
A review by Revd Dr Darrell Jackson, Senior Lecturer in Missiology, Morling College, Sydney, and the Melbourne College of Divinity’s University of Divinity. March 2013.

The 20th Anniversary edition of Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission on which I am basing this review is the third copy of David Bosch’s magnum opus that I have owned. With my first copy I took the advice of friends that it was a book which deserved careful reading, not a book to be read through from end to end in a hurried fashion. I took their advice: perhaps too literally. A colleague asked if he could borrow my thumbed and highlighted copy, by then eighteen months old. He approached me after a week or so and pointed out that the final fifty pages were missing! I promptly bought my second copy and made sure that I had read through all of the final chapter before my colleague and I sat down to discuss Bosch’s contribution to the development of the theology of mission and the mission of theology.

Originally published in 1991, the first edition was widely lauded, and remains so today. It is recommended or required reading for the greater majority of mission studies programmes across the English-speaking world and beyond. It’s a regular practice to use the year of publication as a guide to pruning reading lists for College and Seminary courses. That a twenty year old book should continue to appear on such lists, with little fear of removal, underlines the status of this book as a classic in its field.

However it is a twenty year old text and the missiological formulations and positions outlined in it were refined during the late 1980s in South Africa, prior to the demise of apartheid, the political changes in Europe, the renewal of interest in global Pentecostalism, and the emergence of uniquely Eastern Orthodox forms of mission practice and mission theology. Some commentators judged it ‘retrospective’ and consider it to have significant lacunae (feminism, ecology, and indigenous spirituality), thus seriously weakening Bosch’s claim to outline a truly post-modern theology of mission.1 In re-publishing Transforming Mission with a new concluding chapter, written by Darrell Guder and Martin Reppenhagen, it would seem that the publishers felt it necessary to address some of these criticisms.

The addition of a final chapter by Guder (an American reformed Scholar from Princeton Theological Seminary) and Reppenhagen (a German reformed scholar from the University of Greifswald in North Germany) is welcome. It outlines biographical details, summarises key themes and methodological approaches in Bosch, and offers a fresh perspective on several areas of his contribution to mission theology. Bosch is portrayed by them as a thoroughly contextual theologian; marginalised by the Dutch Reformed Church for his anti-apartheid position. He is presented as a biblical missiologist, embraced by evangelical and ecumenical counterparts and as equally at home in the Lausanne Movement as he was within the World Council of Churches.2 Further, we learn that Bosch drew heavily upon the formative influences of theologians he met, including Oscar Cullman, Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder. The implicit claim advanced by Guder and Reppenhagen is that Bosch is a theologian for everyone. If this were ever in doubt, we also learn that he was an admirer of Andrew Murray’s pietism.

Guder and Reppenhagen dispense efficiently (though not wholly convincingly in this reviewer’s opinion) with criticisms by Sugden (1996)3 and Kim (2000) of Bosch’s missiological retrospection and omission. It is a pity that opportunity was not taken to offer one or two translation or quotations from Bosch’s work in Afrikaans, to which Guder and Reppenhagen appeal when defending him from the charge of not addressing matters of indigenous spirituality or Pentecostal mission, for example.

The concluding chapter in the 20th anniversary edition not only serves the purpose of an apologia for Bosch but also outlines the formative influence of his work upon the emerging post-Christendom
paradigm of mission. Guder and Reppenhagen suggest that there are several trajectories that follow naturally from Bosch’s work and which continue to have relevance. The most significant of these are the trajectories he set in motion for missional hermeneutics, missional ecclesiology, the mission of theology itself, an understanding that church history is mission history, and the notion that mission, church and unity together delineate particular forms of missiological practice and theology.\textsuperscript{4}

The final chapter’s title ‘The Continuing Transformation of Mission’ alludes to Guder’s \textit{The Continuing Conversion of the Church}, published in 2000 as a contribution to the missional conversation then underway within \textit{The Gospel and our Culture Network} (GOCN). Guder’s extended discussion of missional ecclesiology in this final chapter appears to imply that the baton laid down after Bosch’s untimely death in 1992 has been taken up, in certain aspects, by the GOCN. If that is the case, it has to be hoped that the emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm, described by Bosch in the penultimate chapter of \textit{Transforming Mission}, will be articulated by more than a small, though deservedly influential, group of reformed theologians mostly located in North America.

Guder and Reppenhagen are surely correct to claim that Bosch’s missiology has wide ecumenical appeal. For this reason alone, the global and ecumenical mission studies community will have to wait for a more comprehensive review and evaluation of Bosch’s contribution to missiology. When it arrives, it is to be hoped that it will be compendious, will integrate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and will reflect the creative tension generated by diverse theological and confessional assessments of Bosch. Guder and Reppenhagen have served us well in highlighting the more significant characteristics of Bosch’s approach. We can now look forward to a treatment of Bosch that takes more seriously these characteristics of his lifetime’s work.

[1,068 words]

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\textsuperscript{2} British Baptists reading this review may be interested to note that Bosch was an enthusiast for the 1961 merger of the International Missionary Council with the World Council, engineered under the attentive scrutiny of E.A. Payne, author of the report recommending the merger.
\textsuperscript{4} Explored, for example, by Theme Eight ‘Mission and Unity – Ecclesiology and mission’ of the Edinburgh World Mission Study Conference, 2010.