after the Spirit” is not circumcision but faith (1948d: 27-40).⁸²

The church lives by faith but that faith is made manifest in deeds. The church is given life by the Spirit but the Spirit also unites the church visibly and corporeally. Newbigin sees this in St. Paul’s teaching in I Corinthians 12-13. The apostle begins with the criterion by which claims of the Spirit may be tested—the confession that “Jesus is Lord.”⁸³ The Spirit gives the church diverse gifts in order to build up the one body.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Galatians 4:26; Romans 2:28-29.

⁸² This is Newbigin’s understanding of St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 9-11.

⁸³ I Corinthians 12:1-3.

Boasting over differences of spiritual gifting are disruptive to the body, therefore the greatest gift is love—it builds the body, seeks not its own, and rejoices in the gifts of others.⁸⁵ Christian spirituality is necessarily a corporeal spirituality:

All this bears directly on the ordinary day-to-day difficulties which are vexing the Church in Corinth. It does not refer to some ideal or abstract entity, but to the very particular and, indeed, troublesome group of brothers in Corinth and it dictates some sort of arrangements which have to be made for the ordering of their worship (1948d: 51).

The opposition of the spiritual and the material is “a pagan idea.” Christian spirituality is grounded in a biblical theology of creation that values the material world God has made and the embodied life that God has given to creatures. “To visit the sick or keep honest accounts is as much a work of the Holy Spirit as to speak with tongues” (1948d:53). According to St. Paul the greatest gift of the Spirit to the actual, embodied, visible fellowship of the church is love.⁸⁶ The proper and normal expression of love in community will be visible outward organizational unity:

Where love is lacking, the organization becomes a mere brittle skeleton that breaks at the first strain. But where love is real and deep and steady, organization is the strong, living, bony system that gives the body power to act with determination and unity (1948d: 50-51).

For Newbigin, the teaching of I Corinthians rules out any sort of “spiritual unity” underlying the visible separations of the church. Those separations can only be seen as “proof of our carnality” (1948d: 54). Most ecumenical Christians would recognize the sinfulness of division and the gospel imperative to be united. The source of ongoing conflict centers around questions regarding the proper method and form of reunion. In

⁸⁴ I Corinthians 12:4-11.

⁸⁵ I Corinthians 13.

⁸⁶ I Corinthians 13:13.

chapters 5 and 6 Newbigin charts what he believes to be the only possible way forward, reunion grounded in the truth of justification by faith.

4.3.5. *The Way Forward: Justification by Faith*

The Reunion of the Church was reissued in a second edition in 1960 and Newbigin took the opportunity to write a new introduction. He had changed quite a bit in the twelve years since the book's first publication. In 1948 he was writing from the perspective of a "Presbyterian minister... looking forward to union." By 1960 the experience of being a Bishop in the CSI had changed his "mind and spirit profoundly" though he stood by the "main substance" of the book (1960t: ix).

The second edition introduction gives to the reader the opportunity of hearing Newbigin's own analysis of his earlier work. The work sought to answer what he views as the fundamental question of ecumenical theology: is there an "honest way to understand theologically the issues involved in moving from disunity to unity?" For Newbigin the answer is "yes" which is the real purpose behind the writing of the book. There is a way forward for the church and it is the same path by which an individual must travel. It is found in the double word of judgment and acceptance, the word of the cross. "The heart of it is to be found in the Christian doctrine of justification by faith" (1948d: xvi).

As noted in the previous chapter, Newbigin's 1944 essay "The Church and the Gospel" presents the doctrine of justification by grace through faith as the only means of navigating the disparities that divide the church. It is not only the individual Christian

that is *simul justus et peccator*—the doctrine also has an ecclesial application.⁸⁷ *The Reunion of the Church* is built on the basic premise of the earlier essay: just as the individual Christian is both holy and sinful so the church is both holy and sinful. The doctrine is “equally relevant” to both. The church is also *simul justus et peccator*, holy and sinful at the same time, a living paradox.

Justification by faith...has for a long time and in many contexts been expounded as though it referred primarily to the individual Christian and only derivatively, and at a long remove, to the Church. I do not find any grounds in St. Paul’s own writing for this view. If one begins one’s thinking about Christianity with the individual, then it is natural that one begins one’s reading of St. Paul with the same bias. But if one begins by thinking of the fellowship, the group, the Church, then St. Paul’s language is equally relevant. It is the central purpose of this book to argue that the theological clue to the problem of the method of reunion lies in the fact that the Church has its being from the God who justifies the ungodly, raises the dead, and calls the things that are not as though they were (1960t: xvi).⁸⁸

Newbigin sets out at the beginning of the book to do justice to the truth in both Anglo-Catholic and Free Church ecclesiologies. He seeks to show how the spiritual and corporeal unity of the church cohere in the scheme and do so in a way so that both Free

⁸⁷ Newbigin anticipates the ecclesial insights of the recent revolution in New Testament studies known as the “New Perspective on Paul.” In the new perspective “justification” is not seen primarily as a doctrine referring to how an individual enters a relationship with God (a forensic transaction in which a person is acquitted and declared “righteous”). It is to be understood *covenantally*, reflecting the beliefs of first century Jews that God would be faithful to put the world to rights and deliver God’s people. Justification is not primarily about how God deals with individuals but with peoples. The word is *eschatological*—just as much about the future of God’s people as it is about the past. It is not primarily about how someone enters the people of God; rather, it is fundamentally about how to discern who is in, i.e. because God has declared them to be righteous (Wright 1997: 113-33). See also (Sanders 1977), (Dunn 2008) and (Wright 2009).

⁸⁸ Newbigin anticipates the covenantal and ecclesial insights of the New Perspective on Paul, but he is typical of traditional Protestants in that he uses “the doctrine of justification” as a term to do duty for the entirety of God’s reconciling work towards humanity. As N.T. Wright observes, “justification” is used to refer to “everything from God’s free love and grace, through the sending of the Son to die for sinners, through the preaching of the gospel, the work of the Spirit, the arousal of faith in human hearts and minds, the development of Christian character and conduct, the assurance of ultimate salvation, and the safe passage through final judgment to that destination” (Wright 2009: 86). Alister McGrath observes that “the doctrine of justification has come to develop a meaning quite independent of its biblical origins, and concerns the *means by which man’s relationship to God is established*. The church has chosen to subsume its discussion of the reconciliation of man to God under the aegis of justification, thereby giving the concept an emphasis quite absent from the New Testament” (McGrath 1986: 2-3).

Church and Anglo-Catholic constituencies would give their support. The lynchpin of his argument and the “theological clue” for finding a method of reunion is the doctrine of justification by faith:

How can one combine a belief that episcopacy is God’s will for the Church with a belief that non-episcopal Churches are fully and really Churches? The proposal for supplemental ordination has emerged out of that dilemma; but it does not resolve it; it only confuses vital issues, concerning the Church and the ministry. The dilemma is insoluble if one’s thinking is on the two-dimensional surface of a legalistic doctrine of the Church. Only in terms of the mystery of justification by faith, of the God who calleth things that are not as though they were, is the dilemma to be resolved. The central purpose of this book was to place the discussion of the question of Church union in that perspective (1960t: xxvi-xxvii).

By “legalistic” Newbigin is referring to the idea that the life of the church and validity of ecclesiastical orders depends on the historical succession of bishops. Newbigin was a bishop and he had come to embrace episcopacy for the *bene esse* of the church, but saw no way to reconcile what he termed the “legalistic” view with any other approach. Even the conciliatory Anglo-Catholics who recognized some kind of validity in the orders of their Free-Church colleagues had to default to supplemental ordination schemes. Their legalism trapped them into grounding ministerial validity in human actions and conformity to divine commands. The way forward for all the churches could only be found by appropriating the unity already given by God through the grace of justification. The life and being of the church must be understood as a gift, given and received by faith:

I will come to the central point, and I will state it as plainly as possible. It is possible to believe (as I do) that it is God’s will that the Church should be episcopally ordered, and yet deny absolutely that episcopal ordination is essential for a valid ministry. For the being of the Church, and therefore the validity of its ministry, rest not upon the conformity of the Church to God’s will, but upon the grace of God who justifies the ungodly. Once again we come to the doctrine of justification by faith. If episcopal ordination is essential to a valid ministry, then

that ministry which is not episcopally ordained is not a valid ministry and has no way of becoming such except by receiving the ordination which it lacks. But if the true secret of the Church's being is that it is the place where God's supernatural grace takes hold of those who were no people and makes them His people, takes the prodigal and makes him a beloved son, takes the sinful man and the sinful body of men and makes them verily members incorporate in the Body of Christ for no worthiness of theirs but for His own infinite mercy; then one can both insist that episcopacy is God's will for the Church and at the same time acknowledge without any hedging or double-talk that non-episcopal bodies are truly churches. That is the root of the matter. Conformity to God's will is not the pre-condition of fellowship with Him, but the fruit of it. God justifies the ungodly through Jesus Christ. That is the secret of the being of the Church as it is of the Christian man. Those who know that will rightly resist any plans for reunion which appear to found the being of the Church upon any other foundation. Those who believe, as I do, that God wills His Church to be one body, united not only in word and sacrament but also in visible fellowship with a universal ministry credibly representative of that apostolic ministry which was its first foundation, must also listen to the apostolic teaching about justification by faith as our only standing ground in the presence of God (1960t: xxxiii-xxxiv)

4.3.5.1. Yves Congar

Justification is the “true secret of the life of the church” and the “root of the matter.” In *The Reunion of the Church* Newbigin first deals with justification in chapter 5, “The Extension of the Incarnation?” This chapter examines the Catholic theology of continuity. Interestingly, he chooses to engage the Roman Catholic theologian Yves Congar rather than contemporary Anglo-Catholic theologians. In a “detached note” at the end of the chapter he explains that since the Anglican church had repudiated the papacy it was “obviously impossible” for it to claim that the “historical and institutional continuity of the Church as one body was of its *esse*” (1948d: 82). The Anglican view is “faced with logical difficulties (not to say incoherences) from which the Roman Catholic is free” (1948d: 56). He focuses his attention on Congar's groundbreaking work *Divided*

Christendom (1939),⁸⁹ a seminal work that marked the first significant development in Roman Catholic ecumenical theology in the twentieth century. Pope John XXIII placed him on the preparatory commission for Vatican II and during the council he drafted all the critical documents on ecumenism (Stransky 1991: 217). It is difficult to imagine a Roman Catholic in the 1930s writing something as ecumenically inclusive as the following:

Insofar as particular dissident Christian bodies have preserved some or other of the means which God has ordained to unite men with Himself and imparted to His Christ and His Church they are, in spite of error, in possession of something which belongs to the nature and integrity of the one Church, some fibers of her very being. In the measure, therefore, in which these communities, and *by* their officials, the true Word of God is preached and His sacraments administered to them, those who belong to them may truly be said to be sanctified *in* these bodies and even *by* them (Congar 1939: 236).

There is recognition of Protestant validity in Congar that goes farther than any other Roman Catholic writing at the time and beyond what most Anglo-Catholics would grant. Still Newbigin gives him no quarter, seeing in Congar the same near-heretical ecclesiology he detests in traditional Roman Catholicism. The principal objection is that Congar draws a direct analogy between the united humanity and divinity in the person of Christ and the humanity and divinity in the church understood as the body of Christ, the latter being understood as an “extension of the incarnation.” Congar calls this insight “the law of incarnation” or “the incarnational principle” (1939: 68). The incarnation is “the key to the whole mystery of the Church”:

In the degree to which Protestantism can school itself in a profound and realist contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation will it return to the sphere of

⁸⁹ First published in French with the title *Chrétiens désunis, principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique* (1937).

Apostolic Christianity and prepare itself for reunion in the Church (1939: 274-275).

Newbigin rejects this with the zeal of a Protestant reformer and critiques it with a biblical argument that mirrors the sacramental metaphysics of John Calvin.⁹⁰ The idea that the church is an extension of the incarnation is “irreconcilable with New Testament evidence”:

The whole stress of New Testament ecclesiology is upon the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord; that it is most clearly taught that the gift to the Church of the Holy Spirit is given precisely because Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father; that the mode of Christ’s presence with His disciples after Pentecost is decisively different from the mode of His presence in the days in which it was said that “the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.” While, as I have repeatedly urged, the whole Bible is the story of the People of God, of God dealing with men on the plane of history through a particular people and a particular society, yet it is a confusion of terms to subsume this under the “the law of incarnation,” for the Incarnation was an event, *within* this whole history. It had a beginning and an end. It was something done “once.” (I Peter iii.18; Heb.ix.26-8), in the sense of “once and for all” (1948d: 60).

Catholic metaphysics suggests that by the incarnation a new relationship was established between spirit and matter. As a consequence, the outward and visible structure of the church now has a uniquely sacramental relation to spiritual and inward realities. Newbigin counters that God is creator of both body and spirit, and in the incarnation the salient fact is not that matter entered spirit but that creator entered human flesh. Jesus did not come into the world to rearrange the elements of spirit and matter; he came to “accomplish on behalf of all men an atonement with God their Creator which

⁹⁰ In the *Institutes*, Calvin articulates a concept that Todd Billings has called “differentiated union.” The church is united to Christ in an eschatologically conditioned way. “Union” does not mean some kind of fusion of divine and human attributes; rather, the true identity of redeemed human beings is in communion and union with God (Billings 2007: 14-19).

was to be appropriated by faith. The Church is the body of those who believe in and live by that atonement” (1948d:62-63).

Newbigin sees the Roman Catholic position as essentially saying that by means of incarnational extension the church *is* Christ. It possesses in itself the power to forgive sins without any reference point beyond itself :

If the Church is in itself, as an institution, the incarnation of God, then there is no need for it to point beyond itself to Christ—as true preaching must do. But if it be once admitted that the Church must look beyond itself to Him, and especially must look to His Cross and Resurrection, must not only transmit His authority but also submit afresh in every age to His authority; if it be admitted that its sacraments are sacraments of *the gospel*, always to be administered with the Word that points men back to their source, then it cannot be agreed that the Church is an extension of the Incarnation. The Church is the Body called into being by the work of the Holy Spirit, that Spirit who could only be given when Jesus was glorified and who is given to those who hear and believe the Gospel. And the Gospel is, basically, this: “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. XV.3,4). Of this Gospel the Apostles are heralds because they are witnesses. The Church is related to the Gospel not merely by the fact that its historical origins are to be found in these facts. The Church now and always lives by the Gospel...because she is sinful it is wrong to define the Church solely in terms of historic continuity apart from reference to that Gospel by faith in which the Church at all times lives. When once reference is made to that Gospel another principle has been introduced besides that of continuity. The conflict between these two is the essence of our problem (1948d:62-64).

Calvin and the other magisterial reformers believed that the church’s life depends on the gospel. Historical continuity was important but not constitutive. In its state of extreme corruption the church was forced to look beyond itself as it was “unto the living God, himself, known in his redeeming work in Christ” (1948d: 79). They rediscovered the eschatological center to the church’s life, that the church is a community of sinners who depend on the good news of the cross, the grace of justification. Otherwise the

church exists as a historical institution that cannot be critiqued or reformed in the light of any ideal beyond itself.

4.3.5.2. An Eschatological Doctrine of the Church

The emphasis here is on the *eschatological* character of justification. When a person comes to have faith in Christ that person is restored to fellowship with God and enabled to share in the divine life in the present. “The coming of God’s kingdom is no longer a far-off event. The King Himself has come and made [believers] already citizens in [the kingdom], and they have tasted its power and glory.” This new life is experienced *now* in a world that is still fallen and sinful and where suffering comes to all, but the Christian nonetheless shares by faith in the “blessed life of fellowship with God which is the end of history” (1948d: 76-77). Authentic Christianity always finds its life between the twin realities of “the accomplished redemption of the Cross” and the “longed- for victory when Christ shall come again,” of thankfulness and hope. Any attempt to present the church’s nature as a historical process rather than an eschatological dynamic of faith resting on these two pillars of thankfulness and hope is “gravely suspect.”

These two points are, if one may put it so, the points at which eternity meets time; or—to speak in more fitting language—the points where the eternal God makes Himself known in history as Redeemer and as Judge of all men. The Church lives with its eyes on these points because it lives in history the life of God who is beyond history. Because it is in history the Church has the character of a historical institution. But because its life is hidden in God, until the day when He shall be manifested in glory, the question “where and what is the Church”? cannot be answered by explaining simply the history of the Church as an institution. This, however, is what is done when it is maintained that the Church only exists where the institutional continuity has been maintained. A true account of the

essential nature of the Church cannot be written without reference to this eschatological dimension of the Church's existence (1948d: 76-77).

The church lives in history the life of God who is beyond history. It lives in communion with God by reason of the accomplishment of the cross and enjoys the gift of the Holy Spirit because of its faith in Christ. In expectant hope it awaits the coming of Christ's perfect kingdom when history shall be brought to its end. When the Roman Catholic Church or Anglo-Catholics within the Church of England claim that the church possesses within itself a law of its own development they are effectively denying the possibility of any appeal beyond themselves to the Lord. Such a church has, Newbigin declares, "come perilously near to denying its right to be called a Church" (1948d: 79).

The doctrine of justification by faith is essential if the church is to see itself as *simul justus et peccator*. The doctrine expresses the fundamentally eschatological character of the church's life and alone provides a meaningful way to express the fact of sin in the church. If the church were not sinful there would be no question of a need to appeal beyond the institution to God's revelation. The church would be a perfect instrument of God in the world, revealing God's love and life at every level of its institutional existence. The fact of sin renders such mediation impossible. "The whole of our problem lies in this—the bearing of the fact of sin upon the nature of the Church as a visible historical institution" (1948d: 81).

Catholics and Protestants, like the Galatians and Corinthians before them, attempt to deny that the church is really divided. Justification by faith provides the necessary basis for visible unity because this doctrine alone acknowledges the paradox of the church's being, "that it is both holy and sinful." The church is a communion of sinful

humans with the holy God. “There is in the Church both union with Christ and also rebellion against Him—not that some are united and others are rebellious, but that those who are truly “in Christ” are yet at the same time rebels against Christ” (1948d: 84).

Newbigin sees a unique dynamic of ongoing spiritual life in the doctrine justification by faith. Faith is a constant experience of death and rebirth.⁹¹ There is simultaneously a “double response of shattering and upbuilding,” of “self-loathing” as one comprehends the depths of sin and “wondering gratitude and newfound hope” as one looks to Christ and the cross:

Before the Cross every ground of human confidence is destroyed. Every vestige of the pride with which man in his self-chosen independence from God surveys his own achievements in culture or in piety and godliness is utterly shamed and put to confusion. The message of the Cross breaks upon the busy world of human life, its culture, its morality, its religion, like the sudden threat of destruction by a mine upon the bustling life of a great ocean liner. All its busy round of social activities, all its fears and ambitions, all its cliques and coteries, are suddenly dissolved at the opening out of a forgotten dimension of existence, and there is only one question for all—life or death... The message of the Cross comes as the opening up of a forgotten dimension of existence. Every man is seen to stand in this one awful situation—a sinner before his God, a rebel before his Creator, a traitor before his King. Every man hears in his own ears the terrible sentence pronounced against him; “Murderer of the Son of God.” A man must either blot the Word of the Cross out of vision and memory or else confess that his life is forfeit...but the Word of the Cross is at the same moment the creative word of divine love itself. “Christ died for our sins.” That is the measure of his love for us, as well as the measure of our sin against Him. Of His free will and choice He laid down His life for us. And the manner of His laying it down was that in His love for us He made Himself one with us, felt upon Himself the whole weight of our sin which we could not feel because of our sin, offered the perfect penitence which only the sinless can offer, and endured to the very end the penalties of our sin. The man who understands that hears at the same time and along with the word of judgment, the word of mercy: “Ye are not your own, ye were bought with a price. The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.” “Murderer of God: beloved of God”(1948d: 89-90).

⁹¹ Newbigin cites several biblical texts to support the idea of this spiritual dynamic of justification: Romans 3:25, Galatians 2:20, Romans 6:4, and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

The person in Christ is not simply in the *theological* category of *simul justus et peccator*. There is a rich *psychological* and *spiritual* experience of faith, a constant realization that one is more sinful than ever imagined but at the same time more loved than ever dreamed. The cross becomes a new basis of existence. There is a “new creation,” a “new kind of self-hood—a self with its centre in Christ and not in itself” (1948d: 91). This new creation is not a status as much as dynamic of spiritual life. It only exists “in an ever new giving of ourselves to the Father in response to, and in union with, His gift of Himself for us.” It requires of Christian believers that they live always “looking unto Jesus” (1948d: 97).

This spiritual dynamic of justification by faith is also true in the church:

The Church is both holy and sinful, as the Christian is both holy and sinful. That is the root of the problem of the Church. And the Church is holy not because of something which it possesses in itself but because it lives in faith, the faith which is the response of God’s redeeming act in Christ. Its life is lived always in this dimension of faith in the living and every-present Lord. Its life is a perpetual receiving from God and giving to God. Its holiness, its justification, its possession of the Spirit is not something given at a point in history and then possessed once for all, like treasure stored in its vaults. It is holy, it is justified, it is indwelt by the Spirit, always and only by faith; and faith is a response new every morning to the redeeming work of Christ (1948d: 101).

It follows that just as an individual can “fall from grace” so also can the church. Denominational claims rooted in historical continuity, doctrinal purity, or evangelistic success are equally “carnal.” The apostolic answer to all such petty denominational claims is the same: “God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹² “The church does not live by what it possesses and has inherited. It lives in the dynamic relationship of ever-new penitence and faith before the Cross of Jesus Christ,

⁹² Galatians 6:14 ERV.

and its unity, its continuity, and all its spiritual gifts are the fruits of that” (1948d: 101-102).

With such a distinctively Reformed idea as justification by faith as his starting point Newbigin knows that he also has to speak to that other distinctively Reformed idea that distinguishes the true church, the *marks* of the church.⁹³ The church is not primarily found in visible historical continuity but in the word and sacraments of the gospel. “The word of the Cross, and the sacraments which Christ Himself instituted and gave to the Church are the means by which He makes Himself present in His ascended power, to evoke faith and to create the Church.” Preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments are “eschatological events” in which the living and ascended Lord draws believers into communion with himself. They are “social events” where communion with Christ is shared between believers. They are “objective means” by which Christ applies the benefits of his death and draws believers into union with himself (1948d: 102).

This is classical Reformed ecclesiology. But in Newbigin there are themes one does not quite hear in the Reformers. He resonates with the theology that insists that the church must live by faith in Christ and that the word and sacraments are the means by which Christ offers himself to the church, elicits faith, and brings the church into existence. He goes farther, however, in pressing for a dynamic eschatological understanding of the church, never possessing its life of its own accord but ever receiving it afresh by faith. He then presses the importance of institutional unity and continuity and the fruit of the living faith. Thus, he concludes the chapter:

⁹³ Cf. Calvin’s discussion in *Institutes* (Calvin: 4.1.9-12).

The word of the Cross to the Church is a summons to return in penitence and faith to Him in whom alone is our righteousness, to abandon confidence in everything save His mercy, and to accept and embody in our institutional life that unity with one another which is given to us in Him (1948d: 103).

Newbigin centers his critique of both Protestant and Anglo-Catholic critics of the scheme on the classic Reformed doctrine of justification by faith, giving it an ecclesial application that is fresh and powerful. The centrality of this idea is not only seen in his words of introduction to the 1960 edition of *The Reunion of the Church* but also in an essay written shortly after the publication of the first edition. Newbigin was asked to be a delegate to the first assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948 and also to contribute to a volume of essays that would serve as study materials for the assembly. His essay, entitled “The Duty and Authority of the Church to Preach the Gospel” echoes this same ecclesial doctrine of justification:

It is when the Gospel is heard and believed, when the redemption accomplished on our behalf on Calvary is the sole ground of our confidence, that the love of God becomes the law of our being. When a man understands what it means that Christ died for him, he cannot anymore live for himself. The life he lives is a gift of God’s mercy. He has no ground of hope save in the death and resurrection of his Lord. The citadel of egotism has fallen and all the defences men erect against their creator are down. Then alone is a man’s soul laid fully open to the presence and power of God’s Holy Spirit. Then alone, therefore, he receives the life for which God created him—a life of freedom and fellowship with God and with His children. The Church, just in so far as it lives by faith in the Gospel, truly shares in the divine life and tastes the powers of the age to come (Newbigin 1948b: 31-32)

There is distinct doctrinal development in Newbigin’s ecclesial application of doctrine of justification by faith. This doctrine, so understood, is the “true secret of the Church’s being.” If the church realizes that its being is entirely owing to God’s mercy, then it is possible to insist that episcopacy is God’s will for the church and at the same

time fully acknowledge that non-episcopal bodies are truly churches. This doctrinal development shaped the theology of the CSI and garnered the attention of the broader church. Newbigin notes the favorable assessment that the Roman Catholic theologian, George H. Tavard, gave to this “dynamic” ecclesiology:

The CSI cannot be appraised only from the peculiarities of its organization; the implications of its theology must also be considered. For it is giving rise to a relatively new conception of the Church. According to this view the Church should be defined in terms of what it is becoming rather than what it is. This dynamic approach may eventually open a way of escape from the difficulties that beset the World Council itself (cited in Newbigin 1960: xxxiv).⁹⁴

4.3.6. *The Method of Reunion*

Chapter 7 of *The Reunion of the Church* defends the pledge against its critics. The pledge was a commitment between uniting churches stating that no worship form, ritual, or form of ministry that was different or objectionable would be forced on any congregation. After the inauguration of the union a thirty-year period was set aside to allow for issues of ministry to be resolved. The church would include a large number of ministers who had not received episcopal ordination and it was agreed that during this period ministers from any of the older churches that had founded the originally separate parts of the united church could be received. It was agreed that the eventual goal was for all ministers in the CSI to be episcopally ordained (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 17-18).

Newbigin’s defense of the pledge was examined previously in chapter 3. What remains to be seen is how Newbigin’s defense reflects his distinctive doctrine of the church rooted in the spiritual dynamics of justification by faith.

⁹⁴ (Tavard 1955: 81-82).

Newbigin explains that the pledge is proposed in the theological context of the gospel. The basis of union is a reality in the “personal order” or “realm.” The uniting churches recognize that they have not reached a consensus on the ministry but they have come to recognize one another personally as members of the one true church and have personally to seek to restore the broken unity of the body (1948d: 106, 114, 122). While they lack doctrinal unanimity they can nonetheless trust each other as members of the body of Christ. Behind this personal commitment is the conviction that “the Holy Spirit is indeed ready to lead the Church into the truth”:

If this faith be vain, then indeed the union is a ramshackle structure that will fall to pieces at the first blow. But if it be that having believed the Gospel, and having received the earnest of the Spirit by whom we confess that Jesus is Lord, and being bound therefore to manifest His unity in one body, we shall be led by Him into the truth we do not yet see, then we are right in leaving this issue to be settled by the Church in the light of a generation’s experience as one body (1948d: 120).

Newbigin breaks down the method of union into four theological commitments. First, all the uniting bodies recognize each other as fully a part of the one true church. This reflects the gospel conviction that that church is constituted by faith in Christ and not by historic succession and continuity. Second, there is mutual recognition that this is not a group of autonomous bodies coming together to form something new; rather, it is a restoration of a broken unity and a ministry standing in historic succession. This reflects the gospel conviction that the CSI is committed to union with the world-wide body of Christ. The succession is not adopted to add legitimacy but to facilitate repentance and reunion. Third, there is recognition that unity is a reality in “the personal realm.” This reflects the gospel conviction that important matters are not ultimately resolved by rules and regulations but through the mutual love and assurance that flow from being in Christ

together. Fourth, recognition that important questions will need to be postponed because the church needs time to grow into its experience of being united. This reflects the gospel conviction that the church is in the process of becoming as it exercises faith in Christ (1948d: 122-123).

For Newbigin these four principles are fundamentally issues of the biblical gospel not simply workable methods for the South Indian context. He envisions the day when reunion will come with the “great Catholic communions East and West.” The “same principles” would have to shape such a reunion because true reunion would not be one group granting legitimacy to the others; rather all would be acting in repentance and responding to God’s grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. The church on earth will always live in time but the eschatological truth is that “its life is hid in God who is eternal.” The life of the church cannot therefore ever be primarily grounded in historical continuity. “Historical continuity is the fruit of that justifying and sanctifying grace of the eternal God by which the Church lives” (1948d: 123).

4.3.7. Heads of Agreement: Standards, Ministry, and Sacraments

The third section of the book deals with the three heads of agreement in the scheme: the doctrinal standards of the church, the episcopal ministry, and the sacraments. The chapter entitled “The Faith of the Church” was one of the most contended in the entire scheme. It begins by acknowledging the Bible as the “supreme and decisive standard of the faith” and the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds are accepted as “witnessing to and accepting that faith.” Having affirmed this, three notes were added to the section to

explain what was meant when the church said it was “accepting” the creeds. First, acceptance did not mean that assent would be “demanded to every word or phrase” and reasonable “liberty of interpretation would be allowed.” Second, the church asserted its right to “issue supplementary statements concerning the faith” in the future. And third, the act of union would not debar the use of any of the confessions of faith used by any of the uniting churches before the union, as long as they were doctrinally consistent with the standards of the uniting church (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 4-5).⁹⁵

Certain Anglican critics of the scheme worried that the statement of faith short-changed the role of the the church as the interpreter of scripture and guardian of orthodoxy. Their related concern was the potential Pandora’s box that might be opened with a constitutional commitment guaranteeing “liberty of interpretation.” At the Lambeth conference of 1948 the joint committees of the convocations of Canterbury and York had pronounced that they “were fully satisfied as to the credal orthodoxy of the Church of South India” and that the controversial notes did not present “any intention to depart from, or to make possible any future departure from the historic faith of the Church” (Joint Committee Report 1950: 9). There were still critics, the most vocal being T.G. Jalland, lecturer in theology at the University of Exeter. He was part of the small Anglo-Catholic circle that had collaborated with Kenneth Kirk and Dom Gregory Dix in the essay collection *The Apostolic Ministry* (1946). In 1944, the same year that T.S. Eliot and Dix published their most incendiary works, Jalland published a critique of the

⁹⁵ The constitution as finally adopted did not include notes 1 and 3 but incorporated note 2 as the final paragraph of the section: “The Church of South India is competent to issue supplementary statements concerning the faith for the guidance of its teachers and the edification of the faithful, provided that such statements are not contrary to the truths of our religion revealed in Holy Scriptures” (*Constitution* 1952: 4-5).

proposed statement of faith entitled *The Bible, the Church, and South India* (1944). Jalland viewed the scheme as “an artificial creation of unity on the basis of a paper agreement.” In his view non-Anglicans should not be brought into union with Anglicans until they completely attained to Anglican “doctrine and morals” (Jalland 1944: 93). Chapter 8, perhaps more than any other portion of *The Reunion of the Church* reveals Newbigin’s impatience and frustration with his Anglo-Catholic opponents. He responds to arguments that are summaries of things from numerous CDCP and SPG conversations, tracts, and especially the dialogues hosted by the Cowley Fathers back in 1946. He engages mostly with Jalland and Father W.B. O’Brien, one of Dix’s fellow monks at Nashdom Abbey and a participant in the dialogues (Newbigin 1993k: 81).

Newbigin narrows the focus of the debate to two questions: “what are the Church’s standards of faith?” and “what is the relationship of the Church and the individual member to those standards?” (1948d: 128). He defends the statement of faith in its answers to both questions and grounds his answers in his eschatological ecclesiology of the cross.

4.3.7.1. Standards: the Bible or the Church?

The scheme was criticized because it names the Bible as the “supreme and decisive standard of faith” and does not say anything about tradition or the authority of the church in interpreting scripture. The statement departed from “catholic principles” for in the ancient church the scriptures held “only a subordinate place in relation to the common witness of the Church’s tradition...just as no law is self-interpretive, no

document can be decisive”(Jalland 1944: 52). These same critics idealize the church of the fourth and fifth centuries, the church of the Nicene Creed and the Vincentian Canon—*quod ubique, quod semper, quo ab omnibus creditum est*, “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all” (McKim 1996: 230). The faith of the true church is the *quod* of the Canon, a collection of core doctrines by which all may be tested (1948d: 130).

In the introduction to the 1960 edition, Newbigin states that the reprinting is justified because of the ongoing discussion between the CSI and the Anglicans concerning the statement of faith. While the Anglicans had cordially blessed the formation of the CSI there was also “firm instruction” to other churches not to follow its methodology. When union negotiations in the Middle East and Western Africa were developing along the lines of the South India model the Lambeth Conference of 1958 “strongly recommended” that they follow instead the model of the Ceylon scheme. The Ceylon statement of faith clearly identifies its faith as “the faith which the Church has ever held” and acknowledges that it is the church that “handed down the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments” (1960t: xvii-xx). The discussions go back to 1941 when various Sri Lankan churches formed the National Christian Council of Ceylon along with the Anglican diocese of Colombo (*Church of Ceylon* 2009). The Lambeth Conference of 1948 requested that the statement of faith be redrafted, especially with reference to an earlier version of the South Indian statement of faith that had included a reference to the church “handing down” scripture (*Lambeth 1948*: 38-41). While Newbigin does not mention it explicitly in the 1948 edition of *The Reunion of the Church* he does allude to the disputed phrases.

Newbigin considers the statement “the faith which the Church has ever held” to be problematic. Which church is being referenced? There are many bodies calling themselves churches whose beliefs radically differ from both the uniting church in South India and the Anglican Communion. “All the beliefs held at all times by all the bodies in all lands calling themselves Christian Churches hardly together constitute a manageable standard of faith.” Appeals to the Vincentian Canon, the Nicene Creed, or to an idealized epoch—whether third, fourth, fifth or sixteenth centuries—fail to secure an adequate foundation for true faith. The errors compound bringing about the “logical completion of the destruction of the New Testament idea of the Church.” When a theology seeks to ground the church’s life in historical continuity or tradition “the true relation between the Church and faith is denied”:

Faith is the response to God’s revelation in Christ; by it the Church lives. The Church has the duty of confessing before men the faith by which she lives, but in making her confession she must be aware that she who confesses is sinful and fallible. No one can state the truth who is not aware of the fact that he may also speak untruth. The Church will confess truly when she keeps her eyes on the object of faith—the revelation of Jesus Christ. The standards of faith, therefore, by which the Church’s confession is to be judged is not the confession itself, but the revelation to which faith is her response (1948d: 130).

He adds in the 1960 preface:

The Church does not remain in the orthodox faith merely by proclaiming that it does not intend to leave it. It remains in that faith only by a continually renewed laying hold upon God’s revelation of Himself in Christ, and this means preserving the right relation of the Church to its standards of faith (1960t: xx).

The church remains in the faith just as it comes to faith. There is a continuous laying-hold of Christ, a being and becoming in the personal realm of faith. The church’s

existence and orthodoxy are in the final analysis for Newbigin to be found in the “eschatological dimension”:

The ultimate standard of faith is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. When we appeal from the present to that revelation we are not appealing from a later to an earlier phase in the development of a society call the Church. We are appealing to the Church’s living Lord, who is alive in the Church today, whom alone we must obey, but who has made His nature and will clear to us by a work done for mankind at a certain point in history. To that point in history, therefore, we must go, not because it is earlier than the point at which we live but because it is the place where Christ has revealed Himself and wrought redemption for us. We do not go to the Bible to find the earliest forms of the traditions and rules of the Church. If we were doing that, the criticisms of those who point to the still earlier traditions of liturgical practice would be sound. We go to the Bible to meet Christ, our present and living Lord (1948d: 131).

Newbigin here sounds the classic Reformation idea that the church is created by the word of the gospel.⁹⁶ The church is brought into existence by the “proclamation of event of God’s work in Christ.” The church is historical and eschatological, a “society living in history by reference to something beyond history—by faith in the eternal and ever-present God, which faith is the response to His redeeming act once and for all at a point in history.” In its relation to scripture, it is scripture that is constitutive of the church. In terms of historical process, the church did not so much choose the canon as recognize it:

It was like a court sifting evidence in order to obtain the most reliable account of what really happened. The controlling fact was that Christ had lived, taught, done mighty works, died, risen again, and appeared to His disciples. The appeal was to those who could claim either to have seen and heard and handled these things, or to have been in direct contact with those who had. The canon of scripture is the result of that appeal. The selection of the canon is the work of the Church, but it is the expression of the fact that it is the actual event of God’s work in Christ which

⁹⁶ Consider this from Martin Luther: “the gospel is the unique, the most certain, the most noble sign of the church—more so than even bread and baptism; for it is through the gospel alone that the church is conceived, formed, nourished, born, trained, fed, clothed, cared for, strengthened, armed, preserved—in short, the entire life and substance of the church is in the word of God” (cited in Althaus 1966: 289).

is the supreme and decisive standard for the Church... The Christian faith is faith in the living God evoked by, and based upon, what God has done for men at a point in time. The supreme and decisive standard of faith must, therefore, be the testimony of those who were eyewitness of what God did (1948d: 132-133).

Newbigin aligns with the Reformation doctrine that the church is created by the Holy Spirit through the word of God.⁹⁷ The church confesses Jesus as Lord “because the Holy Spirit moves us to do so.” It is “speaking in the Spirit...because the Spirit lays hold on us personally and we can do no other.” This gift of the Spirit is the fruit of hearing the gospel; therefore the church can never be free from the authority of the scriptures in which the content of the gospel is embedded. Tradition can never supplant the unique role the scripture has in the life of the church for human tradition will always have the taint of sin and error:

The Church is liable to error and has erred. When she treats her own traditions as finally normative, she delivers herself over in a kind of bondage which Christ never imposed to a law which is not the law of God. She is to live always in penitent and alert obedience to her living Lord, and she has the revelation of His nature and the record of His mighty acts done for her redemption in those Scriptures which she has treasured from the days of those who were witnesses of them. These, therefore, are her supreme and decisive standard of faith, and to these she must ever turn, knowing that she exposes herself afresh to the Gospel of which the Scriptures are the record, she will receive afresh the guiding of the Holy Spirit as to the present will of her Lord (1948d: 136).

The second question he sets out to answer is “what is the relationship of the church and the individual member to the standards”? The answer is straightforward: the individual is responsible for his or her faith. But this personal dimension of faith lies at

⁹⁷ Martin Luther’s Larger Catechism, Apostles’ Creed, concerning the Holy Spirit: “[The Holy Spirit] leads us into his holy community, placing us in the bosom of the Church, where he preaches to us and brings us Christ...In the first place, he has a unique community in the world. It is a mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God... For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian Church, and outside it no one can come to the Lord Christ” (cited in Braaten 1996b: 70)

the heart of the existence of the church corporate, for that existence is eschatological and spiritual. When the church fails to give its members the opportunity to accept personal responsibility for their faith it “destroys in itself the capacity for stating what is the faith” (1948d: 128). The second part of the answer is also straightforward: the church is responsible to declare to each generation “what is the faith, to expose and combat errors destructive of the faith, to expel from her body doctrines which pervert the faith, and to lead her members into a full and vivid apprehension of the faith.” No appeal to church history, ecumenical creeds, the Vincentian Canon, or even the scriptures themselves can relieve the church of this basic responsibility: “to state in every new generation how it interprets the historic faith and how it relates it to the new thought and experience of its time.” The church has an enduring responsibility to state “*now*, what is the faith. It belongs to the essence of a living Church that it should be able and willing to do so” (1948d: 137-138).

Newbigin passionately supports the theology behind the first note of the earlier draft of the statement of faith. Acceptance did not mean that assent would be “demanded to every word or phrase” but that reasonable “liberty of interpretation would be allowed.” This note occasioned T.S. Eliot’s famous metaphor that the scheme was creating a “pantomime horse” that would be animated by every variety of theology and heresy (Eliot 1943: 21). Newbigin considered this fear unwarranted for what the uniting churches had in mind was “reasonable liberty” not “unreasonable liberty.” Newbigin provides metaphors of his own that he thinks are more serious and realistic. The church can become a “jellyfish”—incapable of articulating its doctrine and flowing with the tide of culture wherever it drifts; but it can also become a “petrified fossil”—blindly

submitting to historical documents and prescribed confessions, “having the form of a church but not its life” (1948d: 142). The CSI’s intention to safeguard reasonable liberty is not designed to smooth the way for heresy. The design is to “secure the widest possible diffusion of that personal faith which issues in the love of God...by which the Church lives and is edified and empowered to commend to every generation Him who called Himself not tradition but Truth” (1948d: 146).

4.3.7.2. Ministry: An Eschatological Theology of Ordination

In chapter nine Newbiggin defends the scheme and its proposal for a unified ministry. Looming behind his arguments in this chapter are the developments of the Lambeth Conferences of 1920, 1930, 1948, and 1958. Lambeth 1920 had been a wonderful encouragement for reunion advocates. The bishops issued *An Appeal to All Christian People* inviting churches into organic reunion along the lines of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. But the invitation softened the episcopal requirement of the Quadrilateral in order to promote the great need of a ministry acknowledged by all. The episcopate was proposed as “one means of providing such a ministry” (cited in Bell 1924: 24).

As union negotiations made progress in South India, Lambeth 1930 gave its blessing upon the scheme and withheld judgments on its as yet undecided plans for unification of the ministry. They simply “encouraged the reunion” and expressed their strong desire that “as soon as the negotiations are successfully completed, the venture should be made and the union inaugurated” (cited in Bell 1948: 4).

Things were different by the time of Lambeth 1948. Following the advice of the 1946 “Derby Report”—so named because it was chaired by A.E.J. Rawlinson, Bishop of Derby—the bishops approved the scheme, but requested redrafts of and amendments to several articles of the constitution. A significant minority of the bishops voted to postpone approval making the unanimous votes of 1930 a thing of the past (Rawlinson 1960: 27).⁹⁸

There was less rancor ten years later with Lambeth 1958. The bishops commended the process of the last ten years and even acknowledged a debt a gratitude to the CSI for strengthening the pastoral dimension of the episcopal office.⁹⁹ But their advice to other churches looking for models of reunion was to commend and point them to the scheme and the statement of faith produced in Ceylon as well as the plan of union developed in North India, both of which included provisions for supplemental ordination at or near the inauguration of union. Writing in 1960 Newbiggin stated that this was “undoubtedly” the reason why these schemes were commended over the plan of South India (1960t: xx). Lambeth 1948 had recommended “more theological scrutiny” before any such rites be recommended “as the medicine for the healing of the church.” Newbiggin felt that Lambeth 1958 had mistakenly decided to “advise all concerned only to

⁹⁸ Bishop Rawlinson explains that there was a “change in climate” between Lambeth 1930 and 1948. By the time of the latter the union had already come into being. There was an eighteen-year interval between the conferences and Lambeth 1948 was largely a different body of bishops. The vision and optimism of 1930 had been replaced by the mood of “a war weary and disillusioned generation.” The outbreak of WWII in 1939 meant that the scheduled conference of 1940 had to be postponed for eight years (Rawlinson 1960: 25-26).

⁹⁹ “It may well be that the Church in the West may be able to learn from the polity of the Church of South India lessons which would restore to its exercise of episcopacy more of its primitive pastoral character as the office of Father in God” (*Lambeth 1958*: 2.27).

take that medicine” (1960t: xxv).¹⁰⁰ In his memoir he lamented the actions of the Anglican Communion. It had “served notice” to churches all over the world that it would not look favorably on any plan of union that did not include the “the kind of unification of ministries that the CSI had rejected.” “The only way of uniting Anglican with non-episcopal churches which had actually succeeded was rejected, and a way which had never been tried was commended as the only acceptable one” (Newbigin 1993k: 108).

In addition to the actions at Lambeth the other factor that figures prominently in the chapter on ministry is the massive and scholarly volume of Anglo-Catholic essays entitled *The Apostolic Ministry* (1946). Newbigin sees the essays collectively as a defense of “the polity of Cyprian”¹⁰¹ held forth as “the last and unalterable word on the nature of the Church” (1948d: 189). He interacts with several of the essays though his focus is on the chapter written by Dom Gregory Dix, his old sparring partner from the CDCP dialogues. Dix’s chapter, “The Ministry of the Early Church” is the heart of the collection. While the other ten essays are twenty-five to thirty pages in length Dix’s essay runs to one hundred twenty-two pages.

The basic criticism of the scheme that Newbigin defends against is this:

Episcopal ordination is the guarantee of a valid ministry (that is, a ministry certainly possessing Christ’s authority) and that by recognizing the competence as

¹⁰⁰ The committee report on the unity of the church for Lambeth 1948 includes an appendix entitled “The Theory of ‘Supplemental Ordination’.” It states that supplemental rites cannot be considered ordination: “a man either has received the commission of Christ by ordination, or he has not. The Church can only recognize the fact, not ‘supplement’ it, since the efficacy of ordination comes from Him, and not merely from the Church’s administration...Study will need to be given to the subject by theologians before a decision can be reached with regard to the possibility of bringing peace to the Church, by means of a procedure based theologically on the conception of ‘Supplemental Ordination’ in any of its forms” (*Lambeth 1948*: 66).

¹⁰¹ The third century Bishop, Cyprian of Carthage, held that the unity of the church existed through the bishops as successors of the apostles, and through the episcopate in solidarity. For Cyprian, “the bishops are the glue that binds the church together.” For Cyprian “the bishop is in the church and the church in the bishop.” It follows that if one is not in the bishop, one is not in the church (Cyprian 1921: 66,8).

presbyters of men not episcopally ordained the Scheme surrenders something vital to the existence of the Church (1948d: 150).

Dix argues that the episcopate alone possesses a valid commission from Christ for ministry. His authority rests with it only and any church that fails to recognize this truth and submit to this authority should be excommunicated. This is not a simple matter of form of government; rather, it is whether or not there is recognition of “the episcopate as the repository of the commission which Christ gave to His Apostles.” Dix argues that the earliest church made a distinction between the apostles and elders, the latter being a Christian equivalent to the *zeqenim* of the synogogue. The elders took care of local church matters collegially but had no power to ordain presbyters. The Apostles formed the apostolate and alone possessed a commission from Christ for ordination, a “power of attorney” based on the Jewish model of the *shaliach*—a power to speak or act on behalf of one’s principal. This power the Apostles handed on to “apostolic men” (the episcopate) as their successors but not to the elders (Dix 1946: 243-266). Newbigin’s critique of this line of argument is that it is speculative and falls short of anything looking like “proof.” There is not a single recorded instance of any of the apostles giving personal authority to a successor. Newbigin also objects to the way Dix lays out his historical arguments with such confidence when, in fact, some of his interpretations are dubious and lack the backing of the scholarly consensus.¹⁰² For Newbigin the evidence is at best “scanty” and no basis to “perpetuate the division of the Body of Christ”:

¹⁰² A.E. J. Rawlinson, the Bishop of Derby and a leading Anglican ecumenist wryly observed: “There is much to be learnt from Dom Gregory, but those who are wise will not take all that he writes as though it were Gospel” (Rawlinson 1950: 42).

We are dealing not with academic questions with the question “Where is the Church?” and therefore with the question, “What must I do to be saved?” The gravest issues which the human mind can conceive are at stake. We are often reminded that the word “valid” means, fundamentally, sure and reliable. It would be difficult to imagine anything that conformed less to that description than the historical arguments which are here offered to prove what is and what is not a valid ministry. The death of Christ for sinners, His rising from the dead and ascension to the right hand of God, His gift of the Holy Spirit to believers to the end that we might be built up in one Body—these are the mighty certainties upon which we rest all that we have and are, and which we proclaim to every man who will hear. When a man speaks to us of things which he deems so vital to the redemption of the world that he can place them alongside the Gospel, and demands in their name the excommunication of great parts of Christ’s Church, he must speak a language of like assurance. There are places where historical probability is all we have a right to look for; but here, surely, we are in a realm where probability is not enough. Here we need something as sure as the Cross and the empty tomb (1948d: 156-157).

Newbigin gives praise to one of the contributors to *The Apostolic Ministry*, Father Gabriel Hebert, a monk of the Society of the Sacred Mission, Kelham. Newbigin would later call Father Hebert one of his “staunch Anglican friends” (1993k: 131). Hebert’s chapter lays out the theological grounds for episcopal ministry and Newbigin considers it “noble” and the “most important chapter of the book” (1948d: 157). Hebert sets forth episcopacy as having a two-fold character: it represents Christ *to* the church, and *in* the church it holds a personal apostolic commission from Christ. The ministry is both an organ of the body of Christ and a representative of Christ, the head, to the body---it speaks and acts for him to his church (Hebert 1946:527). This fits with Dix’s notion that the early church had two distinct orders, the elders and the apostles. These two reflected this double character of the ministry, though in time they became fused together. Now the episcopate alone has the dominical commission to represent Christ to the church.

This theological line can be traced through all the essays in the book. Kenneth Kirk in his essay summarizes the underlying thesis of the book: “It is only as [the church]

can claim that her ministry derives direct from the Lord Himself in the days of His flesh, and is given her for Leadership, for path-finding, and for spiritual replenishment, that she can pursue her victorious yet dreadful pilgrimage undaunted” (Kirk 1946:52).

In response to Kirk’s essay Newbigin supplies a brief theology of ordination. The first principle the New Testament¹⁰³ teaches is that ministry is a gift of the ascended Lord to the church. Kirk is wrong to link ordained ministry to Christ “in the days of his flesh.” (1948d: 158). This treats the ministry as an extension of the incarnation and “removes Ascension and Pentecost from the determinative position which the New Testament gives them” (1948d: 159). The uniting churches in South India believe that in ordination “God bestows on and assures to those He has called and His Church has accepted for any particular form of the ministry, a commission for it and the grace appropriate to it” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947:7).

Ordination is thus a point at which the relation between the two dimensions of the Church’s existence becomes vividly clear. In it the Church acts in her true character as a society constituted by the union of her members in faith with the ascended Christ. In this faith she sets before Him the man whom she believes the He has called, and she lays her hands upon him in the act of prayer that Christ Himself may bestow upon him the commission and grace that are required. And in the faith that He hears and answers, acting as His instrument she commits to the ordained man the authority to act as minister of Christ to the Church. The prayer is the prayer of the whole Church and the hands are the hands of the whole Church which is His body—not only of those now present, not even of those now living, but of all who have gone before everywhere and always. It is the hands that bear the unmistakable authority and commission of the whole Church that must be laid on the head of the ordinand, in token that the prayer that is offered is in truth the prayer of the whole Church—is indeed “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” a part of the one undiscordant offering of perpetual prayer which is made by Christ and by the Church in him... The man so ordained is not merely the representative organ of the Church. He is the representative of Christ to the Church, possessed of the authority to speak and act for Him to His Church. But his commission does not come to him “from the Lord Himself in the days of His

¹⁰³ Ephesians 4:7-13.

Flesh.” It comes from the Church’s living Lord who having ascended upon high led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. It therefore comes from the same Source as that from whom the whole Church from the Day of Pentecost onward derives her divine life (1948b: 162-163).¹⁰⁴

Newbigin is articulating here a Reformed theology of ordination. He echoes language from the 1920 *Manual of Church Doctrine of the Church of Scotland* which defines ordination similarly:

Throughout the life and mission of the Church in all ages the holy ministry derives directly from the ascended Lord who continues to send down gifts for the ministry upon His Church, so that whenever a man is called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament He is called and sent by Christ Himself and endowed with gifts for his office by the Spirit (Wotherspoon 1960: 75).

In one significant way Newbigin moves away from the Scottish Presbyterian heritage. In the Presbyterian tradition ministry derives “*mediately* from the historical and risen Jesus through the Apostles and *immediately* from the ascended King and Head of the Church through the Holy Spirit.” The ministry thus has a “two-fold derivation from the One Lord that is the ground and justification of the Church’s ministry from generation to generation” (1960:75). In his effort to contend with Anglo-Catholics Newbigin rejects this equal ultimacy of the eschatological and the historical and subordinates the historical to the eschatological. Ordination does not derive *mediately* from Christ’s “days in the flesh” but *immediately* from the ascended Lord.

¹⁰⁴ Newbigin states the view succinctly in the 1984 report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, *God’s Reign and Our Unity*: “Ordination is the act which constitutes and acknowledges the special ministry of representation and leading within the life of the Church. . . In the act of ordination, the Church in Christ prays to the Father to grant his Spirit to the one ordained for the office and work to which that person is called, accompanying the act with a sacramental sign which specifies by the imposition of hands the one for whom prayer is made, and—in faith that the prayer is heard—commits to the person ordained the authority to act representatively for the universal Church in the ways proper to that office” (*ARIC Report*: 51).

Newbigin develops this idea many years later in his commentary on the gospel of John, *The Light Has Come* (1982). Commenting on the words of Jesus in John 20:21 “as the Father as sent me, so send I you,” he argues that the sending referred to in the passage is not merely a historical act, “simply the commissioning of a company of people by a man”; rather, the sending should be seen as an act by the eschatological man, “the last Adam,” “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” the one “who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” The sending of the disciples into mission necessarily comes after Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is completed. It is only after he has “judged and cast out the ruler of this world” that he can “fulfill the promise that he made—the promise of a Paraclete who would continue the work of manifesting the divine righteousness.” It is only after Jesus has been glorified and the Spirit given that the disciples can be sent into mission, “bearing in their life the life of God himself, continuing the mission of Jesus in the power of the same Spirit who abides eternally in him and in them through him” (Newbigin 1982k: 268-269). This eschatological commission is for the entire church and the commission of a special office of ministry is exactly intended to enable the entire church to share in the mission:

There can be no dichotomy between the priestly authority of the ministry and the priestly authority of the Church as a whole in its mission to the world. The former is for the sake of the latter, and it is only when the missionary character of the Church is forgotten that the dichotomy appears (1982: 270).

In *The Reunion of the Church* Newbigin warns that the Anglo-Catholic theology of ordination is dangerous because its subordination of the eschatological to the historical creates a church that theoretically could have an existence independent of the living Christ. Its ministry is sufficient unto itself equipped with a legal doctrine of power of

attorney and a historical line of episcopal descent. Newbigin insists that the core theological truth at the heart of biblical ecclesiology is eschatological. The church “exists in Christ and derives its life at every moment and in all parts from Him.” It is only because of the fact that the church lives in a dynamic relationship of faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit that the apostolic ministry shares in the body’s life and has a commission from Christ to the body:

The clue to the double character of the ministry does not lie in the existence of a double historic succession—the succession of validly transmitted “power of attorney” from Christ in his flesh, on the one hand, and the continuous succession of the Church’s life, on the other. It lies in the double character that belongs to every part of the Church’s life—sacramental, evangelistic, ministerial. This—as I have suggested—is made clear in ordination. Here the prayer of the whole Church in every time and place is offered up to the Father in and through Christ, and here the gifts of God’s Spirit are poured down in and through Christ upon the Church so that the Church, acting as His Body, commissions and empowers the man set apart for sacred work. And both in the upward and in the downward movement Christ acts through the ministerial organs of His body—organs which have been part of its structure from the beginning (1948d: 166).

While Anglo-Catholics denied the validity of non-episcopal orders they readily acknowledged the presence of the Holy Spirit in Free Church life and credited the spiritual fruitfulness of many of those ministries. The Lord was pouring out upon the Free Church gifts “which produce results such as the validly ordained minister ought to produce” (Kirk 1946:37). These ministries were “real” but only in a “*de facto*” sense. Kirk compares them to a rival who overthrows a lawful king in a *coup d’état*. The usurper may become the *de facto* ruler and can exercise his power, but he cannot command the moral high ground because he is not king *de jure*. In this same way non-episcopal ministries could be acknowledged as real without being recognized as valid,

and therefore there was no obligation for intercommunion or exchange of ministers (Kirk 1946: 44-45).

Newbigin sees this as a demonstration of the fatal flaw of a non-eschatological understanding of the church. In Kirk's story the king can be none other than "our Lord Himself." It is the Lord who has blessed non-episcopal ministries and they yield the fruit of God's blessing—which Anglo-Catholics acknowledge. If the Lord blesses them in what sense are these ministries not *de jure*? An eschatological doctrine of the church insists that all ministries blessed by the Lord belong to the Lord. The church is "the Body of the living Christ, and the ministry is the gift of the living and ascended Christ to the Church" (1948d: 159).

4.3.7.3. The Sacraments: Lay Celebration and Priesthood

In the short chapter on the sacraments Newbigin examines two major criticisms of the scheme: first, that the meaning and efficacy of baptism and the eucharist are not sufficiently explained; second, that the essential role of the minister as celebrant of the eucharist is not made clear. Newbigin felt that his colleague Bishop Palmer had answered the first question sufficiently¹⁰⁵ so he addresses only the second.

Anglo-Catholics were particularly concerned by the wording of section four of the basis of union "The Sacraments in the Church." Eucharistic celebration by a minister is referred to as a "custom of the church." The only "indispensable conditions" for the sacrament are the "unchangeable promise of God" and the "gathering together of God's

¹⁰⁵ (Palmer 1944: 11-12).

elect people in the power of the Holy Ghost” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 6). There was also a note in section eight indicating that “after union certain exceptional arrangements will continue...The Synod of the United Church will have full authority to make what provision is needed for the administration of the sacraments in all its congregations” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 9). For those with catholic convictions regarding the sacerdotal nature of priestly consecration these words were suspiciously viewed as loopholes for lay celebration of the eucharist.¹⁰⁶

There was a limited practice of lay celebration in some of the former Methodist and Congregationalist churches of the SIUC. It was never viewed as a permanent state of affairs but a “temporary expedient to meet special and exceptional needs” that had arisen “in mass movement areas.” Basically it was a means of securing ministry to areas of new church development and for new converts to the faith (1948d: 175). The joint committee spent a considerable amount of time addressing concerns regarding the practice of lay celebration and found that the desire to safeguard it came from a “deep-rooted fear that the doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers [was] not adequately safeguarded by the Scheme of Union” (1948d:175-176).

For Newbigin the directive that the celebrant should be an ordained minister is a “very good rule of order.” It reflects the wisdom of the early church that the ministry represents Christ to the church in a permanent exercise of pastoral responsibility and in a succession of authority binding the church through time (1948d: 177-178). The eucharist is not a sacrifice offered by a celebrant on behalf of the church but “a sacrifice offered by the church in its corporate unity.” Ironically, grounding the priesthood of believers in a

¹⁰⁶ (Cf. O'Brien 1943: 6-7).

permanent order for lay celebration reinforces the idea that the celebrant alone is the priest. Newbigin sees that all believers are priests; all participate in all acts of the corporate worship of the church. Leadership by the minister is seen as a prudential matter for the ordering of the church. The scheme is pastorally accommodating an existing situation where people depend on lay celebrants. The means of grace in this situation should not be “suddenly terminated.” A provision for rightly ordered communion would be made as soon as possible (1948d: 178). For the time being, however, circumstances required occasional lay celebration. In the missionary situation that South India found itself facing, the church had “the power and the duty to make exceptions” (1948d: 180).

The theological issue at the core of lay celebration is the definition of priesthood and whether there is a special priesthood for ministers that differs in kind from other Christians. For Newbigin the answer is eschatological. The status and function of priesthood is something shared by all believers and found in union with “the risen and ascended Christ”:

In [Christ] all priesthood exists and there is no priesthood apart from participation in his risen and ascended life. In this priesthood the whole church is called to share. A doctrine of the ministry, or a practice with regard to the ministry, which makes it appear that priesthood is the exclusive possession of the ministry violates the most essential element in the character of the Church and justifies the most energetic protest against her falsehood. In the service of Holy Communion the congregation acts as the local manifestation of the whole Church of Christ in heaven and on earth. They meet as a holy priesthood (1948d: 176).

Newbigin would take up the issue of “lay-presidency” two more times in his life. He addresses it in the report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission in 1984¹⁰⁷ and in a paper written in 1996 in response to Anglican advocates for the practice.

In the ARIC report he succinctly states the same critique he had developed in 1947:

The practice of “lay celebration” has sometimes been advocated because it was held to be a necessary witness to the “priesthood of all believers.” This advocacy clearly rests on a misunderstanding, since it implies that it is the president who is alone the priest. The practice thus contradicts the doctrine which it is intended to support... The general rule should remain that the president at the Eucharist should be the person who has, by ordination, received the authority so to preside, and the Church ought to order its affairs in such a way that this proper rule may be kept. The presidency of the ordained person does not depend upon his possessing a priesthood which others lack; it depends upon the good ordering which is essential to the life of the Church as it exercises corporately the priesthood given to it by the one who is alone the good High Priest (*ARIC Report*: 53).

Writing in 1996 Newbigin grounds his position on lay celebration in his theology of ordination. The trouble with the Anglo-Catholic position is that it views ordination as conveying a new “status.” Rather than seeing ordination as authorization to act in certain ways for the entire church, to be “priest for the priestly people,” it envisions a power to give to the ordained “a new kind of being”:

Is the distinction of the ordained from the rest an ontological one or one of relation? Is a priest (or a bishop) to be understood in terms of what he or she is, or in terms of his or her relationship to the whole body of the baptized? I would want to affirm the latter position, that priesthood is to be defined in terms of a set of relationships between the priest and God on the one hand and God’s people on the other. I do not know of any “higher” doctrine than this (Newbigin 1996a: 181).

¹⁰⁷ Newbigin was the principal writer of the final report (1993k: 243).

4.3.8. Part Four: South India and the Ecumenical Movement

At the conclusion of the book Newbigin admits that much of the work has been “negative and destructive in character.” His defense is that an important group of thinkers in the Anglican communion is actively seeking to “excommunicate the South India Church” (1948d: 181). There is an issue that must be settled and it is at the heart of the disputes and the ecumenical movement itself: “whether non-episcopal ministries are real ministries” (1948d: 186). Until that issue is settled the “future of the ecumenical movement must be permanently precarious:”

The process of mutual understanding and synthesis which the ecumenical movement has made possible has been based upon a tacit acceptance of one another as Christians by the members of the different Churches. Its starting-point is the acceptance of the fellow-Christian of another Church, *in his Church*, as a fellow-member in Christ... If South India is to be excommunicated by the Anglican Communion it can only be because that Communion has decided that it cannot regard the non-episcopal Churches as parts of the universal Church, that apart from the historic episcopate there is no Church. If that decision is made it must also bring to an end Anglican participation in the ecumenical movement, for it will have involved a clear rejection of its starting-point (1948d: 186).¹⁰⁸

Newbigin holds out hope that the principle of mutual recognition can be a basis for reunion with Rome and the Eastern churches. He even envisions the possibility of a “central organ of unity” in the papacy.¹⁰⁹ However long it may take to grow into such unity it will only happen if there is a willingness by all to recognize the other as “truly a part of the Church.” Episcopacy is a gift for the unity of the church but the Anglo-

¹⁰⁸ Newbigin writes that same year that “the basis of the ecumenical movement” and of “reunion” is that “churches proposing to unite... must recognize each other as truly and simply Churches, parts of the one Church of Christ and His Apostles, and their ministries, therefore, as truly ministries” (Newbigin 1948a: 162).

¹⁰⁹ Nearly fifty years later in the encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* John Paul II would call on Protestants to join in a “patient and fraternal dialog” to give help and advice on reforming the papacy in the interests of Christian unity (*US* 1995: 96)

Catholics have wielded the gift as a weapon that alienates both Protestants and the Catholic and Orthodox:

I would plead with Catholic critics who advocate the excommunication of the Church of South India because it acknowledges the reality of non-episcopal ministries to consider again whether the ground they are occupying really holds out any hope at all for the restoration of the Church's visible unity. So long as episcopacy is accepted and cherished as the organ of the Church's continuing unity from the Apostles in Palestine to the Christian Churches in every land today it will offer a centre round which the Church may be visibly re-united. But the claim that episcopacy—by itself and in isolation—is the sole organ of the Church's apostolicity, will be rejected as emphatically by the great Roman and Eastern Churches as by the non-episcopal. The tragedy of the position which I have criticized is that in the attempt to justify itself against Rome and the East it is compelled to excommunicate the rest, yet by this dual warfare it can gain the acceptance of neither. What might have been a stepping-stone for mutual traffic between separated bodies is turned into a fortified and isolated island inaccessible to either side (1948d: 188-189).

The book ends with a plea for repentance and a return to the “central simplicity of the gospel,” to “know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified” and to have “no ground of glorying save in his Cross, that the broken and distorted pattern of His divine life in us will be visibly restored” (1948d: 190).

4.4 CONCLUSION

During his years as union negotiator and in his works defending the scheme Newbigin reflects the theological identity of an evangelical ecumenical; however, he is no longer the young idealist fresh from Westminster College, Cambridge but an increasingly seasoned church leader, missionary, and polemicist. There is an observable process in Newbigin's work during this period, that of a person going deep into the Bible, patristic writings, Reformation theology and works of contemporary ecumenical

theology. He is searching for a synthesis that resonates with his deep convictions as an evangelical ecumenical and that enables him to build the bridges for visible unity. But the bridges he builds need theological integrity—he is not interested in unity at any cost. Out of this deep theological searching and the painstaking work of union negotiation his ecclesiology develops. Its trajectory is consistent with his earlier convictions but there is progress in complexity and refinement that reflect maturity and experience. Newbigin’s ecumenical ecclesiology has three defining characteristics: it is *Reformed*, it is *eschatological*, and it is *missional*.

4.4.1 *A Reformed Ecclesiology*

The first characteristic of this ecclesiology is that it is rooted in a Reformed understanding of the church. While Newbigin does not explicitly cite the phrase, his ecclesiology embodies the Reformation motto *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* “the church reformed and always being reformed.” This is an affirmation that the church is “a dynamic community, dependent on a living Lord” emboldened for continual reformation according to the word of God by the agency of the Holy Spirit (Stotts 1992: 71). While this motto is sometimes used for what theologian Hughes Old has called “theological Trotskyism”¹¹⁰—leaders with personal agendas submitting the church to perpetual revolution—its meaning derives from a most basic “ur-Reformed”¹¹¹ notion: everything in the life of the church is set against the measure of scripture for it is the

¹¹⁰ (Old 1984: 162).

¹¹¹ A term used by the Dutch Reformed theologian A.A. van Ruler (cited in Janssen 2006: 84).

word of God that brings the church into existence. Newbigin has great regard for tradition but in the classic Reformed sense of viewing it as *testes veritatis*, as a witness to the truth of scripture.¹¹² He concurs with Cyprian as quoted by Calvin¹¹³—“no one can have God as Father without the Church as mother”—because he sees this as ancient testimony supporting the biblical idea that the visible church is the bearer of the gospel. To regard the visible church as of “subordinate importance” is a “false spirituality divorced from the whole teaching of the Bible” (1948d: 29). But he is willing to disagree with Cyprian or any other authorities if he believes they are teaching an idea that runs counter to scripture. The bishops are not the glue that holds the church together—the crucified, risen, ascended and living Lord is.

In *The Household of God* (1953) Newbigin will demonstrate his commitment to *semper reformanda* even more clearly. He is fiercely critical of the “defective ecclesiology” of the reformers that allows for the “virtual disappearance of the idea of the Church as a visible unity” (1953e: 54). He does, however, believe that when it comes to the place of tradition the reformers got it right. Writing in 1948 to explain the “Presbyterian Heritage” within the CSI he drew particular attention to the question of how churches view their traditions: “traditions which are good in themselves are evil when they are put into the place which belongs only to the gospel itself. It was not Calvin or Knox but Christ who was crucified (I Cor. 1:13)” (Newbigin 1948c: 53).

Writing in 1964 Newbigin explained his deep commitment to *semper reformanda*:

¹¹² Cf. discussion in (Old 1984: 169-171); also (Calvin: “Prefatory Address”).

¹¹³ (Calvin: 4.1.1).

It is not sufficient to have been once reformed, and to honour the teaching of the reformers, if one does not acknowledge that there is always a need for reformation...A truly reformed church is a church which is always ready to listen afresh to the word of God...it knows that the Lord remains Lord and that the Church can never claim that place. It knows the subtle temptation that always besets the church to act as though it were the patron of Christ and could itself determine how to handle His affairs. A truly reformed church has the posture of a servant, alert only to hear and obey the Master's word (Newbigin 1964h: 15).

4.4.2. *An Eschatological Ecclesiology of the Cross*

The second characteristic of his ecclesiology is that it is radically eschatological. For Newbigin the church receives and experiences its life by faith in the living Lord. The resurrection life of the future proleptically enters the present through the Holy Spirit. The promised kingdom to come is experienced immediately as “future hope and present possession in foretaste.” In justification the longed-for day has “actually dawned” (1948d: 92,94). The life of the future kingdom has been made a reality for sinful people in the present.

Newbigin affirms C.H. Dodd's concept of *realized eschatology*—the idea that history has reached its fulfillment in Christ's death and resurrection, both of which have absolute significance for the final goal God has set for history. He also holds to a strong belief in a futurist eschatology.¹¹⁴ As it was with the first Christians, Newbigin “looks forward as well as back.” The kingdom is inaugurated, but it has not come in fullness. He believes that Christ is actually coming back to earth, that there will be a new heaven and the new earth, the resurrection of the dead and that it will all culminate with the final

¹¹⁴ Dodd believed that St. Paul and the first Christians expected Christ to return immediately, but this hope was eventually replaced by “Christ-mysticism,” the rich spiritual experience of present union with Christ (cf. Dodd 1951:44, 63-65; Ridderbos 1973: 40-41).

judgment bringing God's wise justice and order to the entire creation. The second coming, the resurrection and the final judgment "are the cardinal ideas of the New Testament eschatology" (Newbigin 2003b: 28-30).

"The eschatological in Christian experience is the shadow of the eschaton cast backwards across time" (2003b: 34). This prolepsis is only possible because of the cross. In justification a person is restored to relationship with God. He or she receives a new standing before God, not as a possession, but in loving dependence upon Christ the redeemer. In him they are holy even though they are still sinners. This message of the cross is not only true for the individual but also for the church. Justification is the "true secret of the life of the church" (1948d: 82), the place where God's grace "takes hold of those who were no people and makes them His people, takes the prodigal and makes him a beloved son, takes the sinful man and the sinful body of men and makes them verily members incorporate in the Body of Christ for no worthiness of theirs but for His own infinite mercy" (1960t: xxxiv). The church is holy in that it belongs to the Lord but it is also sinful. Its holiness and status as God's people is not a possession that is "in the bag" but "ever and only in living relation with the Lord." It is less like a fortune in the bank and more like "the love and trust given by wife or husband" (1964h: 14-15). The church exists in dynamic relationship with the Lord, defined more by what it is becoming than what it has been (1960t: xxxiv).

While the unity of the church is historical it is primarily eschatological. By grounding the being of the church in the historic succession Anglo-Catholics were subordinating the eschatological to the historical. Ironically, that emphasis on historic succession in effect undermines the centrality of the events of salvation history—Christ's

death, resurrection, and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Willem Visser 't Hooft, the first general secretary of the WCC, made the criticism in 1933 that the “conception of Incarnation” had become so central in Anglo-Catholic teaching that it was “emphasized at the expense of its counterpart: the doctrine of the Cross” (Visser 't Hooft 1933: 166). Newbigin is the first to develop this notion in-depth. In his critique of Congar he demonstrates *how* the idea that the church is “an extension of the incarnation” undermines the doctrine of the cross.

Newbigin proposes that the only fruitful ground for church union is in the context of the eschatological mystery of justification. The message of the cross to the church is the same as the message to an individual. A verse he quotes several times to explain this is Romans 4:17. The context is the story of Abram, who though “ungodly” when called into relationship with God was nonetheless personally forgiven and “justified.” God “justifies the ungodly”¹¹⁵ and “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”¹¹⁶ God is the source of new life for Abram, but not just for Abraham—God is the source of new life for the family God promises him. The two realities are intimately connected. Abram believes the promise that he will have a family as numerous as the stars in the heavens and belief in this promise is credited to him as righteousness.¹¹⁷ “Hoping against hope”¹¹⁸ he believes he will become the “ancestor to a multitude of nations” and he receives the new name *Abraham*—father of many nations.

¹¹⁵ Romans 4:5 NRSV.

¹¹⁶ Romans 4:17 NRSV.

¹¹⁷ Genesis 15:5-6.

¹¹⁸ Romans 4:18 NRSV.

In a Christian reading of the ancient texts of Genesis this makes Abraham “the Father of us all”¹¹⁹ and St. Paul takes hope for the church that just as God brought the family of Abraham into existence with the creation of Israel so the heirs of that promise, the gathered church of Jesus Christ, will likewise be drawn from the nations into one family by the God “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

It is significant that Newbigin goes beyond standard Reformation readings of Romans 4 to see that these verses speak about more than just individual justification and forgiveness of sins through the cross. While this is implied in the texts their explicit purpose is to set the gospel promise in an ecclesial context.¹²⁰ The Bible is first and foremost the “story of the people of God” (1948d : 27).

It is these evangelical convictions about the cross that give shape to Newbigin’s ecumenism. It is the saving event of the cross that alone offers a basis for reunion among the churches. It enables one to accept a brother or sister in Christ with an understanding that they too are holy and sinful and that the church in its corporate expression is also holy and sinful. Individual and communal identity is found in the cross and the eschatological reality of grace offered to sinners by faith. This new community is a creation of God’s word and spirit, a fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham for one family through whom the world would be blessed. Its existence is not brought about by human effort or guaranteed by historical continuity with the apostles, but created and ever sustained by God’s grace alone.

¹¹⁹ Romans 4:16 NRSV.

¹²⁰ (cf. Wright 2009: 216-224)

The Anglican Communion had an important role to play in facilitating this gospel-centered reunion, for among the Protestant churches it had the unique privilege of having preserved the historic episcopate. At the dawn of the ecumenical movement it had taken steps to invite separated Protestant churches to “take episcopacy into their systems”¹²¹ and reunite. If Lambeth 1948 had truly celebrated the South Indian scheme of union “the whole worldwide movement of unity among Churches would have gone forward”:

The Anglican community would have fulfilled its true ecumenical vocation to provide a centre around which reformed Christendom can be brought together in unity and in continuity with the historic ministry of the universal Church. That opportunity was lost, and it is not likely to come again (Newbiggin 1948d: 108).

For Newbiggin the only hope for the ecumenical movement is found in mutual recognition of one another under the cross as fellow Christians. *The Reunion of the Church* attempts to demonstrate that ecumenical disaster awaits the church if the polity of Cyprian prevails, which Newbiggin later describes as “making the bishop the king-pin upon whom the whole being of the church depends” (Newbiggin 1983d: 11). Against Cyprian Newbiggin identifies with Ignatius: “where Christ is, there is the Catholic church” (1983d:13).

¹²¹ A phrase coined by Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his University sermon delivered in Cambridge in 1946 entitled “A Step Forward in Church Relations” (Fisher 1950: 11).

4.4.3. *A Missional Ecclesiology*

A third characteristic of his ecclesiology is that it is missional. Mission becomes a major theme in Newbigin's writings of the 1980s and 1990s, but the kernel of this post-Christendom missional ecclesiology is already present in his writings in the 1940s. The seed was originally planted by Hendrik Kraemer and the Tambaram Conference of 1938 that declared, "the church exists to fulfill a divinely ordained mission" (Hogg 1952: 298). In his paper prepared for the first WCC assembly in Amsterdam Newbigin proclaims that his primary purpose in writing is to declare that it is the "duty...given to the *Church* to preach the Gospel" (1948b: 20). The WCC paper marks the first time that Newbigin quotes Emil Brunner's famous dictum that "the Church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning."¹²² He presents the mission of the church, from the preaching of Jesus up to the present as a "burning of a fire which, from the moment of its kindling, possessed the quality of fire—namely, that it burns" (1948b: 21). In a time when the concerns of Christendom uniformly occupied the attention of Western churches and theologians, Newbigin could declare that mission is essential for the life of the church: "It is the Church which must be the 'mission.' It is upon the *Church* that the authority and duty is laid to preach the Gospel" (1948b: 33).

The Reunion of the Church is a theological defense of the scheme, but at the beginning of the book Newbigin also describes the scheme as a "plan of action" that has been given to the church in its commission. That commission is found in Jesus' words to

¹²² (Brunner 1931: 108).

his disciples: “As the Father hath sent me, so send I you.”¹²³ It is this commission that “gives [the church] its existence” (1948b: 22) and is “the very heart of [the church’s] being” (1953e:124). It is “none other than the carrying on of the mission of Christ Himself” (1958b: 17).

¹²³ John 17:21 ERV.

5. AN OUTWARD, VISIBLE AND UNITED SOCIETY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter surveys Newbigin's thought on visible reunion during the years that followed the formation of the CSI. The chapter title is taken from the Lambeth *Appeal* of 1920. Towards the end of his life Newbigin confessed himself to be essentially unchanged in his commitment to visible reunion in the church:

Nothing can remove from the Gospel the absolute imperative of unity. I am sure that, for so long as I have breath, I must continue to confess my belief that God intends his Church to be—in the words of the Lambeth Appeal—"an outward, visible and united society", and that the unity he wills requires (in the words of the Assembly) that "all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship" and at the same time are "united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages." And I am sure that, while obedience to this vision calls for immense patience, it does not permit any slackening of prayer and effort (Newbigin 1993k: 240)

This chapter covers the period immediately following the formation of the CSI in 1947 until the end of Newbigin's life in 1998. By tracing the developing contours of his reunion ecclesiology during these years it will be shown that throughout his life he remained essentially an evangelical ecumenical with an ecclesiology that was Reformed, eschatological, and missional. While he continued to affirm the Christocentric missiology of Hendrik Kraemer and the Tambaram conference of 1938, in the 1950s he embraced the theology of the *missio Dei* and his ecclesiology began to take a more fully Trinitarian shape. This only intensified his commitment to visible organic unity. Until the end of his life he believed that that the church was called to be a sign, instrument and

foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. If all things would someday be united to Christ, then the only way for the church to be a sign of that future unity would be through visible unity in the present. He never wavered in his belief in the vision he articulated for WCC New Delhi Assembly of 1961: the churches are called to move towards visible reunion, all in each place. In his later years he came to the conviction that the future of ecumenism lay with the full participation of evangelicals, Pentecostals and other Christian groups that have historically been outside the movement.

5.2. SHAPING A MISSIONARY UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH (1948-1959)

The Derby report at Lambeth 1948 asked the CSI to make numerous changes to the scheme.¹²⁴ Newbigin viewed these requests as attempts to squeeze the CSI “into a strictly Anglican mould.” Every bishop at Lambeth 1948 had a copy of *The Reunion of the Church* but “no attempt was ever made...to come to grips with the argument”:

There was simply a steady insistence that the CSI must conform to the Anglican model. The replies which we prepared covered thirty four printed pages and were widely distributed. There was no formal response. Gradually the pressure ceased. The CSI was allowed to be itself. And, as I have said, I do not think that many South India Christians lost much sleep over the anxieties of the Church of England (1993k: 121).

Newbigin was not discouraged about the future of the CSI. During the first few years after the reunion and the first assembly of the WCC Newbigin was filled with

¹²⁴ The concerns touched on six points: first, strengthening the statement of faith to “place adherence of the CSI to the historic faith of the Catholic church beyond question”; second, the statement on sacraments was considered too ambiguous regarding lay-celebration; third, the rite of confirmation needed to be made a rule for the church; fourth, the position of bishop needed to be better safeguarded in the rules of procedure; fifth, the CSI needed to reconsider its future relationship to churches “not episcopally ordered”; and sixth, clarification was requested as to whether or not non-episcopally ordained ministers would exercise ministry after the thirty-year interim period (*Lambeth 1948*: 2.44).

ecumenical optimism. The CSI was more than a successful reunion experiment. It was the beginning of the true shape of the ecumenical movement:

The whole basis of our scheme of union is an act of faith that this can be a beginning of growing together of Churches throughout the world. If, and only if, under God, this leads to a growing together of Churches throughout the world will it be possible for issues at the end of the thirty years to be faced with any hope of a logical solution. It is on our hearts and consciences that if the union in South India produces only a happy united body in South India and leaves relations of other Churches untouched it will have failed (Newbigin 1952c: 10).

Newbigin spent a great deal of his time as bishop easing tensions between the newly partnered churches in the union, putting new ministry structures into place, overseeing relief work, and traveling around to the villages of his diocese sometimes preaching and conducting confirmations in as many as five different locations in a single day (1993k: 119). He recounted his experiences in the first years of the CSI and the process of growing into union in *A South India Diary* (1951a).

Newbigin was present at the inaugural assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948. Alongside such ecumenical luminaries as Hendrik Kraemer, Stephen Neill and Emil Brunner he was asked to prepare a study paper for the assembly. The purpose of the essay, he wrote, was “to emphasize the connection between the duty of evangelism and the duty of reunion” and to “assert that the clue to all God’s dealings with His human family “ are to be “found in the church” (Newbigin 1948b: 30-31).

In 1950 Newbigin was asked join the central committee of the WCC and to chair the theological committee charged with preparing the theme for the next assembly in Evanston, Illinois in 1954, “Christ, the Hope of the World.” The “Committee of 25” included theological luminaries such as Karl Barth, Reinhold Neibuhr, John Baillie, Emil Brunner, and George Florovsky. Newbigin drafted the report of the committee “The

Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity” which provided the key ideas for the world consultation on world mission in Willingen Germany in 1952 (1993k: 123-126).

A shift was taking place in Protestant missionary thinking regarding the relationship between mission and church. The missiologist David Bosch describes it as a shift from “church-centered mission” to “mission-centered church” (Bosch 1991b: 370). After the formation of the WCC in 1948 many ecumenical leaders were beginning to question the parallel existence of a separate missionary council (IMC). Why should church and mission be separated? Willingen 1952 began the process of exploring a new theological model to address the incongruity. It no longer seemed appropriate to subordinate mission to the church or the church to mission. Both church and mission should be taken up into the mission of God, the *missio Dei*.¹²⁵ In this paradigm “the church changes from being the sender to being the one sent” (1991b: 370). The Willingen conference statement “The Missionary Calling of the Church,” which was written by Newbigin, grounds the church’s missionary calling in the *missio Dei* and the doctrine of the Trinity (1993k: 130):

The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God (cited in Goodall 1952: 188).

In 1958 Newbigin became general secretary of the IMC with the understanding that the goal was to integrate the council into the WCC, eventually making him director of the WCC Division of World Mission and Evangelism. He was reluctant to become an

¹²⁵ The concept of *missio Dei* emerges clearly for the first time at Willingen. Karl Barth is one of the first theologians to define mission as God’s activity and his influence was crucial for the new paradigm that came out of Willingen (Wright 2006: 49-69; Bosch 1991b: 389-393).

“ecumenical office-wallah” but was persuaded by Bishop Michael Hollis that this was “a clear call from God.” The CSI seconded him for a period of five years beginning July 1959 “as a bishop of the Church of South India without diocesan charge, released for service with the International Missionary Council.” The family was already spending their furlough in Bromley, South London so Newbigin simply took up the new post and remained in the city (1993k: 147-149). The two most significant ecclesiological writings from this period are *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (1953e) and *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (1958b).

5.3. THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD (1953)

5.3.1. Introduction

The inspiration for *The Household of God* came five years before its publication in a chance encounter between Newbigin and the Anglican theologian, Alan Richardson, on a train. Richardson suggested that the implicit ecclesiology of *The Reunion of the Church* should be lifted from its South Indian context and given a more systematic treatment. An invitation to deliver the Kerr Lectures at Trinity College, Glasgow gave him the opportunity to do so. When Newbigin delivered the lectures he felt that they “fell flat” and even the professor who was his host told him that he “could not make out” what Newbigin was trying to say. But the publication of the book met with great success eventually being published in French, German, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. One of the *periti* at Vatican II reported that it had been influential in the writing of one of the

principal documents of the council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) (1993k: 128-129).

The lectures focus on “the nature of the church.” In order to understand the context in which to discuss the theological issues Newbigin explains three contextual factors that have been at work to foster deeper reflection within the churches on their purpose and mission: the “breakdown of Christendom” (1953e:11-14), “the experience of Christian missions” (1953e:14-18), and “the ecumenical movement” (1953e: 18-24).

The first factor is an acknowledgment that the centuries old “synthesis between the Gospel and culture” in the West is dissipating. This breakdown is “forcing questions” as to the nature of the church, especially in light of its scandalous divisions:

Is there in truth a family of God on earth to which I can belong, a place where all men can truly be at home? If so, where is it to be found, what are its marks, and how is it related to, and distinguished from, the known communities of family, nation and culture? What are its boundaries, its structure, its terms of membership? And how comes it that those who claim to be the spokesmen of that one holy fellowship are themselves at war with one another as to the fundamentals of its nature, and unable to agree to live together in unity and concord? (1953e:14).

The second factor comes from the missionary experience of the younger churches outside the bounds of the old Christendom. Converts in Hindu and Muslim countries make a total break with their indigenous culture and look to the church community for “the total environment” of their lives. In this context Christian disunity is “an intolerable anomaly:”

At the centre of the whole missionary enterprise stands Christ’s abiding promise, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself,” and its goal is “to sum up all things in Christ.” When the Church faces out towards the world it knows that it only exists as the first-fruits and the instrument of that reconciling work of Christ, and that division within its own life is a violent contradiction of its own fundamental nature. His reconciling work is one, and we cannot be his

ambassadors reconciling the world to God, if we have not ourselves been willing to be reconciled to one another. It is the result of this deep connection at the heart of the Gospel itself that a Church which—within Christendom—had accepted their disunity as a matter of course, found that when they were placed in a missionary situation their disunity was an intolerable scandal. Out of this new missionary experience arose those forces by which the Churches were drawn from isolation into comity, from comity into cooperation, and – in some areas at least – from co-operation into organic union (1953e: 17-18).

The third factor prompting deeper reflection among the churches was the fact of the ecumenical movement itself. The WCC member churches had committed to “covenanting together” though they had not agreed upon the ultimate form their unity should take. The central committee issued the “Toronto Statement” in 1950 to reassure churches that membership did not commit them to any “particular view as to the visible form of the church’s unity.”¹²⁶ The WCC was giving “institutional embodiment to the conviction that the Church ought to be one, while remaining neutral as to the proper form of that unity” (1953e: 20). While being neutral “*in intention*” the WCC was not “neutral *in fact*.” The council was itself a form of unity, but if the current form was anything other than “a transitory phase of the journey from disunity to unity,” it was “the *wrong* form.”

I am...abandoning any pretense of speaking from a position of neutrality among the conflicting ecclesiologies with which we have to deal. I cannot so speak, for I believe that the divinely willed form of the Church’s unity is at least this, a visible company in every place of all who confess Jesus as Lord, abiding together in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. Its foci are the word, the sacraments, and the apostolic ministry. Its form is the visible fellowship, not of those whom we choose out to be our friends, but of those whom God has actually given to us as our neighbours. It is therefore simply humanity in every place re-created in Christ. It is the place where *all* men can be made one because all are made nothing, where one new humanity in Christ is being daily

¹²⁶ Newbigin wrote shortly after the Toronto Statement, “I believe that the council must—if it is to serve and not betray the purpose for which it exists—acknowledge more explicitly the possibility that, this side of the End, there shall be one Flock as there is one Shepherd” (Newbigin 1951b: 254).

renewed because the old man in *every* man is being brought to crucifixion through word, baptism and supper. Its unity is universal because it is local and congregational. Believing this, I am bound to believe that all conceptions of reunion in terms of federation are vain. They leave the heart of the problem—which is the daily life of men and women in their neighbourhood – untouched. They demand no death and resurrection as the price of unity. They leave each sect free to enjoy its own particular sort of spirituality, merely tying them all together at the centre in a bond which does not vitally and costingly involve every member in every part of his daily life. They envisage a sort of unity whose foci are not the word and sacraments of the Gospel in the setting of the local congregation but the conference table and the committee room. They do not grapple with the fact, which any serious reading Testament must surely make inescapable, that to speak of a plurality of Churches (in the sense of ‘denominations’), is strictly absurd; that we can only do so in so far as we have ceased to understand by the word ‘Church’ what the New Testament means by it; that our ecclesiologies are, in the Pauline sense, carnal (I Cor. 3: 3-4). The disastrous error of the idea of federation is that it offers us reunion without repentance (1953e: 21-22).

Twelve years later in the preface to the second edition Newbigin expressed that at the time he was writing these lectures he was concerned about the WCC’s ecclesiological neutrality, but he was hopeful that the South India model could be the beginning of a worldwide ecumenical movement toward reunion:

When the lectures were written, the World Council had just issued its famous “Toronto Statement” affirming the ecclesiological neutrality of the Council. I was concerned that this neutrality might, unless it was recognized as a purely provisional neutrality, become the cover for a false form of Christian unity. The Church of South India had recently been inaugurated and—in spite of the pronouncements of the Lambeth Conference of 1948—I believed that what had happened in South India could lead on to a growing movement of organic reunion in which the historic episcopate as preserved in the Anglican Communion could be a visible centre of reintegration (Newbigin 1964i: xi).

In his memoir Newbigin recalls that he felt strongly that the ecumenical movement “was not being undergirded by an adequate doctrine of the Church.”

Everything he had read either defended traditional Catholic or Protestant ecclesiology

against the other. To chart a course through the impasse he introduced the eschatological perspective as a third ecclesiological type that he called the “Pentecostal”:

I started working from the Catholic-Protestant dichotomy as it had been so powerfully explored in the Amsterdam debates. But as I dug into the biblical material I became more and more convinced that this two-fold approach did not reach the heart of the matter, and that these two traditions would only accept each other’s truth if there was brought into the debate a third element—that which lays stress on the immediate experience of divine grace and power. For a long time I hesitated about how to name this third element. Finally I used the name Pentecostal (1993k: 128-129).

Newbigin is straightforward in acknowledging that he is an advocate of the South Indian “standpoint.” The CSI has built-in to its constitution an ecclesiology of a church that is defined more by what it is becoming than what it is. The “idea of development” is built into its constitution. It confesses itself as a church in process, “not yet the Church in the full sense that the word ‘Church’ ought to have.” It is “on the road, and it makes a claim to be on the right road, but it does no pretend to have arrived” (1953e: 25). Its ultimate aim is for “the union in the Universal Church of all who acknowledge the name of Christ, and that the test of all local schemes of union is that they should express locally the principle of the great catholic unity of the Body of Christ” (*Proposed Scheme* 1947: 25). The church is a “community *in via*, on its way to the ends of the earth and to the end of time” (1953e: 31).

Newbigin proposes a vision of the nature of the church that is essentially eschatological and missional. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to share in the spiritual life of the future in the present moment. It is the Spirit who makes the church one by enabling it to share in unified life of the triune God. And the same Spirit commissions the church into the *missio Dei* in the world:

If there is any single constructive feature in these lectures it will simply be the attempt to draw out what is involved in that statement. The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one. Therefore the nature of the Church is never to be finally defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological, and only in that perspective can the deadlock of our present ecumenical debate be resolved. But – and this is of vital importance – it will be a solution in which theory and practice are inseparably related, not one which can be satisfactorily stated in terms of theory alone. There is a way of bringing the eschatological perspective to bear upon our present perplexities which relieves them at no cost to ourselves, which allows us to rest content with them because in the age to come they will disappear. That is a radically false eschatology. The whole meaning of this present age present age between Christ's coming and His coming again is that in it the powers of the age to come are at work now to draw all men into one in Christ. When the Church ceases to be one, or ceases to be missionary, it contradicts its own nature. Yet the Church is not defined by what it is, but by that End to which it moves, the power which now works in the Church, the power of the Holy Spirit who is the earnest of the inheritance still to be revealed. To say that the deadlock in the ecumenical debate will be resolved in a perspective which is missionary and eschatological is not true unless it is understood that that perspective means a new obedience to, and a new possession by, the Holy Spirit. It is a perspective inseparable from action, and that action must be both in the direction of mission and in that of unity, for these are but two aspects of the one work of the Spirit (1953e: 25-26).

This still leaves open the question of how one finds, identifies and becomes a part of this fellowship. Newbigin's method is to propose the questions of first importance and then to offer answers. Christians all agree there is a church on earth, but "Where is that body to be found?" "By what signs or works can a body rightly claim to be the church of God?" Christians know where the church was on the day of Pentecost, but "where is it today"? All agree that the church is constituted by Christ and all that he has done, but "*what is the manner of our ingrafting into Christ?*" This question of incorporation into Christ is "the real question with which we have to deal" (1953e:30).

Newbigin offers three main answers to the “real” question and each reflects an insight of one of the ecclesiological types—Protestant, Catholic, and Pentecostal—and these types are each the subject of the next three chapters of the book. The first answer is that Christians are incorporated into Christ “by hearing and believing the gospel.” This is the wisdom of Protestantism and its emphasis on the centrality of faith and the word of God. The second answer is that Christians are incorporated into Christ by “sacramental incorporation into the life of the historically continuous Church.” This reflects the wisdom of the Catholicism. The third answer is eschatological—Christians are incorporated into Christ “by receiving and abiding in the Holy Spirit.” Newbigin acknowledges that it is difficult to find “a single inclusive name” for this tradition (1953e: 30-31). In chapter four he designates this type of faith and life as “Pentecostal.” The emphasis is that “new life in the Spirit is an actually experienced and received reality, something involving an ontological change in the believer” (1953e: 89).

5.3.2. Three Ecclesiological Types: Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal

5.3.2.1. The Congregation of the Faithful

The church is “the congregation of the faithful.” Starting with Jesus’ invitation to “repent... and believe in the gospel”¹²⁷ Newbigin shows how the summons to faith results in the believing community described in the book of Acts. Revisiting Galatians and Romans, he presents the doctrine of justification by faith along lines similar to his

¹²⁷ Mark 1:15 ERV.

arguments in “The Church and the Gospel” and *The Reunion of the Church* (1953e:32-48). Protestants say that incorporation into Christ comes by hearing and believing the gospel—justification by faith. The reformers developed an “intensely dynamic conception of the Church.” The “living Lord is in very truth present today in His Church through the word and sacraments with power to create, to re-create, to convert, to reconcile, to root up and pull down, to build and to plant.” The weakness of this conception, according to Newbigin, is that it ignores “the continuing life of the church as one fellowship binding the generations together.” The word and sacraments are “creative in relation to the Church” but they do not “create the Church *de novo*, or *ex nihilo*.” Whenever the word is preached and sacraments administered it is always “an event in the life of an actually existing Church or fellowship of some kind” and “cannot be severed from it.” Christ left behind a community entrusted with the task of being his representatives to the world “publicly,” and “on the plane of history.” “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you”¹²⁸ (1953e: 49-52).

Protestantism therefore has a defective ecclesiology. By saying that the church exists only by the preaching of the gospel and setting this up against the importance of the continuing life of the fellowship it lays the groundwork for an “over-intellectualizing” of the proper content of the constitutive word that must be preached:

If we answer the question: “How are we made incorporate in Christ?”, solely in the words “by hearing the believing the Gospel”, and apart from the continuing fellowship through which the Gospel comes to us, we become inevitably involved in an over-intellectualized conception of faith. Doctrinal agreement, which means agreement that can be formulated in written doctrinal statements, comes to be more and more regarded as the one essential basis for Christian unity. And the life of the Church comes to be centred in the teaching and acceptance of correct

¹²⁸ John 20:21 ERV.

doctrine. ...The true character of the union of believers with one another in Christ is disastrously distorted when it is conceived essentially in terms of doctrinal agreement. The effect of such distortion is to break the Christian fellowship into rival parties, each based upon some one-sided doctrinal formulation and eventually into completely separated bodies...I think it behooves us who are the grateful heirs of the Reformation to consider penitently whether the tragic fragmentation of Christendom which followed the Reformation was not in part due to a theological defect at this point (1953e: 53-54).

Martin Luther proclaimed the gospel of justification to a church that in turn excommunicated him. His response was to this was to develop a “false and unbiblical dialectic of outward and inward, visible and invisible.” He failed to apply to his ecclesiology the “dialectic of holy and sinful,” *simul justus et peccator*, and by so doing “helped profoundly to confuse the issue of the Reformation” (1953e: 56). Newbigin repeats this charge in a later chapter and adds “Luther abandoned his deepest insight when he substituted for the true biblical picture of the Church both holy and sinful, a false and unbiblical distinction between the invisible Church and the visible Church” (1953e: 127).

While there are many wonderful passages in the works of Luther and Calvin that describe the church as “mother of us all, sphere of forgiveness, and the home outside of which there is no salvation” it is irresponsible for Protestants to enter the ecumenical conversation as though matters are resolved. There is a distortion of the doctrine of the church that must be acknowledged:

It is necessary to seek penitently and realistically for the source of the tendency to endless fissiparation which has characterized Protestantism in its actual history. How has it come about that the vast majority of Protestant Christians are content to see the Church of Jesus Christ split up into hundreds of separate sects, feel no sense of shame about such a situation, and sometimes even glory in it and claim the support of the New Testament for it? Where is the theological root of the error which can produce such an astounding blinding of the eyes of good Christian men and women? I submit that we are not responsible participants in

the ecumenical conversation if we do not try to answer these questions (1953e: 54).

Protestantism has a weak understanding of the importance of the unity and continuity of the church. By defining the church simply as a community constituted by the event of the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments it has neglected to understand a critical aspect of the nature of the church: “that it is a continuing historical society...constituted and set forth once for all by Jesus Christ” (1953e: 59).

5.3.2.2. The Body of Christ

The second ecclesiological type is of the church as “The Body of Christ.” This ecclesiology focuses precisely on the element that is weak in the first type: incorporation into Christ “primarily and essentially by sacramental incorporation into the life of His Church” (1953e: 60). The biblical basis is found in Christ’s “choosing, training, and sending forth a band of apostles” that function as his representatives (1953e: 61). The phrase “body of Christ” refers both to Christ’s “body of flesh” offered on the cross as well as to the “union of believers with Him in His risen body of which they have been made members” (1953e: 68).

To understand the church as the body of Christ is characteristic of Catholic ecclesiology. But just as Protestantism has a distorted and defective ecclesiology the same must be said for Catholicism. The fundamental problem is its insistence on the unbiblical idea that since the church is the body of Christ it cannot sin:

No honest person can deny that the Church as a visible institution has in the course of its history been guilty of pride, greed, sloth and culpable blindness. Nor can we admit the possibility of easing the difficulty by making a radical distinction between the Church and its members. The ‘individual Christian’ is such only as a member of Christ, and there is no meaning in saying that the body of Christ cannot sin but His members can. Nor, finally, does the New Testament leave us in any doubt that the Church *does* sin. The words, ‘Ye are the body of Christ’ and the words ‘Ye are yet carnal’, were addressed by the same apostle to the same body of men and women. The living Lord of the Church can say to a Church, ‘I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.’ The Lord Himself can remove the candlestick out of its place. When...the Church is identified simply with whatever society has continued in unbroken institutional succession from the time of the apostles, then the flesh, not the Spirit, has been made determinative. There is in truth no ‘extension of the Incarnation’, for His incarnation was in order to make an offering of Himself in the flesh ‘once for all’. The fruit of that offering, of that casting of a corn of wheat into the earth, is the extension of His risen life to all who are made members of His Body in the one Spirit – until He comes again. (1953e: 81-82).

Protestantism allows the “eschatological to push out the historical” (1953e: 50) whereas Catholic doctrine “subordinates the eschatological to the historical” (1953e: 82). It allows for a church that “possesses *in herself* the plenitude of grace,” a purely historical institution that is “the trustee of an absent landlord.” (1953e: 83). Any system that cannot acknowledge God’s grace and blessing in the communions that have no such historic succession is “self condemned” and hypocritical.¹²⁹

What seems to be implied in so-called Catholic definitions of the Church... is that while a Church may in other matters lose what belongs to its essence and yet be accepted by God as a Church, a Church which loses its continuity with the undivided Church forfeits completely its character as part of the Catholic Church;

¹²⁹ It is to be remembered that Newbigin is writing before Vatican II which allowed that separated ecclesial communities “were not without significance in the mystery of salvation” (cited in Wainwright 2000b: 420). The recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* confesses that “one cannot charge with the sin of separation those who at present are born into communities [that resulted from separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers...All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church” (*Catechism* 2002: 818-819).

that though a Church be besotted with corruption, bound to the world in an unholy alliance, rent with faction, filled with false teaching, and utterly without missionary zeal, God's mercy is big enough to cover these defects and they do not therefore destroy its claim to be regarded as part of the Church; but that though a Church be filled with all the fruits of the Holy Spirit, if it lack the apostolic succession it is no part of the Church and all the mercy of God is not enough to make it so (1953e: 85).

The church in the New Testament is “that real, visible, human fellowship in which Christ is alive in His members, and they are growing up into Him” (1953e: 79). Catholicism is right to assert that the unbroken historical continuity of the church is “God's will.” It is mistaken in thinking that conformity to this aspect of God's will “is the condition of our standing in [God's] grace” (1953e: 86).

5.3.2.3. The Community of the Holy Spirit

The third ecclesiological type is that of the church as “The Community of the Holy Spirit.” The Catholic and Protestant streams share a love for the elements of Christian faith that are fixed and permanent. Such an emphasis on orthodox doctrine or “impeccability of succession” can result in a church that is an outer shell with no living kernel within. The Pentecostal stream does not just ask the question “where is the Church?” but more importantly “where is the Holy Spirit recognizably present with power?” (1953e: 87-88). The story of the church told in the book of Acts, and in the epistles of St. Paul and St. John attests to the centrality of the Spirit in the life of the

church. It was the fact of the Holy Spirit's presence that convinced St. Peter that God had granted "gentiles repentance unto life:"¹³⁰

Nothing could be more plain or more unambiguous. The gift of the Spirit was a visible, recognizable, unquestionable sign that God had accepted these Gentiles as His own people, and before the fact the most massive and fundamental theological convictions simply had to give way. The Holy Spirit may be the last article of the Creed but in the New Testament it is the first fact of experience. We are accustomed to discuss the Spirit as a doctrine after we have dealt with creation, incarnation, atonement and so on. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit appears rather as a fact, God's recognizable witness to His own presence, and therefore entitled to right of way before all arguments based on an *a priori* reasoning (1953e: 89).

On the day of Pentecost everything was ready for the church's ministry to begin. Christ's work on the cross was completed and the leadership structure of the new church was in place—nothing was lacking in "faith and order," but still they were told "to wait":

All was complete: and yet nothing was complete until the Spirit of God Himself should be breathed into the new race of men. Only then, empowered by Him, could they go forth to proclaim the message of salvation, and to baptize men in the Name of Christ unto remission of their sins. In very truth it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Church" (1953e: 90).

Newbigin illustrates his point with the example of an oil well. When the oil is discovered it gushes from the ground and often there is a raging fire for several days before it is brought under control. Eventually the oil will be pumped, refined and distributed. It would be nonsensical to want to return to the early blazes as some sort of ideal time in the process. But that first gush did prove something: "that the oil was there; and without this all the pipes and refineries in the world are merely futile." Even so,

¹³⁰ Acts 11:16-18.

without the Holy Spirit “creedal orthodoxy” and “historic succession avails you nothing” (1953e: 92).

Just as is the case with the other types, the Pentecostal ecclesiology suffers from distortions. It has a tendency to elevate religious experience over “Christ’s work in the flesh, the Scriptures, and the sacraments” (1953e: 98). It is prone to elevate “ardour against order” (John MacKay’s phrase) and in so doing give pride of place to individuals with spectacular gifts (1953e: 104). Their congregations have a tendency to “deny any binding obligations towards one another” and split into “mutually irresponsible sects” (1953e: 108). Many of these groups have attacked the ecumenical movement with “propaganda...marked by such a blatant self-righteousness, and such a total negation of all charity, that one is tempted to despair of them altogether.”

But we must not yield to this temptation, for within these same movements we must recognize authentic marks of the Holy Spirit’s presence, and also a witness to truth which the traditional Protestant and Catholic alike need to learn. We must acknowledge that we without them cannot be made perfect. We must therefore assure our brethren of our willingness to learn from them in fellowship of the ecumenical movement, and we must at the same time bear witness to them concerning the things which the Holy Spirit has taught us (1953e: 109).

5.3.3. *The Eschatological Perspective: “The end of the world”*

In the preface to the second edition Newbigin says that his intention in writing these lectures was to show “that an ecumenical theology of the Church would have to be founded on the doctrine of justification.” The church would have to be understood as “a company of pilgrims on the way to the end of the world and the ends of the earth.” “The last two chapters of the book therefore contain its essential point, and they still say what I want to say” (1964i: xi).

The first of the final two chapters is entitled “Christ in You, the Hope of Glory.”¹³¹ Newbigin proceeds to give his most thorough and systematic treatment of what he means by the “eschatological dimension” of ecclesiology. He begins by pointing out the problem with all three of the previously described ecclesial types: each regards its unique perspective to be of the *esse* of the church and cannot admit that what others possess apart from them is of the *esse* (for that would damage their claims to uniquely be the true church). The eschatological perspective is incompatible with this way of thinking about the church and presents an entirely different vision. The church is never defined by what it is at present but only in terms of what it is becoming (1953e:111, 134). Newbigin cites his foundational verse for this idea, Romans 4:17: the church is defined in the terms of the mercy of God “who quickeneth the dead and calleth the things that are not, as though they were.” (1953e:111).

The eschatological perspective derives from the “central mystery” of the Christian faith: “union with Christ in his death and resurrection”:

By His taking of human nature upon Himself and living a human life in the world, Christ has exposed Himself to all the powers of this dark world and they have conspire to destroy Him. But by this deed He has taken upon Himself the whole curse of sin, manifested the righteousness of God, and broken the grip of Satan upon us. Yet this victory must remain hidden, for only so is there room left for the free response of faith, hope, and love. The full revelation of God’s kingdom must mean the obliteration of all that is opposed to it, and God in His mercy withholds that final revelation so that man may repent and believe. Until that day of Christ’s coming in glory, His reign is to be known not by sight but by faith, not in full enjoyment but in foretaste, not in complete manifestation but in signs which point beyond themselves to a greater reality than themselves; and such signs were present in the ministry of the incarnate Lord, and in the ministry of the apostles as it is recorded in the Acts and Epistles (e.g. Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:3; 19:11; Rom. 15:19; II Cor.12:12, etc). The supreme sign on which all else depends is the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb on the first Easter morning.

¹³¹ Colossians 1:27 ERV.

This is the divine event without which the Church could not have been born. Had the tomb not been empty on that morning there would be no Church. But it is at the same time a sign pointing beyond itself, a foretaste, the first fruits of a harvest yet to come (I Cor. 15:20; Acts 26:23; Rom. 8:11) (1953e: 115-116).

The Christian life is lived in paradox: “risen with him” yet “awaiting resurrection”; crying “Abba, Father” yet awaiting “adoption”; being “the bride of Christ” yet awaiting “the marriage feast”; hearing the promise that he is “with us always” yet crying “Come, Lord Jesus.” St. Paul summed it up perfectly in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me” (1953e: 115-117). Life in union with Christ is therefore a paradoxical finding of “life through death,” of “having and not having” and “living yet no longer living.” (1953e: 118-126). The “self which is centred in itself has to be obliterated in order to make room for the self which is centred in Christ” (1953e: 124):

This is true selfhood—a life whose centre is Christ, a life in which the life of the believer and the life of Christ mutually interpenetrate, of which the very essence is a bond, a relationship constituted by His love for me and accepted in my faith in Him issuing in an answering love to Him and to all men...the Scripture teaches us to find there the very heart of the Church’s being. “The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me” (John 17. 22-23). The Church is called to be a union of men with Christ in the love of the Father whereby their separate beings are made one with that perfect mutual interpenetration in love, that perfect community which is the glory of God. The final paradox of the Church’s being is simply the paradox of which all know something who know what love is—the mutual losing of isolated self-hood to find it in the beloved. And, as we have seen, it is only within this understanding of our union with Christ in the mutual interpenetration of love that we can rightly understand what we have called the paradox of the eschatological overlap. It is only because we are in Him and He in us that we taste the powers of the age to come and have the foretaste of eternal life (1953e: 124-125).

Incorporation into Christ therefore has to be understood in terms of “the eschatological tension between faith and hope,” both of which “find their ultimate meaning in love.” (1953e: 131). Newbigin reflects on I Corinthians 13 and the teaching that “faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”¹³² Faith and hope necessarily have a provisional quality. We “see in a glass darkly, but when Christ appears and “sight comes,” faith will be “outdated.” On that day “hope will vanish into sight.” All that will remain and abide is love, which is known now as “supreme foretaste of God’s eternal life...through the Spirit.” Love is the “finally normative term in all thought about the church” for it alone “belongs to the last things which abide after all else is dissolved” (1953e: 129).

The experience of God’s love reveals that these paradoxes—life through death, having and not having, living yet no longer living—are not fundamentally self-contradictions but “the refraction of God’s glory within the world which is passing away.” In a world where “love has become self-love” God’s glory can only be disclosed “in the form of a Cross where the life-giving stream of divine love is poured out in utter self-giving in the waste-land of man’s futile self-seeking.” It is this love that sends the church out into the world “to bear the pain of the paradoxes” as the “condition of life” (1953e: 130-131).

The different ecclesiological types each attempt to identify the *esse* of the church with their own distinctive streams. The result in a profoundly “un-evangelical,” “uncatholic” and unspiritual “sectarianism.” “Every effort to slacken the eschatological

¹³² I Corinthians 13:13 NRSV.

tension by supposing now some sort of true Church within the Church, involves a concealed—and sometimes open—Pharisaism” (1953e: 128). It is a mistake, therefore, to define the *esse* of the church in terms of something that it “has and is.” There are no “minimum visible marks” to identify a true church.

The Church’s life in the flesh is within this total paradox of grace and is itself the clue to it. The Church does not exist by virtue of something which it is in itself. It exists only by the mercy of God “who calleth the things that are not, as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). Every attempt to define it by works ascertainable by simple observation and apart from faith, violates the law of its being. The Church exists, and does not depend for its existence upon our definition of it. It exists wherever God in His sovereign freedom calls it into being by calling His own into the fellowship of His Son. And it exists solely by His mercy...I think that if we refuse fellowship in Christ to any body of men and women who accept Jesus as Lord and show the fruits of His Spirit in their corporate life, we do so at our peril. With what judgment we judge we shall be judged. It behoves us therefore to receive one another as Christ has received us (1953e: 132-133).

Newbigin calls on the churches to “meet one another in penitent acknowledgement” of a “common failure to be what the Church ought to be.” With an assurance born of “the mercy of Christ, who calls the Church to be his own bride” the summons is to move forward with a determination to “cease judging one another for what we are, and to build one another up in faith and hope and love into what He has called us to be” (1953e: 134). Newbigin summarizes his argument succinctly:

...the Church can be rightly understood only in an eschatological perspective. Whenever we seek to define it simply in terms of what it is, we go astray. One might express the truth in a rather violently paradoxical way by saying that the Church is not what it is because it exists by the mercy of God who calls the things that are not as though they were. The Church is not merely a historical reality but also an eschatological one (1953e: 135).

Newbigin never explicitly narrates the theological influences that led to his eschatological ecclesiology of the cross. There are at least two peers writing around the

same time who apply the eschatological perspective to ecclesiology and he references both of them in *The Household of God*. There is William Nichols, whose *Ecumenism and Catholicity* (1952) has a chapter entitled “Unity, Eschatological and Historical.” Newbigin credits Nichols for showing “with great clarity” that the fundamental error of Catholicism is its subordination of the eschatological to the historical (1953e: 82; cf. Nichols 1952: 46-60). There is also an acknowledgment in the preface of his friend “T.M. Torrance of the University of Edinburgh.” This is actually a reference to T.F. Torrance (it is unclear whether it was a typographical error or if Newbigin wrote the incorrect initials for his friend “Tom”), who had taken the “church” chair in ecclesiastical history at the New College, Edinburgh in 1952 (McGrath 1999: 84). Newbigin thanks him for helping him “in the early stages with books and suggestions for reading” though he does not share the contents of the reading list. A sample of Torrance’s own writing on the subject will suffice to show that Torrance also has a rich eschatological ecclesiology centered on “justification in Christ”:

In our debate with the Church of England over questions of order, we are... concerned with the centrality of Christ, and the primacy of Christology—and therefore the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ is in the forefront. It is Justification by Christ alone that makes it so, for He alone is the ground and Head of the Church, and in Him alone is the Church’s unity constituted and its order maintained. But for that very reason Justification by Christ alone disallows any appeal from one Church to another for recognition of its orders, as it also rebukes the self-justification of a Church in calling in question the orders of another Church. Justification by Christ alone means that we renounce the way of the flesh in seeking honor from men, or justification from one another; and therefore Justification by Christ alone means that in any movement for reconciliation between Churches, the question of the recognition of orders cannot have priority without radical betrayal of the Reformation, nay, without radical betrayal of Christ for He is thereby ousted from His place of centrality. It becomes more and more clear that in the ecumenical movement it is the doctrine of Justification by Christ alone that is at stake, and that it can just as easily be sinned against by those who shout loudest that they are upholding the Reformation tradition as by those who make no such boast. He is truest to the Reformation tradition who is

always ready to subject it to the ruthless questioning of the Word of God (Torrance 1960: 242-243).

5.3.4. *The Missional Perspective: The ends of the earth*

The second of the two final chapters is entitled “Unto All the Nations.”¹³³

Newbigin contends that that necessary implication of the eschatological perspective is missionary obedience. The salvation envisioned “embraces the ends of the earth as well as the end of the age.” Newbigin looks to Acts 1:6-8 as a biblical basis for this assertion:

⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question is “a warning, a promise and a commission followed by the withdrawal of Christ’s visible presence and the promise of His return.” The warning is that God’s kingdom is entirely in God’s hands. The timing and manner of its victory belong to God alone. The promised gift of the Spirit is the sure sign that the victory is coming, a “sharing in Him” of a “foretaste of the powers of the age to come.” The Spirit is the sign, foretaste and “means” by which the Church “is enabled to lead the present age to its consummation, by bringing all the nations under obedience of the Gospel”:

¹³³ Matthew 24:14 ERV.

...the meaning and purpose of this present time, between Christ's coming and His coming again, is that in it the Church is to prosecute its apostolic mission of witness to the world. "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The answer to their questions about the times and seasons, about the limits of this world's history, is a commission. What has been done for the whole world must be made known to the whole world, so that the whole world may be brought under obedience to the Gospel, and may be healed in the salvation which God has wrought for it. It is for this that the end is held back. The end has been revealed once for all; it must now be made known to all that all may believe. The decisive victory has been won over the world; the remaining centres of enemy resistance must now be destroyed. That is the meaning of the time still given to us. It is the time for bringing all men and all nations to the obedience of faith. It is for no other purpose that the end is delayed (1953e: 138-139).

Visible unity is essential if the church is to reflect its eschatological nature. A salvation that is "corporate and cosmic" must be communicated "in and by a community which embodies—if only in foretaste—the restored harmony of which it speaks." "A gospel of reconciliation can only be communicated by a reconciled fellowship" (1953e:141). It is equally true that visible unity is essential if the church is to fulfill its commission. The mission of reconciling humanity to God through Christ is only possible in as much as the church itself is "living in Christ, a reconciled fellowship in Him, bound together in the love of the Father" (1953e: 148).

Newbigin quotes Brunner: "the Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning."¹³⁴ The being of the church is "the magnetic field between Christ and the world," "its *koinonia* in Him is a participation in His apostolate to the world." This is a determinative factor in any serious doctrine of the church. It is never heard in *esse* and *bene esse* discussions between Protestants and Catholics but if true the implications are

¹³⁴ (Brunner 1931: 108).

dramatic. The church is only true to its essential nature “when it takes this fact seriously and treats the world wide mission” as something that “belongs to its existence as a corporate body”:

It is impossible to reconcile with the New Testament the view which seems to be more or less accepted among the majority of Churchmen, that while missionary work is an admirable thing to do, within reasonable limits, it is not something without which the Church simply falls to the ground. We must say bluntly that when the Church ceases to be a mission, then she ceases to have any right to the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament. Apart from actual engagement in the task of being Christ’s ambassador to the world, the name “priests and kings unto God” is but a usurped title (1953e: 143).

Visible unity is essential for the world to believe, the sign and instrument of salvation. Disunity is “a direct and public contradiction of the Gospel.” The world will not believe the message of reconciliation unless it sees that it has actual power to bring about actual reconciliation among people (1953e: 150-151). The twin tasks of unity and mission need must therefore be “prosecuted together and in indissoluble relation with one another.” Newbigin concludes the book by summing up the task of the ecumenical movement:

Our task is, firstly, to call upon the whole Church to a new acceptance of the missionary obligation to bring the whole world to obedience to Christ; secondly, to do everything in our power to extend the area of co-operation between all Christians in the fulfilment of that task, by seeking to draw into the fellowship of the ecumenical movement those who at present stand outside of it to the right and to the left; and thirdly, to press forward unwearyingly with the task of reunion in every place, until all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus are visibly united in one fellowship, the sign and the instrument of God’s purpose to sum up all things in Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all the glory (1953e: 152).

5.4. “ONE BODY, ONE GOSPEL, ONE WORLD: THE CHRISTIAN MISSION TODAY” (1958)

5.4.1. *Introduction*

In *The Household of God* Newbigin articulates a radically missional and eschatological ecclesiology—the church exists for mission and it can only be faithful and effective if it is visibly united. Other works during this period resonate with these themes.

In 1954 while attending the second assembly of the WCC in Evanston he delivered the Thomas Memorial Lecture at the University of Chicago with the title “The Quest for Unity Through Religion.” Contrasting Hindu and Christian proposals for the unity of humankind, Newbigin focuses on the task of the ecumenical movement. The unity that Christians offer to the world is the “unity created by Christ in his atoning death,” which means “unity not only for churches but for the world in him.” The “great task” before the church is to proclaim the “finished work of Christ on the cross” for “here and here alone, at the place where all men are made nothing, is the place where all men may be made one” (Newbigin 1955: 33).

That same year he authored a theological training resource for village teachers. Written and published in Tamil it was later published in English with the title *Sin and Salvation* (1956). Newbigin observes in his memoir that his thinking on the ecclesiology of mission had changed significantly in the twenty years prior to writing. Earlier he had ascribed a minor role to the church in his answer to the question “how does salvation

become ours?” In his early years he answered the question first by discussing faith, then the Holy Spirit and the church last. By 1954 he found that he had “to begin with the church” for this is the first contact the unbeliever has with the message of Christ. He credited his missionary experience with the change from a “Christendom context” to “logical place” of the mission-centered church (1993k: 137-138).

The emerging mission-centered ecclesiology after Willingen lacked coherent articulation. Newbigin synthesized and clarified the primary developments in *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (1958). The book originated out of a talk Newbigin gave to IMC officers in Montreal then developed as a discussion paper for a three-day consultation in Oxford between IMC staff and consultants.

Newbigin brought the group together as part of his charge to lay the groundwork for the integration of the IMC and the WCC. The question he sought to answer was “how [can] the fundamental Gospel calling to mission be restated in terms which [are] free from the stench of colonialism?” (Newbigin 1958b: 8; 1993k: 155).

5.4.2. *Seven Principles of Action*

Newbigin begins by stating the “unchanging basis” of mission found in the New Testament. The church’s mission is fundamentally “the carrying on of the mission of Christ himself ...through the Holy Spirit” (1958b: 17-18).¹³⁵ Out of the “new creation of a common life” (*koinonia*) authentic service and witness emerge. The “fellowship created by the Holy Spirit is both local and universal” and “concerns the ends of the

¹³⁵ Newbigin cites Luke 4:18-19, John 20:21 and Acts 1:8.

earth” with “the end of the world in view” (1958b: 24). He offers seven principles for missionary policy that flow out of these theological convictions.

First, “the Church is the Mission.” There is no biblical basis for a separation of church and mission. When such a division is maintained the church becomes introverted and self-focused and loses interest in the kingdom of God. Church and mission belong “indissolubly together” for mission “belongs to the essence of the church.” One cannot have fellowship with Christ without being committed to partnership in Christ’s mission to the world (1958b: 25-27).

Second, “the Home Base is Everywhere.” The church’s mission is to “the ends of the earth.” In the post-Christendom era “Boston is as much the ends of the earth as Tokyo.” There is a missionary opportunity on “every person’s doorstep.” The church is always in a “colonial situation” as St. Paul told the Philippians, but the current problem is that the church has appeared more as “a colony of some white race” rather than as a “colony of heaven.” The church should embody “true foreign-ness” of the gospel deliberately crossing national and cultural boundaries. The goal is not to abolish “foreign missions” but rather to universalize them (1958b: 29-31).

Third, “Mission in Partnership.” The “younger churches” are not simply places where Western missionaries send their converts. St. Paul treated his “young churches” as adults empowered by the Holy Spirit with their own “standing and responsibility before God” for the mission. This “spiritual equality” does not mean that there are gifts that each have to share with the other. What is needed is a genuine partnership in the missionary task (1958b: 31-38).

Fourth, “Mission and Inter-Church Aid.” The proposed integration of the IMC and the WCC raised multiple issues that needed clarification. Newbigin feared that the North American mission boards were more interested in “modern Western technology as a tool for development” than in “the gospel as the power of God for salvation.” His fear was that mission would be “absorbed into inter-church aid” (1993k: 158). The missionary past was regarded by many in the ecumenical community as nothing more than “a religious aspect of colonialism.” The IMC was being encouraged to put its resources behind new development initiatives in post-colonial countries. Newbigin was supportive of development aid but was deeply concerned by what he perceived as an antipathy towards evangelism and church planting (1993k: 160). He advocates a cooperative strategy. Inter-Church aid defines its task as the “strengthening and renewal of all church life in all continents and a ministry to human need throughout the world.” There should be a missionary focus in everything, whether word or deed. “All the Church’s deeds of love have...a part in the Church’s mission...But such deeds will be properly regarded as missionary...when they are explicitly and fully part of an action of the Church going out to those who do not know Christ as Lord with the intention of bringing them to faith in Him” (1958b: 38-44).

Fifth, “The Role of the Missionary.” Newbigin proposes the novel idea of a “ecumenical missionary order of men and women committed to life service as missionaries.” He sees this a natural result of the emerging paradigm of mission as “the mission of the whole Church” (1958b: 44-49).

Sixth, he deals with issues of “Co-operation in Mission” and specifically that Western and “younger” churches 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: 49-53).

Seventh, “Cooperation is Not Enough.” Here Newbigin applies his ecclesiology of visible reunion to the challenges of mission.

The unity that Christ wills for us is something more than co-operation. It is a unity of being—the new being of the new man in Christ. It is the unity which is described in St. John’s gospel as abiding in Christ. It is the unity which comes from entering into the perfect at-one-ment which He has wrought for us on the Cross. Our divisions are a public contradiction of that atonement (1958b: 54).

Co-operating partners must face the question: “Mission for what?” The mission is to invite all people into “the Father’s house.” The church’s divisions require that matters of faith and order be addressed in such a way that people can “hear the authentic voice of the good Shepherd, undistorted by... racial and national and denominational egotisms” (1958b: 55).

Newbigin concludes the book with his personal hopes for the future:

For myself, I do not believe that we can be content with anything less than a form of unity which enables all who confess Christ as Lord to be recognizably one family in each place and in all places, united in the visible bonds of word, sacrament, ministry and congregational fellowship, and in the invisible bond which the Spirit Himself creates through these means, one family offering to all men everywhere the secret of reconciliation with God the Father. I believe that missionary obedience in our day requires of us that we should treat the issue of such visible churchly unity as an issue not for to-morrow but for to-day. (1958b: 55-56).

5.5. VISIBLE UNITY AND THE *MISSIO DEI* (1959-1998).

5.5.1. *Introduction*

In 1959 Newbigin began his service as general secretary of the IMC. He traveled extensively for the next two years visiting the Pacific islands and fifteen countries in Africa in 1960, traveling throughout Latin America in 1961, and the islands of the Caribbean in 1962. He oversaw the integration of the IMC and the WCC in 1961 at the New Delhi assembly (1993k: 158-182). With his new position as WCC Director of World Mission and Evangelism he moved to Geneva in 1962, leaving his family behind in South London. During these years he served as editor of the influential *International Review of Missions* working closely with WCC general secretary William Visser t'Hooft. He continued with a heavy travel schedule on behalf of the WCC, not least because his division now had three offices—New York, London, and Geneva (1993k: 183-201).

He returned to India in 1965 with an appointment as Bishop of Madras. His previous experience in Kanchipuram and Madurai had been principally among villages. He now oversaw a metropolitan diocese of a thousand congregations in a city of three million people. He served as Deputy Moderator for the entire CSI during these years and as a delegate to several ecumenical assemblies—at the WCC general assembly in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968, the Commission on Faith and Order at Louvain, Belgium in 1971, and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism at Bangkok in 1973. When he reached the mandatory CSI retirement age of sixty-five in 1974 he declined an optional five-year extension feeling strongly that he should be replaced by an Indian

leader. After a two-month holiday with Helen journeying through Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey the Newbigins returned to England (1993k: 202-225).

Newbigin may have retired from the CSI but he was not retired from ministry. He turned down an invitation from Bishop Laurie Brown to become an assistant bishop in the diocese of Birmingham and instead entered the ministry of the United Reformed Church (URC), feeling that “commitment to unity in the Church of South India required” him to “choose ...the one from which we had come” (1993k: 230). He accepted a position at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham teaching the theology of mission and ecumenics for the next seven years. He remained deeply involved in Faith and Order and in 1975 attended the WCC assembly in Nairobi. In 1978 he was elected Moderator of the URC and three years later, at the age of seventy-two, he was installed as pastor of a tiny, struggling inner-city URC congregation opposite the Winson Green prison, a post he would hold for the next seven years (1993k: 226-237).

Before his retirement in 1974 Newbigin had published seventeen books and over fifty articles, many of which were written while he was traveling to meetings and conferences all over the world. During his “retirement” years he wrote another fifteen books and over one hundred sixty articles, sermons, and smaller pieces (Foust 2001b: 11). During the 1980s his writing began to focus on the secularization of the West. The England he had returned to was “a pagan society” that gathered its values and beliefs “from a television screen.” His pastoral experience in Birmingham was “tougher than anything [he] met in India”—“a cold contempt for the gospel.” The greatest “intellectual and practical task” before the church was the development of a “truly missionary encounter with this tough form of paganism.” For the rest of his life his principal

concern was the promotion of a missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture (1993k: 235-236).

Newbigin continued writing and lecturing during his final decade. In 1988 he returned to India for a WCC sponsored consultation in Tambaram on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1938 world missionary conference. The focus was on inter-faith relations and Newbigin was distressed by the “(so called) pluralist” theology he saw being championed by Harvard theologians Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Diana Eck. Ironically, Newbigin found himself defending the uniqueness of Christ and “fighting the same battle Kraemer had fought” fifty years earlier (1993k: 243).¹³⁶ The next year he was invited to address the WCC conference on world mission and evangelism in San Antonio, Texas and spoke to a crowd that included almost every delegate. In 1996 he attended his final WCC assembly, the world conference on mission and evangelism in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. Though his eyesight was so poor that he could not longer read he nonetheless gave an address in two installments that many who were present remember as the most valuable of the entire conference (Wainwright 2000b: 15). He charged the delegates to mission: “whatever else we do for people—to come to know Jesus, to love Him, to serve Him, to honor Him, to obey Him—*that* is the greatest thing that we can do for anyone and it is the specific thing entrusted to us. It must be the center of our missions” (Newbigin 2003b: 115).

¹³⁶ Essays from the conference were published in the *International Review of Mission* (Eck 1988; Smith 1988). Newbigin responded in depth in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Newbigin 1989k: 155-170).

In the 1990s Newbigin became embroiled in disputes over the theological direction of the URC.¹³⁷ The crisis finally came in 1997 when it seemed that the church was on the verge of endorsing the ordination of homosexuals to the ministry. Newbigin addressed the general assembly, wrote a series of articles and worked closely with a group opposed to the change and even circulated an open letter to all the churches to rally support for what he considered essential biblical teaching touching “the meaning of the human story with, at its centre, the divinely given duality of man and woman, and the total faithfulness of the divine lover to his bride” (Newbigin 1997e: 4; 1997f). He was also concerned that that move would cause ministers and churches to leave the denomination and would be a serious “threat to ecumenical partnerships” (1997a). He agreed with theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, who charged those advocating such change with “promoting schism” and warned that a church which moved in such a direction would “no longer be based on the foundation of Scripture, but, rather, in opposition to its unanimous witness. A church that moves in such a direction would have ceased being an evangelical church following in the steps of the...Reformation.”¹³⁸

Newbigin and his wife moved from Birmingham to London in 1992 in order to be near their four adult children. He became involved in teaching at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), a large evangelical and charismatic Anglican church in Knightsbridge. Seeing

¹³⁷ It began when Moderator Donald Hilton, a noted theological liberal, proposed the question mark [?] as the defining symbol for the church’s future (Wainwright 2000: 329). Newbigin, a former moderator, responded with a critique of what he saw as the logical inconsistencies of theological liberalism in a pamphlet entitled “*A Decent Debate About Doctrine*”: *Faith, Doubt, and Certainty* (Newbigin 1993a).

¹³⁸ Newbigin’s eyesight was very poor at this time and he relied on others to do research for him or to come and read books to him. Newbigin requested this quote and its reference from a URC colleague, Barry Cooke, to be used in advocacy against the proposed change. “The Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/18/3. Letter from Barrie G. Cooke to Lesslie Newbigin dated September 18, 1997. The quote is an English translation from the original German by Karl Braatan (Braaten 1996a: 44; Pannenberg 1994:1).

HTB as “a gushing oil well which simply needed capping” he became a featured teacher in the life of the congregation, relishing the opportunity to shape the lives of hundreds of highly educated and influential urban professionals (Wainwright 2000: 15-16).

Newbiggin spent Christmas of 1997 in the hospital due to an unexpected heart condition. He was looking forward to a long-awaited reunion celebration in Birmingham—a new ecumenical partnership joining Winson Green URC and Bishop Latimer Anglican Church into one worshipping congregation. But his health continued to fail and on January 30, 1998 Lesslie Newbiggin died. He was eighty-eight years old (2000: 16). His friend and Selly Oak colleague Dan Beeby remarked in an obituary that “his brilliance, pastoral care and missionary zeal were all present” to the end, especially “in the two ‘sermons’ he preached in intensive care a few hours before he died” (Beeby 1998a).

Newbiggin was actively engaged in promotion of visible and organic church reunion from the time he arrived in India in 1939 until the end of his life. In 1947 he participated in the most dramatic reunion scheme in the history of the ecumenical movement and in the years following distinguished himself as the ablest apologist for the South Indian vision for unity—a scheme involving visible reunion and an organic approach of growing into union. This vision found expression by the integration of the IMC and the WCC at the New Delhi assembly in 1961 as well as by the famous paragraph drafted by Newbiggin describing “the unity we seek.”

During these years he engaged in several projects that involved what he called “the tedious labor of reconciling structures” even though his efforts met with little success (1993: 239). While serving as Bishop of Madras he participated in the

unsuccessful reunion discussions between the CSI and the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. In 1972 he convened the National Council of Church's committee on Faith and Order and oversaw an all-India study program involving Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Mar Thoma and Protestant churches. While no formal action came out of the study group Newbigin nonetheless believed that the work was fruitful (1993k: 219-220). In connection with Faith and Order he sought to resolve issues that had arisen from the New Delhi statement concerning local and universal aspects of the church's unity (Newbigin 1969e) and the form and structure of visible unity (Newbigin 1973e). He drafted the report on "Conciliarity" for the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order at Louvain in 1971 even though he disapproved of the scheme, fearing that conciliarity would become an alternative to visible union (1993k: 220). In the 1980s he participated in the failed "Council on Covenanting" that attempted to reunite Methodists, Anglicans, Moravians and Reformed churches in England. From that experience he came to believe that the movement for visible unity launched by the Lambeth *Appeal* had come to a "final collapse" (Newbigin 1984c: 1; 1993k: 239). He was "deeply involved in one effort which looked towards full organic reunion"—the Anglican Reformed Theological Commission. Newbigin wrote the commission's report *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1983) but felt that their work failed to make any "significant impact on the ecumenical scene", concluding that "there is a great gulf fixed between these internationally achieved theological agreements, and the willingness of large ecclesiastical bodies, deeply rooted in long traditions, to surrender their distinct identities" (1993k: 243). He welcomed Roman Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement after Vatican II but was disappointed that all that seemed to be accomplished was "informal meetings and co-

operative projects” (1993k: 239). The net effect was that theological discussion among “globally organized denominations” displaced concern for “the issue of local unity” (1993k: 162).

Newbiggin eventually found himself out of step with the direction of the WCC. Uppsala 1968 was the turning point where he saw mission dismissed as “nothing but a desperate struggle to solve insoluble problems.” It was the church that was the problem and there was no longer any “enthusiasm for enlarging the membership for this dubious institution” (1993k: 219). The paradigm shift that began at Uppsala would intensify under the leadership of Newbiggin’s theological and missional polar opposite, Konrad Raiser, who became general secretary of the WCC in 1992. Under his leadership the WCC mission gave way to inter-faith dialogue and visible and organic union was discouraged in favor of conciliarity and “reconciled diversity.” In Newbiggin’s view, the WCC had come to treat unity as “something marginal, unimportant in comparison with the great issues of justice and peace.” The divided churches had settled for being “campaigners for peace” rather than becoming “a sign of peace” (1993k: 240). Of Raiser’s vision and of 1990s “ecumenical talk” Newbiggin had this to say:

What troubles me...is the reluctance to give any serious thought to the continuing mission of the Church to all nations, an effective abandonment of their calling to preach the gospel to people of all races and creeds on the ground that it endangers the human community. If the confession of Jesus as the one Lord and Savior of the world is withheld from the arena of public discourse and reserved for the privacy of the home and the sanctuary, then the only image of God present in the public square will be a Unitarian one, whether the increasingly powerful image of the Allah of the Qur’an, or the shadowy and ineffective God of a Christendom that has lost its nerve (Newbiggin 1997i: 8).

Newbigin criticized the direction of the WCC but remained engaged in the ecumenical movement until the end of his life. An important concern towards the end of his life was that many of the burgeoning churches within global Christianity were largely independent and separate from ecumenical fellowship. He appealed to the WCC to reach out to house church movements, base ecclesial communities and Pentecostals, to the evangelical communities where “the signs of vitality were evident” (Newbigin 1995c: xv) He retained a commitment to evangelistic mission and visible unity of all in each place for the rest of his life.

5.5.2. Churchly Unity

5.5.2.1. All in Each Place

In the 1950s Newbigin served as vice-chairman of the Faith and Order working committee. He stepped down from the position once he became staff secretary of the IMC, but because of discussions the previous year he was invited to return to the meeting that took place in the summer 1959 at Spittal, Austria. He was asked to prepare a paper explaining what he meant by “churchly unity.” The resulting discussion around the issues discussed in the paper led to a committee minute addressed to the central committee of the WCC. The minute reminded the committee of the history of Faith and Order and requested a reaffirmation of commitment to being “a help to the ‘churches’ in realizing [God’s] will for the unity of the Church.” It required the union of “all in each

place who confess Jesus Christ as Lord into a fully committed fellowship with one another.”

It is for such true *churchly* unity that we believe we and all the World Council must pray and work. Such a vision has indeed been the inspiration of the Faith and Order Movement in the past, and we reaffirm that this is still our goal...its achievement involves nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can suffice (cited in 1993k: 161).

The background of the discussion went back to the 1950 Toronto Statement of the central committee of the WCC. The committee made it clear that the WCC was not committed to a particular form of unity. Members were obligated to seek unity but were not obligated to pursue any particular model of unity (Newbiggin 1977j: 14-15).

Newbiggin believed that this “declaration of neutrality” could only be provisional:

The World Council of Churches cannot be permanently uncommitted about the form of unity which God wills for the Church, because it is itself a form of unity. Obviously it is not and does not claim to be more than a transitional form—a campsite on the road towards the real goal. But if those in charge of a campsite do not agree about the road, the campsite becomes a shantytown, and eventually a slum. The question of the nature of the unity we seek is not a timeless question which can be taken up or postponed at our pleasure. There is a time limit after which the options do not remain open. To remain permanently uncommitted about the goal of unity would have meant to accept the present conciliar form of collaboration as the permanent form of Christian unity. And it does not need to be repeated that—by the standard of any reputable ecclesiology—this is the wrong form (Newbiggin 1976a: 289).

Eleven years after the Toronto Statement the third assembly of the WCC meeting in New Delhi adopted a paragraph from the Spittal minute as part of its statement entitled “The Church’s Unity.” Newbiggin’s original wording is preserved with very little change:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel,

breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people (World Council of Churches 1961: 116).

New Delhi affirmed Newbiggin's vision for the ecumenical future. The "unity we seek" must focus "all in each place." This commitment to visible unity goes beyond mere cooperation—it is a "churchly unity" that empowers the church to "speak" and "act" for the "tasks" of the *missio Dei*. The integration of the IMC and the WCC dramatically emphasized the equal ultimacy and interdependence of ecumenism and mission. Speaking to the assembly, Newbiggin pointed out that that it was "an acknowledgement that the missionary task is no less central to the life of the church than the pursuit of renewal and unity" (World Council of Churches 1961: 4). Proceeding from this insight, the assembly went on to amend the "basis" document of the WCC. The council had originally described itself as a "fellowship of churches which *accept* our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior." The word "Accept" was changed to "confess" and the words "and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" were added (Bosch 1993: 460; WCC 1961: 152-159). The "common calling" was to "confess" Jesus Christ to the world. Stephen Neill considered the commitment "a revolutionary moment in Church history" for "more than two hundred Church bodies in all parts of the world...had solemnly declared themselves in the presence of God to be responsible as Churches for the evangelization of the whole world." The event was unprecedented "in the history of the Church since Pentecost" (Neill 1968: 108).

The vision of organic unity “all in each place” had significant influence at the fourth world conference on Faith and Order at Montreal in 1963 that maintained “the proving ground of unity” was “the local church.” The pendulum began to swing in the other direction at Uppsala 1968 where the emphasis was on the universal dimension of unity and the hope that the “members of the WCC, committed to each other, should work for a time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians.” The increased presence of the Orthodox churches in the life of the WCC gave a higher emphasis to the role of ecumenical councils in the history of the church. Most significantly, the “massive presence” of the Roman Catholic Church from the 1960s onward shifted the emphasis from local unity schemes to “bilateral dialogues between world confessions”(Newbigin 1991q: 1044). The impact of Vatican II was “to relegate the issue of local unity to the margin and bring back into the centre of the stage the development of theological discussion among globally organized denominations” (1993k: 162).

The emphasis on a universal ecumenical council reinforced the desires of those who advocated a *conciliar* model of unity—a communion of churches united by the fact that they take counsel together. There was a tension in the ecumenical movement throughout the 1970s over whether conciliarity was an alternative to organic union or an important aspect of it. The Faith and Order commission meeting at Louvain in 1971 defined conciliarity as “the coming together of Christians—locally, regionally or globally—for common prayer, counsel and decision, in the belief that the Holy Spirit can use such meetings for his own purpose by reconciling, renewing and reforming the

church by guiding it towards the fullness of truth and love.”¹³⁹ The Faith and Order consultation in Salamanca, Spain in 1973 interpreted conciliarity in such a way that it could not be treated as an alternative to organic union. Conciliar fellowship consists of local churches that are themselves truly united:

The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit (cited in Newbigin 1977j: 14).

At Nairobi the WCC defined as one of its primary functions the task of calling the churches “to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship” and affirmed the vision of Louvain and Salamanca of “a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united” (World Council of Churches 1976: 60). Newbigin experienced the tensions but was encouraged by the promise of the assembly’s trajectory towards “committed conciliarity”:

Over and over again [conciliarity] has been denounced, or welcomed, because it was thought to be a way of describing the goal which would be less costly than full organic union. Those who see it this way and who therefore embrace or reject it, have in view the kind of *uncommitted* conciliarity which is (alas) exemplified in many of our local and national councils of churches, and in the WCC itself. All who have been through the experience of moving from the present type of conciliarity in—for example—a national council of churches into full organic union understand very well the difference. There is a profound contrast between the character, the spirituality of a meeting from which we can go knowing that we are not absolutely bound by its decisions, and the feel of a meeting where we know that the decision will bind us all right down to every local congregation. Total commitment is costly—and is worth the price; uncommitted conciliarity is cheap. I hope and believe that by the time the discussions at Nairobi were over everyone understood that we were talking about a committed, a costly

¹³⁹ From “Conciliarity and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement, Commission on Faith and Order, Louvain 1971,” p. 226 (cited in Lanne 1991: 212).

conciliarity, about a kind of conciliar fellowship which assumes full organic unity and describes something of its character. (Newbigin 1976b: 156-157).

5.5.2.2. Committed Conciliarity: A Local Church Truly United

The WCC's acceptance of the formulation "one church envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of churches which are themselves truly united" led to the logical question, "what is a "local church...truly united"?" (Newbigin 1991q: 1045). In 1976 Newbigin sought to answer in a paper prepared for Faith and Order and the WCC working group on renewal and congregational life (Wainwright 2000: 117). Newbigin addresses three questions in the paper: What is a local church? What does it mean to say that such a church is truly united? What is conveyed by the adjective *conciliar*?

What is a local church? Newbigin understands the adjective "local" as referring to "place," not in a simple geographic sense but in the teleological sense of "its place in the fabric of human society." The church is "*for that place*":

The Church is wrongly described unless it is described as the Church *for that place*, and the meaning of the preposition "for" is determined Christologically; that is to say, it is determined by what Jesus Christ has done, is doing and will do with and for the world as its author, redeemer and consummator. The Church in each place is the Church for that place, in the sense in which Christ is for mankind and for the world. Jesus as Christ is not understood unless He is understood as the Word by whom all things came to be, for whom they are, and in whom they are to be consummated, and as the Last Adam in whom alone mankind's destiny lies; so also the Church in any place is not rightly understood unless it is understood as sign, first-fruit and instrument of God's purpose in Christ for that place. And in this sentence the word "place" must mean the whole secular reality of the place including its physical, social, cultural and political aspects (Newbigin 1977j: 17).

Newbigin's definition of "local" is thus eschatological. The church in each place is to be a sign "of the true end for which everything in the secular reality of that place

exists.” It is to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s reign “present in Christ for that place”:

...a sign, planted in the midst of the present realities of the place but pointing beyond them to the future which God has promised; an instrument available for God’s use in the doing of his will for that place; foretaste—manifesting and enjoying already in the midst of the messianic tribulations a genuine foretaste of the peace and joy of God’s reign. As often as it gathers to hear God’s word and to share in the eucharistic celebration, the church is renewed as the body of Christ in and for that place (1977j: 17).

What does it mean to say that such a church is truly united? Again, the principle for Newbigin is eschatological. The unity of the church will not be fully manifested until God’s purpose to “sum up all things in Christ” is brought to completion. “The local Church will be a credible sign of that eschatological unity when it is moving towards it, and when it is already embodying a foretaste of it in its own actual life” (1977j: 22). True unity is therefore characterized by *movement* and not by “*stasis*.” The question is not so much whether or not a body of Christians is united within itself as much as “is this body of Christians functioning as a true sign, foretaste and instrument of God’s purpose in Christ to draw *all in that place* into unity in Christ”? (1977j: 24).

Newbigin recognizes that there are still reasons for “separation for the sake of mission.” He cites as an example the white middle-class suburban congregations of the city of Birmingham. It is not reasonable to expect that they will function as sign, instrument and foretaste for the burgeoning immigrant population of the inner city. “There have to be communities where these and others can hear and see in terms of their own culture the words and signs of the Gospel” (1977j: 22-23). A truly united church will recognize these differences as provisional and accord “full mutual recognition by which the distinct congregations accept and welcome one another, recognizing that their

separate meeting represents no mutual estrangement but only the acknowledgment of creaturely distinctions of language and culture.” As well, “full welcome” will be provided for “members of each at the meetings of all.” And the structures of a truly united church will be “explicitly designed to promote unity of those who are provisionally separated” (1977j: 23-24).

Finally, Newbigin addresses the question of the adjective *conciliar*: what does it convey? Again, the answer is defined in eschatological terms, in “terms of that to which the Church looks forward and towards which it strives in its mission.” True conciliarity “seeks to make the universal Church an image of the divine Trinity.” Jesus has given the glory of the Trinity to those who believe in him,¹⁴⁰ but it will not be manifested until his mission of salvation is completed and he was “drawn all people unto himself.”¹⁴¹ True conciliarity designates that “pattern of common life” in which the church learns “with all the saints what is the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ.”¹⁴² It provides for the “imperfect discipleship” of local congregations both the “correction and the support of the wider fellowship”:

Within this conciliar fellowship the legitimate and proper variety which must mark the Christian discipleship of different human communities inhabiting different “places” is at the same time affirmed and controlled by the unity which is given in Christ himself. Thus the wider conciliar fellowship is not a substitute for unity in each place; rather it is the necessary context in which true local unity is to be progressively learned and experienced. In the wider fellowship we receive Christological correction which is necessary for an authentic local unity (1977j:26).

¹⁴⁰ John 17: 22-24.

¹⁴¹ John 12: 32.

¹⁴² Ephesians 3:18.

Where mission requires a separation of congregations, the wider fellowship or regional council should function in a way that recognizes such separation as provisional.

Alternatively, variety in local expressions of church life provides a safeguard against tendencies towards “monolithic imperialism” that “in the name of unity, crushes that blessed variety which God the Father has so lavishly bestowed on his creation”

(1977j:28). At the conclusion of the paper Newbigin lays out his vision for the eschatological unity of the church that exists for all humankind:

What matters is that the Church should everywhere be recognizable as simply the new, the true humanity; as the place where every human being is given the freedom of his own home where he can know and love and obey God as his Father, and Jesus as his Lord in the power of the Spirit who is himself the living presence now of the blessedness to which all are called. In order that the Church may be this, it must be this in each place where human beings are, speaking to everyone in the language of his own humanity; but it cannot be this unless it is also this universally, unless the local fellowship truly embodies in its own life the universal love which is the being of the triune God and into which He would draw all creatures. The diversity-in-unity which is expressed in the word “conciliarity” must be the mark of the Church at every level from the local to the universal. Local unity and universal fellowship cannot be set against each other. Only if the Church at every level is moving towards the unity to which God calls all human kind is it true to its nature (1977j: 29).

5.5.2.3. Uncommitted Conciliarity: Denominationalism

The WCC made numerous statements affirming the vision of New Delhi but the desire among the churches to protect their individual denominational identities was fierce. Conciliar unity was seen by many as an acceptable alternative to the impossible task of organic union. Newbigin cites the example of the Lutheran World Federation

concept of “reconciled diversity” which he viewed simply as participation in ecumenical church meetings with full intention to retain a separate identity (1993k: 221). He gave his most extensive critique of “uncommitted conciliarity”—the reconciled diversity model of unity—in his response to John Macquarrie’s *Christian Unity and Diversity* (1975).

In the review essay, “All in One Place or All of One Sort?” (1976a) Newbigin responds to Macquarrie’s advocacy of “practical ecumenism,” defined as “practical service to the world” as opposed to schemes for organic union that “set up a unitary or uniform Church, either by absorbing one body into another, or by try to work out some sort of hybrid” (Macquarrie 1975: 42). Newbigin is astonished by Macquarrie’s dismissal of the achievements of the ecumenical movement and humorously compares him to an astronaut who has been absent from earth for the last fifty years:

I confess that I have found it a strange experience to read this book. It is as though one were reading the essay of an astronaut who had left the earth about fifty years ago and had been in orbit ever since. The organic union of two or more Churches to form a single body is referred to as an abstract possibility which would produce either a take-over or a hybrid; the reader would never guess that more than sixty of such unions have taken place in the past fifty years and that millions of Christians are living in such united Churches, daily thanking God for the blessing of unity. The model of unity which is offered is the one which was popular among Protestants of the free-church type half a century ago: the peaceful coexistence of separated bodies each representing particular traditions and a particular style of churchmanship. The work of Faith and Order in the past fifty years is completely ignored. Whatever be the causes of this apparent amnesia, the splash-down will certainly create a wide circle of ripples. Indeed the concept of unity advocated in this book is likely to be very popular for it offers an invitation to reunion without repentance and without renewal, to a unity in which we are faced with no searching challenge to our existing faith and practice, but can remain as we are (1976a: 293).

Macquarrie's proposal follows W.E. Hocking's proposal for a post-colonial "reconception" of the Church's missionary task. Newbigin responds to this thesis in detail elsewhere¹⁴³ but here simply admits that "if indeed to preach Christ as Lord and Savior to all nations was a nineteenth century mistake, then certainly the modern ecumenical movement was a mistake too" (1976a: 293). Macquarrie is concerned simply with a "general search for a pluralist society" (1975:11). For Newbigin, Macquarrie "operates in a different universe of discourse than the ecumenical pioneers." The "realities...on which he takes his bearings are sociological rather than theological" (1976a: 294).

Newbigin defines the church in terms of Jesus Christ, his mission and announcement of the reign of God. Though Jesus' initial call is to Israel the announcement is for all nations. The atoning death of Jesus on the cross is a promise that all nations are to be gathered to the messianic feast. Until his return this community gathers for the eucharistic feast which is a sacramental participation in Jesus' death and a foretaste of the messianic banquet. "Clearly the Church is seen here as a company of people who are bound together in a recognizable unity, centred in the person and work of Jesus and looking towards a universal consummation of which the manifest kingship of Christ will be the centre" (1976a: 295).

Newbigin cites St. Paul's refusal to condone the separation of differing "types" of Christians in the communities of the early church. First, in the famous conflict with St. Peter over the situation in Antioch where Christians from Jerusalem refused to share in

¹⁴³ (Newbigin 1961a: 46-53).

table fellowship with Gentile Christians.¹⁴⁴ St. Paul thought that “the whole truth of the Gospel was involved in resisting the proposal.” Similarly in Corinth, the rival names—“I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas”—could be viewed as “differing ways of stating the Christian message, differing styles of teaching and practice.” Yet St. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for “carnality.”¹⁴⁵ Whatever the gifts or styles within the church there was only one crucified and risen Lord and the Corinthians were to be called by his name alone (1976a: 296).

Macquarrie’s model for reconciled diversity is inspired by the example of the Uniate churches, Eastern rite churches in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. He envisions a scenario where existing denominational families exist side by side within each geographical area with their distinctive doctrines and customs intact, but “all related in some undefined way to the See of Rome and with one another.” Newbigin rejects this proposal on both practical and theological grounds. Practically, this proposal would provoke a “violent reaction” from the Orthodox who view the Uniate churches as schismatic and do not recognize Rome as a unique guardian of catholicity. To suggest a uniquely Western model was “unpardonable” (1976a: 297, 301). Theologically, this model fails to understand the biblical mission of the church:

The church is not just (though it should always be) a body that serves society. It is the body sent into the world to be the bearer of peace—peace with God and with men, the sign and first-fruit of God’s new humanity. It cannot permanently evade the question: where is that fellowship in which I can become and permanently remain truly a member of God’s family at peace with him and with my neighbors (1976a: 298).

¹⁴⁴ Galatians 2:11-14.

¹⁴⁵ I Corinthians 3:1-4.

New Dehli stated that the nature of the unity being sought in the ecumenical movement was both global and local. Macquarrie envisages a global unity centered in the See of Rome but not one in which “all in each place who bear the name of Christ form one fully committed fellowship.” Newbigin concludes his essay with a passionate plea for visible union that is both global and local and that rejects the reconciled diversity model of unity:

Can there be a visible and recognizable and therefore local expression of the fact that what God has done in Jesus Christ is nothing less than the destruction of all the powers that separate men from God and from one another, or must this be a truth that remains in the mind, above involvement in space and time?...Such a unity implies the death of all our denominations as we know them. It implies the surrender of every name, every claim to identity, so that the name of Jesus alone may be on our lips, and so that we may find out identity only in the fact that we belong to him. It is nothing abstract or theoretical. It is immensely costly. It involves long and patient work to reach the mutual understanding without which there cannot be such a mutual commitment. It rejects the false spirituality which imagines that the High Priestly prayer of Jesus has nothing to do with the long and costly and even agonizing wrestlings that are needed before such understanding and such commitment are possible. It is not ashamed to be deeply involved in the hard and difficult and even trivial details of a plan of union. It is ready for long disappointment and for the discipline of prayer that seems for long to be unanswered. Is such unity possible? Can there such in each place such a shared common life in Christ as can be a credible sign of the unity of all mankind? God knows. But to give up the quest of such unity is to settle for something less than the Gospel (1976a: 305-306).

The following year he reviewed the essay collection entitled *Denominationalism* (1977) edited by Russell Richey containing essays by several authors that survey the rise of denominationalism in American Protestantism. Newbigin describes it as “a celebration of denominationalism as a distinctive and dynamic contribution of Protestantism to American Christianity.” For Richey the celebration is possible because the brief period when “the norms of ecumenism... made denominationalism suspect” is over. Newbigin contrasts this celebratory attitude with the earlier judgment of H.

Richard Niebuhr that “denominationalism represents the moral failure of Christianity” (Newbigin 1978f: 189; Niebuhr 1929: 25). While Newbigin compliments the historical and sociological information in the book as “fascinating and informative” he ends the review with a pointed rhetorical question that makes his assessment of the celebration quite clear: “Can the phenomena here described make any claim to be an authentic manifestation of what the New Testament means by Church?” (1978f: 189).

In *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (1986d) Newbigin suggests that if there is to be a “missionary encounter” between the church and Western culture there must be a theological critique of “the theory and practice of denominationalism” (1986d: 144). He proceeds to provide a brief sketch of his own critique.

He acknowledges that denominations are powerful agents of self-propagation but they fail to live up the New Testament idea of the church:

In the Pauline letters the name *Ecclesia tou Theou* is applied to actual visible bodies of sinful men and women defined simply by the names of the places where they lived—God’s congregation in Corinth, Philippi, or Thessalonica. It is also applied to the whole body of such people in all places, since it is the same God who is assembling them in each place. These assemblies are the church. The exponents of the denominational principle acknowledge that a denomination does not and cannot claim to be *a* church or *the* church in any biblical sense. In their view, the church in its true being is invisible: the denomination is a partial manifestation of the church but makes no claim to be *the* church. It is a voluntary association based on the free personal choice of a number of individuals to cooperate for certain purposes, purposes that in the nineteenth century, when the great development of denominations took place, were described as the advancement of the kingdom (1986d: 145).

Reconciled diversity can never be a model for missionary encounter with the culture for it is itself “the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual surrender to the ideology” of Western culture. Newbigin sees denominationalism sociologically

functioning as “the religious aspect of secularization”—a private affair where individuals or groups create their own meaning. In its current state the church can no longer confront the culture “with the claim with which Jesus confronted Pilate—the claim of the truth.” Denominations cannot confront the culture with the witness to the truth because they are nothing more than associations of individuals who share similar opinions. Genuine ecumenism is essential for authentic mission: “a genuinely ecumenical movement, that is to say, a movement seeking to witness to the Lordship of Christ over the whole inhabited *oikoumene* cannot take the form of a federation of denominations. It must patiently seek again what the Reformers sought—“to restore the face of the Catholic Church” (1986d: 145-146).

Many of these same themes are repeated and developed in the Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity that Newbigin delivered at the Council on Christian Unity (CCU) luncheon in San Antonio, Texas, on September 24, 1983 entitled “The Basis and Forms of Christian Unity.” He theorizes that the main reason that any genuine movement towards unity had failed to come about in England was “the inertia of denominational traditions, the inbuilt commitment of large organizations to their own self-preservation”:

This will always be an immensely powerful counter-force against any movement for reunion. It is surely for this reason that the proposals for a kind of unity which leaves the denominational structures intact are so attractive. “Reconciled Diversity” is the title by which these proposals are dignified. They are attractive just because they do not call the denominations to surrender their separate identities. They cost nothing and they achieve what they cost. They evade both the demand of truth which requires us seriously to wrestle with our differences until we come to a common mind, and the invitation of love which calls us to be ready to live as brothers and sisters in one family even while we fall short of full mutual understanding (Newbigin 1984c: 2).

Newbigin compares denominations to the recognized and protected private cults and sects of the Roman Empire. The early church never availed itself of this designation or of the legal protections offered to these groups described by the Greek words *heranos* or *thiasos*. They were protected because like denominations they did not make the total and exclusive claims made by the church. The church called itself *ecclesia tou Theou*, the assembly of God. The *ecclesia* was the public assembly to which all citizens were summoned to resolve the affairs of the city. The *ecclesia tou Theou* is the place where all humanity is summoned and to which even the imperial claim of Caesar has a subordinate place. Citing the article on the Greek word *ecclesia* from Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (cf. Schmidt 1965: 501-536) and expanding on his argument thirty-five years earlier in *The Household of God* (cf. 1953e: 27-29; 1994a: 51-54) Newbigin explains that the church is God's gathering of all people in all places into Christ:

If we turn to the New Testament it is clear that the word "Church" is applied quite simply and realistically to visible bodies of very sinful human beings. It is applied equally to local congregations and to the entire body of those who belong to Christ. Schmidt, in his article in Kittel's dictionary, helpfully shows how this double usage is possible. Like the word "kingdom", the word Church, *ecclesia*, is a dynamic word which requires the subjective genitive to describe the one whose power is at work. The kingdom is the kingdom of God—God's active putting forth of his kingly power. So also *ecclesia* is shorthand for *ecclesia tou Theou*, the assembly of God—God in action to draw all persons to himself in the crucified and risen Christ. Both these words are misconstrued when the noun is taken in isolation from the action of God which is the source of it. The Kingdom is the kingdom of God, i.e. God assuming his sovereign power. The Church is the assembly of God, God drawing people by the power of the Spirit into the allegiance of Christ. God is thus acting in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Rome, in the household of Priscilla and Aquila, and everywhere in the world, and so in all these places one can speak of this as a single action: God assembling his people. It is one action of God in each place and in all places because God is equally present in each place and in all places (1984c: 7).

Denominationalism reduces the church to a *thiasos*, “an association of religiously minded people.” For Newbigin this is a fundamental departure from the ecclesiology of the New Testament and a retreat from any meaningful missionary engagement with culture. Denominations are living in “an illicit syncretism” with Enlightenment ideology and its exaltation of individual personal pursuits of happiness above all other concerns. The churches must take seriously the New Testament’s teaching concerning the nature of the church (1984c: 9).

Newbigin offers guidance on the way forward in seeking the form of union. Visible forms of church order have to change for different structures are needed in different times and places—the apostles disappeared after a generation and church order changes in the New Testament from the time of Corinthians until the Pastorals. Newbigin challenges the churches to recognize that as the society that is the provisional incorporation of humanity into Christ the church must be “as open-textured and a many-faceted as the human race itself.” The *ecclesia tou Theou* must develop according to the structures of society. “The Church can only be a sign of God’s intention for all humankind if it is in each segment of society a relevant sign of God’s intention for that segment” (1984c: 9-10).

The change moving out of denominationalism and into unity will require a rejection of the ways of the past—“absolutist and exclusive claims that have been made for pope and bishop, presbytery and congregation”—and move forward with the criteria provided by Jesus. Newbigin sees two principles from the example of Jesus that he thinks point the way forward. First, “leadership in the way of the cross.” Jesus words “follow me” leads to the cross where Jesus goes first. Newbigin cites the image from

Passolini's film "The Gospel according to St. Matthew" of Jesus striding ahead of his disciples, imparting commands over his shoulder, "and then storming forward to face the next bastion of evil or suffering that holds out against the invading reign of God." In a fundamental sense the church can be defined as "the company of those who follow Jesus in his encounter with the rulers of the world. He leads, they follow." Leadership in the way of the cross also means having the courage to take personal responsibility for decisions, to refuse "sheltering behind majorities." Most importantly, leadership in the way of the cross is "not self-aggrandizement but self-negation" (1984c: 10-11).

The second principle from the ministry of Jesus is "supreme care for the marginal." Jesus cared for those that society had relegated to the margin—outcasts, untouchables and lost sheep. "A ninety-nine percent majority was only an imperious call to look after the one that was missing. Here is no deification of majorities but a sustained concern for the last and least" (1984c: 11).

For Newbigin these two elements provide the criteria for decisions about the forms of the church and visible unity. The form itself is always to be considered relative to the structures of the society that it serves:

The Church does not exist for itself, but as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ. Therefore the Church is always for the society within which it lives, and its outward forms will be such as will enable it to function as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's intention for *that* society. But in seeking relevant forms it will be controlled by the two criteria I have suggested. At each level—local, regional, provincial, national, global—it will seek to ensure both the freedom for personal leadership modeled on the leadership of Jesus, and the provision for involving all the membership as far as humanly possible in the life and activity of the whole. This will call for a proper balance and a mutually correcting and sustaining interaction at every level between the personal and the synodical elements in Church leadership (1984c: 11).

5.5.2.4. Working for Visible Unity in England: God's Reign and Our Unity (1984)

When Newbigin left India in 1974 and returned to England he was discouraged by the lack of progress towards church reunion. “Thirty years ago we had been innocent enough to hope that three decades would be enough to enable the divided Churches in England to catch up with India” (1993k: 230). From 1979 to 1982 he served as a URC representative on the “Council on Covenanting,” a working group seeking to establish visible unity in England between the URC, the Church of England, Methodists, Moravians, and the Churches of Christ. The URC general assembly approved the covenant but it was defeated by the general synod of the Church of England. The defeat only deepened his discouragement over the state of the churches in England. The sixty year chapter that had begun with the Lambeth *Appeal* was closed (Newbigin 1984c: 2):

The whole exercise and the character of many of the debates in which I was involved exposed in a painful way the lamentable fading of the ecumenical vision in the minds of English Church people. I began to realize how great was the loss which had been inflicted on the Church by the virtual eclipse of the SCM. I belonged to a generation which had been given their formative vision of the Christian life and received their Christian calling in an ecumenical setting. But now the majority of those in the Churches had been shaped either in a conservative evangelical setting where visible unity was not seen to be important, or in a merely denominational setting which had deprived them of the opportunity to form deep and trustful friendships outside of that setting. With the failure of the Covenant the whole movement which had begun with the Lambeth appeal of 1920 seemed to have come to a dead end, and the united churches of the Indian subcontinent were marginal oddities rather than pioneers (1993k: 236).

Newbigin may have been discouraged but he was not dissuaded from working for organic reunion. The Anglican-Reformed International Theological Commission (ARIC) met in Woking in January 1983 for five days and had similar meetings over the next two years. Newbigin found the process “very rewarding” and was asked to write the report,

which was published as *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1984). In spite of the rewarding process he thought that the work had little ecumenical impact: "There is a great gulf fixed between these internationally achieved theological agreements, and the willingness of large ecclesiastical bodies, deeply rooted in long traditions, to surrender their distinct identities" (1993k: 243). The agreement demonstrates the continuity of Newbigin's thought on unity from the time of *The Reunion of the Church* (1948) up until this period.

The ARIC report makes clear that ecumenical malaise comes from a false and static understanding of "the nature of the Church and of God's calling to the Church." The church is not simply "the religious aspect of society" and a "bark to carry passengers safe into harbour." As long as the church is seen in this way there will never be urgency in the quest for unity:

The Church is to be understood in a much more dynamic way, as a pilgrim people called to a journey whose goal is nothing less than God's blessed Kingdom embracing all nations and all creation, a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's purpose "to sum up all things with Christ as head" (Eph 1.10). It is only in this missionary and eschatological perspective that the question of unity is rightly seen (*ARIC Report* 1984: 9-10).

A dynamic and missionary view of the church means that the quest for unity is seen in the "context of God's purpose to reconcile all people and all things in Christ."

Faith and Order was born out of this missionary concern:

The pioneers of the movement drew their inspiration and their guidance from the prayer of Jesus that his disciples might be one "so that the world may believe" (John 17.21). They sought unity not as an end in itself but for the sake of mission. Yet it must be acknowledged that his perspective has sometimes been lost. It needs to be reaffirmed that if we seek unity among Christians it can only be in order that the Church may become a more credible sign instrument and foretaste of God's purpose to "unite all things with Christ as head" (Col. 1.19f., cf. Eph. 1.10) (1984: 11).

The report emphasizes that the gospel is a message concerning the unity of the human race and the promise of the kingdom of God. The Faith and Order task of seeking unity for the sake of world-wide mission is framed by the promise and perspective of the kingdom of God—“the reign of God in which creation and human community are renewed by the Spirit through their transformation in Christ.” The report presents the kingdom-perspective in an effort to overcome the apathy of the ecumenical movement by linking concern for the unity of the church with the unity of humanity in God’s purpose (1984: 14-15).

The core ecclesiology of the report is found under the heading “The Church: God’s Apostolic People” subdivided into three sections: “Debtors to Grace,” “First-fruits of a New Creation” and “Sent to All Nations.” The ecclesiology is grounded in the Trinitarian love of God and the *missio Dei* that flows from that love: “The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son’s love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another. This is grace and to reject one another is to reject God’s grace” (1984: 16).

The church is the first-fruits of a “reality that comes from beyond history”—the kingdom of God. It enjoys an eschatological foretaste of the final reconciliation of all things through Christ, the final righteousness, peace and joy of journey’s end. It is only a sign and instrument of God’s reign inasmuch as it is a foretaste. “Life in Christ is the end for which all things were made, not a means to an end beyond it.” The church is the provisional embodiment of God’s purpose for humanity and creation. To say that it is *embodied* is to recognize that it is actual men and women who share in Christ’s life and

ministry to the world. It is *provisional* in that only part of the human family has been brought into it and those who have been only partially conformed to God's ultimate purpose of full reconciliation (1984: 19).

These two principles—the embodiment of Christ's life in an actual community and its provisionality in relation to the kingdom—expose the fallacious arguments of those who oppose visible unity. To those who complain that pursuit of visible unity detracts from evangelism it attests that if the church is a sign and first-fruits of the reconciliation of all things in Christ then the fruit of evangelism should be communities reconciled to one another in Christ. “The mere multiplication of cells, unrelated to the purpose of the body, is a sign not of life and health, but of cancer and death.” To those who say that issues of justice and peace are more important than ecclesiastical issues of faith and order it insists that the church is more than just a means to an end. The church is only a provisional embodiment of the new creation but it is a real embodiment and foretaste here and now of the kingdom. In so far as it is a true sign and true first-fruits it will also have an instrumental role in promoting justice and freedom in the transient social order of history and culture. To those who argue that unity must not be pursued at the expense of truth Newbiggin is in agreement. But all truth formulations “must be judged by their relation to the central reality of God's redeeming and reconciling work in Christ.” Not all doctrinal matters need to be agreed upon before unity is possible. That would deny the provisional nature of the church in relation to the kingdom. “We are more likely to reach unanimity as a result of accepting one another in Christ and then working out our differences in one fellowship than by giving them in effect a higher status than that of the one supreme truth given to us in Christ” (1984: 20-21).

The church is sent to all the nations. As a provisional embodiment of God's reconciling purpose the church must see itself as a people in pilgrimage towards a goal no one has yet reached. The church is on a "missionary pilgrimage...both to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age. The ecclesiastical forms developed at the time of the Reformation grew out of the context of Christendom. "Consequently our theologies and ecclesiologies have been developed in dialogue...between different versions of churchmanship rather than in missionary encounter with the unevangelized world." A missional perspective is necessary in order to rethink the issues of ministry, word and sacrament that have traditionally divided Reformed and Anglican churches. Both must enter more deeply into the perspective of the New Testament, where "the Church is a small evangelizing community in a pagan society, where ministry is primarily leadership in mission, baptism is commitment to that mission, and Eucharist is the continual renewal of that commitment." Both communions must see the perspective of the *missio Dei*—the mission is God's:

Mission is not simply the action of the Church enlarging its own borders. Mission is the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit who, through the faithful words and deeds of the Church, bears witness to Jesus (John 15:26) and does his own work of convicting the world (John 16:8-11) and of leading the Church into a fuller understanding of the Father's will (John 16:12-15). As in the Old Testament, so also in the New, the work of gathering all the nations to become God's people and to worship him from whom their life comes, is the work of God himself. It is the presence of the Spirit, foretaste of the eschatological kingdom, which constitutes the effective witness to Jesus. The human occasions for the Spirit's work include both words and deeds, all springing from and expressing the life of the one body which lives for the praise and adoration of God. Where there is a shared life centred in the worship and service of God the Father, rooted in Christ as he is made known to us in Scripture, interpreted in the teaching of faithful teaching of faithful witnesses all down the ages, and sustaining the free exercise of the Spirit's varied gifts of speech and action among all the members, there the sovereign Lord, the Spirit, both gathers the peoples and leads the Church into fuller understanding. It is within this missionary perspective that we can begin to

overcome the partial understandings that have kept out two communions apart (1984: 24-25).

The final section of the report under the heading “The Form of Unity” considers the question: “what visible form of unity will correspond to the character of the Church as the provisional embodiment of an eschatological unity?” The report affirms the descriptions of local and universal unity adopted by WCC assemblies at New Delhi (1961), Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver (1983). It calls upon the two communions to endorse these “ecumenical findings” and states emphatically that the two global organizations are not content to continue a reconciled but separate existence. The point of emphasis for growth in unity is at the local level. “We seek the emergence of reconciled local communities, each of which is recognizable as ‘church’ in the proper sense: i.e. communities which exhibit in each place the fullness of ministerial order, eucharistic fellowship, pastoral care, and missionary commitment which, through mutual commitment and which, through mutual communion and cooperation, bear witness on the regional, national, and even international levels.” Such churches reflect “both the unity to which God calls his whole creation in Christ and the diversity which properly characterized the human family as God intends it to be.” The hope was that the member churches would play a part in drawing others into “something which might express locally the wholeness of the Catholic Church” (1984: 69-70).

The report concludes with a challenge to the two communions to heed the call of God to move forward into deeper unity and missionary faithfulness:

We have been led to see our work in the perspective of the Church’s missionary calling, acknowledging that the Church is but a provisional embodiment of what is promised at the end. The Church is—to use again the familiar usage—a

pilgrim people. The Church must therefore be willing to move where the Lord calls it to do so. This is our final, and perhaps most important word. Many of the gravest warnings in Scripture are addressed to those who are unwilling to move forward in response to the call and promise of God (e.g. Heb. 3.12-19). The call to unity challenges our sloth and unbelief with a summons to look up and listen to the voice of the living God who has called us to be one as he is one, and who is able to complete what he has begun in us. We may well take to ourselves the call addressed to an unbelieving company on the brink of the Red Sea: “Tell the people of Israel to go forward” (Exod.14.15) (1984: 81).

God’s Reign and Our Unity is the most complete statement on visible unity among Newbigin’s later writings. His absolute devotion to the process is illustrated by his description of the preparation process he underwent for the paper he presented at the final ARIC meeting in Woking in January 1983:

I began by reading as much as I could lay my hands on of recent Faith and Order discussions. I have made special use of the latest revision of the document “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”... I have also looked at the record of bilateral discussions in which Anglicans and Reformed have been involved. And I have looked again at the writings on the subject of two Reformed theologians—John Calvin and Peter Forsyth. From these readings I turned to the New Testament and went through its entire text making notes on every passage which bears on the subject (Newbigin 1983d: 1).

Newbigin had a troubled relationship with Anglicanism. He had many very close friendships with Anglicans but the issues connected to the CSI and reunion tested some of them. He was invited to the Lambeth Conferences of 1948 and 1958 as the “special guest” of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher.¹⁴⁶ Newbigin believed that Lambeth 1948 had squandered the Anglican Communion’s unique opportunity “to fulfill its true ecumenical vocation to provide a centre around which reformed Christendom can be brought together in unity and in continuity with the historic ministry of the universal Church.” The

¹⁴⁶ Newbigin returned to Lambeth in 1968 as a consultant to Archbishop Michael Ramsey for the committee on the ministry of bishops (Newbigin 1993k: 218).

opportunity was lost and “not likely to come again” (1993k: 108). The “final and terrible difficulty”, as Stephen Neill noted in his survey of unions achieved and contemplated, “churches cannot unite unless they are willing to die” (Neill 1967: 495; cited in Newbigin 1991p: 1030).

Archbishop Fisher was upset by Newbigin’s remarks about Lambeth 1948 in the 2nd edition of *The Reunion of the Church*. The two men had a heated argument that Newbigin characterized as “a full out assault” on the subject nearly resulting in his being “thrown out of Lambeth Palace” (1993k: 181). Newbigin defended his words in the book and in their conversation as “true in fact and legitimate in form and intention.”¹⁴⁷ At Lambeth 1958 the bishops received communion at a celebration using the CSI liturgy but were still unable to declare themselves in full communion with the CSI. From Newbigin’s perspective, this absolute insistence on episcopal ordination did nothing but “pervert the real purpose of all rules of order, and use them to perpetuate disorder.”¹⁴⁸

Sometime during the Council on Covenanting process or perhaps during the work with the ARIC Newbigin prepared a manuscript entitled “Thoughts on the Role of the Church and the Future of the Church of England.”¹⁴⁹ At the conclusion of the paper he candidly states that he does not see the Anglican Communion making the kinds of changes that will allow for reunion and missionary engagement with the world. He imagines a “long slow general decline into genteel anomaly and introverted biblical and liturgical fundamentalism until finally, small groups impelled by the Spirit, break out

¹⁴⁷ Lesslie Newbigin to Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, April 29, 1959. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/8/26.

¹⁴⁸ Lesslie Newbigin to William Stewart, November 2, 1961. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” finding number DA29/2/8/58.

¹⁴⁹ The paper is undated but contained in the box labeled “Addresses, Lectures and Associated Papers, circa 1952-1996.” Several references in the document place it sometime in the 1980s. “Lesslie Newbigin Papers,” without finding number.

from the body of the Church of England and unite with small break-away groups of other denominations to found a unified pattern of life and worship.” Newbigin appears to give approval for ecclesial realignments that are for the sake of unity of all in each place. He calls this a “theology of the second day”—Christ’s body must “decompose in the tomb” for a while before it can “rise in majesty.” He envisions new groups laying the foundation for “an eventual break” as they see in the midst of decline the clear path of faithful Christian living in the ecumenical future (Newbigin n.d.-b: 4).

A similar idea is suggested in a short contribution he made to the January 1987 issue of “Ecumenical Trends” answering the question “What is the Ecumenical Agenda?” Newbigin suggests that there is “need for fresh thinking in the field of structure” with the impasse existing between advocates of full organic union and reconciled diversity. In their extreme forms they offer a choice between “monolithic structures” or “agreeing to do nothing.” He advocates exploration of a middle ground between the extremes “looking to visible forms of ecclesial life which would combine the variety of different forms of discipleship and spirituality manifest in our divided churches with a degree of mutual commitment and shared ecclesial life much greater than is provided in our existing councils of churches” (Newbigin 1986g: 1-2).

5.5.3. *Visible Unity and the Ecumenical Movement*

5.5.3.1. Conflict with Konrad Raiser and the Direction of the WCC

When Lesslie Newbigin died he was hailed by the communications office of the WCC: “Bishop Newbigin’s influence will live on and continue to shape the ecumenical vision for the new millennium” (Lundy 1998). In truth Newbigin had been out of step with the direction of the WCC since Uppsala 1968 and what he saw as the beginning of a major shift of ecumenical theology in the wrong direction.

Konrad Raiser, WCC General Secretary from 1992 until 2004, put forth a vision for the ecumenical movement in his *Ökumene im Übergang* (1989), translated into English as *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement* (1991). Raiser sensed a profound shift from what he termed “Christo-centric universalism” to a Trinitarian model, from salvation history to a focus on the broader “household of life.” He characterized the older paradigm as overly Christocentric, too concentrated on the church and as having an unrealistic universal perspective on the Lordship of Christ and the scope of Christian mission (Raiser 1991: 41-46). In Raiser’s paradigm the focus of God’s working is not the church but the world (1991: 84-91). The Christocentrism of the older ecumenical paradigm is replaced by a new focus on the Holy Spirit who is at work in the *oikoumene*, the worldwide community of “all men and women struggling to become what they were intended to be in the purpose of God” (1991: 91-96). The new paradigm envisions a church that embraces religious pluralism and in solidarity with the world seeks to address economic injustice and renew the moral

fabric of society. The task of the church is not to Christianize the world but to change it (1991: 104-105). It is the *oikoumene* not the *ecclesia* that comes down as a city from heaven (1991: 87).

Newbigin published a lengthy review of *Ecumenism in Transition* that first appeared in *One in Christ* and was later reprinted with the title “Ecumenical Amnesia” in *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Raiser responded and Newbigin came back with a reply that focused on remarks Raiser made at the bicentennial of the London Missionary Society in 1995. These dialogues¹⁵⁰ illustrate what missiologist David Bosch has called the “abiding tension” in ecumenical missiology between two irreconcilable views of the church:

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

Newbigin agrees with Raiser that a fuller Trinitarian emphasis was needed in the ecumenical movement. In the 1950s and 60s he began to develop a more fully Trinitarian emphasis in his ecclesiology, “setting the work of Christ in the Church in the context of the over-ruling providence of the Father in all the life of the world and the sovereign freedom of the Spirit who is the Lord and not the auxiliary of the Church” (1993k: 187). For Newbigin this was a development of the concept of the *missio Dei* in a fully

¹⁵⁰ (cf. Wainwright 2000b: 128-134; Goheen 2004: 97-111).

Trinitarian way—the Father’s reign, the Son’s mission and the Spirit’s eschatological witness. He points out to Raiser that he wrote two books addressing his change of emphasis: *Trinitarian Faith for Today’s Mission* (1963) and *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (1966). In these works he acknowledges the inadequacy of the older Christocentric paradigm and goes so far as to approve certain elements of the turn towards the world that occurred in the 1960s (Newbigin 1994d: 2, 5; 1994h: 52).

Newbigin’s central objection is Raiser’s rejection of Christocentrism: “a Trinitarian perspective can only be an enlargement and development of a Christ-centric one and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history” (1994b: 2). He notes that Raiser speaks often of the incarnation in his book but never once mentions the atonement or the cross. For Newbigin this is at the heart of the being of the church:

That overwhelming obligation to the one who gave himself for the sin of the world is surely at the heart of the being of the church...I miss this deep sense of that absolute sovereignty over my heart that Jesus has won, which makes it intolerable that I should be unable to share the Eucharist with everyone for whom Christ died. That is how I understand “Christo-centric universalism” (1994b: 3).

Newbigin takes issue with Raiser’s argument that a more Trinitarian paradigm would replace the hierarchical model of the unity of the church with a model of conciliarity expressing itself through dialogue. Newbigin agrees that Jesus reveals a picture of the divine life that is not authoritarian and that the Holy Spirit is not “domesticated within the Church” but “sovereign to range far beyond what the church knows and does.” Yet he maintains that Jesus “lived and died in obedience to the Father

whose rule is over all” and that the Spirit is “always proving to be the Spirit of the Father by leading men and women to acknowledge the Son”:

We do need the full Trinitarian framework for proper understanding. But there can be no true understanding of Christian unity that fails to have at its center the mercy seat, that place where—at inconceivable cost—our sins have been forgiven and we are able to meet one another as forgiven sinners who must embrace one another because we have been embraced by the divine compassion in Jesus Christ (1994b: 3).

Raiser speaks of dialogue as a “struggle for truth” but throughout the work he rejects an instrumental purpose for dialogue in the discovery of truth seeing it instead as “the sharing of life.” Newbigin sees this as “merely an expression of indifference to truth” and a violation of a principle at the heart of the ecumenical movement since its inception: “the challenge to accept mutual correction in the light of God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Scriptures.” Newbigin warns “if this mutual correction gives way to the relativism of postmodern culture and dialogue is seen as simply as the ‘sharing of life,’ something has gone badly wrong” (1994b:3).

The vision of organic union as “God’s gift and our task” established at New Delhi is questioned by Raiser because it is incompatible with Roman Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies which claim that the unity that God wills and gives already exists in their communions. Newbigin sees three possible responses to the situation. The first is to follow Raiser and settle for coexistence and a “relationship of conviviality.” This option calls for “no reformation. It is cheap.” The second option is to insist on total doctrinal agreement, to view Christian doctrine “as an integral whole no part of which can be surrendered without corrupting the whole” (1994b: 4). Newbigin offers a third way and sounds the familiar themes of the eschatological ecclesiology of the cross: Christ and the

atonement, the acceptance that comes through justification by grace, and a dynamic and eschatological understanding of the church that is understood not by what it is but by what it is becoming:

There is a third possibility, and it depends absolutely on the centrality of Christ and his atoning deed. It is to see the entire Christian church as a company that lives only by the grace of God to sinners, a company that does not possess in any of its divided parts the fullness of what is “essential” but that God nevertheless in his mercy sustains as witness to and foretaste of his blessed reign.

This third way of understanding creates the possibility and the necessity both of radical mutual criticism in light of what we believe to be God’s intention for his church and of mutual acceptance of those who have been accepted by God in his mercy to those who fall short of his purpose. I know, of course, that this way of understanding the movement toward unity is not now acceptable either to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, but I believe it is the only dynamic that can keep the ecumenical movement moving. I think it would be the signal for a halt, for an abandonment of the true goal of the journey, to settle for a conciliarity that does not continue to call all Christians to the goal of full communion in the Eucharist, and therefore to a life of full mutual commitment—however far we may yet be from seeing precisely what the form of that unity must be.

At each of these three points it will be that the (literally) crucial matter is the centrality of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross, that work by which he has won lordship over the church and the world (1994b: 4).

Newbigin diagnoses Raiser with “total amnesia in respect of the missionary and evangelistic work of the Churches.” As the leader responsible for bringing the IMC into the WCC he states that if Raiser’s vision for the WCC were to be realized “then the bringing of the International Missionary Council in the WCC would have to be judged as a mistake.” To “allow the missionary and evangelistic calling of the church to disappear from the agenda of the WCC...is much more than a ‘paradigm shift’” (1994b: 5).

Newbigin heard Raiser speak at the bicentennial of the London Missionary Society in 1995. The speech highlighted three major issues challenging the church in its

world mission—the ecological crisis, rival claims to universal hegemony and hierarchical patterns of social order.¹⁵¹ In an unpublished paper Newbigin expressed his astonishment that the leader of the WCC speaking at such a historic event could fail to even mention the historical gospel that had launched the mission two hundred years earlier:

We were celebrating the birth, 200 years ago, of a missionary society. We were reminded of the bold decision of a small group of Londoners to do what most of their contemporaries regarded as crazy, if not impious...It seemed to many Englishmen of that time that the world as they knew it was coming to an end. But these events did not apparently occupy the centre of their thoughts. That centre was occupied by “the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God.” They did not see themselves as a society dedicated to finding an answer to the conflicts which were tearing Europe in pieces. They had a gospel which concerned the whole inhabited world, and they were filled with the desire to share it (Newbigin 1995h).¹⁵²

In response to Raiser’s concerns for the “safeguarding of plurality” Newbigin argues that plurality “cannot be the first and last word about society.” Unless a society has a strong cohesive principle it is bound for fragmentation and conflict. “What is the force strong enough to create that degree of mutual trust and forbearance between these groups to make plurality tolerable...where is the centripetal force strong enough to hold together the communities drawn by the centrifugal power of their separate ethnic and religious identities?”

I am committed to the ecumenical missionary cause because I believe that the Gospel is itself the good news that in the atoning work of Jesus Christ there is provided for us that place, that “mercy seat” (Greek *Hilasterion*) where we can be reconciled to one another because we have been reconciled to God. When those who are entrusted with that gospel use it as a means for the coercion or subjugation of others, they subvert it. But to cease offering it to all peoples as

¹⁵¹ Newbigin shared Raiser’s concerns for justice and creation care (Newbigin 1991a: 195-200) but felt that the WCC had been ineffective in alleviating either because it “attacked the symptom and not the cause of the malady.” “Idolatry cannot be countered merely by moral protest against its effects. It has to be tackled at its source...the first priority for the churches and for the WCC should be a radically missionary encounter with this ideology” (Newbigin 1994h: 52).

¹⁵² Unpublished manuscript without pagination.

God's invitation to a reconciliation which gives room for particularity, would be a betrayal of trust (Newbigin 1995h).

Newbigin's Trinitarian vision builds on the earlier Christocentrism of the ecumenical movement. He takes seriously all of the "crushing problems" that Raiser addresses—the environmental crisis, ethnic and religious conflicts and other issues of justice and peace. But Newbigin will not sacrifice his basic conviction concerning the universal claims of the Lordship of Christ. He is unwilling to renegotiate biblical faith in the light of contemporary pressures. For Newbigin, Jesus is the only solution to the problem of human disunity and the church is called to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of the unity promised in the gospel. He reasons, that:

If [Jesus] is the one appointed by God to be the king of men, then all other claims to provide a final basis for human unity will have to be denounced as disobedience. If he is the concrete revelation of God's truth, then all that does not conform to that revelation will have to be exposed as false. Every proposal for unity among the religions rests on some belief which may be open but is usually covert about what is ultimate truth. A proposal for a unity which includes Christianity and other religions rests (openly or covertly) upon belief in some reality other than God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The experience of learning to listen to one another which the ecumenical movement has given us is certainly valid beyond the confines of Christendom. We have indeed to learn to enter into real conversation with men of other religions if they are to apprehend Jesus Christ as Savior and if we are to learn all the manifold wisdom of God which he set forth in Jesus. But the ecumenical movement remains missionary through and through because it is a movement not for any kind of unity, but of the unity which is God's creation through the lifting up of Jesus Christ upon the Cross and through the continuing work of his Spirit.

One can make the same double point by making the following affirmations:

(a) The ecumenical movement remains open to *all* who confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. The movement springs from the faith that is in Jesus Christ that God has chosen to unite all men to himself, and that therefore all who confess him ought to acknowledge one another as his, however great be the difference between them.

(b) The ecumenical movement remains open *only* to those who confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. Because Jesus Christ is God's mercy-seat given

for mankind, no other proposed basis for the unity of the human race can be accepted (Newbigin 1963i: 19-20).

5.5.3.2. Engaging Evangelicals in the Ecumenical Movement

Newbigin concludes his review of *Ecumenism in Transition* with a challenge to the WCC to reach out to evangelicals. Prefacing his appeal with the caveat that he does not endorse all that is done by evangelical churches and movements, he issues this challenge:

It is a very important fact that [evangelical] bodies are the ones that are growing and showing increasing breadth of vision in their approach to the whole range of contemporary human problems, while the bodies that hold the doctrinal position represented in [Raiser's] book are largely in decline. The WCC must see itself as the meeting place for all who make a Christological and Trinitarian affirmation along the lines of the WCC Basis. However sharp the disagreements are, the WCC cannot accept a less demanding role. A body that ceases to be concerned about communicating its faith to others is on the way to death. It would be heart-breaking if the WCC should in truth become, what some already claim to see in it, only the organ of those parts of the Christian Church that are in decline. God grant it may not be so (1994b: 5).

In an introduction to a biography of the missionary-theologian Roland Allen, Newbigin notes that historically the ecumenical movement focused on local, national and global questions of unity among the “main Christian confessions.” In the 1990s the growing edges of Christianity were not in these bodies but “in the increasing numbers of independent bodies of Christians: house churches, ‘independent Christian fellowships’, ‘base communities’ and so on.” It is in these communities that “signs of vitality are evident.” Acknowledging that these groups generally lack “the objectivity, given-ness and power of sacraments and the apostolic ministry linking them to the universal Church” he points to the example of Allen, who understood that “one can cherish the elements of

order which give coherence to the universal Church and yet be free from the heavy structures with which these elements have been associated during the centuries of Christendom.” It seemed to him that this direction—vibrant missional faith joined with adaptive missional orders—was the future of the movement for Christian unity in the coming decades (Newbigin 1995c: xv).

5.6. CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter it was established that Newbigin the evangelical ecumenical went to India and synthesized a reunion ecclesiology that was distinctively eschatological, Reformed and missional. His continued development since 1948 has been surveyed in the present chapter. In the process of tracing his ecclesiological progression it has been shown that there is significant continuity in Newbigin’s core ecclesial convictions from the 1930s until the end of his life, though there are significant developments that enhance those core convictions.

From the 1930 Lambeth *Appeal’s* vision of the church as “an outward, visible and united society” he went on to embrace the 1961 New Delhi vision for local unity where “all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship” and a universal vision of unity “with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages.” He resonated deeply with the Christocentric missiology of the 1938 Tambaram conference and never wavered in his absolute belief in the universal claims of the Lordship of Christ, but from the time of the 1952 Willingen conference he embraced the *missio Dei* and

began to develop a more fully Trinitarian—though nonetheless Christocentric—missionary ecclesiology. The emphasis is on the church's vocation, continuing the mission of Jesus, making known the Father's reign and bearing the eschatological witness of the Spirit. The church is the *ecclesia tou Theou*—the assembled people of God in each place making known (as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's reign) the life of God's eschatological future in the present. If the church is to be a sign of that eschatological future, then it must move toward a unity that is visible.

Newbigin became discouraged by the paradigm shift in the WCC that began in the 1960s, epitomized by Konrad Raiser. Its hallmarks from his perspective were dialogue in place of evangelism and reconciled diversity (which he regarded as reunion without repentance) instead of the pursuit of visible organic unity. In his years in England he worked tirelessly both to promote visible unity and a missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture. He came to believe that the future of the ecumenical movement would require new structures beyond the WCC and would necessarily include evangelicals and Pentecostals.

The final chapter of the dissertation will assess the significance of Newbigin's reunion ecclesiology for the future of the ecumenical movement. It will also set forth the theological relevance of his case for visible reunion.

6. CONCLUSION: THE RELEVANCE OF NEWBIGIN'S REUNION ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE ECUMENICAL FUTURE

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter assesses the relevance of Newbigin's reunion ecclesiology for the future of the ecumenical movement. The paradigm is theologically rich and places radical demands on the churches. It is profoundly Trinitarian—the church continues the mission of Jesus, making known the Father's reign and bearing the eschatological witness of the Holy Spirit in the world. It is dynamic and not static—it calls for a body of Christians to embody an actual foretaste of eschatological unity in their actual community, to serve as a true sign, instrument and foretaste of God's purpose in Christ to draw all people in that particular place into Christ. It is centered in the cross—it begins with full mutual acceptance based on the work of Christ, which then leads to an ongoing experience of growing into union. It is costly—it calls on churches to die to beloved sectarian identities. Is such a prescription likely to ever to be implemented by a significant number of churches?

This chapter will consider the significance of Newbigin's reunion ecclesiology in terms of recent developments in global ecumenism and conclude with a final theological evaluation of his contribution.

6.2. THE FUTURE OF NEWBIGIN'S REUNION ECCLESIOLOGY

6.2.1. *The New Delhi Vision and the WCC*

2011 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the New Delhi assembly and the WCC's dedication to work towards unity made visible in one fully committed fellowship. General secretary Samuel Kobia committed the WCC to an anniversary celebration, seeing an opportunity to remember "the key moment in which the theological affirmation of the intimate link between missiology and ecclesiology took an interdenominational and institutional form at the worldwide level" (Kobia 2009).

Skepticism about the WCC's commitment to the vision of New Delhi is warranted given the experience of the last few decades. In recent years the WCC has moved away from an emphasis on visible structured unity and toward reconciled diversity. The Norwegian missiologist Ola Tjørhom calls this state of affairs "static diversity" based on a "postmodern worship of limitless plurality" that allows the churches to maintain their denominational identities and "remain as they are" (Tjørhom 2004: 74). *The Princeton Proposal* was issued in 2003 by a group of sixteen theologians and ecumenists from various church traditions who met for a period of three years in Princeton, New Jersey to consider the current state of ecumenical ecclesiology. They arrived at the conclusion that the institutions of conciliar ecumenism are captive to a paradigm that "subordinates the concern of the Faith and Order movement for the visible unity of Christians to social and political agendas which are themselves divisive." They complain that the "classical interests of Faith and Order and Mission and Evangelism have been marginalized in the

Council” and declare with Willem Visser t’Hooft that “the World Council of Churches is either a christocentric movement or it is nothing at all” (Braaten 2003: 5-6, 25). They seek to steer the ecumenical movement to the goal of the “visible unity of Christians worldwide, of all those who are reconciled in one body through the cross” (2003: 58-59). According to Geoffrey Wainwright, one of *The Princeton Proposal* theologians, whatever happens in the ecumenical movement, the churches in the global South and East will likely shape the future of Christianity:

We are already on the verge of “The Next Christendom” forecast by Phillip Jenkins in his 2001 book under that title. Given the southward shift in Christianity’s demographic center of gravity, I had expressed the hope...that the Western churches might put their own house in order before handing on their historic responsibilities to the churches of the South. Time presses; that moment may be gone. We may certainly pray that “the next Christendom” will, by grace, remain committed to the Great Tradition of a christocentric Trinitarian faith and its visible embodiment in ecclesial life (Wainwright 2003a: xiii).

Newbigin never wavered in his allegiance to the vision of New Delhi. He was committed to visible unity of “all in each place” and to a worldwide mission of gospel proclamation. The WCC’s move away from visible church unity to focus on the unity of humankind led Newbigin to ask this question of the ecumenical movement: “what is the center around which the human family is to be made one?”

The ecumenical movement rests upon the recognition of the decisiveness and finality of Jesus, and therefore the relativizing of everything else. The invitation to move from an interchurch ecumenism to an inter-faith ecumenism is not an enlargement of the ecumenical movement but a reversal of it. The World Council of Churches stands or falls on its fundamental confession “Jesus Christ God and Savior according to the Scriptures.” It cannot accept an invitation to relativize the name of Jesus in favor of some other absolute (1984c: 3).

At the end of his life Newbigin could see no signs of change in the WCC. But since the time of *The Princeton Proposal* there have been major changes on the

ecumenical horizon. The WCC dramatically renewed its commitment to the vision of New Delhi at its 9th Assembly in Porto Allegre, Brazil in 2006. At the request of the Central Committee of the WCC the Faith and Order Commission produced *Called to be the One Church: An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue* (WCC 2006:1). The purpose of the invitation was two-fold: first, to reflect on what the churches could affirm together at this point on the ecumenical journey, and second, to renew the conversation about the issues that continue to divide them from one another. The statement is clearly in line with the vision of New Delhi—full visible unity, all in each place:

Churches in the fellowship of the WCC remain committed to one another on the way towards full visible unity. This commitment is a gift from our gracious Lord. Unity is both a divine gift and calling. Our churches have affirmed that the unity for which we pray, hope, and work is "a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation." Such koinonia is to be expressed in each place, and through a conciliar relationship of churches in different places (2006:1).

Faith and Order produced a consensus text to accompany the invitation entitled *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, which speaks of the “absolute centrality of ecclesiology to the ecumenical movement” (WCC 2005b: 8). One imagines that if Newbigin were still alive he would be both surprised and thrilled.

6.2.2. *The Global Christian Forum and “Reconfiguration”*

Newbigin believed that the WCC needed to reach out to evangelicals and Pentecostals and that the structures of ecumenism would have to change. The WCC has recently sought to do just that. General secretary Samuel Kobia gave an address in 2009 in which he commended the centennial celebration of Edinburgh 1910 as an opportunity for “healing the memories... of Christians of the evangelical mission family and Christians of the conciliar or ecumenical mission family.” He urged that both “find a way to confess mutual exaggerations and disrespect” so as to create an “authentic reconciliation process” (Kobia 2009). He drew particular attention to the importance of the newly formed Global Christian Forum as an opportunity for “encounter and dialogue to acknowledge publicly how the face of Christianity has changed in one century”:

Some of the most dynamic mission movements are to be found among Christian traditions not represented in any of the formal fora that exist as a consequence of the structures of the last century. We must imagine new forms of meetings and dialogues, to give visibility and credit to the spiritual revolution brought by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements and churches... **we need a new Edinburgh** and one can only hope that the celebration we foresee for 2010 will be a step in that direction!...the older Christian traditions need the reinvigorating experience and theologizing on the Holy Spirit if they want to be renewed in their own missionary and evangelistic motivation (Kobia 2009).

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the current general secretary of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), served as director of Church and Society for the WCC from 1988 until 1994. During that time he also served as moderator of the task force on relations with evangelicals, with the goal of strengthening links between the WCC and evangelical communities around the world. He praised the November 2007 launch of the Global Christian Forum as “a watershed event in modern Christian history”:

The emergence of the Global Christian Forum responds to the dramatic shift of the world church to the global South. Pentecostal, African Instituted, and evangelical churches are growing at breathtaking rates in many of these areas; many show a commitment to works of social justice as well as church planting. But often these younger churches are isolated from those historical churches, mostly based in the North, that carry centuries of Christian tradition and a commitment to church unity. New bridges across the geographical, theological, and practical divisions of world Christianity are critically needed, and the Global Christian Forum provides a space to begin.

So what will this unique new body do? It's probably too early to answer that question. This is like a family reunion of long-lost relatives who have been out of touch and even alienated from one another for years. We're just re-establishing trustworthy relationships. In this process, "being together" precedes what we do together.

Several of those gathered in Nairobi emphasized that the Global Christian Forum presents new possibilities for joint cooperation in meeting pressing global needs. Rev. Daniel Okoh, chair of the Organization of African Instituted Churches, spoke of an "active" Christian unity addressing issues of poverty, war, and bad governance. Korean Pentecostal theologian Wonsuk Ma, who directs the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, underscored that "It is all for God's mission's sake that we are called together to be in one body."

This gathering was a watershed event in modern Christian history, where God's Spirit began erasing the excuses that have kept Christians judging one another and apart from one another. Now the task will be to discern how this gift can empower the global church to participate together in God's mission in the world (Granberg-Michaelson 2008).

At the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre the council clearly committed itself to engagement with evangelicals. The moderator of the WCC Central Committee, His Holiness Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic Church, called the council to the urgent task of *aggiornamento*, of the renewal and transformation of ecumenism:

We have entered a new period of ecumenical history. The ecumenical landscape is undergoing rapid and radical change: traditional ecumenical institutions are losing their motivation and interest; new ecumenical models and norms are emerging; new ecumenical alliances and partnerships are being formed; and new ecumenical agendas are being set. The ecumenical panorama today represents a new picture... We need ecumenical models that challenge the churches not simply to co-habitate, but to grow together... For many, unity is not longer an ecumenical priority, but rather an academic topic or at best an eschatological goal. The

council must re-emphasize the vital importance of visible unity by re-embarking on convergence and reception processes (cited in Ryan 2006).

The official term for this *aggiornamento* in the WCC is “reconfiguration.” The task will be to develop and sustain relationships between ecumenical organizations and Christian churches and movements that are not part of the WCC. According to the Policy Reference Committee of the WCC “reconfiguration” is best understood “not as a patching up of the existing ecumenical structures, but as a dynamic process to deepen the relationship of the ecumenical movement to its spiritual roots and missionary identity, and to clarify the relationships among the various ecumenical instruments towards ensuring that the message and the effort be coordinated and coherent” (cited in Ryan 2006).

“Reconfiguration” was evident at the opening of the historic Edinburgh 2010 conference on June 2, 2010. The new WCC General Secretary, Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, stood side by side with Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe, the international director of the World Evangelical Alliance. Tunnicliffe told the delegates that there was no “authentic church that does not have a passionate commitment to mission, reflecting the heart of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” He urged them to listen to one another with “love and respect” and to “build bridges rather than create chasms.” Tveit said that the prayer of those who gathered Edinburgh in 1910 – Jesus’ prayer “that the church may be one” – was the same prayer for leaders gathered today:

Mission and unity belong together. To be one in Christ is to witness together to Christ. We have a foundation going deeper than ourselves, our institutions or our traditions. We have a call which goes wider than our plans. One hundred years after the Edinburgh conference in 1910 we are challenged to launch together a new beginning for common mission in the 21st century. We need to discern

together what the call to carry the cross of Christ means for us today, as we witness together and find different ways to make it visible that we are called to be one (cited in Mackay 2010).

These directions are exactly along the lines that Newbigin prescribed: the New Delhi vision of the churches moving towards visible reunion, all in each place, coupled with the conviction that authentic ecumenism requires the full participation of evangelicals, Pentecostals and other Christian groups that have historically been outside the movement.

Will the vision become a reality? Only time will tell. There are signs that ecumenicals are reaching out to evangelicals, but it is not at all clear the extent to which evangelicals will be interested in what the ecumenical movement has to offer. The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization will hold its third International Congress in October 2010 in Capetown, South Africa. The executive chairman, Douglas Birdsall, says that the year 2010 was selected to celebrate the centenary of Edinburgh 1910. Capetown was selected in honor of William Carey's first proposal for an international missionary conference to be held there in 1810. According to Birdsall, "the 200th anniversary of William Carey's vision and the centennial of its fulfillment is an appropriate time to, once again, encourage international leaders to come together to chart the course for the work of world evangelization in the 21st century." Dr. Michael Cassidy, a member of the advisory council, believes that Lausanne III "will add enormous impetus and encouragement to the African church to fulfill its destiny in World Missions in the 21st Century" (Lausanne 2010).

It is conceivable that this community of missions-minded evangelicals may find that in their desire for mission and partnership they too, like their forbearers a

century ago, become “unintentional ecumenists.” Newbigin would no doubt be hopeful of this outcome. He believed that among the varied movements that led to the formation of the WCC, the “central thrust came from the experience of the mission fields” (Newbigin 1976a: 323).

Newbigin became critical of the WCC but he never abandoned his hope in divine power or intention to bring about God’s reign. His reunion ecclesiology grows out of his missional understanding of the kingdom. His final action as an ecumenist conveys this hope. His last major ecumenical meeting was the 1996 conference on world mission and evangelism in Brazil. When the assembly proposed that they commit themselves to unequivocal witness to the gospel of hope in Jesus Christ, Newbigin proposed the following phrase be added: "so that all may come to know and love Jesus" (Vandervelde 1998: 6). Those ten words encapsulate the evangelical, eschatological and missional ecumenism of Lesslie Newbigin.

6.3. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NEWBIGIN’S REUNION ECCLESIOLOGY

Newbigin was a theologian shaped by the Reformed tradition. Whether or not visible reunion was being taken seriously as one of the principle aims of ecumenism. Regardless of the state of affairs at the WCC, he would ultimately be concerned to say that the gospel mandates visible reunion. He believed that the Bible itself would keep the issue alive: “as long as churches continue to use and to cherish the language of scripture about the Body of Christ, the issue of organic union can never be ignored...However

difficult the way, it is hard to believe that anything can be the final goal except the organic unity of one body” (Newbigin 1991p: 1030). The relevance of his paradigm, therefore, cannot be measured merely by whether or not the ideas are popular at the moment. The more important issue is whether or not they are biblically and theologically sound.

His most significant theological contribution to ecumenism is the insight drawn from the message of the cross that the holy God accepts sinners and therefore Christians ought to accept one another. The “basis of the ecumenical movement” and of “reunion” is that “churches proposing to unite...must recognize each other as truly and simply Churches, parts of the one Church of Christ and His Apostles, and their ministries, therefore, as truly ministries” (Newbigin 1948a: 162). He grounds this recognition in the classic Reformation doctrine of *simul justus et peccator*—a message usually applied to the individual—and addresses it to the church. The church is not understood simply as a flawed human institution but by what it is in union with Christ in the light of justification and the hope of resurrection. The church is understood by faith in terms of what it is becoming. This destroys pre-conditions of church unity and invites brothers and sisters to a family life of growing into the union already given by God. Reunion is an act of repentance in which separated churches meet one another at the cross and accept one another as they are:

I am asking that we should all take as the basis of our approach to church unity the elementary evangelical truth that conformity to the will of God is the fruit of grace and not the pre-condition of it. This means that, however severely we may have to criticize one another for our failure to conform to the whole will of God for his Church, we do not demand of each other certain measure of reform as the pre-condition of acceptance. Its means that when we turn together to God in an

act of repentance, which includes a willingness to surrender our separate existences in order to put ourselves afresh under the judgment and mercy of God, *at that point* we accept one another as we are. That is surely the only method of Christian reunion which is proper to the order of grace (Newbigin 1958a: 227).

Newbigin's experience of growing into union after the formation of the CSI was life-changing. In the years that followed he had a rich experience of "speaking the truth in love,"¹⁵³ of what he calls "Christological correction," i.e. genuine engagement in disagreement because of genuine mutual acceptance:

What we have to do is to accept one another as forgiven sinners, as God has accepted us, and then say—not "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound", but rather—"Having been forgiven, having been accepted now let us ask what is God's will. Where have we fallen away from God's will?"; and there is the place we can receive the Christological correction one from another and be genuinely the *Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda*, which I believe with Calvin the Church is intended to be (Newbigin 1960d: 16)

This mutual acceptance is vital for the church's mission in the world. "Honest, deep-going, costly union" that brings people together at the cross "cannot fail to release new resources of reconciling love to draw others into the same reconciled and reconciling fellowship" (Newbigin 1957b: 5). "The only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it" (Newbigin 1989k: 234).

Newbigin believed that a visibly united church was a sign of God's peace to a sinful and fragmented world. The unity of the church has an invisible source in the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is the visible reality of Christian unity that enables the world to believe. This is the unity that Jesus prays for in John 17:

The prayer of Jesus is for a unity which is a real participation of believers in the love and obedience which unites Jesus with the Father, a participation which is as

¹⁵³ Ephesians 4:15 NRSV.

invisible as the flow of sap which unites the branches with the vine, and which is at the same time as visible as the unity of branch and vine—as visible as the love and obedience of Jesus. It is this visible unity which will bring the world to believe (v.21) and know (v.23) what otherwise it does not and cannot know (v.25), namely, God himself in his revelation as the Father of Jesus. Moreover, this unity will enable the world to know the love of God not just as an idea or doctrine but as a palpable reality experienced in the supernatural love which holds believers together in spite of all their human diversities, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another (13.35) (Newbigin 1982k: 235).

Newbigin resisted efforts to treat the Christian gospel as just another species of comparative religion. The church is the provisional incorporation of humanity into Christ until the time when “he shall unite all things.”¹⁵⁴ There is no other center. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom of God, which is the true goal of the creation’s history. The church exists to bear witness to this eschatological reality for the sake of the world until Christ’s return.

For Newbigin, the eschatological doctrine of justification by faith is the essential article that undergirds and makes true ecumenism possible. The divine *verdict of the future* is known in the present and creates the possibility for mutual acceptance grounded in the cross. This verdict also means that the life of God is present with church as a *spiritual reality* in the present. There is therefore a Pentecostal element that is a necessary dimension to the life of the church. This was paramount in Newbigin’s mind when confessing in the creed, “I believe in one church”:

Credo in unam ecclesiam. We believe, therefore, that...the provisional incorporation of men into Jesus Christ is not abandoned by the way, but that God completes what he has begun. We believe that he completes this through the work of the Holy Spirit. Our belief in one holy catholic and apostolic Church is

¹⁵⁴ Ephesians 1:10 RSV.

based upon our belief in the Holy Spirit. And the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church may be described by saying that it is the continual renewal of faith, hope and love.

The Holy Spirit enables us by *faith* to hold fast to Jesus Christ, to continue to confess him as Lord...

The Holy Spirit enables us continually to *hope* for the completion of that which he has begun to do in incorporating men into Jesus Christ. Through this hope we are enabled to reach out beyond the present boundaries and the present structures of the Church, to discern the working of God beyond the bounds of the Church, to strike camp and move on when we see that the glory of the Lord has moved onward, to press on continually to the completion of God's purpose for all men in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts a *love* which both unites us to our fellow members in the Body of Christ and also draws us towards those who are outside that fellowship. This love enables us to bear the tension between the "now" and the "not yet", to endure the conflict between those who cling to that which has already been given in the Body of Christ, and that which lies ahead though the fuller incorporation of mankind into him. It enables us to be forgiven by those who are opposed to us in this conflict. And it keeps the Church true to the two basic principles of structure—that leadership is to be only along the way of the Cross, and that order is to provide a voice and a place for the last and the least of God's children (Newbigin 1977g: 125-126).

In his final years Newbigin spoke of the critical need within ecumenical structures for the inclusion of evangelicals, Pentecostals, house churches and other Christian groups that were outside the movement. He also envisioned scenarios where current ecumenical and denominational structures might fail or even where churches would decide to realign for the sake of a deeper unity of all in one place. As the title of his memoir suggests, the ecumenical missional agenda of his life remained "unfinished" (1993k). But he was firm in his faith that God's will for the church and the world would be accomplished, so in this sense he was hopeful for the ecumenical future. It was not because of anything that he saw happening in the movement at the end of his life, but simply because of the eschatological hope he found in Christ. When asked whether he was an optimist or a

pessimist about the church's future he responded, "Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The kingdom of God is at hand—nothing can change this fact" (Newbigin 1987a: 15-16; 2003a: 46).

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