



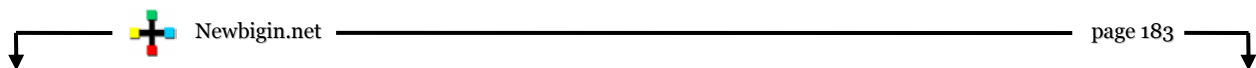
Review of “Christ and the Younger Churches”, by Georg F. Vicedom

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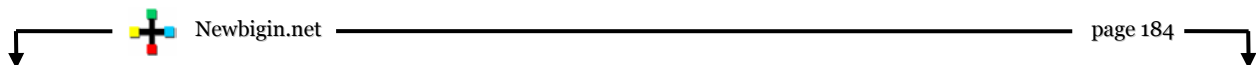
J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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This is a collection of seven theological papers, written for various purposes and in various circumstances, by theologians of Asia, Africa



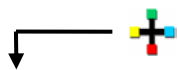
and Latin America. They have been brought together with an Introduction by Dr Vicedom of Neuendettelsau. The papers are all of high quality, but this reader was left wondering whether the fact that they all come from ‘younger Churches’ really provides enough theological unity for the volume. The Editor, as a professor of missions in the heart of one of the European Churches, sees them all as ‘younger Churches’ which must all necessarily go through the same ‘apologetic stage’ that the early Church did. But is this true? Does the category ‘younger Churches’ constitute a kind of theological unity, or is it just a phrase like ‘non-Christian’, merely meaning ‘Churches that do not happen to be in Europe or North America’? I am not sure, but I doubt whether the perspective of a professor of missions looking at ‘younger Churches’ is the best one for interpreting what is really going on!

Be that as it may, we must be grateful to Dr Vicedom for bringing together a fine collection of essays, each of which repays careful study in its own right. In my estimation the outstanding papers are those of Miguez Bonino, Kosuke Koyama, and Choan-seng Song. The first takes up the popular ecumenical slogan of the 1960’s about God being at work in history, and asks exactly what it means. He admirably debunks a lot-of easy talk about the ‘prophetic role of the Churches’ and tackles a very difficult question with balance and discernment. He shows that Christians have no blueprint for world history, but that God’s action in history is veiled, and yet carries signs discernible by faith of the final consummation of history.

Kosuke Koyama is, as always, fresh and penetrating. He is attacking the 'love-monism' which he sees in popular Thai theology, and interprets the *opus alienum* of God as necessary to a true understanding of history. We do not understand the love of God rightly if we do not know his wrath.

Choan-seng Song of Taiwan sees Christology as the fundamental issue for the mission of the Church in Asia. He looks at the ways in which Indian and Chinese thought have evaded a direct meeting with the real Jesus - the former by seeing him as one of the *avatars*, the latter by seeing him as one of the moral teachers. He pleads for an understanding of the unity of Christ as Being and Act, and says - rightly I think - that 'the direct and decisive encounter with Jesus Christ with Eastern Religions has not yet taken place'.

Adeola Adegbola, in a paper read at a W.C.C. meeting in January 1965, also deals with the question of God's action in history, and undertakes an examination of Max Warren's thesis in *Caesar the Beloved Enemy*. The other African contributor, John Mbiti of Kampala, drawing on the evidence of African preaching collected in H. W. Turner's book *Profile through Preaching* shows how the African churches, especially the Independent Churches, have interpreted Jesus. In Mbiti's view the centre of African interest in Jesus is in the resurrection. Jesus is above all the conqueror of death and of the negative elements in life. Mbiti says that traditional African thought, which has a rich mythology of the past, has no mythology at all of the future. Into this vacuum, he says, Jesus has come as the one who creates the possibility of a victorious future.



Kazo Kitamori, in 'The Problem of Pain in Christology' examines and compares the relationships of the concept 'Lord' and the concept 'pain' in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. He finds that, in this respect, the Nicene Creed has taken 'a step backward' from the firm connection between the two established in the Apostles' Creed.

The final paper in the series is by Mark Sunder Rao, entitled 'Amanyatva, the Realisation of Christian Non-Duality'. The starting point of the paper is the statement of an analogy (which seems to the present reviewer very questionable) between the relation *darsana-siddhanta* in Hindu thought and the relation *kerygma-didache* in Christian thought. Taking the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit, the writer seeks to show from the teaching of the early Church Fathers that these doctrines are intended to interpret the divine-human relationship in terms of non-duality. Reading the paper reminded me of a recent conversation with a Brahmin friend who said - angrily - to me: 'You Christians have failed to recognise that your Gospel is something radically different from Hinduism or any other religion: it is a radically new interpretation of personality and of history. You have turned it into another religion. We, do not need any more religions in India'. I confess that I have more sympathy with this protest than with the essay under review, which seems to me to miss completely the radically different understandings of human personality which are involved in the Hindu-Christian dialogue. From the Introduction one gathers that the original German edition contained two comments on this essay by Fr Britto and Dr L. S. Rouner, but these are unfortunately not included in the English edition.

Dr Vicedom in his comment on Sunder Rao's paper acknowledges that the question 'How God's relationship to men takes place in concrete terms' has been sadly neglected in Protestant theology. Perhaps the great value of this book lies in the questions which it poses - implicitly or explicitly - to the theology of the Churches in Europe and North America. In this sense the book is to be

judged as a valuable contribution to the ecumenical conversation. I remain convinced, however, that the real theology of the Asian and African Churches will be a theology wrought out in their own languages and in the context of the deepest convictions and desires which those languages express.

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