

# the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

## Community-friendly Theology

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Real estate agents who know the Atlanta market will tell you that the single most stable middle-income neighborhood inside the perimeter is Toco Hills. Over the years shopping centers and road widenings have nibbled at the edges of this residential community but its quiet streets and modest homes have remained virtually

Torah's Sabbath day teaching encourages the devout to refrain from driving their automobiles on the Sabbath. Living in proximity to the synagogue allows the faithful to walk rather than drive to services. Consequently, the desirability of having a home close to the synagogue has caused turnover to be low and the

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undisturbed. Nor is there much turnover here. Homeowners seem to want to stay in Toco Hills. There are even second generation families here who have chosen to raise their families where they grew up. The reason for this remarkable stability? Synagogue Beth Jacob.

Not that everyone who lives in Toco Hills is Jewish, of course. Not even a majority. Actually only 20% or so of community residents attend the synagogue. But this orthodox congregation embraces a theology that has powerfully influenced the stability of the neighborhood. An observance that derives from the

entire residential area to remain largely immune to commercial incursion. Whether intentional or not, this obscure theological teaching is responsible for unparalleled community stability for many decades.

In another part of the city, a very depressed inner-city area, I discovered another religious group whose theology has also had an impact on their community. The Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam bought a vacant strip mall in the East Lake neighborhood and established a mosque there. They mounted loud speakers on the four corners of their building and in the orthodox Muslim tradition issue a call

### *In this Issue*

*Congregations. The "powers." And the continuing legacy of Lesslie Newbigin. These themes travel together in this issue of the newsletter.*

*What about congregations? Bob Lupton wonders out loud about the dynamism of congregations in which the most "innocent" of theological traditions has profound effect on the neighborhood in which they are located. George Brown introduces the latest book by Michael Warren (page 5), who with his characteristic depth of cultural nuance and theological interpretation has helped us to understand further how congregations function as "zones of meaning."*

*And the "powers"? Tom McAlpine's incisive exposition of Mark 10:32-45 (page 4) implicates us all as "trapped in the society of death and in need of ransom." This begins to open up the whole matter of "discerning powers" as a theological task and as the vocation of the church. This is to be the theme of the next GOCN Consultation, as indicated in the notice on page 6.*

*Lesslie Newbigin's imprint on our sense of the calling of the Spirit remains important to the movement of which this network is a part. The Church of South India which he served so many years has honored his legacy by establishing an Institute for church and mission study (page 7). In addition, the first in a series on "Cultivating Ways of Christ" (page 3) draws on the contributions he makes for Christians living in the postmodern transition.*

*-Editor*

five times daily for the faithful to gather for prayer. Proximity to the mosque has an obvious benefit for the devout. Many members have purchased homes and established businesses within the sound of the speakers, allowing them convenient access to daily communal prayer. The effects on the surrounding area are tangible. The presence of honorable, hard working, faith-motivated homeowners and shopkeepers in this high-crime community has helped to restore order and stimulate legitimate enterprise. Their school, which invites non-Muslims to attend, has brought top quality education back into a community that the public system failed long ago. An age-old prayer theology—not a community development strategy—is the driving force behind this congregation’s positive impact.

For some time now I have been looking for a Christian belief system that is equally community-friendly. I am searching for a theology that causes Christian churches to be agents of transformation of the neighborhoods in which they are located.

There is one such church in the very rough ghetto on Chicago’s south side. It started some years ago with a bunch of street kids whose volunteer wrestling coach introduced them to the Christian faith. After a rather rudimentary study of scripture, they concluded that their little group met the definition of church and asked their highly reluctant coach to be their pastor. Amazingly their church began to grow and soon was attracting members from well beyond their turf. Distressed by the growing influence of these “outsiders,” they voted to exclude anyone from membership who did not live within the boundaries of their neighborhood. This would prove to be the most community-friendly decision they would ever make.

As these young believers reached adulthood and found jobs that would allow them to “move on up,” their desire to remain members of the church held them in the community.

With growing resources the church was able to send some away to college with the understanding that they, too, would return to the church and community. The vibrancy and vision of the church attracted other talented people to move into the neighborhood to be part of the new life that was sprouting up everywhere. Today, their church with hundreds of members—all living in the neighborhood—has established a multimillion dollar real estate development company that is restoring blocks of abandoned housing units, the largest Christian health care clinic in the city, a variety of new businesses, residential rehab programs for drug abusers, sports leagues and computer training, to name but a few of their activities. The Lawndale Community Church, through establishing parish boundaries, has become a powerful agent of transformation in their community. Their theology of turf, though originally somewhat mixed in motive, has caused their neighborhood to blossom.

Churches with community-friendly theologies do exist but they are hard to find. Often they minister in obscurity, off the radar screen of the religious establishment. About ten years ago, a

handful of disconnected urban ministry types who had somehow found each other decided to get together for a day of discussion. We reserved a small meeting room at O’Hare Airport. To our utter amazement, the room was soon overflowing with more than sixty urban ministry leaders from all over the country who had learned by word of mouth about the gathering. There was enthusiastic consensus that some mechanism was needed to identify and nurture those ministries who labor unnoticed to restore hope in their communities. The Christian Community Development Association was born that day. Its momentum has been growing steadily ever since.

Several weeks ago I attended the annual gathering of the Christian Community Development Association which was meeting in St. Louis. More than 2000 people from nearly 200 cities assembled, mostly grass-roots practitioners living and serving in communities of need, all working out practical theologies of community. The energy and passion that permeated the assembly kindled hope within me that perhaps a new movement is stirring across our land. Perhaps the parish church is not dead after all! ■

## **The Gospel and Our Culture Newsletter**

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# CULTIVATING WAYS OF CHRIST IN THE POSTMODERN TRANSITION

## RESOURCES FOR PASTORAL LEADERS

George R. Hunsberger  
GOCN Coordinator

*In the latter years of his life, it was Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's purpose to open Western culture to a missionary dialogue with the gospel. In the course of that effort, he was essentially cultivating ways of Christ for people living in the midst of the cultural transition from a modern to a postmodern world and in what had already become a post-Christian social era. His cultivation of ways of believing, of witnessing, of being community and of living in hope anticipates the daily and weekly preoccupations of pastoral leaders sensitive to the demands of the present day. For these crucial elements in the renewal of the church, important resources are to be found in Newbigin's approach. Here the first of these elements is addressed.*

### Ways of Belief

When Christians feel intimidated about telling other people the Christian message, it is not just a matter of believing that people will not like being told that this is true and other claims to truth are called into question by it. It goes much deeper, to the ability to believe it themselves in a world that tells them in one way or another that a religious conviction cannot lay claim to be the truth in any factual sense and must be held only as a private option.

The strict dichotomy that grew up under Enlightenment rationality between knowable public fact and chosen private opinion already pushed in this direction. The emerging postmodern sense that all knowing is from some particular perspective further relativized all claims to truth and questioned such claims as exertions of the will to power.

Christians imagining any form of direct public assertion of the Christian message do not have to be told that it will meet with a cloud of questions about its legitimacy. Besides pushing them toward silence, the atmosphere erodes the strength of their own inner conviction that the Bible's account of things can be taken to be a valid option for construing the world.

Newbigin always wrestled with such matters himself, and

the way he found pathways through the intimidating terrain lays foundations for others. His early theological training under John Oman of Cambridge had taught him the importance of recognizing the personhood of God, and that God's personal character is displayed by the freedom to act, and to choose the time and place of such action. God can be known in the ways that any person can be known, by what that person reveals in the choices made and actions taken.

This sense of the necessity of revelation as the way to know God had come to be viewed by many, under the imprint of the Enlightenment's confidence in autonomous human reason, as a less sure form of knowledge than that gained through the scientific method and the certainty of tracing cause and effect. What Newbigin ultimately discerned, helped immeasurably by the work of Michael Polanyi, was that science was as much a tradition, borne by a community and rooted in certain beliefs, as is any religious tradition, including that of the church. Polanyi's book *Personal Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) gave clarity to Newbigin's sense that knowing what the gospel announces and knowing what science detects are not so fundamentally different sorts of knowing as the culture tends to assume.

In fact, Newbigin shows that Christian faith is not irrational but represents a wider rationality than the norms of scientific discovery posit, because the gospel opens the question of purpose which scientific knowing set aside in favor of cause and effect. Newbigin's use of Polanyi's approach, most emphatically in the first five chapters of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989), provides an apologetic approach that undergirds the faith of believing people, something that is essential for the presence of confident witness. I have watched as students have read those sixty-five pages and found themselves liberated to believe—to really believe—that this good news is true and can be told with assurance.

Today's pastoral leader is in the business of securing ways for people to see how they can believe. What I call Newbigin's "postmodern apologetic" is a helpful frame of reference for that work. It is essential for a context where Christian faith is no longer merely what polite citizens are expected to believe. ■

[Excerpted from the *Journal for Preachers*, Advent 1998.]

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# JESUS CONFRONTS CONFLICTING KINGDOM VIEWS

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During recent workshops with community leaders and World Vision personnel in Chile and Bolivia, we read together Mark 10:32-45. In this passage Jesus foretells his death and resurrection for the third time (verses 32-34), and James and John ask to be allowed to sit on either side of Jesus in his glory (verses 35-45).

The results of our reading this passage together were surprising for me. I had been used to working with verses 35-45 alone, with the result that the latter part of verse 45 (“and to give his life a ransom for many”) had seemed a little extraneous. Working with the expanded unit (verses 32-45) showed greater coherence and spoke more powerfully.

A useful starting point for any study is recognizing the borders of the text: Where does one start and stop? For narrative, borders often are signaled by changes in place, time, or actors.

In the Mark 10:32-45 text, verse 32 identifies the place. Later, verse 46 signals a new location (Jericho). Within verses 32-45, there are no signaled shifts in place or time.

Within the passage, a nice symmetry of actors signals four moments.

- Verses 32-34 Jesus speaks to the Twelve, sharing the prediction of his passion for the third time.

- Verses 35-40 Jesus responds to James and John who requested, “Let us sit at your right and left.”

- Verse 41 The ten become indignant over the brothers’ request.

- Verses 42-45 Jesus tells the Twelve, “The Son of Man came...to serve.”

The transitions between all but the first two moments are obvious. The request of James and John in verses 35-40 prompts the reaction by the ten in verse 41. The reaction prompts Jesus’ response in verses 42-45.

The continuity from verses 32-34 to verses 35-40 is less obvious until we

recognize that the subject matter may be the same—what is about to happen in Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples have radically different expectations. The disciples’ expectations of Jesus’ kingdom and glory prompted James’ and John’s request.

Jesus responds to their request in verses 42-45 by contrasting the conduct of those who are “great” or “first” in society with the conduct he expects of the disciples. It is here that taking verses 32-45 as the unit, rather than verses 35-45, becomes important.

We already have met the rulers and great ones in the persons of chief priests in verse 42 and the scribes in verse 33. We already have seen what lording it over and being tyrants looks like with regard to what awaits the Son of Man in Jerusalem. Thus Jesus’ response in verses 42-45 does more than offer us an abstract pattern. It reminds us of the realities that are shaping the story.

Jesus’ response identifies the pattern common to the predicted conduct of the chief priests and scribes and to the actual conduct of James and John. Put differently, Jesus does not need to journey to Jerusalem to meet this pattern; he already is encountering it among his own disciples. And if he meets it among them, how much more likely is he to meet it in Jerusalem. Thus James and John unintentionally have testified to the likelihood of the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction.

Jesus’ response to his disciples identifies two societies: one of death (oppression, tyranny, the death of innocents such as Jesus) and one of life (service and resurrection). The narrative frame (verses 32-45) for this response makes it clear that not only the rulers and great ones (verse 42), the chief priests and scribes (verse 33) but also the Twelve (verses 35-41) are members of the first society mentioned.

This provides the context for understanding why Jesus came “to

*Mark 10:32-45 (RSV)*

*32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him 33 saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; 34 and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.” 35 And James and John, the sons of Zeb’edee, came forward to him, and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” 37 And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” 38 But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” 39 And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

give his life as a *ransom* for many” as expressed in the latter part of verse 45. Everyone from the chief priests down to the humblest disciple is trapped in the society of death and is in need of ransom.

Sometimes we talk about the two societies Jesus refers to in this passage as though they were two alternatives existing more or less

independently. When we put Jesus’ comments in the context of the entire passage, a more dynamic picture emerges.

Here the kingdom of life comes into being in the midst of the kingdom of death, with the frontier marked by Jesus’ self-giving—and by the self-giving of his followers.

When we read the passage as a

whole, we find that Jesus ups the ante with regard to patterns of leadership. It no longer is simply a matter of following Jesus’ advice.

The narrative frame makes it clear that to opt for society’s way of using power is to align oneself with the chief priests and scribes in Jesus’ death and with their modern equivalents in the deaths of too many innocents. ■

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***AT THIS TIME IN THIS PLACE: THE SPIRIT EMBODIED IN THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY*, by Michael Warren, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999). Paperback, 181 pages.**

Reviewed by George Brown, Jr.  
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Michael Warren has long had an interest in the intersection of culture and church (*Faith, Culture, and the Worshiping Community: Shaping the Practice of the Local Church*, Paulist Press, 1989; *Communications and Cultural Analysis: A Religious View*, Bergin and Garvey, 1992). That interest is pursued and further developed in *At This Time In This Place: The Spirit Embodied in the Local Assembly*.

Like *Communications and Cultural Analysis: A Religious View* (1992), this book owes much to the thought of Raymond Williams. Warren also draws on the thought of Pierre Bourdieu regarding practice. (In focusing on practice, Warren enriches the current focus on Christian practices stimulated by Craig Dykstra and others.)

Warren intends his newest book to be “a hymn to the Spirit of Jesus tangibly present in the coming together, in a particular place and at a particular time in history, of disciples who face the challenges of that time and place” (page 3). Following his music imagery, this hymn has six “stanzas:” “The Worshiping Assembly: Zone of Cultural Contestation” follows up a theme in his 1989 work; “The Material Conditions of Our Seeing and Perceiving: Religious Implications of the Power of Images,” which draws on the work of David Freedberg on the power of images; “The Local Church and Its Practice of the Gospel: The Materiality of Discipleship in a Catechesis of Liberation” reflects some of Mike’s earlier work with Daniel Levinson’s concept of the “life structure;” “How We Speak in the Church: As Houseguest or Family Member;” “Life Structure, or the Material Conditions of Living: An Ecclesial Task;” and “Spirit Resonance: The Achievement of Practice.”

For Warren, churches and religions are “zones of meaning prompting their adherents to question the meanings of the

wider culture. As such, religions can be healthy countervailing forces, examining, contesting, and redirecting the meanings of the wider social-economic order” (page 1).

Some hymns are easier to sing than others. Warren’s “hymn” may prove demanding for some. But the effort to understand the critical concepts with which Warren works will be well worth the challenge.

Here is a brief sampling of the kind of lines singers will find in this “hymn:”

“ . . . if you want congregational change, you must show its significance for worship, which is one of the main reasons feminists pressing for church renewal pay so much attention to worship” (page 4).

“A key question for liturgy today is whether, in light of what a particular community actually stands for, ritual is capable of being an authentic expression of the life of that community. Or, put the other way around, can what a particular group actually stands for in its everyday life be of such a character that the Eucharist cannot signify it? In other words, the Eucharist would be a countersign of that life” (page 9).

“In our time we are immersed in images but tend to deny they have any power over us, including the power to desensitize us to important human matters—to blunt our sensitivities as persons” (page 32).

“Those in a Spirit-resonant community are meant to develop a perceptive system attuned to the gospel in a way a parent of an infant can be so physically tuned to her person that he wakes at night to her slightest cry and immediately attends her needs. When the Spirit of Jesus resonates in our congregations, it becomes discernible in their gospel practice because resonance involves not just perception but action” (pages 124-125).

Religious educators, youth workers, and pastors who want to examine “the conditions under which religious groups, particularly the Christian churches, can become embodiments of their functional convictions about the human situation” (page 2) are encouraged to check out *At This Time In This Place: The Spirit Embodied In The Local Assembly*. Questions for discussion and reflection at the end of each chapter make for an interesting and challenging study by a small group in the church. ■

# NETWORKINGS

## ANNUAL CONSULTATION

The annual GOCN Consultation scheduled for October 21-23 will give attention to an issue that has been implicated at every turn in the network's agenda. To use language supplied by Walter Wink in his trilogy on the subject, *How do we name, unmask, and engage "the powers"?*

The importance of the issue can be illustrated in emerging literature within our network. In his essay, "The Gospel in Our Culture," Paul Hiebert shows from the outset the relationship between what the Bible calls the "principalities and powers" and what we have come to call "culture" (*The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, pp. 139ff.). Interpreting our culture involves naming the powers—good, bad or ambiguous. On the gospel side of the agenda, Charles West takes up the gospel's unmasking encounter with the presence and exercise of power in his forthcoming book in the Christian Mission and Modern Culture Series, *Power, Truth, and Community in Modern Culture*. Lois Barrett identifies engaging "the powers" as a crucial element for the church's rediscovery of its missional identity and for its missional practice in the world (*Missional Church*, pp. 110-117). The GOCN agenda that sees the interaction of gospel, culture and church as critical begs the question of "the powers" as a central issue.

A team of people in the network will be working on a design for the consultation around the theme "Discerning Powers." The consultation begins with the evening meal on Thursday, October 21, 1999, and concludes with the noon meal on Saturday, October 23. It will be held at Techny Towers, Techny, Illinois, just north of Chicago. Full details will be forthcoming later, but any who wish to pre-register may do so by contacting Judy Bos at the GOCN office.

## MISSIONAL CHURCH '99

The Synod of Albany of the Reformed Church in America is holding a major event this summer to encourage the people of its congregations to "discern God's vision in calling and sending them to be a missionary church in the cultures and communities where they live." Entitled *Missional Church '99: God's Own People Sent on a Mission*, the event will feature addresses by William Willimon, Craig Van Gelder, and Alan Roxburgh, with Renee House and Gregg Mast leading worship. The meeting will be held at Utica, NY on August 1-3. Planned as an event to serve the congregations of the RCA in that region, a limited number of people from other denominations will be welcomed on a space available basis. For details, contact Albany Synod, 1790 Grand Blvd., Schenectady, NY 12309-5299, <albansyno@aol.com>.

## NEW MATERIALS AVAILABLE

■ The Autumn 1998 issue of the journal *Reformed Review* brought together a collection of articles on the theme "The Missional Church." Several of these articles, containing reflections of people working at the heart of the GOCN, have been reprinted in a booklet entitled *Developing the Missional Church*. The booklet contains three articles: "Features of the Missional Church: Some Directions and Pathways," by George R. Hunsberger; "Take Time to be Holy: Cultivating the Missional Church," by Inagrace Dietterich and Dale Ziemer; and "The Church in the Cultural Currents," an interview with Kathleen Ponitz, Marlin Vis and Craig Van Gelder. The booklet is available from the GOCN office for \$3 each, postage included.

■ The British and Foreign Bible Society has produced a special edition of its periodical *TransMission* in tribute to Lesslie Newbigin. The Bible Society has produced extra copies which the GOCN is able to make available at minimal cost. While supplies last, copies can be ordered from Judy Bos at the GOCN office in multiples of fifteen (15), at a cost of \$10 per 15, shipping included. For groups or classes desiring a brief and personal portrait of Newbigin's life and thought, this edition serves the purpose well.

■ Another of the British and Foreign Bible Society's initiatives has been to offer its institutional support to the re-establishment of the British Gospel and Our Culture network. Under the leadership of the network's coordinator, David Kettle, the British Gospel and Our Culture newsletter has been re-instituted with a Spring '99 issue (Issue 24, picking up where the newsletter left off several years ago). Subscribers are invited to make donations to defray the cost, especially if it involves international postage. To subscribe, contact The Gospel and Our Culture Network, Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7DG, U.K. (telephone 01793 418100, fax 01793 418118, e-mail <Gospel-culture@bfbs.org>).



## ***www.gocn.org***

In recent months the GOCN website has been refurbished and brought up-to-date. Several new features have been added. One of those is the Newsletter Online. The current issue is there, along with back issues from December 1997 to the present. Earlier issues will be added along the way. In addition, the growing number of volumes in the Gospel and Our Culture Series, published by Eerdmans, are presented. The important Christian Mission and Modern Culture Series (Trinity Press International) is also listed, detailing the central thesis of each of the nineteen volumes that have appeared so far in the series. Features to be added include links to select sites around the world that share the agenda of the GOCN.

## ***gocn@calvin.edu***

The GOCN Chatline continues with about 200 persons logged on to the conversation. Recent discussion has included topics like: missionaries and culture (with special reference to early missionaries among Native Americans), political leaders and morality, and the film “Prince of Egypt” and questions like: How separate must the church be? How

*announcing...*

## ***THE BISHOP NEWBIGIN INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH AND MISSION STUDIES***

**L**unched officially on the anniversary of Lesslie Newbigin’s death at the end of January, the Bishop Newbigin Institute for Church and Mission Studies is an exciting venture sponsored jointly by the CSI Diocese of Madras and the Synod of the Church of South India. The brain child of Bishop Masilamani Azariah, at present Bishop in Madras, the Institute seeks to promote scholarship in fields of ecclesiology, mission, evangelism, dialogue, and other related subjects which are linked to the vision and thought of Bishop Newbigin.

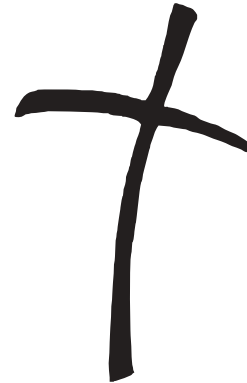
The Institute, which will be situated close to the Synod Offices in Madras, will provide a centre for study and research. It expects to cater for students working on long-term projects as well as people—clergy and lay—seeking resource material for on-going work or space for reflection during a sabbatical.

At the opening ceremony, Dr. Eleanor Jackson spoke of her recollections of Newbigin—amusing, poignant and serious—and

do we measure success? To sign on, send an e-mail message to <majordomo@calvin.edu> with your own email address showing in the “From:” field and “subscribe gocn” (without the quotes) in the body of the message. A welcome message will clarify the focus and procedure for the Chatline.

## ***gocn.org***

New addresses for communicating with the GOCN office are now in place. Old addresses will be forwarded for a time, but changing your records to show the new addresses will insure that your communications arrive in a prompt fashion. For George Hunsberger the address is <grhuns@gocn.org> and for Judy Bos it is <judybos@gocn.org>.



gave a picture of a dedicated scholar, a man of prayer and action, a loving family man and at times a ruthless bureaucrat. She spoke of his evangelical outlook and his search for ways towards unity and she told too of the breadth of his areas of interest. Right up until his death he was involved in schemes such as the gospel and culture. It is hoped that the Institute will reflect that breadth of vision and subject matter.

On the day following the launch a tablet to the memory of Bishop Newbigin was unveiled at St. George’s Cathedral in Madras.

At present work is afoot to gather documents related to Newbigin and materials written by him. Anyone having access to such papers or books and who would be willing to share them is asked to contact the archivist at Bishop Newbigin Institute for Church and Mission Studies, Whites Road, Royapettah, Madras 600014, India ■

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### ***Briefly Mentioned***

*The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, by Belden Lane, is a book that explores, personally and historically, the spirituality of “desert” and “mountain”—the two images that keep cropping up in “imageless” apophatic spirituality. Near the end of the book, the author is summing up the experience of passing through brokenness, to the silence of the desert, where the “deepest mystery of love” is realized through the experience of “having nothing to offer in return.” His description of those who have been through this desert ends with these words:

“They are what the church has been summoned to be, a community of broken people, painfully honest, undomesticated, rid of the pretense and suffocating niceness to which ‘religion’ is so often prone. They love, inexplicably and unflinchingly, because of having been so loved themselves.”

I particularly like the fact that, first, these people *are*, second, that they *love*. Simple, yes? It reminds me of the suggestion of using a year’s worth of worship time just to pray the Lord’s Prayer, in as many ways as we know how, until it forms (maybe re-forms) us.

-Laurie Baron, Holland, Michigan