



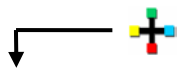
Pierre Benignus 1912-1963

1963

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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Pierre Benignus was a man whose presence gave one courage and gaiety. The first reaction of many when they heard the news of his death was: How can one imagine Pierre dead? He was always so alive! But this was not mere natural buoyancy. Its roots were deeper. He had deep anxieties, but he knew how to cast them simply upon his Lord and to leave them there. He believed in God, and he loved people. There cannot have been many people whose death left such a wide circle of men and women feeling that they had lost a dear personal friend.

Again, this gift of friendship was not a cheap or easy thing. Those amazing little notes which always arrived in some mysterious way when one was going on a long journey, or facing a hard task, or having a special joy – they were written late at night, often in the sweltering heat of some spot in West Africa. More astonishing than the volume of this kind of personal correspondence was the unceasing remembrance and caring which kept his friends always in mind and prompted the right word at the right moment.

This caring for people was the heart of his work as a missionary. He thought of people and not just of programmes. In all the negotiations for bringing the daughter churches of the Paris Mission to full autonomy, he thought of the people concerned, felt as they felt, was determined to sweep away any kind of paternalism which would in effect deny them their true dignity. But this was never a doctrinaire attitude; it was rooted in his love and respect for his friends.

The same personal caring made possible the development of the 'Islam in Africa' project, of which he was in a true sense the father-in-God. He was tireless in his visiting of the 'advisers', and in establishing the contacts which could make their work more effective. Because he so manifestly loved and served God, he won the trust of many who suspect ecumenical programmes, and opened the way for a wider ministry to the churches faced with the need to understand Islam.

At the time of his death he was travelling on behalf of the Division, seeking to develop an enquiry into evangelistic needs and opportunities in West Africa. One cannot doubt that if he had been able to carry this



through to completion, something as fruitful as the Islam project would have grown from it.

In the name of the Division for which he did so much we would express our gratitude, and our affectionate sympathy for the bereaved family, and for the Paris Mission which was so generous in setting him free to serve in ecumenical projects. It is easier to believe in God for having known him, and to rejoice in the communion of the saints because he is of that good company.

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