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Unpublished 1990 two-page critique of the first Gospel and Our Culture Conference at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, 15-17 October 1990. The conference on the theme "Mission to our Culture in the Light of Scripture and the Christian Tradition" was the first of two regional conferences (three were originally planned) sponsored jointly by The Gospel and Our Culture and the British and Foreign Bible Society leading up to "The Gospel as Public Truth" National Consultation at Swanwick (U.K.) in July 1992.

"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.

First Reflections on the High Leigh Conference

It was a happy Conference. The spirit was affirmative throughout. Much or most of its positive character can be attributed to the way in which worship was planned and led. For me, and I guess for many, the worship will remain the most memorable part of the meeting.

We were well served by the speakers, and the two Bible Studies were especially good. They addressed the issue directly and complemented each other by taking the contrasting relation to culture suggested by Acts 17 and I Cor 1 and 2.

The experiment of putting the discussion of issues before the lecture was not a success. It built up a lot of frustration because people felt that their questions had not been adequately dealt with by the lecturer and therefore wanted immediately after the lecture to discuss it, whereas they were required to discuss the theme of the next lecture which they had not yet heard. This should not be repeated.

The chairmanship of Vincent Nichols was superb, especially in the closing session where he handled a vast range of questions and comments with superb skill.

The Conference brought together people most of whom had never met each others before and who represented networks normally out of contact or hostile. In the final plenary there was comment to the effect: 'How is it that fundamentalists and liberals have met here for two days without quarrelling, and what is the theological basis of the GOC programme which makes this possible?'

My main feeling is that the conference will change the nature of our enterprise. The very fact that (because of the Bible Society) we could put on a large conference with sophisticated organization,

created the impression that we were a much more solid affair than we are. Consequently there was a flood of issues which GOC *must* be expected to address. In vain I repeated several times that we are only one half-time retired missionary and one half-time typist! There are expectations which will not be put off by this disclaimer.

Colin Greene has arranged for a record to be given to us of the very wide-ranging discussion of the plenary. I think that this must feed into the planning of 1992. I think that the Montefiore book must be supplemented by collateral material, and that we can find among those at this conference people who will be potential invitees to 1992. Meanwhile I would suggest two possibilities:

- 1 A letter to all the participants in High Leigh asking them:
 - (a) Do you want to be kept in touch with this programme (if so, send £5.00 for Newsletter);
 - (b) What is your area of experience and the issue you want to contribute to?
- 2 Our Management Group Meetings are far too short to go deeply into large issues. Would it be worth trying to have a full-day meeting (in London) so that those who were at High Leigh might formulate some suggestions for the Management Group? I would suggest: Hugh, Dan and me; Roy Pointer and/or Colin Greene; Kristin Ofstad, Jenny Taylor and Vincent Nichols. Obviously Philip Morgan should also be there though he was not at High Leigh. Also Lawrence Osborn.

I spent most of an hour with a young group from St Thomas' Church Sheffield, who are deep into new styles of worship using rock music but deeply committed to the orthodox faith. They were angry because there was no chance in the Conference for them to share the very remarkable things which have been achieved through their ministry. I asked them, along with Jenny Taylor, to consider planning a meeting in Autumn 1991 to which they would invite similar young groups and plan a programme which would not be platform speeches, but sharing their experience. Jenny Taylor will be our link person there. I said we would help in any way that was relevant.

I am more and more sure that, even though we do not have a chapter on Authority in the book, there must be a group working on this at the 1992 Consultation. We cannot permanently evade the question asked in the 5th paragraph above. We ought to begin thinking about this soon.

I hope we may in due course have other evaluations, especially from our Bible Society colleagues.

18 October 1990 Leslie Newbigin