

# The Future of Mission in the World Council of Churches

*The Dialogue between Lesslie Newbigin and  
Konrad Raiser*

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, Michael W. Goheen summarizes and evaluates a debate between ecumenical pioneer Lesslie Newbigin and former WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser. Raiser exemplifies a trinitarian approach to ecumenism and mission that recognizes the universal presence of the Holy Spirit among all peoples and religions, and so would cease to have a Christocentric focus. For Newbigin, while a trinitarian approach to ecumenism and mission is of paramount importance, an abandonment of the centrality and universality of Jesus Christ is something that cannot be abandoned. In the end, says Goheen, the differences between Raiser and Newbigin are differences revolving around the meaning of Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross.

In the middle of the 1990s a disagreement surfaced over the future of mission in the World Council of Churches (WCC) between Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the WCC, and Lesslie Newbigin, an important architect of the ecumenical tradition in its early years. The stature of both of these men within the ecumenical movement makes their encounter an issue worthy of consideration.

The initial skirmish between Newbigin and Raiser took place in the pages of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* in 1994. Newbigin

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fired the first volley with a lengthy review and rather harsh critique of Raiser's book *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement* (Newbiggin 1994a: 2-5; Raiser 1991). Raiser's response was brief and generous but the issues were not engaged on a deep level (Raiser 1994: 50-51). Newbiggin's response to Raiser in the same issue of the IBMR was likewise brief and more subdued (Newbiggin 1994b: 51-52). One year later Raiser delivered a public lecture at the Bicentenary Celebration of the London Mission Council entitled *Toward an Ecumenical Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Raiser 1995). Newbiggin attended that lecture and was incited to draft a nine page response to what he heard (Newbiggin 1995). These are the only times that Raiser and Newbiggin directly engaged one another in print. Both of these encounters are brief, the complexity of the issues are not given full justice, and many questions remain unanswered. However, these brief skirmishes contain important clues to central issues of two very different visions of the future of mission within the WCC. This paper examines these different visions.

### **A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement**

In *Ecumenism in Transition* Raiser articulates a decisive shift taking place in the ecumenical movement. He identifies a classical ecumenical paradigm which he labels "Christocentric-universalism." This vision shaped the ecumenical movement from its inception until the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) and remains an important stream today within ecumenical thinking (Raiser 1991: 36-51). Raiser explicates the "Christocentric-universalist" paradigm in terms of four elements. First, the "all-determining central element in the paradigm is a deliberate *Christocentrism*" that highlights the divinity and Lordship of Christ (Ibid.: 41). A second element is a "concentration on the church" that accents the unique identity and task of the church (Ibid.: 43-44). The third characteristic is the universal perspective. The Christ event has universal significance, and therefore the church's being and mission also have universal validity (Ibid.: 45). The final element is its emphasis on salvation history and eschatology as a central category of thought. A dynamic conception of universal history links together the Christocentrism, the focus on the church, and the universalism of the paradigm (Ibid.: 45-46).

Raiser believes that this classical paradigm is facing challenges that place its continued existence in question. Religious pluralism, various forms of oppression and injustice, and the ecological threat are burning issues that question the viability of the old paradigm (Ibid.: 54-78). Raiser wants to catch the wave of a new paradigm that has been developing since Uppsala and ride it into the future (Ibid.: 79-120). Fearing the Christomonistic and triumphalist tendencies of Christocentrism, Raiser wants to stress a trinitarianism that gives full scope to the working of the Spirit. In contrast to the ecclesiocentrism of traditional ecumenical theology, Raiser calls for an understanding in which “the institutional distinctions between church and world and church and society fall in to the background” (Ibid.: 73). Raiser fears that the present ecclesiologies tend to lead to a “Christian exclusivism” (Ibid.: 44). He also fears that the universal emphasis leads to a triumphalist mission which is unable to meet the challenges of pluralism, oppression, and ecological disaster. Raiser wants to substitute a more humble service orientation centred in dialogue that contributes to a household of life. Finally, Raiser wants to replace the category of universal salvation history with a notion of the *oikoumene* as the central image for the future mission of the church. Social, political, economic, and ecological crises call for the guiding image of the *oikoumene* as a household of life which stresses concrete human stewardship in solidarity with all life forms.

Newbigin recognized important insight in Raiser’s views: trinitarian thought must be foundational; ecclesiocentrism must give way to an emphasis on solidarity with the world; *oikoumene* refers to the whole inhabited earth; the church’s mission is to be one of humble service and not a crusading triumphalism; issues of religious pluralism, economic justice, and ecological stewardship must receive priority attention. However, he critiques Raiser at several points: the universal validity of the atoning work of Jesus Christ is eclipsed; the necessary distinction between the church and the world is obscured; and there is a neglect of the missionary and evangelistic calling of the church.

In Raiser’s response he avers that Newbigin’s “entire critical reflection is based on the conviction of the non-negotiable truth of the earlier paradigm. . .” (Raiser 1994: 50). Newbigin protests that he does not regard the classical paradigm as unalterable (Newbigin 1994b: 51). During the

1960s a major shift took place in his own thinking in which he accommodated the insights of that time and modified the classical paradigm. In *Trinitarian Faith for Today's Mission* (1963) Newbigin expands a Christocentric missionary theology into a trinitarian one. In *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (1966), Newbigin acknowledged elements of truth in the 1960s "turn to the world" and revised his missionary ecclesiology accordingly.

The evaluation of that crucial period in the 1960s as represented by the Uppsala Assembly offers a lens with which to evaluate the contrasting visions. For Raiser, Uppsala is judged to be a positive development that responds to the challenges of the present by modifying the emphases of the classical vision. For Newbigin, however, Uppsala represents a painful experience where there is a denial of the original ecumenical vision. Newbigin and Raiser agree that a paradigm shift has taken place that has its roots in Uppsala; their differences lie in how they evaluate that shift. I elaborate these contrasting visions at three points: their understanding of the *missio Dei*, of ecclesiology, and of the mission of the church.

### *Missio Dei*

In their writings both Raiser and Newbigin point to the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) (1952) as a turning point in the ecumenical tradition for understanding mission (Newbigin 1970: 178; Raiser 1999a: 191). This conference signalled a shift from the church to the redeeming mission of God as the central reference point. According to the Willingen reports, the church's mission was rooted in and shaped by the mission of Triune God. The term "*missio Dei*" was introduced into mission theology by Karl Hartenstein following Willingen to give expression to this new emphasis (Bassham 1978: 332). The term was intended to move beyond an ecclesiocentric basis for mission by placing the church's calling within the context of the mission of God.

The Willingen statement, however, already concealed profound differences about how the mission of God was to be understood. Two interpretations of this phrase had already appeared at Willingen. One interpreted the phrase to mean the providential action of God by His Spirit in the world with little reference to the church. The other emphasized God's work through the unique witness of the church as it continued the mission of Christ. The latter understanding was endorsed by Willingen but

it was the former that would gradually gain in prominence becoming the “received view” at Uppsala.

Originally the *missio Dei* was interpreted Christologically: the church participates in the mission of God by continuing the universal mission of Christ in the power of the Spirit. However, after Willingen the *missio Dei* concept gradually underwent modification (Rosin 1972; Bosch 1991: 391-392). The *missio Dei* was interpreted as the Spirit’s work that embraces both the church and the world: “this wider understanding of mission is expounded pneumatologically rather than christologically” (Bosch 1991: 391). The church participates in God’s mission by participating in what God is doing through the Spirit in the world. The differences between Raiser and Newbigin are rooted within these divergent understandings.

Newbigin maintains the Christocentric understanding of the *missio Dei*. In his response to Raiser’s charge that he is an advocate of an outdated paradigm, Newbigin responds: “I do not regard the ‘classical’ paradigm as non-negotiable. . . . But I do regard as non-negotiable the affirmation that in Jesus the Word was made flesh; there can be no relativizing of this, the central and decisive event of universal history” (1994b: 51). Raiser believes that such a Christocentrism is insufficient to meet the demands of the contemporary world. Global crises demand that the church shift attention to the Spirit’s work in the *oikoumene*. For Raiser Christocentrism tends toward Christomonism; it does not open up to a full trinitarian vision (1991: 92). Further, Christocentrism eclipses meaningful dialogue with neighbours from other faiths and inhibits the church from contributing to the one household of life which is facing grave dangers (1991: 58). Thus Raiser calls for a shift to the Spirit, which he refers to as a “step beyond the christocentric basis developed in the statements from Willingen. . .” (1999a: 192). He formulates this as a move from Christocentrism to trinitarianism.

Is this an accurate way to describe the shift? The Dutch theologian G.C. Berkouwer believes that “the characterization from a rigorous Christo-centricity to thoroughgoing trinitarianism as the direction of missionary theology is meaningful only starting from a wrongly understood Christocentrism” (Berkouwer 1976: 395). Newbigin argues also that a “Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christo-centric one and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say

that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history” (1994a: 2; see 1977d: 214). Indeed, Newbigin expanded his Christocentric position into a more comprehensive Trinitarian framework.

This Christocentrism is in keeping with Newbigin’s understanding of the person and work of Christ. Central to Newbigin’s convictions is the belief that *in Jesus Christ God has revealed and accomplished the end of universal history*. Since Jesus is the fullest revelation of the Father’s character and will, our starting point for thinking about God and his mission must be Jesus Christ.

Raiser too wants to develop a trinitarian perspective that is Christological (Raiser 1994: 50). Yet a significant difference remains between their conceptions. Newbigin uses the word “Christocentric” while Raiser uses the word “Christological.” The primary focus of Raiser’s Christology is the historical ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In his rightful concern to return to a concrete Christology, the cosmic Lordship of Christ as well as the universal significance of the atonement are neglected. In fact, any treatment of the atonement of Christ is lacking in Raiser’s writing.

It is precisely at the point of an assessment of the work of Christ that we find the fundamental difference. Raiser is critical of classical Christology. The emphasis on the universal Lordship of Christ and his divinity obscure his earthly ministry. This earthly ministry must be recovered in view of the urgent needs of the day. The crises of a contemporary world require a servant church that follows the earthly Jesus and ministers to the needs of the world. This kind of mission must be rooted in a “concrete Christology which takes seriously the historical particularity of Jesus” (Raiser 1991: 59).

Raiser is correct to emphasize the need to recover the historical mission of Christ that has been obscured by classical Christology. The question is whether these two aspects of Christology need to stand in tension. In Newbigin’s Christology they do not; it is precisely in the earthly ministry of Christ as well as in his suffering death that he revealed and accomplished the end of history. And it is exactly this understanding of Christ that will not allow Newbigin to abandon his Christocentric commitment. If Christ has, in fact, made known and effected the goal of universal history, then he cannot merely be a model for the church’s mission. Christ must be the starting point and controlling factor for all thinking about the church and its mission.

Two further observations can be made. First, in Raiser's writing, reflection on the *missio Dei* that begins with the work of the Spirit seems unable to take into account the full significance of the work of Christ; while in Newbigin reflection starts from the work of Christ and is inexorably driven on to the work of the Spirit. Second, when the Spirit's work in the world is the starting point for mission, there is no criteria by which the church can assess and evaluate where God is at work: "...there are many spirits abroad, and when they are invoked, we are handed over to other powers. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is known by the confession that Jesus alone is Lord." (Newbigin 1994b: 52).

Nevertheless while Newbigin's understanding of the work of the Triune God significantly expanded during the 1960s, his theological reflection on the work of the Father and the Spirit remain underdeveloped, especially with respect to God's work in creation and history. Raiser notes this need. In light of various crises facing the global community he calls for a "deepened understanding of God's creation and of humanity's place within it" (1997: 65). If a Christocentric orientation is to be taken seriously in the coming decades, Raiser's call for a more developed doctrine of creation must be heeded.

### *Ecclesiology: A Unique Body with the World*

David Bosch describes the ecclesiological developments within the ecumenical tradition and concludes by sketching an "abiding tension" between two different views of the church (1991: 381-389). Bosch's historical analysis shows that the first of these ecclesiologies is rooted in the classical ecumenical tradition, while the second emerged in the 1950s, and was embraced by the Uppsala Assembly. The classical ecclesiology is rooted in a Christocentric understanding of the *missio Dei*. The concentration point of God's eschatological work is the church; the church is a unique body formed by Jesus Christ to participate in the salvation of the coming age through the Spirit and mandated to continue his worldwide mission. The Uppsala ecclesiology is rooted in a pneumatological understanding of the *missio Dei*. The focus of the Spirit's work is not the church but the *oikoumene* which includes both the church and world. The church exists in the world as a picture of God's involvement with the world. The distinct existence of the church is played down; the church exists in solidarity with the world

making its contribution to the humanization of society. Neither Newbigin nor Raiser completely fit these two ecclesiologies yet their ecclesiologies broadly follow these two distinct lines. Newbigin's views are recognizable in classical ecclesiology and Raiser's in the ecclesiology springing from Uppsala.

The impetus for Uppsala's challenge to the classical ecclesiology of the ecumenical tradition was a "holy impatience" with the complacency, introversion, and structural rigidity of the church in the face of terrible social evil (Bosch 1991: 385). This holy impatience continues to shape Raiser's thought. In light of global crises, he calls for a church that serves the burning needs of the world and lives in solidarity with its cultural community. He criticizes the classical ecclesiologies for their "Christian exclusivism" manifested in "attitudes and practices which not only draw a distinction between church and world but actually separate them..." (Raiser 1991: 73). Subsequent ecclesiological revisions in the WCC do not go far enough in correcting this Christian exclusivism (Ibid.). Raiser calls for a "future ecumenical paradigm" in which there is "critical revision of the ecclesiological assumptions" (Ibid.: 72). He criticizes traditional ecclesial structures, arguing that flexible structures are needed in varying contexts that enable involvement in the world. Raiser pleads for an ecclesio genesis in which "the institutional distinctions between church and world and church and society fall into the background" (Ibid.).

Newbigin shares many of Raiser's concerns. Like Raiser Newbigin believed the classical paradigm exhibited an ecclesiocentrism that was structurally rigid and fostered a separation from the world. His discussion of flexible ecclesial structures that enable the church to serve the needs of the world is indebted to the discussion taking place during the 1960s (Newbigin 1966: 100-122). Further, Newbigin affirms the renewed interest in the laity that emerged during this time with the need to evaluate all ecclesial structures according to their ability to equip the laity for their calling in the world (Newbigin 1963: 52-63).

Yet Newbigin differs from Raiser in that Newbigin did not believe that the institutional distinctiveness of the church should be downplayed to encourage solidarity with the world. Newbigin's most characteristic way of articulating his ecclesiology is to use three images: sign, instrument, and first fruit. As a sign, the church points to the kingdom of God beyond its



present horizon; as an instrument God uses the church for his work of healing and liberation; as a first fruit, the church has a real taste now of the renewal God intends for all. Newbigin's threefold description of the church was forged in the crucible of an encounter with the ecclesiology of Johannes Hoekendijk (Newbigin 1953: 168-170). Hoekendijk believed that the church could be sufficiently defined by its function, i.e. its participation in God's work in liberation, seeking justice, and peacemaking in the world. Newbigin protests this interpretation of the church. The church cannot be understood solely in terms of its instrumental role within society. The church is also a place where the life and salvation of the kingdom is experienced in foretaste.

Unlike Hoekendijk Raiser does not reduce the church to an instrument; his writings recognize the church as a distinct body within the *oikoumene* (Raiser 1991: 105; 1997: 47). The question arises, however, as to whether the importance of this insight is obscured by his rightful stress on the solidarity of the church with the world. Raiser's continual emphasis on participation in struggles against the current crises blurs the distinction and between the church as a body which now experiences the life of the kingdom, and the world that continues to live in the grip of sin.

Again, the differences between Newbigin and Raiser are rooted in differing assessments of Christ. If Christ has revealed and accomplished the age to come in His life, death and resurrection, and if the church has begun to share in the life of the age to come by his Spirit, the church will be distinct, even separate from the world. It is more than a unique community that contributes to the moral fabric of society and the resolution of global threats. It is a community that bears God's purpose for all history and thus stands to some degree in antithesis with the world. The church's distinctiveness and solidarity with the world are both essential for a faithful missionary church (cf. Berkhof 1979: 412-415).

This being-different-from-the-world will take on an institutional form. Christianity devoid of an institutional nature cannot offer a true alternative. Raiser's concern for the church to contribute toward the household of life is not well served by his call to minimize the institutional distinctions between church and the world (Raiser 1991: 73). The way ahead for an ecumenical ecclesiology is to recover an understanding of the church as a distinct body that shares in the victory of the cross, but at the same time

to find appropriate structures that enable the church to address the needs of the day.

### **Mission: Bearing the Whole Gospel to the Whole World**

In Bosch's characterization of the abiding tension between the two differing ecclesiologies, mission is also understood in two different ways. The ecclesiology rooted in Uppsala conceives of mission as "a contribution toward the humanization of society," while evangelism, missions, baptism and entry into the church are central to the classical paradigm (Bosch 1991: 381).

Raiser's understanding of mission again falls within the Uppsala trajectory. For Raiser the mission of the church is not to Christianize the world but to change it. Religious pluralism, the wrongs of economic injustice, and the threat to all natural life systems require the church to engage in "self-critical analysis" regarding the universalism that informs the missionary task (1994: 50). The imperialism of missionary work and the exclusive claim for the gospel threaten the unity that is desperately needed in today's world. The urgency of world need demands that the "primary task" of the church be "to further the process of reconstructing sustainable human communities" (Raiser 1997: 26). The mission of the church can be captured in the terms "solidarity" and "dialogue" that contribute "to the transformation on the level of systems by changing cultural consciousness" (Ibid.: 36; see 27). Raiser highlights two ways that the church does this: by contributing to the "spiritual and moral foundations" that sustain life in human community (Ibid.: 18; see 26, 31, 39); by functioning as salt and light, positively as an illustration of the "household of life" that God wills for society, and negatively as a critical presence (Ibid.: 45-49). The church's mission is not to bear an exclusive gospel that points to the end of history, but to contribute to the restoration of an ethical culture (Raiser 1991: 104-105; 1997: 31). The primary way the church's mission contributes to the one household of life is to "cooperate with others in rebuilding the moral fabric that sustains life in community" (Raiser 1997: 39; see 18, 26, 31).

Newbigin reserves perhaps his harshest criticism for Raiser's understanding of mission. Newbigin's concern is that Raiser ignores the evangelistic and missionary task of the church (1994a: 5). According to Newbigin,

Raiser evidences little concern for the great majority of people in the world who have not confessed Christ, been baptized, and incorporated into the church. Newbigin confesses a deep personal concern; he was the primary figure who engineered the joining of the IMC with the WCC in 1961. He writes that “if the vision for the WCC that [Raiser’s] book represents were to be realized, then the bringing of the International Missionary Council into the WCC would have to be judged as having been a mistake. . . . To allow the worldwide missionary and evangelistic calling of the church to disappear from the agenda of the WCC (as this book effectively does) is more than a ‘paradigm shift’” (Ibid.).

Newbigin also observes that Raiser seems to have forgotten that the ecumenical movement finds its historical roots in the missionary task of the church. Indeed, up until 1999 Raiser’s writings demonstrated little reflection on the missionary stream of the ecumenical movement. This can be partly explained by Raiser’s socialization into the ecumenical movement which was in the streams of Faith and Order, and Life and Work. In 1999 Raiser published two articles in which he reflected on the missionary origins of the ecumenical tradition (Raiser 1991a, b). New accents and themes appear in those writings that are not found in earlier work. Yet these new themes are developed only in terms of their contribution to a culture of dialogue and solidarity rather than as the call to a body entrusted with a message about universal history.

The primary impetus for Raiser’s reticence regarding the evangelistic task of the church is religious pluralism. Raiser’s writings contain a deep sense of the global dangers that threaten the human race. An exclusive claim for the gospel threatens the already fragile global equilibrium. The precarious nature of the times requires a dialogue of life rather than Christocentric proclamation. Thus Raiser rejects exclusivism (Barth, Kraemer, Visser ’t Hooft, and Newbigin) and inclusivism (Rahner and Pannikar), opting for a pluralist position (Raiser 1991: 54-59).

Newbigin does not find Raiser’s analysis compelling. In fact, pluralism is not a new experience for the church. Christianity was born into a religiously plural world and at many times and places has continued to exist in a pluralistic world (Newbigin 1993: 227). The response of the early church to religious pluralism was not to give up the exclusive claim of the gospel but to proclaim it as truth (Ibid.: 228-230).

What is new about our situation is the urgent need for the unity of the human race (Newbigin 1989a: 157). Any kind of exclusive religious claim appears to be immoral and even dangerous since it exacerbates existing divisions in the global community. Economic and cultural interdependency seems to demand a search for harmony that repudiates an exclusive claim for any one religious tradition. Raiser offers a masterful and insightful analysis of precisely these threats facing the global community. His consistent strain is to ask how the Christian church can contribute toward a culture of dialogue and solidarity that will ease global tensions.

Newbigin does not dispute the need for global unity; in fact he commends Raiser's insightful analysis. The real question is where a centre for global unity might be found. The gospel offers Jesus Christ in his death as embodied in the church as the center for unity and reconciliation. Raiser apparently rejects this affirmation. Newbigin points out that here there is an unproven assumption that "one particular religious tradition cannot provide the focus for that unity" (Newbigin 1989a: 156). However, everyone must offer an exclusive centre whereby unity can be achieved. Newbigin is fond of quoting André Dumas who argues that "any proposal for human unity that does not specify the centre around which unity is to be constructed has as its hidden centre the interests of the proposer" (Newbigin 1989b: 50).

Raiser proposes a unifying center as a "life-centred vision," a life-centered spirituality and ethic toward which all the various religious and cultural traditions can contribute (Raiser 1991: 84-91; 1997: 19-21). Newbigin does not dispute the need for life-centeredness; the question is how such life can be achieved. For Newbigin God has put the cross at the center of human history as the place where human sin can be forgiven and defeated; this is a prerequisite for life. The kinds of question Newbigin raises are: Does a formal concept such as "life" have the power to unite the human race? If "life" is proposed as the center, whose life are we talking about? How can this abstract concept break down the pride, selfish ambition, and imperialisms that wrack the human race and destroy life? Newbigin is concerned that Raiser's neglect of the atonement has removed the only possibility for the global unity he desires.

The contrasting views of mission between Raiser and Newbigin emerge in the different understandings of dialogue. In his book, Raiser labels

Newbigin's understanding of dialogue as "instrumental" and concludes that this demonstrates the limits of Christocentrism in regard to other faiths (Raiser 1991: 56). In response, Newbigin understands Raiser's position to be based on "contemporary talk about the 'richness of diversity', which is proper in respect of some aspects of human life but not proper when it is merely an expression about indifference to the truth" (1994a: 3). Newbigin believes that this understanding of dialogue is part of the broader cultural crisis in which modernity is collapsing into postmodernity (Newbigin 1993: 232-234; 1994b: 52). Newbigin labels Raiser's understanding of dialogue as "cocktail party dialogue" that operates on assumptions other than those revealed in Jesus Christ. For Newbigin dialogue must always operate in the context of a commitment to the finality of Jesus Christ.

Once again the differences between Raiser and Newbigin spring from differing understandings of Christ. For Newbigin, Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of the character of God and God's purpose for the whole world. If this is true, then the gospel must be proclaimed to all people; evangelism and missions are essential to the church's witness. Dialogue must proceed with the commitment that God has revealed in Christ the center for human unity. Christocentrism is not a threat to human unity but the only condition by which it might be accomplished. Raiser's Christology focusses on the earthly ministry of Christ that highlights his loving and liberating care for all people. The atonement is the price paid for total devotion to God and to the marginalized (Raiser 1991: 59). The mission of the church continues that loving and liberating care toward the needy; an exclusive proclamation exacerbates the fragile global setting with the potential to produce more violence and injustice.

At each point, the parting of ways between Raiser and Newbigin finds its ultimate source in their differing assessments of Jesus Christ. A future paradigm of mission depends on the answer given to the question that Jesus posed to Simon Peter: 'Who do you say that I am?'

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### **Summaries in Spanish, German, French**

En este artículo, Michael W. Goheen resume y evalúa un debate entre el pionero Lesslie Newbigin y Konrad Raiser, quien fue el Secretario General del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias. Raiser representa un acercamiento trinitario al ecumenismo y a la misión que reconoce la presencia universal del Espíritu Santo entre todos los pueblos y religiones, dejando atrás de esta manera un enfoque cristocéntrico. Para Newbigin, el acercamiento trinitario al ecumenismo y a la misión es de gran importancia, pero la centralidad y universalidad de Cristo es algo que no se puede dejar de lado. Al final, dice Goheen, las diferencias entre Raiser y Newbigin tienen que ver con el significado de Jesucristo y su obra de expiación en la cruz.

In diesem Beitrag faßt Michael W. Goheen eine Debatte zwischen dem Vorkämpfer des Ökumenismus Lesslie Newbigin und dem ehemaligen Generalsekretär des Weltkirchenrates Konrad Raiser zusammen und zieht einige Schlüsse daraus. Raiser stellt den Zugang zu Ökumenismus und Mission von der Dreifaltigkeit her dar, der von der universellen Gegenwart des Heiligen Geistes in allen Völkern und Religionen ausgeht und daher einen christocentrischen Blickpunkt aufgibt. Für Newbigin ist der trinitarische Zugang zu Ökumenismus und Mission von ungeheurer Bedeutung, aber die Zentralität und Universalität Jesu Christi kann dennoch auf keinen Fall aufgegeben werden. Am Ende findet Goheen, dass die Differenzen zwischen Raiser und Newbigin mit der Bedeutung Jesu Christi und seiner Sühne am Kreuz zu tun haben.

Dans le présent article, Michael W Goheen résume et évalue un débat entre Lesslie Newbigin, pionnier du mouvement œcuménique, et Konrad Raiser, ex-secrétaire général du COE. Raiser incarne une approche trinitaire de l'œcuménisme et de la mission qui reconnaît la présence universelle de l'Esprit Saint au sein de tous les peuples et de toutes les religions, et peut donc cesser d'être christocentrique. Pour Newbigin, si une approche trinitaire de l'œcuménisme et de la mission revêt une importance capitale, le renoncement à la centralité et à l'universalité de Jésus-Christ est inacceptable. En fin de compte, les divergences entre Raiser et Newbigin portent sur le sens même de Jésus-Christ et sur son rachat de l'humanité sur la Croix.



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