

Introduction

THIS BOOK IS A slightly revised version of my doctoral thesis on South African missiologist David Bosch, completed at the University of Aberdeen under the tutelage of James B. Torrance and Andrew Walls in 1990. It describes the theology of mission and evangelism in the writings of David Bosch as it developed up to 1989 (just prior to the publication of his historic *Transforming Mission*), and evaluates his contribution to the church in South Africa and beyond. When originally written, it was the first systematic study of Bosch's theology of mission and evangelism, and is now the first such study to be published in North America.

I had two original motives in studying Bosch's theology of mission and evangelism during my years in Aberdeen. First, David Bosch was indisputably one of the foremost mission theologians of the twentieth century. His writings ran the gamut of missiological concerns. His involvement as an active participant within the South African church struggle against apartheid as well as the global conciliar and evangelical mission movements was extensive. His contribution to the academic study of missiology in his many writings as well as through such organizations as the Southern African Missiological Society and the International Association for Mission Studies has been widely acknowledged. These were reasons enough to justify an exposition and analysis of his thought.

I was also motivated to explore Bosch's missiological thought because it provided an "entry point" into the global missiological discussion. His perspective brought greater clarity to many of the contentious issues facing the mission of the church in our era, and moved the debate forward in a constructive manner. Furthermore, Bosch's missiological "style"—living as he did in creative tension, a bridge builder between races, church denominations, and conflicting political and theological perspectives—gave me a trustworthy model of how missiology was to be "done." His work was marked by biblical fidelity, ecumenical breadth, theological sensitivity, historical awareness, and social relevance.

Yet so much has changed in the intervening years since the writing of my original doctoral thesis, most notably South Africa's emergence from a white-dominated apartheid state into a multiracial democracy. Why then should an academic work

rooted in realities now more than twenty years old be published at all? Let me answer in two ways.

First, David Bosch's influence has only grown since his untimely and tragic death in 1992. Shortly after the completion of my thesis, Bosch published his magisterial *Transforming Mission*, a work that has now been translated and published in eleven languages and has become the most widely used missiological textbook in the world, what Lesslie Newbigin once called a *Summa Missiologica*. In the years since, a variety of significant studies have emerged that continue to assess Bosch's theological legacy and build on his insights.

Particularly noteworthy book-length contributions include two appraisals of Bosch written by South African colleagues and friends;¹ a retrospective evaluation of Bosch's work by a distinguished international panel of senior missiologists;² a doctoral dissertation on Bosch's theology of contextualization from a Finnish missiologist;³ a reading guide and "commentary" for *Transforming Mission* from one of Bosch's former students;⁴ a study undertaken at the Gregorian University in Rome analyzing Bosch's "ecumenical paradigm" from the perspective of a Vietnamese Roman Catholic theologian serving the church in Norway;⁵ and a fascinating reading of Bosch through the lens of the suffering church of Christ in Ethiopia.⁶ Significant shorter analyses of Bosch's life and legacy include my own contribution in the IBMR "Legacy" series,⁷ as well as essays by Andrew Walls,⁸ Timothy Yates,⁹ Willem Saayman,¹⁰ and most recently, Darrell Guder and Martin Reppenhagen's insightful exploration of Bosch's ongoing influence in the revised twentieth-anniversary edition of *Transforming Mission*.¹¹

What makes the present work unique is its exposition and analysis of Bosch's missiological perspective in light of his distinctive role in the South African church's struggle against apartheid. For those who have become acquainted with Bosch only through his magnum opus, this book can function as a kind of "prequel" to *Transforming Mission*, illuminating the earlier legacy of Bosch's life and thought and

1. Kritzinger and Saayman, *Mission in Creative Tension*; Kritzinger and Saayman, *David J. Bosch: Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis*.

2. Saayman and Kritzinger, *Mision in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered*.

3. Ahonen, *Transformation Through Compassionate Mission: David Bosch's Theology of Contextualization*.

4. Nussbaum, *A Readers Guide to Transforming Mission*.

5. Pham, *Towards an Ecumenical Paradigm for Christian Mission: David Bosch's Missionary Vision*.

6. Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission History and Contemporary Challenges in Ethiopia*.

7. Livingston, "Legacy," 26–32.

8. Walls, "Missiologist of the Road," 273–78.

9. Yates, "David Bosch: South African Context, Universal Missiology," 72–78.

10. Saayman, "Personal Reflections," 214–28.

11. Bosch, "The Continuing Transformation of Mission," in *Transforming Mission* (2011), 533–55.

contributing to a deeper appreciation of the integrity and the wholeness of Bosch's praxis in the South African context.

Another purpose of this present work is to show Bosch's stellar influence on the contemporary missional church movement. Beginning in the mid-1980s, there emerged from the writings of Lesslie Newbigin, Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger and a legion of others a new way of conceiving the church and its witness to the world, particularly the church in North America and Western Europe. Again, what is less well known is the substantial contribution Bosch made to this conversation. Bosch was speaking and writing about fundamental missional church themes before the word "missional" had even been coined. This becomes apparent in the third part of this book, where we analyze how Bosch conceived the essentially missionary nature of the church through the lens of three *loci* of dogmatic theology, from the perspectives of eschatology, ecclesiology, and soteriology. Bosch had only begun to turn his attention to the missional church discussion at the time of his death with the posthumous publication of his *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. But the topics developed in this brief work were grounded in theological themes he had been addressing for years, stretching back four decades to his doctoral studies in Basel under Oscar Cullmann and Karl Barth. Bosch was a vital forerunner to and early prophet of the missional church conversation.

Three "horizons" shaped Bosch's understanding of the missionary task. These horizons are the historical and ideological context from which Bosch emerged, the biblical foundations for mission that Bosch developed, and the theological structure of mission that informs and gives coherence to missionary practice. Throughout the present work, we will analyze these three horizons, showing how each functioned as an integral part of Bosch's approach.

The structure of the argument unfolds as follows: Part One examines the historical and theological context out of which Bosch emerged. Bosch's Afrikaner identity is probed, with special reference to the relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church and the ideology of apartheid. We then survey Bosch's theological pilgrimage, and outline the breadth of his activities as a missiologist and ecumenical personality.

Part Two expounds Bosch's theology of mission and evangelism. First, we explore Bosch's theological method and his understanding of missiology as a theological discipline. Then we review Bosch's analysis of the tensions inherent within the missionary situation of the late twentieth century by means of three models: *mission in crisis*; *evangelical-ecumenical*; and *First World-Third World*. In each model, Bosch attempted to discover a way forward, moving beyond intractable polarizations in mission theology and practice. Next we analyze Bosch's understanding of the biblical foundation for mission, including his critique of traditional approaches, as well as his understanding of the meaning and relationship of evangelism, mission, and church growth.

In Part Three, we seek to give a creative interpretation of the structure of Bosch's thought from the perspective of the missionary nature of the church. Three doctrines

provide a framework for our analysis of Bosch's theology of mission: eschatology, ecclesiology, and soteriology. In the eschatological dimension of her existence, the church is *the kingdom community*. She is called to act as a witness to and instrument of the eschatological reign of God. Here we explore the creative tension between the kingdom, church, and world, and evaluate the centrality of the kingdom of God for the church's missionary practice. In the ecclesiological dimension of her existence, the church is *the alternative community*. She is set apart from the world and called to discipleship. She is set apart, however, precisely *for the sake of the world*, in order to exemplify to the world the radical implications of life in Christ's new community. In the soteriological dimension of her existence, the church is *the reconciled and reconciling community*. She serves as a sign and agent of God's reconciliation, embodying in her life and actions the love of God in Christ. She strives to live out the unity and mission to which Christ calls her. We shall argue that in each dimension of the church's existence, Bosch linked his missiological reflection with practical, concrete involvement in the social and ecclesial struggles in South Africa and elsewhere. These commitments by Bosch are not as well known and thus merit the focus this study has given them.

The scope of this book is limited in two important ways. First, it is limited to Bosch's life and writings up until 1989, just prior to the publication of his *Transforming Mission*. For later analyses of Bosch, readers are directed to the works mentioned earlier, particularly Ahonen's *Transformation Through Compassionate Mission* and Guder and Reppenhagen's concise summary of Bosch's continuing legacy over the last two decades. The present work is also limited to the main themes of Bosch's theology of mission. It is not an exhaustive review of his entire theological agenda. Such subjects as the relationship of mission and culture, the theology and practice of mission down through church history, the Christian theology of religions, and the communication of the gospel to African traditional religions (all subjects that Bosch addressed at considerable length) are only be touched upon here. Instead, our goal is to provide an overall perspective on Bosch's life and thought, concentrating on his understanding of mission and evangelism, and asking how he worked out these concepts in practice in the tumultuous world of apartheid South Africa. We thus make no claim to speak a final word on Bosch's contribution to the theology of mission and evangelism but instead seek to provide a faithful witness to Bosch's legacy as a "missiologist of the road" who integrated his theology and practice in a faithful, contextually relevant way within his beloved South Africa as well as the global church.