

'As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You':

*J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology
(Mission 28, Missiologisch Onderzoek in
Nederland)*

Michael W. Goheen

Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum,
2000, 484 pp., £14.99, pb., ISBN 90-239-0976-3
(obtainable from The Christian Studies Unit, 76
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SUMMARY

Based on doctoral studies, this book offers a systematic account of the integral missionary calling of the Church espoused by Newbigin. An historical account first places his writings in their context, identifying shifts from a Christendom to a missionary ecclesiology and from a Christocentric to a Christocentric-Trinitarian (rather than cosmocentric-Trinitarian) one. The adequacy of Newbigin's theology of creation is questioned, and the consistency of his ecclesiology (seemingly at once Anabaptist and Reformed). However, this should provoke debate on the kind of foundations offered by Christ, and their integrity, in an eschatological setting.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Auf Doktoraltstudien aufbauend gibt dieses Buch eine systematische Darstellung des integrieren missionarischen Auftrags der Kirche, wie er von Newbigin entwickelt wurde. Seine Schriften werden zunächst in ihren historischen Kontext eingeordnet, wobei der Wechsel von einer Christentums- zu einer missionarischen und von einer christozentrischen zu einer christozentrisch-trinitarischen (nicht kosmozentrisch-trinitarischen) Ekklesiologie identifiziert wird. Die Angemessenheit der Schöpfungstheologie Newbigns und die Konsistenz seiner Ekklesiologie (scheinbar zugleich täuferisch und reformiert) werden hinterfragt. Dennoch sollte dieser Beitrag die Diskussion um die Art der von Christus gelegten Grundlagen in eschatologischer Perspektive anregen.

RÉSUMÉ

Reprenant sa thèse de doctorat, l'auteur présente de manière systématique la pensée de Newbigin quant à la vocation missionnaire intégrale de l'Église. Un compte rendu historique replace les écrits de celui-ci dans leur contexte, caractérisé par une évolution d'une ecclésiologie de chrétienté vers une ecclésiologie missionnaire, ainsi que d'une ecclésiologie christocentrique vers une ecclésiologie christocentrique trinitaire (plutôt que cosmocentrique trinitaire). L'auteur met en question la validité de la théologie de la création développée par Newbigin, et la cohérence de son ecclésiologie (apparemment à la fois anabaptiste et réformée). Ceci devrait susciter un débat quant au genre de fondements apportés par Christ, et quant à leur intégrité, dans un cadre eschatologique.

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During a long and productive life, Lesslie Newbigin was at the centre of landmark developments in the South Indian Church, in the Ecumenical Movement and in missionary engagement with Western culture. He tackled key issues with boldness, attending carefully to the views of others and presenting his arguments with grace. His articulate Christian writings offer rich study for those concerned for the mission of Christ in our time. We have a fine example of this in Dr Goheen's doctoral studies at Utrecht, which form the basis of this book.

The author examines the integral missionary calling of the Church, to which Newbigin was long committed in thought and action as an immediate implication of the Gospel of the cross, which was his enduring focus. Given the strategic context of Newbigin's theological articulations during sixty years, Goheen first attempts a substantial account (102 pages) of the historical development of his missionary ecclesiology before treating it in a systematic way (301 pages). In practice, the content reflects a considerable overlap between these two approaches. A brief summary and analysis concludes.

In his historical section, the author identifies two major developments in Newbigin's ecclesiology. The first he designates as a shift from a Christendom to a missionary ecclesiology. This had taken place by the 1950s, and was informed by Newbigin's years of missionary experience during which the Church also acquired new prominence in his thinking. Goheen describes a second shift in the years 1957–61, from a Christocentric to a Trinitarian ecclesiology. The context was a deepening preoccupation among Christians with God's purposes in the secular world. Goheen distinguishes Newbigin's 'Christocentric Trinitarianism' from an increasingly espoused 'cosmocentric Trinitarianism', which tended to play down the uniqueness of Christ and of the Church in God's purposes for the world. Newbigin by contrast emphasised the doctrine of election, which (as highlighted in Hunsberger's thesis on Newbigin) is mission-oriented, and found in the Trinity an essential basis from which to engage pagan worldviews in mission. Although these developments can be described as shifts in Newbigin's ecclesiology, fundamentally they reflect his discovery and embrace of new concerns, which enlarged his thinking about the Church.

In his systematic section, Goheen expands upon all this. He considers first Newbigin's understanding of the *missio Dei* and of the Church's participation in this. He then investigates the relation of the Church to its mission task, firstly in its institutional and communal life and then with regard to its work in the world. Finally he explores the relation of the Church to culture, looking first at contextualisation and then specifically at mission in Western culture, which occupied Newbigin in later years.

In his closing analysis, Goheen draws together the conclusions and evaluations he has offered in the course of the book and shows their relevance in particular to

contemporary debate on mission, firstly within ecumenical circles and then within the Gospel and Our Culture network in North America. While appreciative of Newbigin's Trinitarianism, Goheen calls for greater attention to the work of the Father in creation and for clearer criteria by which to discern the work of the Spirit in the world. He finds Newbigin's understanding of contextualisation built on a 'less than solid foundation' (p. 424), finds unresolved tensions between his affirmative and negative comments on Christendom and sees inconsistency between his 'Anabaptist' views of the gathered Church and 'Reformed' views of the Church dispersed through society. While these criticisms remind us of the need for further philosophical development of Newbigin's work, sometimes they seem to derive from the authors' acknowledged appreciation of neo-Calvinist scholarship. Newbigin's foundations were in the person of Christ, were eschatological and require that certain tensions be maintained. There is scope for further interaction with Newbigin's theology at this point regarding the *nature* of foundations offered to us in Christ and their integrity.

This is a comprehensive investigation of a large and scattered corpus of strategic writings. Many themes and dialogues are treated in passing and an index (at least of authors) would have made this rich quarry easier to mine, as it deserves, by future students of Newbigin.

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Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers

Christopher M. Tuckett

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, x + 246 pp., £15.95, pb., ISBN 0-7486-0869-9

SUMMARY

Tuckett provides a readable guide to most of the Christologies in the New Testament but also to that of the Sayings Source Q and to Jesus' self-understanding. He offers a discussion of method and of first-century Jewish background before tackling the various parts of the New Testament – Paul, the deuterio-Pauline letters and Hebrews, then the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, and finally the Gospel and Epistles of John and Revelation. A postscript reflects on the issues raised by discovering the gap between Jesus' view of his own role and his earliest followers' presentations of him. Written from a moderate critical perspective, the book constitutes a lucid and judicious overview for students.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Tuckett legt eine gut lesbare Orientierung über die meisten Christologien des Neuen Testaments sowie der Spruchsammlung Q und Jesu Selbstverständnis vor. Er beginnt mit einer Methodendiskussion und einem Teil zum jüdischen Hintergrund des ersten Jahrhunderts,

bevor er die verschiedenen Teile des Neuen Testaments untersucht – Paulus, die deuterio-paulinischen Briefe und den Hebräerbrieff, dann die synoptischen Evangelien und die Apostelgeschichte, und schließlich das Evangelium und die Briefe des Johannes sowie die Offenbarung. Ein Nachwort reflektiert über die Probleme, die die Entdeckung einer Kluft zwischen Jesu Selbstverständnis und den Darstellungen seiner frühesten Nachfolger aufwirft. Von einer gemäßigt kritischen Perspektive aus geschrieben, vermittelt das Buch einen verständlichen und ausgewogenen Überblick für Studenten

RÉSUMÉ

On a ici une présentation de la plupart des christologies du Nouveau Testament, ainsi que de celle de la source Q, et de la compréhension que Jésus avait de lui-même. Après une réflexion méthodologique et un exposé sur l'arrière-plan juif du premier siècle, l'auteur examine les diverses parties du Nouveau Testament : les écrits pauliniens, les écrits deutéro-pauliniens, l'épître aux Hébreux, les Synoptiques et les Actes, puis la littérature johannique et le livre de l'Apocalypse. Il termine par une réflexion sur les questions soulevées par les divergences qu'il a cru constater entre le point de vue de Jésus quant à son propre rôle et la présentation que ses premiers disciples ont donnée de sa personne. Adoptant de manière modérée les thèses de la critique radicale, l'auteur livre une vue d'ensemble lucide et judicieuse qui sera utile aux étudiants.

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Those looking for a reliable and readable guide through the variety of presentations of Jesus in the New Testament and the accompanying interpretative issues will find themselves well served by this latest book from Christopher Tuckett, Professor of New Testament Studies in the University of Oxford. Its title should be carefully noted, however, since it signals that this work is not simply an exposition of New Testament Christologies. It contains both slightly less, because James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude and 2 Thessalonians are not treated, and slightly more, because it takes readers behind the NT and contains a chapter on the Jesus of the Sayings Source Q and one on the self-understanding of the historical Jesus.

In an opening chapter Tuckett makes clear that, while there will always be dialogue between contemporary Christian theology, with its concern for the continuing significance of Jesus, and the earliest sources, his focus will be a historical one, asking who the NT writers thought Jesus was and who he thought he was. He also surveys the Judaism of Jesus' time, setting out the fluid nature of views on eschatology and messiahship, of the use of the terms Lord, Son of God and Son of man, and of ideas about divine agency through angels, exalted patriarchs and divine attributes, such as Wisdom or Logos.