

Reflections of missions

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This essay presents a critique of Newbigin's (1995) approach toward the incorporation of social justice in the discussion of Christian missionary activities. It is argued that the proper inclusion and extension of the Black theology theme would have enabled the author to provide a more balanced account of the subject under consideration.

Keywords: liberation theology, Christianity, missionaries, Black theology

Reflections of Missions In The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission, Newbigin (1995) attempts to present a balanced analysis of the liberation theology, including both its religious and socio-political aspects. The main idea advanced by the author appears to have come down to accepting the critical aspects of liberation theology, while simultaneously casting doubt on the feasibility or desirability of the political program put forth by its proponents. In this essay, I will attempt to situate Newbigin's critique within the narrative of both liberation and black theology, in order to demonstrate some flaws of such argument. Newbigin proceeds from the assumption of the fallacy of purely 'spiritual' notion of religious life and of missionary activity in particular. Accepting that human exist not as separate spiritual monads, but as the inalienable parts of the creation and society, Newbigin asserts that Christian missiology should necessarily take social aspects of human life into consideration (1995, p. 70).

Newbigin lauds Gustavo Gutierrez, a famed liberation theologian, for demonstrating an integral and interconnected nature of political, cultural, and spiritual liberation (1995, p. 99). At the same time, the author warns against any attempts at "a simple identification of a justice of God with the justice of a particular political cause" (Newbigin, 1995, p. 110). Newbigin

<https://assignbuster.com/reflections-of-missions/>

cautions against the acceptance of the idea of integral antagonism between the oppressed and oppressor classes, for this would contravene the basic Evangelical assumption of a sinful character of all humans, with their acceptance into the Kingdom of Heaven by God's grace alone. The author believes that a worldview according to which "the oppressed and exploited are exclusive bearers of truth and righteousness" (1995, p.

111) is fundamentally flawed. Referring to Marxism, Newbigin makes explicit comparison between this ideology and "the Old Testament vision of a meaningful future for the public life of humanity" (1995, p. 104). In this opinion, the Marxist-like fixation on the public aspects of human existence is just as limiting and potentially harmful as the naturalistic emphasis on spiritualistic activities, while the Church should embrace both aspects of the God-given human life, carefully balancing them with each other. Thus, Newbigin proposes the 'mild' liberation theology perspective, which would supposedly avoid the traps of excessively idealistic or visionary political aspirations. An observation that a "third position", committed neither to the right nor to the left, within which a Christian can do a theology" (1995, p.

114) apparently encapsulates the core of Newbigin's criticism with respect to liberation theology's discourse. Having analyzed the main points of the author's view on liberation theology, one should note that Newbigin ignores the contributions of Black theology, with its focus on the upholding of the rights of marginalized Black communities. Unlike the versions of liberation theology criticized by Newbigin, Black theology generally does not provide for unrelenting antagonism between the advantaged and underprivileged racial groups, calling instead for their equality. This would enable Black

<https://assignbuster.com/reflections-of-missions/>

theology to overcome the paradox stated by Newbigin, as its practitioners do not consider Black Christians to be more righteous or closer to salvation than the White ones. In addition, it is notable that Newbigin does not pay due attention to the development of African Independent Churches, with their own elaborate criticisms of both missionary-derived orthodoxy and the traditional paganism.

The only reference to this extremely important subject is characteristically brief, with merely cursory description of the phenomenon provided (1995, p. 147). To my mind, this is one of most serious deficiencies encountered in Newbigin's work. Furthermore, criticism provided by Newbigin with respect to classical liberation theology appears to be somewhat biased, as liberation theologians never purported to stray far from the Christian creed, and their appropriation of certain elements of Marxism was no more un-Christian than Newbigin's own assertion of his sympathies to the Marxist economic critique of capitalism (1995, p. 111).

Thus, I cannot fully agree with the critique of liberation theology presented by Newbigin, even though some of its aspects seem appealing to me. In particular, Newbigin's warnings against uncritical assumptions of 'scientific' character of that or another ideology are especially pertinent in our modern liberal world.