

## TRIBUTE TO A GREAT SOUL

I did not meet Dr. Lesslie Newbigin in India, though I had heard so much about him. It was in Geneva that our paths led together.

I was already in the Geneva office as Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches when Bishop Newbigin joined our staff in the sixties. If I remember right we were still headquartered in the old "barracks" at 17 route de Malagrow. The new ecumenical headquarters in Route de Ferney had not yet been constructed.

What one admired most about Bishop Newbigin was his integrity and sincerity. He came through to me as a man clear in mind and soul, honest and transparent.

We could not always agree on everything. I myself have often difficulty in dealing with missionaries who served in India. They become used to measure of submissiveness and filial loyalty from their "missionary children" in India, which I cannot render to missionaries even if they are very popular missionaries. I suspect that element operated in our relationship.

Besides my ideas about Christian missions were not always the same as Bishop Newbigin's. I tended to see the modern missionary movement of the European Church (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) as integrally related to Europe's colonial expansion in the world, and as tainted with the attitudes of that expansion. I tried to write about these criticisms, but those Protestant journals which condescended to publish my Bible studies had to write editorials disagreeing with me.

Those days we were preparing for the International Missionary Conference in Mexico City. Bishop Newbigin was in charge of organizing it. I had been asked to take the Bible studies at that Conference. Perhaps because the reputation created by my Bible studies at the New Delhi W C C Assembly in 1961 had not yet been dissipated.

I remember I sent Bishop Newbigin a memo asking whether in expanding the Bible, could I interpret the Scriptures in such a way that would imply radical criticism of the modern missionary movement and of negative impact it has had

on the work of Christ's Church in the world. I had also suggested that if the Bishop felt apprehensive about this approach, he would be at liberty to excuse me from my commitment to lead the Bible studies in Mexico City.

I must say that Bishop Newbigin responded very positively and very honestly. He would excuse me from my commitment. That was how Philip Poster came to be asked to do the Bible studies for Mexico City, which he must have done quite admirably.

This incident did not in the least bit affect our personal friendship. The same paternal affection and compassion for the misguided Indian son continued unabated, throughout the quarter century that has now elapsed. Neither was my admiration for his great Christian commitment, transparency and honesty in the least bit diminished because of this or several so many similar situations, like my criticism of the New Delhi statement on Christian Unity, of which he is supposed to have been the principal author.

The conviction has grown in me in the last three decades of dabbling in the ecumenical movement that the key to unity is our growing to be more Christlike- in love, self-emptying, non-seeking of power, transparent honesty (which is true humility) and prayer-filled life. Both Faith and Order are subsidiary to this growing Christ-likeness in community.

My humble tribute to a great Christian, my elder brother in ecumenical pioneering, on his 80th birthday. May God continue to bless his ministry.

Delhi,  
May 1989.

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Churches.