

**Review**  
**A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Mission**

Lesslie Newbigin

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Here is a collection of 17 papers or presentations Newbigin wrote between 1960 and 1992. Themes include: mission and the Holy Spirit, mission in the modern city, the cultural captivity of the Western church, the need for conversion in the West, the continuing validity of international missions, mission in a pluralist society, and what should be done in these days by the World Council of Churches, the churches of Europe, and Christian churches generally.

From this collection, Newbigin appears generally more concerned about the conversion of Christians in the West than about the conversion of non-Christians in the Four-Fifths World. Newbigin believes that missions is still valid because the Christian story is the truth for all humanity, and because churches of different countries need to learn from each other, but not because we should try to increase the number of converts in the world. He is no Church Growth, nor Frontier Missions advocate. His vision of what needs to happen is this: for all local congregations, everywhere, to experience and show the ways of the Kingdom of God - and all that God wants to see happen in the world will naturally unfold from that. This is a good thing, certainly, but far short of a realistic plan for world evangelization or the penetration of Least-Evangelized Peoples. I fear that those who would buy into this agenda would strive forever to make existing churches better, neglecting the planting of new ones, and seeing little growth, or little real progress on the frontiers of gospel advance.

Newbigin is a very able and important missiologist. These messages draw upon his unique experiences as a missionary in India, as a leading ecumenist, and as a local pastor in urban Britain. He does well in weaving his own ministry stories with larger observations and implications, and is adept with at least his favorite lines of philosophical reflection, all the time writing in a good, readable style. Unfortunately, this collection is somewhat repetitive. The same themes, often the same phrases, appear again and again, especially on this theme: that since the Enlightenment the West has sorted all discourse into (1) facts, which belong in the public sphere, and about which we all are supposed to agree, and (2) values, which belong in the private sphere, and about which we all can differ. Newbigin has no peace about which side of this divide modern Western thinking places Christianity on, and the pluralist implications of that.