

starting point is. The first few chapters which set out the theological foundations of mission are full of statements like the following:

'The Christian mission is thus to act out in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all' (p. 17).

I have spoken of mission as the *proclaiming* of God's kingship over all human history and over the whole cosmos. Mission is concerned with nothing less than the completion of all that God has begun to do in the creation of the world and humankind. Its concern is not sectional but total and universal (p. 56).

Newbigin sets out from a comprehensive vision of Christ's Lordship, and this shapes his entire missiology. When one discovers the comprehensive Lordship of Christ (that is, a Christian worldview), one realises that such a holistic perspective reshapes one's thinking in all sorts of areas. Sadly, however, we often do not have the time or texts available to help us work through that process of re-formation. *The Open Secret* is a wonderful example of such reshaping, and if mission is half as central to a Christian theology as Newbigin thinks it is (and I agree), then working through the reshaping at this point will be helpful for one's understanding of the Bible, history (cf. chapter 4), the relationship between evangelism and justice (cf. chapter 8), a Christian approach to other religions and the problem of pluralism (cf. chapter 10), and many other areas. Certainly in the area of mission Newbigin demonstrates that his starting point is capable of bringing a nuanced perspective to bear on many of the contemporary debates in missiology.

Furthermore, Newbigin's *kurios*-centric approach takes the authority of Scripture seriously in a foundational way; Scripture is continuously and thoughtfully referred to. (Newbigin is intensely aware that without a strong doctrine of the authority of Scripture, the church will be unable to critique contemporary culture effectively [cf. Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda* St. Andrews Press, 1993:248-250]). The outline of his trinitarian theology of mission is developed out of passages of Scripture in the most helpful ways. For example, in his chapter on 'Mission as Action for God's Justice', Newbigin outlines in a very useful page how Romans 8 presents the unity of the Christian hope, embracing the private and public life of the human person (pp.106,107). Newbigin rightly focuses the authority of Scripture in terms of its mediating a personal relationship with Christ, but I do not think this is necessarily in conflict with

an evangelical affirmation of a propositional aspect to Scripture, as Newbigin sometimes suggests. (For a discussion of the authority of Scripture, see Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* [London: SPCK, 1986:42-64]). *The Open Secret* remains a model of missiological scholarship in the liberating grip of Scripture.

Newbigin's position on particular areas requires detailed evaluation that we cannot pursue here. Suffice it to mention that I am not persuaded by his appropriation of Paul's doctrine of the powers as a way into a Christian understanding of culture. In my opinion a dynamic notion of creation order, biblically understood, may be the better route here. Newbigin's theology of law and election, plus his view of the several interpretations of Christ in the NT as alerting us to the destination of the gospel to all mankind are always stimulating, but require careful analysis.

The Open Secret is a classic; it is one of those books that should be read widely, and engaged with in detail. Its great merit is its rootedness in a rightly huge view of the LORD CHRIST. Newbigin starts *The Open Secret* with the words, 'Christ is the light of the nations', and he appropriately ends the book as follows:

The mystery of the gospel is not entrusted to the church to be buried in the ground. It is entrusted to the church to be risked in the change and interchange of the spiritual commerce of humanity. It belongs not to the church but to the one who is both head of the church and head of the cosmos. It is within his power and grace to bring to its full completion that long-hidden purpose, the secret of which has been entrusted to the church in order that it may become the open manifestation of the truth to all nations (p. 189).

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Truth and Authority in Modernity **Lesslie Newbigin**

Leominster: Gracewing, 1996. ix + 83 pp.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette brochure vise à aider l'Eglise à comprendre sa responsabilité missionnaire dans le contexte actuel et à l'assumer. L'auteur affirme que la recherche de la vérité s'effectue toujours

dans le cadre d'un ensemble de croyances, et que, si Dieu est le créateur de tout être, toute quête de la connaissance doit trouver son point de départ en lui. Newbigin montre ensuite comment l'autorité de Dieu nous atteint de façon médiate et comment nous devons lui rendre témoignage.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies Büchlein will der Gemeinde helfen, ihre missionarische Verantwortung in der Spätmoderne zu verstehen und auszuüben. Newbigin argumentiert, dass jede Wahrheitssuche im Rahmen von Glaubensvoraussetzungen geschieht, und dass, wenn Gott der Urheber allen Seins ist, jeder Erkenntnisanspruch Ihn als Ausgangspunkt nehmen muss. Der Autor zeigt, wie Gottes Autorität vermittelt wird und wie wir Zeugnis für sie geben sollen.

Since his return to Britain from a long ministry as a missionary in India, Leslie Newbigin has explored in several publications the missionary challenge presented to the church by Western culture. It is therefore fitting that he should contribute to the "Christian Mission and Modern Culture" series which aims at helping the church understand its missionary responsibility to a culture in crisis. This booklet gives him the opportunity to summarise much of what is at the heart of his thinking on Christian mission and modern culture. The first chapter highlights that the authority of the creator cannot be demonstrated independently of God's own self-revelation, since it is personal and final authority. Therefore, the first issue to be addressed must be modernity's rejection of authority. Newbigin retrieves the pre-modern and post-modern insight that all knowledge is based on faith. People gain new insights and are able to doubt rationally only within a framework of beliefs. If God is really the author of all being, all claims to knowledge must start with him. 'The search for an authority prior to and more basic than the authority of God's self-revelation must end in failure.' (9f). But how is this authority mediated to us? This is the question dealt with in the second chapter.

Beginning with observations of what Jesus did to mediate his authority, Newbigin finds three elements: 'a living community, a tradition of teaching, and the continuing work of the divine Spirit illuminating the tradition in each new generation' (31). He then turns to the contemporary debate among Christians on the authority of Scripture, of the church and its tradition, of reason, and of experience.

Newbigin attempts to deliver us from false alternatives by setting the different elements in proper relation to one another.

The final chapter summarises the argument under the heading "Witnessing to divine authority in the context of modernity". It challenges us to acknowledge the personal element in all knowledge (and especially in knowledge of God) and to commend the authority of the Gospel not by asserting a set of eternal and undubitable truths (in line with modernist thinking), but by telling and living the story which we believe and whose author is God.

Thus, this book not only challenges some basic assumptions of the culture in which the church is operating, but it also challenges the church to let its model of truth and authority be shaped by Scripture rather than by modernist assumptions. As a tight summary of Newbigin's writings on the witness of the church in our sceptical age, this volume is especially suitable for those with little time to read. Yet even those who want to explore in some depth the important issue of 'truth and authority in modernity', could do much worse than start with this profound little book.

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Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study

John Barton

London: Darton, Longman and Todd,
1996 (2nd ed.), xvii + 294 pp., £15.95, pb.
ISBN 0-232-52201-4

RÉSUMÉ

Voici la seconde édition, revue et augmentée, de l'ouvrage paru en 1984, Lire l'Ancien Testament. Il présente toute la gamme des approches de l'interprétation de l'Ancien Testament, depuis les méthodes 'traditionnelles' de la critique littéraire, formiste et rédactionnelle, en passant par l'approche canonique de B.S. Childs, le structuralisme et la 'nouvelle critique', jusqu'à la critique rhétorique, la poétique biblique, l'esthétique de réception et les développements post-structuralistes comme la déconstruction. Il met en valeur les points forts et les limites de chaque méthode et défend habilement la thèse qu'il n'existe pas de méthode correcte pour éclairer le sens du texte.