



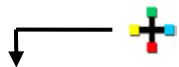
## The Work Of The Holy Spirit In The Life Of The Asian Churches

1961

J. E. Lesslie Newbigin

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We are gathered here to be witnesses together to him who is Lord of all, but who has willed that – until his coming in glory – his lordship should be a hidden lordship, known not by seeing but by hearing and believing.

You will have noted that what is said in the New Testament about our witness to that hidden sovereignty is said in the indicative rather than in the imperative mood. Not ‘You ought to go and be my witnesses’, but ‘When the Holy Spirit comes, you shall be my witnesses.’ The same thing is made even more clear in the word of our Lord at the end of the fifteenth chapter of St John: ‘When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father ... he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning’. The presence of the Holy Spirit means that Jesus is known as Lord, and that the community which knows him as Lord becomes something like a fluorescent screen in which the hidden sovereignty of Jesus is made visible for others. Witness is not primarily something that we decide to do; it is something which happens when the Holy Spirit is in control.

That means that our concern in this Assembly is not first with something that we are to go and do. It is even possible that we are already trying to do too much! It is first a matter of believing, and of bringing all our experience into the light of that belief, so that we begin to understand the world in which we live in the light of the lordship of Christ. This is a matter of opening up the whole of our corporate life as churches, and of our individual lives as Christians, to the illuminating and cleansing and re-ordering power of the Holy

Spirit, so that we may indeed become his witnesses together.

### *The Holy Spirit's purpose in our time*

So, then, we begin by looking at the events of our time, looking at them not just as the background for our missionary concerns, but as the works of him whose witnesses we are called to be. If we are true to the Bible, our position is not that we have a faith which enables us to pass in security over the abysses of evil, but that *we know by faith the true meaning of the events of our time* – can interpret them better than the adherents of other faiths, and can therefore go down among them and play our part there in such a way that we are witnesses to him who is Lord of all.

If we begin, using the jargon of the moment, to talk about ‘rapid social change as the work of God, we shall be challenged by the question: ‘Are you not putting the clock back twenty-five years? Did we not have enough of this sort of thing then, when people confused social progress with Christianisation, and translated the language of the Kingdom of God into terms of what the hotel advertisements call "all modern conveniences"?’ I remember hearing a great missionary complaining about a speaker who, as he said, ‘talks about evangelism, but, when you enquire what he means, he talks about breeding improved strains of pigs and poultry’.

Far be it from me to suggest that pigs and poultry are unimportant in the sight of God! I am sure they are not. I was delighted, the other day, when visiting a group of villages where we have a project of rural development, to find that the best eggs were known by a Tamil phrase which means literally ‘Bible Church eggs’. I am sure that in certain circumstances there is a place on that fluorescent screen for improved breeds of pigs and poultry. But we know also that there has sometimes been a quite intolerable confusion here, and that a revolt was necessary.

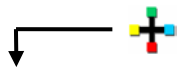
We are heirs of that revolt, which was made visible and effective at the time of the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1938. That Conference marked a change in the direction of missionary thinking, in two ways which have greatly affected the course of events in the ensuing twenty years – first, in its emphasis on *the radical ‘otherness’ of the Kingdom of God*, its discontinuity with any programme of human social development; and, secondly, in

its emphasis on *the Church*, as contrasted with an earlier emphasis upon the Kingdom of God. The Church was seen as the centre of the missionary task, the called and committed body which is the sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. The Tambaram call for a ‘Church-centric’ pattern of missionary development has been determinative of practical missionary policies during the two decades that have followed.

That shift of emphasis was absolutely necessary, and has been fruitful. The great development of the Asian churches as mature and autonomous bodies, of which this conference is an impressive symbol, owes a very great deal to this change in the direction of missionary policy. We cannot fail to be thankful for it. But after twenty years we are also becoming conscious of dangers which arise from a too exclusive concentration on the things which Tambaram emphasised. We are becoming conscious of the danger that the Church may be too much concerned with its own existence and too little with the fate of peoples and nations; too much a self-contained community concerned with its own survival, and too little conscious of its calling to be the servant of all and the witness to all of Christ’s love. It is very easy for such churches to slip into the error of thinking of Christianity as one among the religions, and of themselves as one of the religious communities. From that the next step is fatally easy to begin thinking that it is our business to protect ‘religion’ from the advancing tides of materialism and atheism. It is very important at this moment to insist that, in this sense, we are not interested in religion. From a biblical point of view we have to insist that, in certain circumstances, an atheist may be nearer to

the Kingdom of God than a religious man. Our business – to repeat – is just to be that fluorescent screen in which the hidden sovereignty of Jesus over all men and all nations becomes, in a manner, visible and credible.

The programme of this conference is itself a token of the widespread recognition that the time has come to lift our sights, to devote a much larger part of our attention as Christians to what God is doing in the world. We misconceive the mission of the Church if we think of it simply as an operation carried out against a neutral or hostile background of world-history. The truly biblical understanding of the matter is that God, who created the world and sustains it in being, is leading the world to the final issues of mercy and judgement, and that

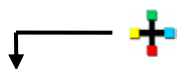


he has set the Church in the world as the witness to what he is doing. Therefore it is our business as Christians to understand what God is doing with the world, but not to confuse the processes of history with the revelation of the Kingdom of God.

The processes of ‘rapid social change’ going on in Asia today are extremely complex. When we examine them in detail at close quarters we find that a great many different factors are operating, and producing varied and complicated patterns. But we have also to stand back, so to say, and try to look at the process as a whole. We require both the detailed work of analysis, and also the kind of synthesis which faith must always be attempting. Recognizing the extreme variety and complexity of the events with which we are dealing, and the fact that all generalizations must be partial and tentative, it seems to me legitimate and necessary to try to see what is the meaning of the whole process in the light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the testimony of Scripture to the meaning of that revelation.

*What we see happening is that the people of East Asia are being drawn out of their separate pools of existence into the current of a single history.* Two points are involved in this. First, a cyclical understanding of human experience is being replaced by an understanding in linear terms. Countries which are dominated by Hindu or Buddhist thought are without a strong sense of history as a meaningful process leading to a worthwhile end. These faiths teach men to interpret the element of change in human experience in terms of recurrent cycles, rather than in terms of development. In the villages of South India with which I am familiar there is normally no sense of history. It is usually impossible to find out the age of any building which is older than the memory of the oldest inhabitant. The only records are those of the purchase and sale of land. Life is interpreted in terms of the natural rhythms of day and night, summer and winter, birth, age, and death. What is happening today is that this cyclical understanding of human life is being broken and replaced by a linear pattern – but an understanding of human life in terms of progressive development, in terms of planning which looks forward to permanent and irreversible changes in the human situation.

There is also involved in this process the drawing together of separate experiences into a single history. There is no need to

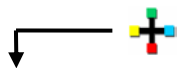


elaborate this point. Every issue of the daily newspapers makes it clear that the lives of all our people are now interlocked. Our national experiences are not separate experiences; they are parts of a single world-history into which we have all been drawn.

*This single world-history into which we are all together drawn is characterized by the fact that it looks towards a single goal – towards the sharing of all in the benefits of a common scientific and technical civilization.* It is true that there are important differences of emphasis from country to country as regards immediate priorities. But the over-all objective is common to all our peoples – a world in which the high standard of living made possible by modern techniques is available for all. It has become clear in recent years that this objective takes precedence now even

over the most deeply rooted convictions which the Asian peoples have derived from their ancient religious traditions. One could cite as examples the fact that it has apparently been possible in Communist China to develop forms of communal living which violate what was usually thought to be the deepest and strongest element in the traditional Chinese way of life, namely reverence for the family; and the fact that in India the profound repugnance to artificial methods of contraception expressed by such men as Mahatma Gandhi has been completely overruled by the determination to prevent the increase of population from destroying the results of national economic development.

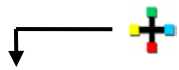
*The origin of this conception of a single human destiny is in the so-called Christian West. It is a secularized form of the Christian eschatology. Whether in its Marxist, or in its liberal forms, it is a product of the history of the Christian West, and ultimately of the biblical conception of history and of the Kingdom of God. It could not possibly have arisen within the thought-world of Hinduism or Buddhism. At two points, it would appear, this modern technological society is dependent upon convictions derived from the Christian faith. Its basis is in a meticulous concern and curiosity about the smallest detail of the visible and tangible world, a concern which is ultimately dependent upon a belief that this tangible and visible world is the creation of God and has significance and value in his sight. And its driving power is a belief that human history is going somewhere, that something happens*



in what happens, that human hopes are not mere dreams but can be validated in human history. It is, as I have said, a secularized form of the Christian belief in the Kingdom of God.

Here let me pause to say that in using the word 'secular' I do not mean to use it as a term of abuse. You will remember that the great predecessor of the Tambaram Conference, the conference at Jerusalem in 1928, was much concerned with this matter of the secular. It saw secularism as the great adversary which the Gospel had to face, the power which had replaced the old religions in the allegiance of men. Perhaps the time has come for a careful re-assessment of the thought of the Jerusalem Conference on this subject. Such a reassessment would recognize that, while secularism is an adversary of Christian faith, the concept of the secular order is a product of Christianity and one that we have to prize very highly. A true understanding of the God-given dignity of the secular order is necessary to liberate us from the demonic powers which operate under the name of religion. The secular order is precisely this created order in which God has set us to do his will. A false under-valuation of the secular order, and a false over-valuation of it – spiritualism and secularism – both arise from false eschatology; the one from over-attention to the future of the individual soul, and the other from overestimation of the possibilities of human history. The clue to a right understanding of the secular order is a right eschatology.

*The process by which all nations are being brought out of isolation into a single historic process dominated by a conception of a common human destiny is to be understood in the light of the New Testament teaching that history leads to a single ultimate issue – Christ or Antichrist? The force which is drawing all nations into a single history is immediately a secularized Christian eschatology, but ultimately the revelation in history of the origin and end of history – namely Jesus Christ. As that revelation makes its impact upon men, a cyclical pattern of existence becomes impossible. Men and societies are drawn irreversibly into a linear pattern, that is to say into a pattern in which human history is seen as movement with a direction, as movement which is going somewhere. When this has happened, it is no longer possible to return to the cyclical pattern. It is inconceivable that the Asian nations which have now become free should go back to where*



they were in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before they were drawn into the orbit of European history.

But the revelation of the source and goal of human history in Jesus Christ, and with it the appearing of a linear pattern of human experience, precipitates the appearing of its opposite, the Antichrist, the false saviour, that which pretends to have but does not have the universal answer to human need; that which, though belonging to this created order, yet pretends to have the universal secret of salvation for this created world.

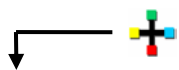
Thus what we read in the New Testament gives us the clue for understanding what is happening in the world. In the Gospels we see Jesus, the true source and goal of human life, bringing men tenderly but inexorably to the ultimate issue of life or death. The same Lord Jesus is he who brings the nations to that ultimate issue. And, within that activity, he has set the Church as the witness among men to what he is doing. The Church is to be the place where the meaning of human existence is made plain, and where men are brought to the point of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord, or rejecting him.

*For the Church, therefore, there is no room for anxiety about God's cause in the world* – for feeling that we are sent to fight a losing battle against overwhelming odds. Certainly there is room for awe in the face of the terrible events of our time. There is need for penitence for the fact that we have obscured rather than revealed the purpose of God, and for an eager openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit that we may simply be that fluorescent screen in which the invisible sovereignty of Christ is made visible. But there is no room for anxiety about God's cause; he leads all things to their consummation, and has set us as witnesses of what he has done and is doing.

What, then, shall we say about the practical witness of the Church in the Asia of today? With great diffidence I venture to put before you some of the things that seem to be implied by the foregoing statements.

### *Missionary methods and the Holy Spirit*

One may begin by making a negative statement. This understanding of what God is doing does *not* lead to the idea of the slow and gradual extension of the boundaries of the Church across the world. That has been, sometimes at least, the opera-



tive idea in the missionary movement of which most of us here are heirs. It is an idea which fits easily into the experience of those who know themselves to be part of an expanding political and cultural and economic power. It was easy to fit in with the optimistic expectations for world history which were current in Europe and America in the nineteenth century. It does not fit with a situation, such as ours, in which the tide is running the other way. And, what is much more important, it is not the idea which you find operative in the New Testament. You find there a set of ideas something like the following

1. *The time is short.* Judgement is at hand. Therefore the good news must be proclaimed quickly to the whole earth.

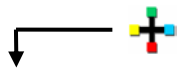
2. *The messengers must not stop to argue with those who will not hear.* So long as there is time they must push on, staking out Christ's claim to the whole earth.

3. *These being the last days, the gift promised for these days has been given* – the gift of the Holy Spirit not just to a few but to all believers. The characteristic function of the Spirit is witness, a witness which overturns and confutes the world's ideas of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement.

In accordance with this pattern of ideas, we find that St Paul proceeds on his missionary journeys at what seems an incredible pace. He does not stay with his converts to train and build

up over a period of years a body of leaders for the new church. Much less does he set about establishing an agency staffed and financed from Antioch. Within a few weeks or months of his arrival he moves on; but when he does so, he leaves behind a living church which from that moment he treats without any kind of hesitation as the Church of God, a church furnished with a ministry and with all the gifts of the Spirit needed for its life and witness.

It is very plain that the pattern followed in the great missionary expansion which has created the Asian churches as we know them was quite different. It is perhaps idle to ask at what point and for what reasons the fatal decisions were made. It would certainly be foolish and impertinent to presume to criticise those who were so faithful to the call of God in their day. But it would be unfaithfulness to the same call in our day if we were unwilling frankly to recognize the consequences which have followed from these decisions, and their profound effect upon the whole life of our churches. Let me

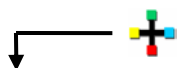


draw attention to three major facts about the missionary methods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which have shaped the life of our churches today.

There was the fact that *missions relied from a very early stage upon a professional agency controlled and paid by the mission*. I am aware of the fact that this was not universally so; there are very important exceptions. Nevertheless the paid mission agency has been general and characteristic. One could spend much time speaking of the achievements of this great multitude of teachers, catechists, and evangelists – mostly utterly unknown outside of a very narrow circle – who have been the real infantrymen of the churches' advance through Asia. They are indeed a noble army. And yet we have to recognize that this pattern of advance has produced results which constitute some of our most difficult problems today.

In the first place, it meant that the basic pattern was not congregational but organizational. The original units of missionary thinking were not congregations and dioceses or presbyteries; they were mission stations and out-stations. The effect of this has been that the reality of the congregation as the basic unit of Christian existence – the gathering together of God's people in one place in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the means of Word and Sacrament, to be the Church of God in that place – has not been really grasped. The congregation has been secondary, the agency primary. The basic reality has not been the Church of God in this or that place, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost; the basic reality has been an out-station of the main mission station, a branch of the organization whose headquarters was elsewhere.

It is, for example, not at all uncommon for a mission which is compelled to reduce its commitments to make arrangements to 'hand over' its work to another mission. In this process the local congregations are sometimes not even consulted. Normally it is a proceeding carried out over their heads. Thus early in the nineteenth century the great Danish Halk mission handed over its work in South India to the representatives of the Church of England, and the Protestant Christians of South India went to bed one night as Lutherans and woke up next morning as Anglicans without knowing that it had happened. Such a proceeding violates the fundamental character of the Church's life. But it has not been regarded as abnormal, because it fitted in with the whole way of thinking which took



the mission agency as the primary reality. And the effects of this are seen in the life of the churches. If you constantly treat a body of people as a sort of out-station, as the branch of an organization whose headquarters are elsewhere, they will behave accordingly; and the result will be that distressing attitude of dependence, that deep spiritual insecurity, and that lack of real selfhood which we so often deplore in our churches.

This also produces a further effect of tremendous importance. A church so based does not become self-propagating. On the principles on which (at least in India) most of our work has been built up, a new congregation is a liability and not an asset. It is something which you can take on only if you have funds in your treasury to look after it. For practical purposes the Great Commission has to be re-written: 'Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations subject to budgetary requirements'. For our traditional mode of operation, a major evangelistic opening would be a major financial disaster.

And yet there is ample evidence to show that St Paul's methods are as valid today as they ever were; that where there is real faith in the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to equip new converts with all that they need for their growth in Christ and their witness to others, the Church grows and spreads spontaneously. My own experience of the way in which new congregations, when treated as fully responsible from the outset, will carry the Gospel to their neighbours at once and in the most natural way, has convinced me of this. Indeed such experiences call attention to the error in a conception of pastoral care which regards the congregation as a purely passive body dependent entirely upon the guidance and protection of the pastor. St Paul gives us a much more dynamic conception of pastoral work, in which ministries of many different kinds co-operate to equip the whole people of God for the active ministry which they have to discharge in the world.

There is also the fact that *in most of our countries the Church has grown up under the shadow of great mission institutions of education, healing, and service*. These institutions have played a great and beneficent part in the whole work of Christian witness. They are a precious legacy to us, and in some cases they are still capable of playing a positive part in



the total Christian witness of the Church. Yet by their very size in relation to the Church, they have accentuated here a weakness which is common to all our churches both East and West. I refer to the very deep-seated and persistent failure of the churches to recognize that the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given, and can only be given, in the ordinary secular work of lay men and women in business, in politics, in professional work, as farmer, factory workers and so on. Much stress has already been laid on this during our Assembly, and yet it can hardly be repeated too often. Christian witness is primarily not something which happens under the official auspices of the Church and in the presence of its ordained ministers or officers. It is given in the acts and words of countless Christian men and women from Monday to Saturday, in field and factory, in office and classroom. The general failure of the Church to recognize this, which is so wide and deep and goes so far back into the history of the Church, is accentuated in places – and there are many such in Asia – where the Church is dominated by large mission institutions, and those church members who are not employed in these institutions come to feel that they are mere camp-followers in the Christian enterprise, instead of knowing that they truly are its front-line troops.

Another key fact is that decisions which ought to have been taken by the church were taken by the mission. A concrete example will make clear what I mean. In the area from which I come, one of the most grievous facts with which we have to deal is the continuance of caste spirit within the Church. The facts of the matter are fairly simple: that Indian society is divided into a great number of groups held together by blood relationship and by many common customs; that such groupings persist among those who have become Christians; and that so long as marriages are normally arranged by parents, they will continue. These facts are not in dispute. But on the question 'What should the Christian attitude to these facts be?' it is very hard to get a rational discussion. The whole subject is charged with emotion to a degree which suggests that reason is playing only a very minor part. As I ask myself why this is so, I am compelled to wonder whether it is because it was not at the beginning left to the Church to make the real decisions about caste. The earliest missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, took the view that caste was a quite natural



part of the social structure, and that the continuance of this structure was not incompatible with Christianity. Later missionaries took the view that it was part of Hinduism and was wholly evil and should not be 'so much as named' among the saints. But in both cases it was the foreign missionaries who took the decisions. It was not a decision of the Indian conscience enlightened by the Gospel.

This is typical of many other matters. And if one looks at it from the perspective of St Paul, is one not bound to ask whether this is not Judaising rather than evangelising? Or, to put the matter the other way round, if one tries from the experience of a modern missionary, to put oneself in the place of the first apostles to the Gentiles, trained in all the sanctity of the law and accustomed to look with horror upon the uncleanness of the Gentile world, one can understand how overwhelming the temptation must have been to begin by insisting that the new converts be trained to live after the pattern of the people of God and to keep all the commandments in the law of God as Israel had received it. If one comes to the matter from this point of view, one is amazed at the daring of St Paul in insisting that it was not to be so, that the law was not to be imposed upon the Gentile churches, because the living Holy Spirit himself was able to do his own work among them, to create by his inexhaustible power new patterns of holiness out of all the diverse material of human nature. As we contrast this with the procedures of modern missions, must we not confess that this daring trust has been notably lacking?

Is it not probable, in fact, that many of the weaknesses which we recognize in our life as churches are to be traced to this root? Our feeling of insecurity in the face of the great and reviving cultures in which we are set, our failure to penetrate boldly and deeply into the thought-forms of the non-Christian faiths in order to state our Gospel in their terms, our lamentable dependence upon western forms of speech, of music, of architecture, to express our Christian faith is it not possible that all this is due to the basic weakness of which I am here speaking, *to a failure sufficiently to believe that the preaching and hearing and believing of the Gospel releases in those who believe the very power of the Spirit of God himself to create his own forms of obedience and holiness, and to bear his own witness to Christ?*



### *Ministry, Congregation and Holy Spirit*

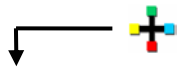
If this is anything like the truth, then some at least of the implications are clear.

*We need to be ready for bold experiment in regard to the forms of the ministry.* I am quite sure that the ministry of Word and Sacraments is part of the fundamental structure of the Church for all times and places. But I am also sure that the forms of this ministry need to be far more flexible than we have made them – and this applies to all our Churches, not least to those who call themselves 'Free'. In particular, I am sure that it is *not* part of the unchanging form of the Church that its ministry must be a professional class. The concept of the ministry as a paid professional group has only a limited application to the situation in modern Asia. Indeed the results which have followed from the attempt to apply this concept, as developed in Western Europe, to the villages of Asia have been quite ludicrous. In large parts of India it is normal for one ordained minister to be in charge of twenty, thirty or even fifty congregations. There are areas where the figure is even higher. Obviously in such areas the pattern of the ministry has broken down. If one asks how this fantastic state of affairs came about, the answer is that those who laid the foundations for the life of the Church in these areas took it as axiomatic that the ministry is a paid profession, that it requires a professional education comparable to what is given in European churches, and that it should be supported by the people. Because these were taken to be axioms, it followed that, instead of asking 'How can each of these little village congregations be equipped with the ministry of the Word and Sacraments?', it became necessary to ask 'How many of these



congregations will be needed to pay the salary of one minister?’ The result was the pattern which I have described, in which the ordained minister became the administrator of a small diocese and the peripatetic dispenser of sacraments to groups of people to whom he was more or less a stranger; while the pastoral care of these groups devolved upon a small army of ‘agents’ paid and controlled by the ‘mission’. This is something radically different from what St Paul left behind as the result of his missionary labours, namely congregations each of which could be addressed quite simply as ‘the Church of God’, each equipped with the full ministry of Word and Sacraments.

I have come to feel that the pattern of ministry which would

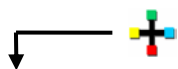


be appropriate to the village churches as I know them in South India might include something like the following.

*A local, non-professional ministry in each village congregation*, able to provide leadership for daily and weekly worship, including the reading and simple exposition of the Scriptures and the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In my own diocese, where we are beginning to develop such a ministry, we have said that men to be ordained for this should be over forty years of age, should be supported by the substantially unanimous vote of the congregation which they will serve, and should be accepted by the Diocesan Ministerial Committee, and by the Bishop, after a reasonable period of preparation. Such preparation is not an academic training in an institution, but rather a prolonged apprenticeship under experienced guidance. Such men give their services as volunteers and continue to earn their whole living as farmers, labourers, or in other ways.

*A fully trained and paid professional ministry*, whose functions will be primarily the spiritual nurture of the local village presbyters throughout an area, and the conduct of teaching and preaching missions. The former is a very necessary task if the work of the volunteer village presbyters is to be spiritually fruitful. The latter will be necessary as a supplement to the very simple teaching which such village presbyters can give. The congregations with which I am familiar are generally much more ready to receive Christian teaching and preaching in the form of occasional missions and conventions, than through the medium of the weekly sermon from their local presbyter. I believe that there is need for a peripatetic teaching and preaching ministry by men who have received a thorough training in the usual theological disciplines.

Thirdly, and of course this may occasion controversy, I think the pattern should include *a bishop as father in God for the Church in an area*, providing a pastoral and spiritual, not merely organizational and administrative, centre of unity and authority for the life of the church. I have spoken much about the local congregation as the basic unit of Christian existence. I think it is important to add that, for the health of the Church, there is needed also a link between the congregations in an area which is not merely that which can be provided by a conference, a council, or an administrative and financial nexus, but that which can be given by a pastor who is accepted as



having a measure of spiritual authority rather than of administrative control. Readers of the writings of Roland Allen<sup>1</sup> will have recognized many of his ideas in what I have tried to say so far. It is important therefore to mention the fact that Roland Allen was an Anglican who took for granted a great deal of church doctrine without explicitly mentioning it. When Roland Allen is read through purely Congregationalist spectacles, the result is something which I do not think he anticipated or intended.

*We need to be ready for bold experiment in regard to the forms of congregational life.* I am thinking here especially of our town congregations, and I speak from only a limited experience. I am sure that the large city congregations which I know in India do not provide in themselves the

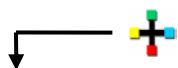
structures through which the full participation of all the members in the fellowship, witness and service of the Church can be achieved. There is need for more experiment along the lines of the 'house-church' – the local group meeting in the home of one of the members. There is need also for experiment with other forms of grouping based on special types of work, special responsibilities, special vocations.

*There is also need for experiment in helping the lay members of the Church to articulate their witness in the different spheres of secular life in which they work.* This is something which the Church as such cannot do. Only those who are actually engaged in these various spheres of work, who have themselves to take every day the decisions which shape their development, can make clear what are the issues upon which Christians can speak a relevant word, or take an action which will bear witness to the Lordship of Christ. For this purpose we need to develop in Asia lay institutes where these issues can begin to emerge.

*And there is need for much bolder experiment in entering into the spiritual wrestlings of the non-Christian faiths today,* so that, sharing in their spiritual struggles, we may be able to express in their terms the good news with which we are entrusted. This calls for a much greater openness in our encounter with the non-Christian faiths than has been common in recent years.

These somewhat scattered and tentative suggestions all

<sup>1</sup> For example, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours* (World Dominion Press), 1953.



spring, however, from one central concern which I have indicated by the title of this lecture and which I have tried to illustrate in various ways during its course. What is needed above all else, I believe, is a great confidence in the Holy Spirit as himself the primary witness to Christ, as himself the real Missionary. Let me draw these thoughts to a conclusion by means of a simple experience which many others here could certainly match from their own memory. A few days ago I was asked to baptise a group of families in a distant village of which I had not previously heard. I sat down with them and asked them to tell in detail how it came about that they wanted to be Christians. The story they told me included a great variety of different characters. There was a Christian engineer who had helped their neighbours to get a regular supply of clean drinking water, a man who quite simply put his engineering skill at the service of a neglected group of people for Christ's sake. There was the talk of their near relatives who had recently become Christians, but whose talk did not begin to carry conviction until a copy of St Luke's Gospel happened to fall into the hands of one of the group, bringing the conviction that this was a serious question. There was the colporteur through whom a tract came to their hands bidding them face the simple question: 'If I die tonight where shall I go?' There was the neighbouring congregation to whom they turned for guidance, and who sent them one of their own number to tell them the story of Jesus, and to bring them finally to the point where they knew that this was the truth. The point, you see, is that all of this was the result of no planned evangelistic strategy. No human mind co-ordinated all these approaches to this single village. One can only say that the Holy Spirit himself brought them to the truth, using for this purpose a variety of different instruments, using in fact all the small acts of fidelity of these believing men and women. And the result was a group of candidates for baptism as keen and well-instructed as I ever hope to meet.

I close, therefore, with the word with which I began. The primary witness is the witness of the Holy Spirit himself. Ours is secondary. 'When the Counsellor comes... he will bear witness of me. And you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.' That, then, is the condition of our being witnesses – *that we be with him.*

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