



Newbigin.net

Online Bibliography

All material is reprinted with permission from the Newbigin family, the Newbigin Estate and the publisher. All material contained on the Newbigin.Net website, or on the accompanying CD, remains the property of the original author and/or publisher. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without express written permission from the appropriate parties. The material can be used for private research purposes only.

Unpublished 1985 two-page letter written for background information to those members of staff of the Selly Oak Colleges with regard to discussing a possible programme outlined in Newbigin's book, *The Other Side of 1984*. Recipients of the letter include: David Tennant; Grance Trenchard; Brian Wicker; Marius Felderhoff; Robert Wetzel; Marcella Hoesl; Maurice Sinclair; Dan Beeby; Martin Conway; and John Sargent.

"Lesslie Newbigin Papers" held in care of the Orchard Learning Resources Centre, Information Services, The University of Birmingham, Hamilton Drive, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6QW, U.K.

'The Other Side of 1984'

Background paper for members of the Selly Oak Colleges staff who are attending the meeting called by Dr Beeby on 16th September 1985

The small essay, (hereinafter 'OS84') was commissioned as part of a process initiated by the British Council of Churches in 1981, intended to lead up to a national conference of the churches in 1984. It was hoped that it would stimulate discussion and the writing of material which could form a solid basis for the work of such a conference. The BCC was given ground for thinking that funds could be made available to sustain a substantial programme, including a full-time director of high calibre, office back-up, and funds for holding conferences and publishing papers. It was hoped that the questions with which the booklet ends would be taken up by groups of people competent in such fields as politics, industry, education, welfare administration and the media, and that there would be substantial published material in these fields for the use of the national conference.

In the event the hoped-for funds were not forthcoming except on a very limited scale. On the other hand the booklet itself produced much, wider repercussions than had been anticipated. It has had to be reprinted many times over and has been translated into several languages. It has been made the basis for intensive study programmes in diocesan conferences, ministers' gatherings, universities and polytechnics, and it has evoked a large volume of written comment. However most of this has been at the level of general discussion; with the exceptions noted below, there has not been much of the detailed working out in specific sectors of public life which was hoped for.

As an interim measure, the BCC's planning group was able to secure the part-time help of Martin Conway to initiate and assist groups working in education, in local- government and in regard to the impact of technology. Because of severe limits on the time and money available, these remain small affairs.

The BCC has been unwilling to accept defeat and has been seeking ways of implementing the original plan, even if in a reduced form. It seems to me that there are good reasons for this. The response to this small essay, so far beyond anything anticipated, shows that it has struck a chord in the minds of many people of very different kinds - including a great many lay men and women in public life. There seems to be a growing sense that the insights of the Enlightenment are no longer enough to show us the way forward. But this can and frequently does become something more serious - a reaction against post-Enlightenment thought and culture which leads into a dogmatism and sometime: violent reaction, a reaction which would put in danger the great positive achievements of the past 200 years of European culture. There is a range of phenomena from Khomeni to Jerry Falwell which has to be viewed seriously. A wholesale rejection of Enlightenment values would be disastrous. On the other hand the continued mouthing of the slogans of liberalism does not meet the needs of our time. What is needed is painstaking work in the various sectors of our common life to discern those points at which we have to be faithful to the insights of the enlightenment, and those at which we have to recognize that they have led us astray. This cannot be done by general discussions about everything; it needs detailed work of the kind which we had originally hoped for.

Faced with the impossibility of carrying out the planned programme, the BCC's planning group decided to explore the possibility of finding some one recently retired who, with secretarial help of high quality, would be able to initiate and direct a modest programme. The name of Dan Beeby was suggested and cordially welcomed. He has from the beginning been very much interested in the debate surrounding 'OS84' and immediately said that he would be very ready to help. His article in the January issue of the Selly Oak Journal already showed that he was regarding this debate as central to his vision of the future of the Colleges. (See *'Mediaeval University or Post-Enlightenment Academy?'*). It was therefore agreed that he should invite members of the Selly Oak staff who have indicated interest to a preliminary discussion along with members of the small group which is acting for the BCC and with Martin Conway. This is the meeting called for 16th September which you have kindly agreed to attend.

Without wishing to pre-empt the discussion at our meeting, I would like to share with you some of the thoughts in my own mind, as a starting point for your own thinking.

- (a) We are meeting as individuals interested in the issues but my hope is that, those at the meeting might become the catalysts for groups in the fields of their specific competence, drawing in concerned people from the University, Queen's College, the West Midlands and perhaps Oxford.
- (b) This enterprise could have a spin-off for future thinking about the role of the Selly Oak Colleges, and the way in which the Colleges might serve the British churches as well as serving the overseas churches as they now do.
- (c) It seems to me that at least the following areas of study could be aimed at with the leadership we now have: Education, Welfare Administration, Mission, Peace and Conflict in Society, Theology in a post-critical age.
- (d) There is reason to think that we might get funding for an operation of this sort, based here in Selly Oak, and including sufficient to cover adequate secretarial help and a modest budget for meetings. I would hope that after our meeting on the 16th it might be possible to formulate definite proposals to a possible donor agency.

I look forward to the meeting.

28th August 1985 Leslie Newbigin

To- Rev David Tennant - Westhill
Miss Grace Trenchard - Social Studies Principal
Brian Wicker - Fircroft
Dr Maius Felderhof - Westhill
Dr Robert Wetzel - Springdale
Dr Marcella Hoesl - Dean of Mission
Canon Maurice Sinclair - Crowther.

Copies to Dan Beeby - St Andrews
Martin Conway - Oxford
John Sargant - Secretary BCC Planning Committee.