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Bosch's Theological Pilgrimage

A Biographical Sketch

PROFILE OF THE YOUNG BOSCH¹

DAVID JACOBUS BOSCH WAS born into an Afrikaner home on December 13, 1929, near the town of Kuruman in the Cape Province of South Africa.² Both his parents were “very simple rural folk,” as were the overwhelming majority of Afrikaner families around him. His father worked a small farm. At the age of six, as a result of the severe 1933–34 drought, Bosch’s family moved to the Western Transvaal, in the district of Schweizer-Reneke, where his father began maize farming, plowing the fields with oxen and donkeys. His father was an elder in the Dutch Reformed Church, and the family attended church when they were able.³ Bosch began his schooling there.

Bosch described his own childhood as a very typical one. During the first fifteen years of his life, he rarely heard a word of English outside the classroom and knew very few English-speaking people.⁴ From his earliest childhood, he began receiving a “Christian Nationalist” education. Bosch stated how

1. Most of the biographical data that follows is taken from a personal interview of Bosch by the author on September 8, 1986, hereafter cited as “Interview.” For a sympathetic sketch of Bosch’s life and work, see Saayman’s “David J. Bosch: A Tribute to the Man,” 6–10; “Some Personal Reflections,” 214–28; and especially Kritzingner and Saayman, *Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis*.

2. It is of historical interest to note that Bosch’s birthplace (Kuruman) was where Robert Moffat, the famed Scottish pioneer missionary, labored. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 5:345.

3. Bosch recalled that with no mechanized transport, getting to church was a time-consuming affair. They went to church by wagon or buggy approximately once a month. Because of the distance involved, they would journey all day Saturday to get to the meeting place, and would depart for home immediately after the Sunday service. Apart from this, the family maintained the typical Dutch Reformed devotional tradition of daily family Bible reading and Psalm singing. “Interview.”

4. Ibid. Cf. Bosch, “Prisoners of History or Prisoners of Hope?,” 14.

. . . at a very early stage already our minds were influenced by teachers and other cultural and political leaders to see the English as perpetrators of all kinds of evil and as oppressors of the Afrikaner. We read poems of Totius and Jan Celliers, we read *Een eeuw van onrecht*—a century of injustice—and we were convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that no people were a patch on the English when it comes to arrogance, self-righteousness and brutal oppression of others. After all, my own mother could tell stories about the concentration camp to which she was taken at the age of eight.⁵

If the English were the “enemy” to the young Bosch, blacks were essentially non-persons. The typical Afrikaner attitude toward blacks was not overt hostility but benign neglect. Blacks were hewers of wood and drawers of water, “a part of the scenery but hardly a part of the human community . . . They belonged to the category of ‘farm implements’ rather than to the category ‘fellow-human beings.’”⁶

The depth to which the dehumanization of blacks could go is illustrated in Bosch's own life. He recalled how he and his friends were once shocked to hear that some of the local Anglican and Roman Catholic priests actually shook hands with blacks! No self-respecting Afrikaner would have considered shaking hands with a black man; that would have “been a sign of full acceptance into the human community.”⁷

After secondary school, Bosch went to Pretoria with the intention of training as a teacher. In May 1948, the pro-apartheid National Party was swept into power during his first year at the Teachers Training College. All the students there were solidly behind the National Party. “It was to us like a dream come true when the Nationalist Party won that victory. [We had] no reservations whatsoever.”⁸ Typical of the early period of Bosch's life is a Nationalist speech he delivered, in which he forcefully reminded his hearers of the providential deliverance of the Afrikaner *volk* and urged his fellows to solidarity and endurance in the continual struggle to develop a Christian Nationalist civilization. He concluded with a pointed admonition:

. . . Ek besweer u by die heilige nagedagtenis van u voorouers, ek besweer u by u eie siele, bowe alles besweer ek u by die lewende God, om saam met Naboth aan elkeen wat u wil verlei van die regte spoor, beslis te antwoord: “Mag die Here my daarvoor bewaar, dat ek die erfenis van my vaders aan u sou gee!”
Laat Jong Suid-Afrika sy nasionale erfenis bewaar, laat hy sy geloofsbelydenis onderteken, nie met sy naam nie, maar met sy lewe, en dan het ons niks te vrees vir die toekoms nie!
“Daar's 'n nasie te lei,
daar's 'n stryd te stry,
daar's werk!

5. Bosch, “Prisoners of History or Prisoners of Hope?”, 14–15.

6. *Ibid.*, 15.

7. *Ibid.*

8. “Interview.”

Part One: David Bosch in Context

Daar's nie na guns of eer te kyk,
daar's nie na links of regs te wyk,
daar's net te swyg en aan te stryk.
Komaan!"⁹

At university, Bosch became involved with the Student Christian Association (SCA), an ecumenical youth movement linked to the World Student Christian Federation. Following his first year at school Bosch participated in a SCA-sponsored summer evangelistic campaign at a lakeside tourist camp. There Bosch became convinced that God was calling him into the Christian ministry.¹⁰

Following the summer camp Bosch did a curious thing. Upon returning to his parents' farm he organized a Sunday service for the black laborers. A large crowd of black workers gathered. What happened next can only be described as a "conversion" of sorts.

As I arrived, trembling, at the place of meeting, everybody came forward to shake hands with me! It was one of the most difficult moments in my life. When they saw my hesitation, they assured me that it was quite alright, that, in fact, it was normal for Christians to shake hands with one another! Only then did I discover that many of them were Christians: Methodists, Anglicans, members of the African Independent Churches, and so on. Previously I only thought of them as pagans and, at best, semi-savages.

Looking back now to that day, thirty years ago, I guess I can say that that was the beginning of a turning-point in my life. Not that, from then on, I accepted Blacks fully as human beings. Far from it. But something began to stir in me that day, and all I can say is, that by the grace of God, it has been

9. I charge you by the holy memory of your ancestors, I charge you by your own souls, most of all I charge you by the living God, that together with Naboth, you should answer thus to each and every one who would try to mislead you: "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers!"

Let young South Africa preserve her national heritage. Let us affirm this confession of faith, not only in name, but with our lives, and then we have nothing to fear in the future!

"There's a nation to lead,

There's a battle to fight,

There's work!

Neither caring for the favor of people,

Nor withdrawing to the left or the right,

Only keep silent and march onward.

Come along!"

See Bosch, "Ons Geskiedenis in Gevaar" [Our history under threat], 14 (my translation).

10. Bosch commented that from the age of ten, he had desired to be a pastor, but at the time this had seemed far too lofty a goal. As a youth he struggled with an inferiority complex. But at the camp, he again sensed a call into the Christian ministry. As Bosch put it: "At camp during those two weeks, although I cannot pinpoint a time, I knew that I could do it [be a pastor]. I knew now that I had the intellectual capacity to make the grade. By then I had shed some of the inferiority feelings I think I had as a child. And then surely it was a spiritual experience . . . It was not a conversion experience . . . I only knew that when I went away from there I knew I had to change my plans." He also notes that this was a call, as far as he knew, to the white Dutch Reformed Church pastorate, not to mission. "Being a pastor in the DRC was as far as my horizon went. I had little understanding of a missionary calling" ("Interview").

growing ever since. Gradually, year by year, my horizons widened and I began to see people who were different from me with new eyes, always more and more clearly. I began to discover the simple, self-evident fact, that the things we have in common are more than the things which divide us.¹¹

Within this short account, we observe two themes that will emerge frequently in our study of Bosch: a commitment to communicate the gospel to others and an ecumenical openness to those of other races and ecclesial traditions.

EARLY THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

When Bosch returned to university after that summer he changed to the pre-divinity course in languages. He went on to take two degrees from Pretoria: the M.A. in languages (Afrikaans, Dutch, German)¹² and the B.D. in theological studies. During that time Bosch sensed a further calling into mission work.¹³ He also began to have some doubts about the adequacy of the apartheid system. "In the early 50's," Bosch recalls, "there were already signs that upset some of us, particularly . . . the removal of the Coloureds from the common voters roll. It was one of the first shocks; the honeymoon was over with the new National Party government."¹⁴ This was a clear sign to Bosch and other theological students that something was wrong. By his final year in the B.D. program, when Bosch was chairman of the SCA branch at Pretoria, he was asked to go to the University of Witwatersrand to discuss the moral legitimacy of an apartheid government. When pressed to defend apartheid, Bosch realized that he could not. "I went to my vice-chairman and discussed it with him and said 'I can't defend it any more . . . That [invitation] forced me to make a decision, and break with the paradigm.'¹⁵

11. Bosch, "Prisoners of History or Prisoners of Hope?," 15. In the interview, Bosch added: "I still can't quite understand today why I did that, because there was no preparation for it in my own background. I felt I had to do something about the state of affairs among the black people and so I organized services on a Sunday afternoon . . . The important thing that stuck was that I discovered that many of them were in fact Christians, and then all of a sudden, there was a different relationship. I had never known them as anything but farm-laborers, and now all of a sudden, even those who were not confessing Christians, were now put into a new context and into a different relationship with me. And I kept on doing that for another year or two when I went on holidays from school until my father sold the farm."

12. Bosch wrote a "Proefskrif" (master's thesis) in 1954 at the University of Pretoria, entitled "Die Probleem van tyd in die epiiek, aan die hand van 'Joernaal van Jorik.'" A copy of the thesis can be found at the University of South Africa Library.

13. After reading a book on DRC missionary work in Nyasaland (Malawi), Bosch recounted, "I just knew then that I had to go into 'black' work, either in Nigeria or Malawi . . . I never looked back after that. I knew that it was going to be mission work" ("Interview").

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid. Bosch elaborated on his feelings about this as a young Afrikaner. "As students, we discussed it [the political and moral inadequacies of apartheid], but *very tentatively*, because none of us dared to say it out loud and clear that we had broken with apartheid. It sounded like treason, like turning our backs upon our own people. The Afrikaner is like the German and very different from the Englishman and the American. The Afrikaner is a herd animal, and the Afrikaner follows a leader. They rally around a cause, around a person. The typical British individualness, of having a point of view irrespective of

During his theological studies Professor E. P. Groenewald, the Professor of New Testament, particularly influenced him. Groenewald was a peculiar mix, in that he was the first person to work out a “scriptural foundation” for apartheid in 1947, but he was also a champion of the ecumenical movement, and a staunch defender of DRC participation in the fledgling World Council of Churches. Groenewald also introduced Bosch to the writings of Oscar Cullmann, particularly his *Christus und die Zeit*, a book that was to have a profound influence on his theological perspective. During his divinity studies Bosch also became acquainted with other DRC pastors and students, including Dr. Beyers Naudé, Dr. Ben Marais, Nico Smith, Willie Jonkers, and Johann Heyns.¹⁶

Before commencing missionary work, Bosch journeyed to the University of Basel for doctoral studies in New Testament under Oscar Cullmann.¹⁷ Cullmann influenced Bosch deeply.¹⁸ It is no accident that Bosch’s thesis linked together two prominent themes within Cullmann’s thought: mission and eschatology. These themes have dominated Bosch’s career ever since.¹⁹ Bosch graduated *magna cum laude* in 1956 after submitting a dissertation entitled “*Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu*.”²⁰

whatever other people think, was totally absent. This has to do with our history of being pushed back. We always had to close ranks, and this is what we always did and that created safety. And to this day, it is one of the reasons why very few Afrikaners who today think the way I think can break out of the grip of the group . . . [Afrikaners] constantly have to go back and be re-assured that they belong . . . I won’t use the word ‘suffer,’ but sometimes one *longs* to belong. One wants to have a place to feel at home, etc. and now you’re neither this nor that” (“Interview”).

16. Bosch, “The Fragmentation of Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaner Churches,” 68. In the course of time, each man would come to renounce apartheid and the DRC’s support of it. Cf. “Interview.”

17. Bosch majored in New Testament with Cullmann as his principal supervisor, minoring in Systematic Theology under Karl Barth and Missiology under Johannes Dürr. Bosch chose Basel over the Free University of Amsterdam and Tübingen primarily because of his desire to study under Cullmann (“Interview”).

18. Reviewing Bosch’s doctoral thesis, Ludwig Wiedenmann actually labeled Bosch a “*Cullmannschüler*.” See Wiedenmann’s *Mission und Eschatologie*, 126. Bosch himself admitted that Cullmann’s eschatological distinction between the “now” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God is one of the few theological insights that have remained absolutely constant in his thinking, although he acknowledged he had moved beyond the sharp Cullmannian distinctions between “salvation-history” and “world history” (“Interview”).

19. For a full discussion of the eschatological dimension of Bosch’s missiology, including the influence of Oscar Cullmann, see chapter 7.

20. Subsequently published under the same title in Zürich by Zwingli Verlag, 1959. The thesis can be summarized as follows: In *Die Heidenmission*, Bosch sought to address the question of the attitude of Jesus towards the Gentiles. Was mission to the Gentiles a central part of Jesus’ earthly ministry, or was it a product of the early church’s reflections on the universalistic implications of Jesus’ teachings? Bosch tried to take a middle ground in the debate. He was convinced that “a positive attitude of the historical Jesus towards the Gentile mission was basic to a scriptural foundation of mission” [a position Bosch no longer maintains, see chapter 5 of this book] and Bosch’s thesis attempted to show just such an attitude in the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

Although Jesus confined his activity to Israel during his lifetime, he envisaged a future inclusion of the Gentiles. In his earthly ministry, Jesus sought to call Israel to repentance and decision. Jesus commanded his followers to undertake a universal mission only *after* his death and his resurrection. Mission was now a possibility, thanks to his resurrection and the sending of the Spirit to empower his disciples.

While at Basel Bosch also came under the influence of Karl Barth, whose theological perspective has significantly influenced twentieth-century missiology. Although his thesis shows a familiarity with Barth's line of thought,²¹ Barth's main impact on Bosch's thought was to emerge only later, in Bosch's more systematic attempts at a theological foundation for mission.

While at Basel, Bosch distanced himself further from the Nationalist Party and the politics of apartheid, although as yet he had no alternative "paradigm" to substitute in its place. He began to feel isolated from the Afrikaner mainstream. "By the time I arrived [in Switzerland]," Bosch recounted, "I had little doubt about the fact that apartheid was immoral and unacceptable. If I say I had by that time broken with the paradigm, one must take that with a grain of salt, because I had not replaced it with another paradigm. It was still very haltingly true of myself. In my early days as a student, my viewpoint was inarticulate, but it *was* a shift out of the *laager*."²²

During that time, Bosch also visited Willie Jonkers, a classmate from Pretoria studying at the Free University of Amsterdam under G. C. Berkouwer. Jonkers had completely broken from the apartheid paradigm and the Nationalist Party. Bosch recalls that the two days he spent with Jonkers helped him tremendously, because he finally met a fellow Afrikaner who could speak articulately to the apartheid issue and say why it was wrong. Jonkers thus played an important part in Bosch's development.²³

MISSIONARY SERVICE (1957–1972)

In 1957 Bosch returned to South Africa to begin work as a DRC missionary among the Xhosa people in the Transkei. For nine years Bosch labored as a missionary pastor in Madwaleni. His work consisted of village evangelism and church-planting in a large, remote area. The country was rugged and accessible only by horse. Although those years had their disappointments, Bosch recalls, "These were our best years, absolutely wonderful."²⁴ Of the many lessons learned in his years of missionary service, two seem to have been of special significance for Bosch.

These events were clear eschatological signs that the "new age" had come, that God's *kairos* had arrived, that the time to "make disciples of all nations" had begun.

As Bosch summarized it: "Heidenmission ist erst möglich, nachdem Jesus durch seinen Bussruf das israelitische Volk in die Entscheidung gestallt hat, nachdem er für die 'Vielen' gestorben und auferweckt ist, und nachdem er seinen Heiligen Geist als 'Missionar' in die Völkerwelt gesandt hat" ["A mission to the Gentiles is not possible till *after* Jesus, by his call to repentance, has brought the Israelite people to a decision, *after* he has died for the 'many' and been raised from the dead, and *after* he has sent his Holy Spirit as 'missionary' into the world at large"] (my translation and emphasis). See Bosch, *Die Heidenmission*, 194.

21. Particularly Barth's exegetical work on Matt 28: 16–20. See Bosch, *Die Heidenmission*, 187, 189.

22. "Interview."

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

First, although Bosch acknowledged that he continued to hold deeply paternalistic attitudes toward black people, he believed that his missionary experience taught him to *trust* people, particularly his African Christian coworkers.²⁵ Second, his missionary experience helped him integrate theory and practice. By day, Bosch would be out among the people, learning from and visiting with them. By night, he would study, particularly in the areas of anthropology and religion, trying to integrate his experience in the Transkei with the scholarly insights of various anthropologists, theologians and missiologists. Through that study, his early theological convictions began to change considerably. Bosch identified this time as the decisive decade in his theological development. “I started with a very conservative theological framework and only moved to a wider approach towards the end of the 1960’s.”²⁶

Although Bosch did not feel his missionary work at Madwaleni was finished, a severe back injury rendered him incapable of continuing with the rugged style of work (on horseback) that the job required. In 1967 Bosch was asked to serve as Senior Lecturer in Church History and Missiology at the DRC’s Theological School in De-coligny, Transkei, training black pastors and evangelists. Bosch enjoyed teaching, but the limited scope of the work (four teachers, twenty students) impelled Bosch to seek other avenues of ministry beyond the little theological college.

Bosch became involved in the work of the Transkei Council of Churches, serving as its first president. This work provided much ecumenical contact with a variety of church traditions, particularly Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Bosch commented that “in the sixties . . . the Transkei was the only place in the Dutch Reformed Church setup where there were practical, structural, working relationships with people from other denominations. There was no other place where you had any practical expression of ecumenical contact.”²⁷

25. Bosch recounted a humorous anecdote of asking a black colleague to crank-start a water pump motor. Try as he could, Bosch’s African coworker could not get the motor started when Bosch was present in the motor-room. Finally the man asked if he could attempt to start the engine without Bosch being present with him. Bosch was skeptical that the man could start the motor but he reluctantly agreed. Moments later, Bosch heard the sound of the engine puffing away. “How did you do it?” Bosch asked. “You could never do it when I was there!” And his African friend answered, “That was precisely the problem!” Bosch recalled that the African man was saying, in effect, “Your presence intimidated me, and the moment I was on my own and I knew that I had to do it because you are not there to do it for me, then I did it.” “That was one of the most important lessons I had to learn,” Bosch concluded. “It taught me that you have to trust people, and when you trust them, they can do the job” (“Interview”).

26. Personal letter to the author, December 12, 1985. Elsewhere, Bosch has commented that: “I have come to the conclusion that the major changes in my theological thinking took place during the previous decade (the ‘sixties), and not to the same extent during the ‘seventies. Perhaps, for me, the ‘seventies were, rather, a decade of clarification and consolidation of a theological position that had already developed reasonably clear contours before that time. After all, not many people change their views very radically once they have turned forty!” See his “How My Mind has Changed: Mission and the Alternative Community,” 6.

27. “Interview.”

That work was particularly significant for many of Bosch's DRC mission colleagues, most of whom had not been overseas and had grown up in an exclusively DRC setting.

A second avenue for self-expression that Bosch developed during his Decoligny years was writing, almost exclusively in the area of missiology. During that period Bosch published his doctoral thesis, wrote three short books,²⁸ and authored numerous articles. He also edited five books for the fledgling South African Missiological Society.²⁹ Bosch's written work from the period reflect two dominant themes: the missionary practice of the DRC, particularly the relationship of the "mother church" to the "daughter churches," and studies related to the biblical theology of mission. Most of them are in Afrikaans.

Bosch's two early Afrikaans books provide evidence of an emerging, wider theological framework, exemplifying both a broadening missiological approach and a departure from traditional Afrikaner sociopolitical perspectives. We will now outline their main arguments in order to understand some emerging themes in Bosch's early thought.

The first of the two booklets was *Jesus, Die Lydende Messias, En Ons Sendingmotief* [Jesus, the Suffering Messiah, and Our Missionary Motive].³⁰ This Afrikaans' publication was based largely on the fruit of Bosch's doctoral research. In it he applied his studies to the South African situation. Bosch argued: "Dit het algaande duidelik geword dat daar 'n enge verband bestaan tussen die via dolorosa van die Messias van Israel en die via missionis na die heidenvolke."³¹ The mission of Jesus can be understood only in terms of the suffering servant of the Lord who, like a grain of wheat, must die in order to bear fruit. Jesus' encounters with the Gentiles exemplified this ethos of servanthood, as did the early church. It is with the same mindset of costly servanthood that the modern church must understand its motive for mission as well.³²

The significance of his argument becomes apparent only when we consider the historical context in which they were written. The booklet appeared at an important crossroads in DRC missions policy. The Tomlinson Commission report, published in

28. Besides the two books mentioned in the text below, Bosch privately published a missionary training manual, *Julle sal My Getuies Wees* [You Shall Be My Witnesses], in 1967.

29. The books edited by Bosch were *Sendingwetenskap vandag: 'n terreinverkenning* [Missiology Today: A Survey] (1968); *Sodat hulle kan verstaan: Kommunikasie as sendingprobleem in Afrika* [So That They May Understand: Communication as a Missionary Problem in Africa] (1969); *Church and Culture Change in Africa* (1971); *Gemeenteopbou in Afrika* [Building Up the Church in Africa] (1972); and *Ampsbediening in Afrika* [The Ministry in Africa] (1972).

30. Published as the third volume in the *Kerk en Wêreld* series.

31. "It cannot be doubted that a strong bond exists between the *via dolorosa* of the Messiah of Israel and the *via missionis* to the Gentiles" (Bosch, *Jesus, Die Lydende Messias*, 32; my translation).

32. See Saayman, "David J. Bosch: A Tribute to the Man," 7. Bosch contrasts this with three other (improper) motives for mission. Some have been motivated on humanitarian grounds to help the "*arme heidene*" (poor heathen), filled with patronizing attitudes of cultural superiority. Others have been motivated by the goal of establishing the kingdom of God on earth, in optimistic, liberal fashion. Still others went out with a colonialistic urge, seeking to realize the political ambitions of their own nations. See *Jesus, Die Lydende Messias*, 34–35.

1955, had uncovered statistical evidence of a large number of unevangelized blacks within South Africa. That prompted DRC mission enthusiasts to promote an expanded evangelistic outreach among them.³³ Bosch, however, discerned non-theological factors at work among some of the proponents. Numerous DRC missiologists and politicians linked the evangelization of blacks to the unfolding government policies of separate development and Afrikaner solidarity. Missionary work was therefore (unconsciously?) coupled to the defense of the *volk* and the preservation of a white-dominated South Africa.³⁴ Bosch warned against such mixed motives in strong terms.

Wat is die uiteindelijke doel van die sending wat so gemotiveer word? Is dit behoud van 'n blanke volk in Suid-Afrika—of is dit die stigting van 'n kerk van Christus wat sy wederkoms tegemoetgaan? Is dit diens aan Suid-Afrika—of diens aan God? Is dit gehoorsaamheid aan die stem van sentiment en eie bloed—of gehoorsaamheid aan die laaste bevel van Christus? Anders gestel: Het ons dit by hierdie sendingmotivering te doen met 'n skaap in wolfsleren—of is dit dalk 'n wolf in skaapskleren?³⁵

Any missionary enthusiasm must be tempered with the realization that mission in Christ's way is *the way of the cross, the way of costly servanthood toward others*. Anything less was simply religious propaganda and prone to ideological manipulation.³⁶

The second booklet that exemplified Bosch's broadening missiological approach was *Sending in Meervoud* [Mission in the Plural], coauthored with his medical missionary colleague, G. Jansen.³⁷ It was written to clarify the theological relationship between proclamation and social service in the church's missionary outreach.

In the history of Christian missions, medical work has nearly always accompanied the proclamation of the gospel. In most instances, however, the medical missions were an afterthought, *theologically* speaking; they had not been adequately integrated (at the theological level) with the traditional missionary tasks of

33. Saayman, "David Bosch: A Tribute to the Man," 7.

34. Bosch exposed these tendencies by citing the writings of M. D. C. de Wet Nel, an Afrikaner ideologue. De Wet Nel maintained that "Sendingwerk is die enigste weg waarlangs ons ons toekoms as blanke volk kan verseker . . . Elke seun en dogter wat Suid-Afrika liefhet, moet hulleself, in een of ander vorm, tot aktiewe sendingaksie inspan, want sendingwerk is nie alleen Godswerk nie, dis ook volkswerk." [*Mission work is the only way whereby we can insure our future as a white nation. . . . Each son and daughter who loves South Africa, must themselves, in one or another form, actively contribute to the missionary effort, because mission work is not only God's work; it is also work for the nation*] (my translation and emphasis). See Bosch, *Jesus, die Lydende Messias*, 36–37.

35. "What is the end goal of mission with such a motivation? Is it to maintain the white people in South Africa—or is it the foundation of the church of Christ . . . ? Is it to serve South Africa—or to serve God? Is it to hear together the sentimental voice of our own blood—or to hear together the last command of Christ? Have we, by this missionary motive, created a sheep in wolf's clothes—or is it perhaps a wolf in sheep's clothes?" (ibid., 36–37; my translation).

36. Ibid., 37.

37. Published as the fifth volume in the *Kerk en Wêreld* series.

proclamation and church planting.³⁸ Although the scope and quality of medical missions grew dramatically, they continued to be labeled “auxiliary services” by most mission agencies, an indication that they were regarded as being of secondary importance.³⁹ By the early 1960s, increasing costs and the rise of national health services in many traditional “mission fields” forced the Christian community to re-think the theological basis of medical mission work. Should Christian medical work continue to be considered an “auxiliary service” or did it deserve to be considered as an aspect of mission *in its own right*? In light of the ever-increasing costs and questions, should Christian medical mission continue at all? At bottom was a theological debate concerning the nature of Christian mission. Bosch and Jansen's book was a part of the re-thinking process within the DRC.

In South Africa as elsewhere, there was a rapidly growing network of missionary hospitals and schools. Yet these institutions were still considered *hulpdienste* (“auxiliary services”).⁴⁰ Bosch sought to address this concern in an essay entitled “Sending Deur Woord en Daad” [Mission through Word and Deed]. He argued that it is unbiblical to subordinate deed under word, *diakonia* under *kerugma*. While Bosch did not confuse the two concepts, he refused to divide them either.⁴¹ In the life of Jesus and the early church, service and proclamation were complementary to each other. Both remain indispensable aspects of the gospel of Christ.⁴²

For Bosch, the theological basis for medical missions is rooted in the compassion of God. The Scriptures reveal a God who acts with compassionate love toward his creation, particularly through the healing ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament the term used almost without exception for these works of love is *diakonia*. Inasmuch as medical missions express God's compassion through diaconal works of healing, they remain an essential task of the church.⁴³ In addition, medical missions function as a sign of God's kingdom. They point beyond themselves, giving witness to the reality of the complete healing God intends for the world. The ultimate purpose of medical missions, then, is not simply to alleviate human need. As signs of the Lordship of God over all life they have an essential *witness-bearing* function.⁴⁴ It

38. Kritzing et al., *You Will Be My Witnesses*, 70.

39. Saayman notes that in South Africa, medical missions frequently had the function of enticing an otherwise reluctant people into hearing the proclamation of the Word, which was considered to be the primary goal. See Saayman, “David J. Bosch: A Tribute to the Man,” 7.

40. Bosch and Jansen, *Sending in Meervoud*, 20–22.

41. It should be noted that Bosch had not completely resolved the issue of the *primacy* of evangelism within the mission of the church. Although he argued that subsuming one concept under the other is unbiblical, he still referred to proclamation (*kerugma*) as “*the primus inter pares*” (ibid., 10–14).

42. Ibid., 10–19. Twice in his essay Bosch cites with approval the famous dictum of the 1952 Willingen Missionary Conference of the I.M.C.: “This witness is given by proclamation, fellowship and service.”

43. Ibid., 12–13, 38–40. See also Bosch, “Die diens van die genesing in sendingperspektief,” 156.

44. Kritzing et al., *You Will Be My Witnesses*, 71.

is precisely at this point that Christian medical service finds its missiological foundation and significance.⁴⁵

In these early writings we note that Bosch raised themes that were to remain central to his thought. We also note that by this time Bosch had begun to raise the ire of his fellow Afrikaners, by publicly questioning some of the government's policies and criticizing the DRC's support of apartheid.

Inevitably, these departures from Afrikaner "orthodoxy" isolated Bosch from the mainstream of Afrikanerdom and the DRC. He was no longer a "*ware Afrikaner*," a true Afrikaner, and began to pay a price for his stand.⁴⁶ Despite Bosch's outstanding academic credentials, he was reportedly refused a position on the DRC theological faculty at the University of Pretoria. The appointment went instead to fellow classmate Carel Boshoff, a member of the Broederbond, even though Boshoff did not have a doctoral degree.⁴⁷ Instead, in 1972 Bosch accepted the invitation to become Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Bosch and his wife did so, however, with some trepidation. As he described it, they "moved back to Pretoria, very afraid of Afrikaners, very afraid of white people. We were returning home, in a sense, but returning *very different* from what we were when we had left [Pretoria] in the early 1950's."⁴⁸ With his appointment, a new phase in Bosch's career began, to which we now turn.

PROFESSOR OF MISSIOLOGY (1972–1992)

The University of South Africa (UNISA) was unique among academic institutions in apartheid-era South Africa. It was a fully interracial university with staff from all ethnic groups, and whose student body extended throughout southern Africa because coursework was done by extension. UNISA was also unique because of its theology faculty, described as "a bastion of those theologians rejected and discarded by the Broederbond [dominated] NGK establishment,"⁴⁹ and as a "faculty-in-exile

45. Bosch cites Hendrik Kraemer approvingly at this point: "... a missionary should live by the ardent desire that all men will surrender to Christ as the Lord of their lives. Whosoever does not stress that, does not sufficiently consider the passionate prophetic and apostolic spirit of the Gospel. The core of the Christian revelation is that Jesus Christ is the sole legitimate Lord of all human lives... [Therefore] ... all activities of the Christian church ... only get their right missionary foundation and perspective if they belong as intrinsically to the category of witness as preaching or evangelization" (Bosch and Jansen, *Sending in Meervoud*, 25, citing Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*).

46. For an in-depth socio-psychological study of the roots, formative influences, and current attitudes of more than a score of "dissident Afrikaners," including Bosch, see Louw-Potgeiter, "The Social Identity of Dissident Afrikaners."

47. Serfontein, *Apartheid, Change and the NG Kerk*, 101.

48. "Interview."

49. Serfontein, *The Brotherhood of Power*, 174.

for anti-apartheid, anti-Broederbond NGK theologians.”⁵⁰ Bosch's move to UNISA placed him, officially at least, on the periphery of the DRC.

During his time at the university, Bosch distinguished himself as an author and administrator. Bosch published more than a dozen books and booklets,⁵¹ numerous book-length study guides,⁵² and a host of journal articles and edited works. As a “systematic missiologist,” his writings covered a broad range of missiological themes. They can be grouped into the following categories: (1) biblical and theological foundations for mission; (2) the mission and unity of the church; (3) the theology of evangelism and its relationship to justice, service and social transformation; (4) issues in African and Black theology, particularly the problem of evil and the nature of God; (5) the communication of the gospel, particularly in the African context; (6) mission and theological education; (7) missionary practice and spirituality; (8) the ecumenical/evangelical debate in mission; (9) the meaning of mission in the polarized and violent South African context; (10) the academic discipline of missiology; (11) the theology of religions; and (12) the theology of liberation.

One key ingredient contributing to Bosch's academic stature as a missiologist was his facility in languages. He is conversant in many languages, including Afrikaans, English, German, Dutch, French, and Xhosa. His linguistic abilities enabled Bosch to play a role as a “bridge builder” between the theological and cultural gulf that frequently divides Continental, Anglo-Saxon and African missiologies.

Besides Bosch's prolific work as a teacher and author, he was also an active academic administrator and editor. As a practicing missiologist, Bosch helped found the Southern African Missiological Society (SAMS), a multiracial and ecumenical fraternity of mission scholars, serving as its General Secretary from its formation in 1968 until his death.⁵³ A major aspect of the work of the SAMS is the production of *Missionalia*, the Society's missiological journal. From its inception in 1973, Bosch served as its editor. As the dean of the Faculty of Theology at UNISA, Bosch also served as editor of the Faculty's journal *Theologia Evangelica*.

50. Serfontein, *Apartheid, Change and the NG Kerk*, 193.

51. Besides the aforementioned *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu*; *Jesus, die lydende Messias, en ons Sendingmotief*; *Julle sal My Getuies Wees*; and *Sending in Meervoud*; see also *Het Evangelie in Afrikaans Gewaad*; *A Spirituality of the Road*; *Witness to the World*; *The Church as Alternative Community*; *The Lord's Prayer: Paradigm for a Christian Lifestyle*; *Transforming Mission*; and posthumously, *Believing in the Future*.

52. These are part of a series of publications for UNISA's massive extension education program, including *Introduction to Missiology MSR 101*; *Theology of Mission MSR 201*; *Church and Mission MSR 301*; and *Theology of Religions MSR 303*.

53. Saayman has commented: “In the fragmented South African society and churches, the value of the SAMS as a rallying point and forum for the honest exchange of views, cannot easily be overestimated. It is certainly no exaggeration to suggest that the personal integrity of David Bosch has a lot to do with the credibility of the SAMS itself” (“David J. Bosch: A Tribute to the Man,” 8).

BOSCH THE ECUMENICAL CHURCHMAN

It would be inadequate, however, to understand Bosch only through the lens of his academic career. He was also a committed churchman and ecumenist, seeking to contribute to the life and health of the church both in South Africa and globally. Within the multidenominational context of UNISA, Bosch devoted his theological energies to three separate but interrelated issues, three prominent missiological frontiers:⁵⁴ probing the meaning and communication of the gospel in Africa today; developing new models to overcome the “evangelical”/“ecumenical” polarization in Protestant missiology; and forging a theological and practical response to apartheid, addressing both the South African state and the Christian community. These three concerns form the basis for most of his pre-*Transforming Mission* writing and serve to integrate his theology around the central question: *What is the meaning of authentic Christian witness in our day?* We will frequently return to these themes as we probe Bosch’s theology of mission and evangelism. We introduce them here in summary form.

Probing the Meaning and Communication of the Gospel in Africa

Since the early 1970s, Bosch contributed to the multi-faceted issue of communicating the gospel in Africa. He addressed issues related to both “African Theology” and “Black Theology.” According to Saayman, Bosch was widely appreciated for his perceptive and sympathetic approach to African theology, especially the complex issue of communicating the gospel in the context of African traditional religions.⁵⁵

Bosch also wrote an in-depth study of the communication process in Africa, *Het Evangelie in Afrikaans Gewaad* [The Gospel in African Robes] which analyzed the communication of the gospel in relation to the African understanding of God and the problem of evil in African society.⁵⁶

54. For a summary of the development of his own theological thought between 1972–82, see Bosch’s article “How My Mind Has Changed,” 6–10.

55. Saayman has commented on Bosch’s contribution to the Umpumulo Missiological Institute’s 1972 “Relevant theology for Africa” Consultation: “At this consultation there was a strong undercurrent of black/white tension on the question whether white theologians could contribute in any way to such a relevant theology. Yet when problems arose in the discussions about the concept of *God*, the assembled theologians and pastors asked David Bosch to read an unscheduled paper on ‘God through African eyes’ in an attempt to gain greater clarity.” See Saayman, “David J. Bosch: A Tribute to the Man,” 7. Bosch’s paper was later published as “God through African Eyes.” Also see Verstraelen, “Africa in David Bosch’s Missiology,” 8–39.

56. Bosch, “Missionary Theology in Africa,” 122. The chapters in *Het Evangelie in Afrikaans Gewaad* were “Op weg naar een theologia Africana” [Towards an African theology]; “God in Afrika: Gevolgtrekkingen voor de verkondiging” [God in Africa: Implications for the Kerygma]; “Een missionair dilemma in Afrika: Het probleem van het kwaad” [A Missionary Problem in Africa: The Problem of Evil]; and “Stromingen in de Zuidafrikaanse Zwarte Theologie” [Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology]. All but the first essay was republished in English translation.

Another dimension of the gospel in Africa was the rise of Black Theology as it emerged in North America and South Africa. As early as 1972, Bosch showed an awareness and critical appreciation of the movement, interacting with such leaders as Steve Biko, Manas Buthelezi, James Cone, and others. It is significant that his essay "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology" was one of the few white contributions included in Cone and Wilmore's standard work on Black Theology.⁵⁷

Bosch also made an impact on the church in Africa through his contributions at regional and continental Christian gatherings. Particularly significant was his impassioned address on the "Renewal of Christian Community in Africa Today" at the 1976 Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA) in Nairobi.⁵⁸ Bosch spoke of the need for the church to be an "alternative community," embodying within its own life the values of God's kingdom and thus serving as an agent of reconciliation and a sign of hope for the world. Bosch appealed to the cross as the model for the life of the church in Africa. In the cross, God's model of costly reconciliation was demonstrated, and serves as a challenge for believers to walk in its way. Of all Bosch's public addresses, this message has been the most widely disseminated.

Overcoming the "Evangelical"/"Ecumenical" Debate in Mission

The second missiological frontier to which Bosch devoted himself was the divide in modern Protestant missiology between the so-called evangelicals and ecumenicals. His major work *Witness to the World* was, in large part, an attempt to describe this controversy and propose a way forward.⁵⁹ Three particular elements of Bosch's work deserve special mention.

First, Bosch was an *active participant* in both movements. In the 1970s Bosch attended a variety of conferences, including the South African Congress on Mission and Evangelism (Durban, 1973);⁶⁰ the International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne, 1974); the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (Nairobi, 1976); and the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (Pretoria, 1979).

In 1980, Bosch was the only South African to attend both of the major world conferences on Christian mission: the WCC's Conference on Mission and Evangelism at Melbourne, as well as the LCWE's Consultation on World Evangelization at Pattaya,

57. For Bosch's evaluation of Black Theology, see chapter 4.

58. For the text of Bosch's address, see Bosch, "Renewal of Christian Community in Africa Today," 92–102.

59. Bosch commented: "In 1978, when I was writing *Witness to the World*, the evangelical/ecumenical issue was uppermost in my mind . . . In my case, it was existential. I had this struggle going on in my own theological mind and my own existential heart. It wasn't simply an attempt to balance the two. I was looking for a way forward, beyond both of them" ("Interview").

60. The South African Council of Churches and African Enterprise, an evangelical mission agency, jointly sponsored this unique gathering, at which both Billy Graham and the WCC's Hans-Ruedi Weber spoke. Bosch addressed the gathering on the subject of "Evangelism and Special Needs." For the text of his address see Cassidy, ed., *I Will Heal Their Land*, 207–12.

Thailand. Bosch played a major role in four other world-level gatherings in the 1980s. In June 1982, Bosch was a main speaker at the Grand Rapids Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR), co-sponsored by the LCWE and the World Evangelical Fellowship.⁶¹ In June 1983, the World Evangelical Fellowship sponsored Wheaton '83, an international conference on the nature and mission of the church. Bosch was involved in the Consultation on the Church's Response to Human Need, and was on the drafting committee for the Consultation's influential "Transformation" statement.⁶² In March 1987 Bosch was a participant in a WCC Consultation on Evangelism in Stuttgart, where he served on the drafting committee for the Consultation's statement on evangelism.⁶³ In 1989, Bosch served as a Section leader at the WCC's Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in San Antonio, Texas.

Second, Bosch *described the historical and theological roots* of the ecumenical/evangelical division. We will discuss his analysis of the controversy, with particular reference to his critique of the 1980 Melbourne and Pattaya meetings, in chapter 3.

Finally, Bosch attempted to *develop a way beyond* the evangelical/ecumenical controversy. Bosch believed that both sides had been impoverished by ignoring the concerns of the other. As a result, both failed to develop a truly adequate theology of mission for our era. Bosch gave particular attention to the development of more adequate concepts of "mission" and "evangelism." The two concepts, while closely related to one another in God's salvific intention for the world, should not be confused or identified—as they often are in both evangelical and ecumenical circles. We will deal extensively with these issues in chapter 6.

Developing a Christian Response to the South African Conflict

Bosch also devoted his energies to the South African dilemma and the challenge it represented to the integrity of the Gospel and the mission of the church. He was a critic of the apartheid system for many years, and worked for change in the pro-apartheid stance of the South African government and of the DRC. Bosch's critique focused on exposing the *ideological* nature of apartheid, and the Afrikaner "civil religion" in which it is embedded.⁶⁴ The heart of matter, according to Bosch, was that the Afrikaner

61. Bosch delivered the paper "Perspectives on Evangelism and Social Responsibility," which was later published as "In Search of a New Evangelical Understanding," 63–83. See also his and Chris Sugden's article "From Partnership to Marriage," 26–27.

62. Bosch delivered the paper "Evangelism and Social Transformation," 43–55. For the final text of the statement "Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need" (which Bosch helped draft) see *Trans* 1/1 (January 1984) 23–28.

63. See the "Statement of the Stuttgart Consultation on Evangelism" in the WCC/CWME's *A Monthly Letter on Evangelism*.

64. See the following works of Bosch: "Prisoners of History or Prisoners of Hope?," 14–18; "Racism and Revolution: Response of the Churches in South Africa," 13–20; "Die religiösen Wurzeln der gegenwärtigen Polarisierung zwischen Schwarz und Weiss in Südafrika," 98–105; "The Roots and Fruits

people are prisoners of their own history, afraid of the future. The ideological nature of apartheid had seemingly blinded most Afrikaners to any future besides the one held out by the South African government. Yet in this desperate situation, Christians had to remain hopeful, for it was not “fate” that controlled the destiny of South Africa, but the Lord of history.⁶⁵

In his critique of apartheid, Bosch also emphasized the cruciality of ecclesiology. Tragically, the DRC served as a bulwark of the status quo rather than the vanguard of change. A truly biblical understanding of the church, Bosch argued, demanded that it be both an agent of judgment and of reconciliation within every society. Drawing on elements within Reformed and Anabaptist ecclesiologies, Bosch argued for a concept of the church as an “alternative community,” believing that this concept provided a model or paradigm by which South African Christians could transform their society. It is precisely as Christians work for the renewal and unity of the church, and live out the implications of their faith in the world, that they most effectively challenge the values and standards of the society around them. The church is not to copy the world's agendas or strategies; instead it must furnish an alternative vision of reality, of life in the kingdom of God. The concrete political and evangelistic implications of the church as “alternative community” will be explored in chapter 8.

The concept of the church as “alternative community” is grounded on the reconciling work of Christ. On the cross, Jesus reconciled the world to God, and broke down all barriers that divide humankind. Thus all differences among persons (racial, economic, linguistic, cultural, religious), while still real, have been *relativized* in Christ. It is thus wrong, even heretical, to divide the one church of Jesus Christ by ascribing “an unduly high value to racial and cultural distinctiveness.”⁶⁶ This would raise the value of one's *national* identity above one's identity *in Christ*. Yet this is exactly what the white Reformed churches of South Africa had done and, as such, they have been perpetrating what Bosch called “nothing but a heresy.”⁶⁷ Instead of polarizing the society by highlighting racial, ethnic, social, or economic distinctions, the mission of the church is to be an agent of reconciliation and a witness to the unity won for the world in Christ. We will further explore the implications of Christ's reconciliation for the unity and mission of the church in chapter 9.

Apart from his writings, Bosch was actively involved in the struggle against apartheid in other ways. Bosch was a major impetus behind the 1979 SACLA gathering, serving as chairman of the executive committee and delivering four plenary addresses. He was also a leading proponent of the 1982 *Ope Brief* [Open Letter], which

of Afrikaner Civil Religion,” 14–35; “The Fragmentation of Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaner Churches,” 61–73; “Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis,” 23–30; “The Afrikaner and South Africa,” 203–16; “The Christian Church in a Revolutionary Situation.”

65. Bosch, “Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis,” 29–30.

66. Bosch, “Mission and the Alternative Community,” 9.

67. These were the stinging words Bosch used to describe his own DRC at the 1982 Pretoria Theological Conference. See Serfontein, *Apartheid, Change and the NG Kerk*, 176–81.

publicly condemned apartheid and urged the DRC to pursue visible unity with its black “sister” churches. As an editor of *Perspektief op die Ope Brief*, he was involved in the discussion of the Open Letter’s significance. Since its launch in 1985, Bosch was involved in African Enterprise’s National Initiative for Reconciliation and in 1988 became its National Chairman. In the late 1980s Bosch participated with a variety non-governmental organizations that were seeking a non-military resolution to the growing struggle between the apartheid regime and various internal and external liberation movements, including the National Convention Movement, the Five Freedoms Forum, and the Movement Towards Democracy, attempting to facilitate the transformation of South Africa.⁶⁸

Perhaps the most telling evidence of Bosch’s concern for the future of South Africa was his refusal to leave. In 1985 and again in 1987 Bosch was offered the prestigious Chair of Mission and Ecumenics at Princeton Theological Seminary. Bosch made the difficult decision to refuse the offer, believing that he could not leave South Africa during such a dangerous and historic time in her history.⁶⁹

We have seen some of the complexities of Bosch’s Afrikaner heritage, and have been introduced to Bosch’s life story. We have discussed his professional and academic achievements, and highlighted three central aspects of his recent work: the meaning and communication of the gospel in Africa; overcoming the missiological division between evangelicals and ecumenicals; and developing an appropriate Christian response to the troubled South African situation. We now turn to analyze Bosch’s theological method in order to gain insight into the theoretical foundations of his missiological approach.

68. Kritzinger and Saayman, *Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis*, 92–96.

69. Personal correspondence with the author, February 24, 1986.