



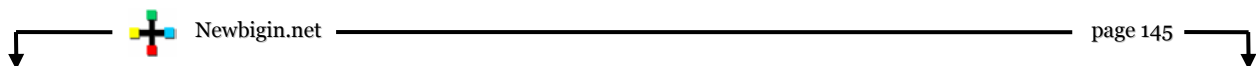
From The Editor

1965

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

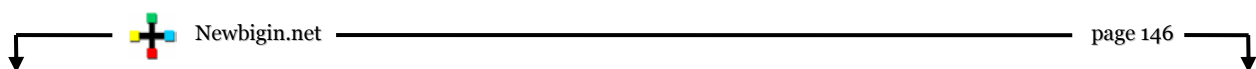
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One of the good things that I inherited in becoming Editor of the *International Review of Missions* was the privilege of receiving a great many unsolicited articles from missionaries in all corners of the world. I wish that it were possible to publish more of them than we do. They ensure, I believe, that the Review remains a real forum for discussion; I trust that it will never become merely the mouth-piece for the views of the Editor and his colleagues. But there has been considerable demand that certain themes should be regularly taken up for discussion in a series of planned articles. It has also been suggested that the Editor should be responsible for something more substantial than the 'Notes' which have hitherto nestled modestly between the book reviews and the bibliography.

With the present number, therefore, we begin a new arrangement, which we hope will commend itself to readers. Each number, except the January number, which will continue to be devoted mainly to the survey of the developments of the preceding year, will contain a series of invited articles on a single theme, as well as a number of unsolicited articles. Each number, with the same exception, will open with an editorial article. The detailed contents will be found inside the front cover.

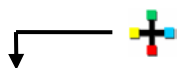


We take up in the present issue the theme of industrial evangelism. The world of industry presents the Christian mission with the challenge of a frontier, in the proper sense of that much overworked word. There are very few places in the world where it can be said that the Church is effectively present within the world of industry. This is a statement which hardly needs to be documented. When the industrial revolution took place in Europe, and masses of men and women were driven into the towns to work in the mills and factories, the churches retained to a large extent the character that had been impressed upon them by centuries of ministry to pre-industrial societies. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, where the growth of large-scale industrialization and the concomitant development of huge urban sprawls are going on with breathless speed, the

churches have hardly begun to face the challenge which this brings to their traditionally rural patterns of life. One can see many places where the Church is truly present in the village and in the suburb; in the mill and the factory the Church is a stranger. Yet it is the mill and the factory which shape more and more powerfully the whole life of man.

As soon as one begins to discuss this subject, it becomes clear that there is not yet very much agreement about what the term 'industrial evangelism' means. This is one of the reasons why discussion is urgent. During the past two years, the staff of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism have been exploring the question whether there is a need for ecumenical collaboration in this field, and it has become clear that there is indeed such a need. In the first place, there is need for the exchange of experience and conviction. This is necessary if the churches are to help one another. There must be at least some beginning of an agreement about what we are aiming at in industrial evangelism. Only so will it be possible to develop schemes for training the workers who are needed in countries where industrial expansion is taking place at an enormous rate. In the second place, there is need to provide the means by which pastors and lay men and women can receive a training which will make them free of the best experience that has been gained so far in many places where experiment is going on. In the third place, there is need of ecumenical help to develop new experiment and pilot projects at points of strategic importance.

This is a field in which it is taken for granted from the beginning that 'mission is an affair of six continents'. Detroit, Sheffield, Mainz-Kastel, Abidjan, Bangalore, Osaka – in all these places the churches are facing fundamentally similar problems, and the help they can give



to one another is certainly not all in one direction. Moreover, it is a form of missionary action in which some of the deepest questions of missionary theology come into focus. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, it becomes crystal clear that mission is not simply church extension, but that it involves something more radical, more paradoxical, more costly – a kind of *kenosis* which is an echo of that from which all Christian mission begins.

The missionary who goes to a new people, remote from his home and speaking a language strange to him, does not need to be told about this *kenosis*. He knows, or he soon discovers, that he cannot simply transplant the church he has known into the new soil. The corn of wheat has to fall into the ground and die. He, with all his learning and training, has to become a stammering child, painfully learning to frame the simplest sentences, learning the ways of behaving – the idiom of living – which the people around him learned when they were little children. He has to undertake the adventure of living in this strange idiom of life and speech, living inside it and learning to see from within it; yet knowing all the time that it is an idiom shaped at every point by unredeemed human experience. The Church as he has known it is simply out of sight. For the present, the Church here is this absurd, stammering, stumbling beginner. But out of this self-emptying, out of this dying, God is able to raise up something which is not a reproduction of the church from which the missionary came, but a new creation – the first-fruit of a whole new community remade in Christ, a fresh adumbration of the new life in Christ in the idiom of this people.

The temptation – especially when there is no great geographical distance to be crossed – is to evade the cost of this self-emptying and to conceive the missionary task in terms simply of church extension. Even when there is a big geographical distance, the same evasion may take place, especially if (as in recent decades) mission goes along the lines of colonial expansion. I have recently been reading the original documents of the controversy between Roberto di Nobili of Madurai and his opponents. It is clear that the difference between them lay here: they conceived their task essentially as the extension of the Portuguese Church which they knew. Their converts were taken out of India and lodged within that Church. Di Nobili saw his task in terms of a new creation – a new kind of community which would be the first-fruit for Christ of Hindu India in all the fullness of its culture and spirituality.



Mission in industry cannot be conceived in terms of church extension. It cannot be a sufficient discharge of the great commission in respect of this sector of human life to invite the men of industry into churches which are moulded by another kind of human existence. Those who are making the most radical experiments in industrial evangelism are attempting to do something analagous to what di Nobili did in South India. They are willing to disappear, as it were, into the world of industry, in order that, in some way which is not yet clear to any of them, that new thing may be formed which will be the first-fruit of the industrial community for Christ. In that adventure, they need and are seeking one another's help across all the six continents.

But to deny that mission is the same as church extension is not to deny that mission seeks conversion. This, I think, is one of the matters that need to be clarified in the present debate about missions. In the recent discussion of 'Evangelism in Depth' which was initiated by Dr Strachan's article in our April 1964 number, the question was raised whether adding members to the Church is 'a by-product, or the fundamental end in view' in the missionary work of the Church (*IRM*, April 1964, p. 202). The writings of Dr McGavran on church growth have promoted discussion of the same question. It is rather easy to state both sides of this debate. On the one hand, a widely held view can be stated as follows: 'When the Church treats its own numerical growth as the supreme goal, it becomes simply an instrument of spiritual imperialism. It ceases to be interested in each person as a human person, and comes to regard him simply as a potential member. This is to ignore both the New Testament indications that the Church must expect to be a small and weak body in human affairs, and also the way in which Jesus Himself actually dealt with those who came to Him.' On the other hand, it can be said with equal force: 'The reality of any belief is tested by the extent to which the believer seeks to persuade others of its truth. It cannot be denied that Jesus called for radical repentance, conversion, the forsaking of all in order to follow Him. A movement which lacks these elements has no right to His name. Whether men hear or refuse to hear is not ours to decide. But we have the clear duty to bring to every man this call for radical decision.'

I believe that this latter note is one which greatly needs to be heard at this time. Missions, like every other form of human activity, are always tempted to be conformed to this world. We find it easy at this



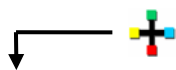
date to detect in our predecessors a tendency to be conformed to the pattern of colonialism. Our temptation is to be conformed to the pattern which is popular now in the affluent societies of the West material and technical aid, without long-term commitment and without religious implications. I think that there is a need to be clear at this time just because it is not popular – that missions are concerned with the radical conversion that leads men to explicit allegiance to Jesus Christ.

But the important point, surely, is to understand both the context and the content of conversion. The context of conversion in the New Testament is the announcement of the coming Kingdom. 'The time has come; the Kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the good news' – the good news, that is to say, that the Kingdom is at hand. Conversion, in this context, is a turning round in order to participate by faith in a new reality which is the true future of the whole creation. It is not, *in the first place*, either saving one's own soul or joining a society. It is these things only secondarily, because the new reality is one in which every soul is precious, and because there is a society which is the first-fruit and sign of the new reality. If either of these things is put at the centre, distortion follows. Biblically understood, conversion means being so turned round that one's face is towards that 'summing up of all things in Christ' which is

promised, and of which the resurrection of Jesus is the sign and first-fruit. It means being caught up into the activity of God which is directed to that end.

It follows that the content of conversion must be understood in the light of God's purpose for the world, and, specifically, of His purpose for that sector of it in which a man is involved. The content of conversion for the man in industry will be determined by what we believe to be God's purpose for industrial life. Conversion will mean being so turned around that one is involved in all that God is doing to realize that purpose in that part of the industrial world in which one lives, living and acting always as those who by faith share now in the consummation to come.

It is perhaps in this context that one should refer to the use of the word 'presence', which is playing an increasing role in the discussion of missionary questions. Those whose language is English find this word a very weak substitute for the more active words in which we have been accustomed to describe mission. It has come into the discussion from the French, where the word *presence* suggests something



much more dynamic than its English equivalent. I do not myself think that it is adequate for all the weight which is being put on it in some places. But its use does draw attention to one vital point with which we are concerned in this discussion. Di Nobili's criticism of his Portuguese colleagues in Madurai was that they were not truly *present*. They were not inside the situation; they were on the edge of it, trying to pick up individuals out of the pagan world of India in order to remove them to the Christian world which was centred in the Portuguese mission station. Di Nobili desired to be present within Hindu India, present with all his powers, in order to become the point at which Christ's redeeming purpose for *that* part of humanity might be manifested. All true missionary action must be first of all *presence*. And surely there is no sector of human life where the truth of this is more apparent than the world of industry.

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