



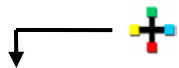
A Review of “Repenser La Mission,” Rapports et Compte Rendu de la XXXV Semaine de Missiologie.

1967

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

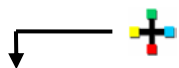
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This volume reproduces eighteen addresses delivered at the thirty fifth Louvain Missiological Week in 1965, together with a record of discussion on the addresses. The addresses are grouped in three sections. The first is mainly biblical and theological, and deals with issues very familiar to the readers of this Review –the theology of mission and its relation to the doctrine of the Church, mission and unity, the relation of the young church to the catholic tradition on the one hand and to its cultural setting on the other, the question of baptism, and the nature of ‘missionary spirituality’. The second section surveys the contemporary situation of missions in Japan, India and the Muslim world, and in the dominant process of secularization. This section also contains an important paper by G. Thils on the salvific value of the non-Christian religions. The third section deals with the role of missionary orders in the total mission of the Church, with the place of the religious in missions, and with the work of the layman abroad – especially the laymen in the technical service of the developing nations.

The contributors include some of the outstanding Roman Catholic thinkers of our time; the quality of the papers is very high; the questions raised in the discussions are real, live questions and the whole volume makes stimulating and enriching reading. Some very familiar issues are freshly considered to the great profit of the reader: If the whole Church is mission, do we need missionaries, missionary orders, and vocations? When the Church is effectively present in almost every part of the world,



are not missions properly replaced by inter-church aid? When Christians have talked so much, is this not a time for silent service? On this latter point the address on the layman abroad has some specially trenchant things to say. ‘A Christian cannot but speak the Word, for when he speaks truly he gives expression to what makes a unity of his whole life – a unity which is simply his living relation with Jesus Christ.’

In such a wealth of good material it is difficult to choose points for discussion, but I will speak of two only. The address of Pere le Guillou on 'Mission and the Ecumenical Spirit' includes a careful exposition and discussion of Joint Action for Mission on the basis of DWME documents. At the outset he rejects without hesitation the language of the documents which speaks of the common mission of a plurality of churches, as being inadmissible from a Catholic point of view. But, having made this negation, one must go on – he says – to acknowledge what is true in the document. 'If the separated communions participate in a certain manner in the mystery of the Church, we must dare to say that they participate in the Church's mission', and consequently we must seek collaboration on the basis of our common baptism and of the Christian reality which we share. Pere le Guillou speaks of the possibilities of co-operation in educational work and also – more daringly – in pastoral and catechetical work.

Three of the addresses deal extensively with the relation of the Gospel and the Church to the non-Christian religions. The discussion is sober and balanced. I especially marked some splendid passages in Congar's address which lift the discussion above the purely individualistic level in which it is so often trapped. 'It is not just a matter of saving some people; it is a matter of making of humanity one people – the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit. It is that all men – except (if there be such) those who are definitely lost – should be able unanimously to call upon the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and say to him: Our Father.' (In the same address Fr Congar, remarking that there are limits to adaptation, says that even St Paul was not able to 'assume' Diana of the Ephesians into his theology!) But, in spite of this, I find the discussion less than satisfactory because of the assumption which is never discussed but simply taken for granted, that the religions are the form of the saving activity of God (if there be such) outside of the Church. A chapter on the 'salvific value of atheism' would surely have made the discussion more adequate!

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