



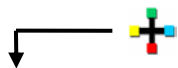
## Reflections After Swanwick

1992

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

*The Gospel and Our Culture (U.K.)*, 14 (Autumn): 4.

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The Programme which has come to be known as The Gospel and Our Culture was originally simply a committee set up by the old British Council of Churches to organize a conference. None of us at that time foresaw what has come to be. Until recently I believed that the Conference would and should be the end of the Programme. If anything of truth came out of it then it would spread by the witness of those participating.

It is now clear that I was wrong. The four hundred people (of a marvellously varied background) were overwhelmingly in support of a continuing programme. The existing Management Group will meet in September to make way for a younger group of men and women drawn mainly from the Swanwick participants. Steps are being taken to find funds and a full-time director to carry the Movement forward.

But what kind of a movement is it? Not a new version of the Gospel; rather an attempt to disengage the Gospel from the too close alliance with a culture in which it has become domesticated. This inevitably involves conflict. I have been reminded by reading John Kenneth Galbraith's recent book *The Culture of Contentment* of how strong in our 'modern' society are the forces that do not wish to be disturbed. Perhaps our greatest need is for the courage to take risks. For mediaeval Christians ultimate truth was safeguarded by Mother Church: the individual believer did not have to take risks in believing. In our society the equivalent of Mother Church is the body of 'facts' which are said to be 'scientifically' established. As long as one does not challenge this body of assured truth ('the real world') one can believe what one likes. And when the Christian leaves the Church with its creed, its liturgy, its story, he is expected to leave these things behind and to accept the intellectual and practical requirements of the 'real' world. (It is useful, in discovering where a clergyman stands, to notice how he uses the phrase 'the real world'.)

With Hugh Montefiore's *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture* and with the intense discussion in the eight sections at Swanwick, and with the undeniable sense of the blessing of God which I felt during the Conference, I cannot doubt that something useful has been started. Its

further development will probably be as surprising as its birth has been. The fiery cloudy pillar will go on before us after a brief stay in camp at Swanwick.

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