



## Lesslie Newbigin


(1909 – 1998)

**Revd Dr Paul Weston**  
Director of the Newbigin Centre  
Ridley Hall Cambridge



Lesslie Newbigin & cultural engagement


1928-31 *Queens' College Cambridge*




[The SCM] were committed to their faith and ready to talk about it, but also open to difficult questions and ready to take me as I was – interested but sceptical and basically unconvinced. I never felt that they were trying to 'get at' me. . .

background


Lesslie Newbigin & cultural engagement



**William Temple**  
(1881 – 1944)



**John Mott**  
(1865 – 1955)




background

Lesslie Newbigin & cultural engagement

1931-33 *SCM secretary*  
*SCM Edinburgh Quadrennial Meeting 1933*

**J.H. ('Joe') Oldham**  
(1874 – 1969)




'profound and prophetic address'

background

Lesslie Newbigin & cultural engagement


1931-33 *SCM secretary*  
*SCM Edinburgh Quadrennial Meeting 1933*



From a perspective of nearly half a century later I would dare to say that missionary thinking in Europe and North America has not yet met the challenge which Edinburgh gave to develop a genuinely missionary encounter with post-Enlightenment civilization.


*Unfinished Agenda* (1985)

background



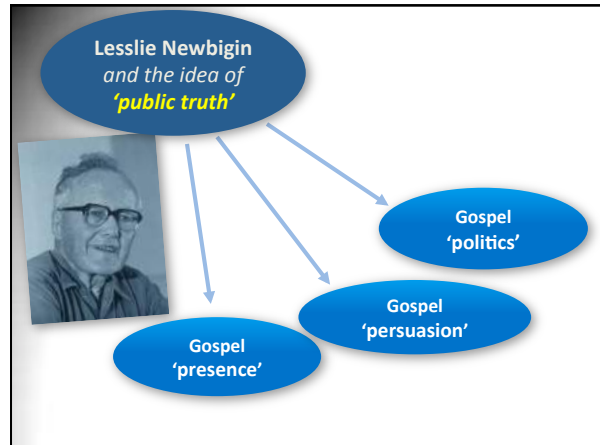


Our culture has acknowledged and protected the right of individuals to hold [religious] faith as a private option. But it has drawn a sharp distinction between this private option and the principles which govern public life.



*Other Side of 1984* (1983), p.26



What is now being proposed is that not just is the private world of the Church the public world of the modern world as the basis of a radical deconstruction of our world; it is the knowledge of our moral and spiritual beliefs that cannot be demonstrated but are held by faith;

Lesslie Newbigin and the idea of 'public truth'

... the most important contribution which the Church can make to a new social order is to be itself a new social order.

*Truth to Tell* (1991)

Gospel 'presence'

Lesslie Newbigin and the idea of 'public truth'




I understand the role of the Christian as that of being neither a conservative nor an anarchist, but a subversive agent.

*Truth to Tell* (1991)

Gospel 'presence'

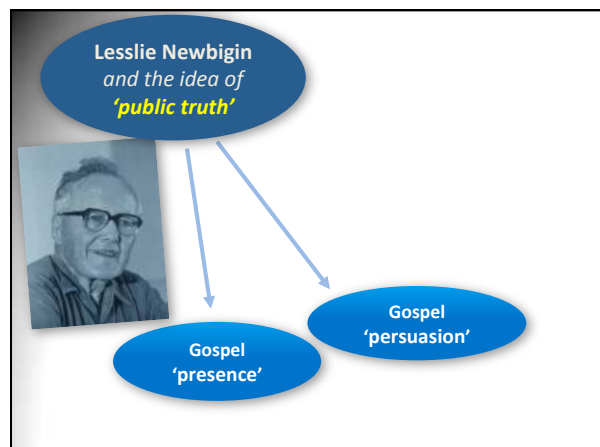
Lesslie Newbigin and the idea of 'public truth'

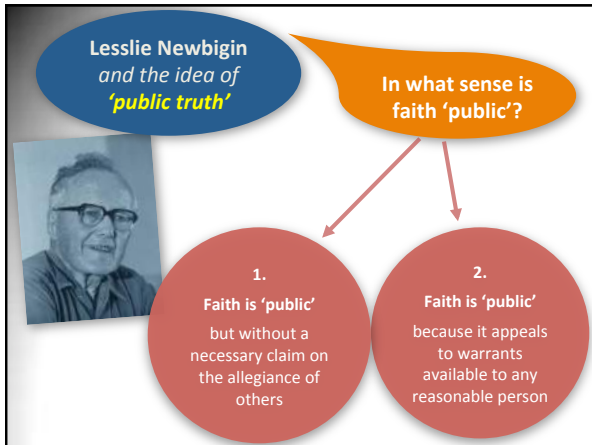



... undercover agents need a great deal of skill. We do not spend enough of our energies in training undercover agents.

*Truth to Tell* (1991)

Gospel 'presence'





**Michael Polanyi**  
(1891-1976)

The enquiring scientist's intimations of a hidden reality are personal. . . Yet they are not a subjective state of mind, but convictions held with universal intent.

*Personal Knowledge  
Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*

'The scientist who commits himself to [a] new vision does so – as Polanyi puts it – with universal intent. He believes it to be objectively true, and he therefore causes it to be widely published, invites discussion, and seeks to persuade his fellow scientists that it is a true account of reality.'

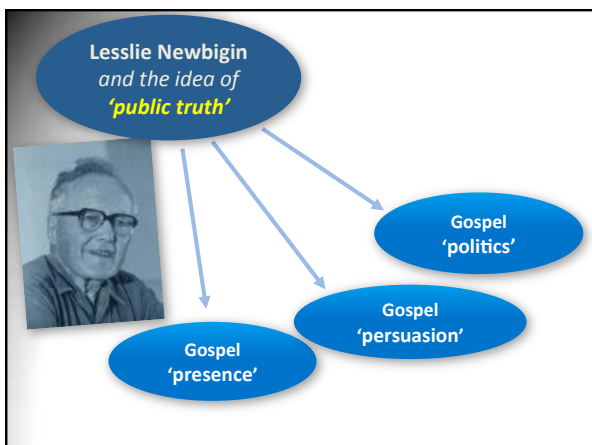
*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989)

**Christian truth claims are socially located**

**Christian truth claims are nonetheless universal**

I know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour. And this 'knowing' . . . is a personal and practical discipleship within the tradition.

But being personal does not mean that it is subjective. The faith is held with universal intent. It is held not as 'my personal opinion,' but as the truth which is true for all.



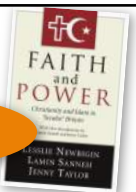


**The recovery of Christian democracy**

'The toleration which a Christian is required to exercise is not something which he must exercise *in spite of* his or her belief that the gospel is true, but precisely because of this belief.'



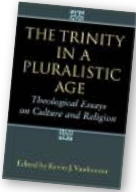
'It is the gospel itself which authorizes freedom of practice of beliefs which are contrary to the gospel.'

*FAITH and POWER  
Christianity and the World Order*  
LESSLIE NEWBIGIN  
LAMBETH SABBATH  
JESSY TAYLOR







**The recovery of Christian democracy**

'Taken together then, the cross and resurrection assure us that while the final triumph of God's reign is not an event within history (public history) it is nevertheless the final reality, a reality with which everyone will finally have to reckon.'

If the confession of Jesus as the one Lord and Saviour of the world is withheld from the arena of public discourse and reserved for the privacy of the home and the sanctuary, then the only image of God present in the public square will be a unitarian one, whether the increasingly powerful image of the Allah of the Qur'an, or the shadowy and ineffective God of a Christendom that has lost its nerve.

'I think we have to recognise that until the second coming of Christ we live in a world where the truth can only be affirmed in conflict. What we must pray for is that we may learn to engage in this conflict exclusively with the weapons of the Spirit.'

*'On the Gospel as Public Truth: Response to the Colloquium.' In Leslie Newbigin Papers, Library Special Collections, The University of Birmingham, U.K. 1996*