



A Review of "Local Leadership In Mission Lands," edited by J. Franklin Ewing, S.J.

1956

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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This volume contains the full record of addresses and discussions at a two-day conference of Roman Catholic missionary specialists from all parts of the world. The subject is divided into seven sections, and on each section there is a major address, two carefully prepared comments and a *verbatim* report of the discussion. A very large variety of Roman Catholic missionary Orders is represented, and there are valuable sections dealing with the training of the ministry, of women workers and of the laity. The contributors are all, it appears, Americans, and the speaking and discussion were evidently able, vigorous and always interesting.

The present reviewer has to confess a certain diffidence in approaching his task, on account of ignorance of the background of actual church life which lies behind these words. This ignorance may easily lead to a wrong assessment of the meaning of the words used. In such a



discussion there are vast areas untouched because they are assumed by all. The reviewer who does not have this background may easily misunderstand, and must crave pardon at the outset.

The first impression which the volume makes upon a reader accustomed to the atmosphere of an International Missionary Council discussion group is one of having stepped back several decades. There is a curiously old-fashioned feeling about the discussion. The mere fact that the 61 participants did not include a single 'native' leader is itself enough to explain it in part. (The decision to use the word 'local' in preference to either 'native' or 'indigenous' in the title was among the subjects discussed; in fact the word normally used in the discussion is 'native', a use for which a vigorous defence is made.) A discussion of this character would be inconceivable in oecumenical missionary circles to-day. Great emphasis is laid upon the necessity to proceed slowly in the task of training a native clergy. This process, we are told, may take centuries in some areas. 'Better slowly but surely' is the motto.

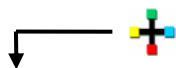
Unless the circumstances or the political situation force our step, I think we should not be in too much of a hurry to give over these dioceses [in Africa] to the native clergy. If the native clergy and the Catholic population are happy and contented with the status quo, we should leave it as it is as long as possible, for the good of everybody.

One of the factors which strengthens this case for caution is the emphasis on elements of training which many of us would radically question. In a New Guinea reference it was stated:

We have to train our natives from the tips of their toes right up to the top of their heads. They come out of the bush with nothing but a piece of cloth round their mid-section. They must not only be trained intellectually, but we have also to teach them to sleep on beds, to wear shoes and clothing, to eat with forks and knives and off plates – even this phase of their training is not as easy as it might sound.

It is fair to add that at a later stage of the discussion one of the lay participants remarked that neither the Holy Family nor St Thomas Aquinas used a fork and knife. But the predominant feeling evidently was that it is not fair to the clergy of the younger churches to give them anything less than, or other than, everything that the European clergy have in the way of training. The assumption, moreover, that the language of instruction has to be a western one (presumably Latin is meant) strengthens the argument for proceeding slowly.

Against this, however, there is impressive evidence of the fact that Rome has used and continues to use its power in favour of the more rapid development of a native clergy, even against local resistance.



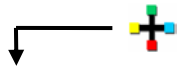
Interesting examples are given. In the opening paper the following words of Pius XI are quoted:

Perhaps sufficient attention has never been paid to the method by which the Gospel began to be propagated and the Church of God to be established throughout the world.... From the earliest literary monuments of Christian antiquity it is abundantly evident that the clergy placed in charge by the Apostles, in every community of the faithful, were not brought in from without, but were chosen from the natives of the locality.

It is plain, however, that this policy meets with strong resistance, and that this resistance is intrinsic to the conception of the ministry which seems to control discussion. One has all the time the feeling that the ministry, the hierarchy, is conceived as a thing in itself which must be established slowly, patiently, thoroughly, with every possible care, in order that the Church may be built upon it. It seems to the present reviewer at least that this conception must necessarily lead – as it has in fact led, and not only in Roman Catholic missions – to an excessively prolonged dependence of the younger church upon foreign leadership and control. One misses the sense that the existence of the younger churches is itself a work of the mighty Spirit of God, and the consequent assurance that the same Spirit is able to furnish them with a ministry adequate to do His work among them, even if that ministry does not measure up to some of the standards which at one time or another the older churches have rightly set for themselves. In other words, one has all the time the feeling that standards other than those indicated by the New Testament are being applied.

But it would be quite unfair to suggest that this volume gives any impression of complacency or stagnation, for it reveals a very real readiness to criticize and correct. There is a severe criticism of the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to provide translations of the Bible for her people. One delegate who had recently toured Africa in the interests of a U.N. agency unfavourably contrasts Roman Catholic with non-Roman Catholic schools, affirming that the latter develop qualities of initiative and leadership which are lacking in the products of Roman Catholic schools, with their strong emphasis upon obedience. The most illuminating and

challenging part of the whole discussion concerns the training of lay leadership, especially leadership by women. This is a matter upon which Rome has recently given a very strong lead, and the addresses contain both severe criticisms of the clericalism which stifles real lay leadership, and also remarkable examples of successful work in developing lay leadership in evangelism, in pastoral



work and in secular occupations such as politics, commerce and literature. There is a great deal to be learned from this part of the discussion, especially in the emphasis placed upon training in small groups by close personal contact, on the complete identification of the leader with his group and on the key concepts of charity and responsibility. Examples are also given of the use by the Church of techniques of leadership-training developed in industry since the war, some of which are being used by churches in the U.S.A. but which the reviewer has not seen applied in the younger churches.

Three thoughts remain after putting the book down. 1. How far is the conception of 'leadership' really one which we ought to encourage? It is so hard to use it without being misled by the non-Christian conceptions of leadership. It has been truly said that our need is not for leaders, but for saints and servants. Unless this fact is held steadily in the foreground, the whole idea of leadership-training becomes dangerous. 2. In our training we need to approximate more to the old idea of apprenticeship than to the pattern so often set in academic courses. Learning the art of Christian service must largely be by doing. 3. This apprenticeship must be served in the atmosphere of companionship. The Fordham discussion repeatedly directs attention to the vital importance of small groups, where work is shared in an intimate fellowship between the more- and the less-experienced. Here numbers are a real danger. The pattern of training in Christian leadership must still be that given in the Gospels – the training of the Twelve.

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