

# “Blogging” David Bosch and *Transforming mission*

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## Abstract

An innovative and participatory teaching method using interactive digital media and “blogging” was used to teach and discuss David Bosch’s *Transforming mission*. The teaching method is described, as along with a brief summary of ten of Bosch’s elements of an emerging ecumenical paradigm. From these discussions, it became clear that *Transforming mission* found fertile ground in the hearts and minds of a digitally literate, innovative generation of emerging theologians. The end result of these public digital discussions provides a window into the way emerging missiologists reinterpret *Transforming mission* twenty years after its first publication. A brief summary of interesting points of discussion and reinterpretations of Bosch’s description of “mission as ...” introduces the reader to a community of trustworthy interpreters who have taken the first small steps towards *Transforming mission* through blogging.

**Keywords:** Blogging, church-with-others, comprehensive salvation, emerging missiologists, increation, justice, learning methodology, mission, mediating salvation, organic church, participatory teaching, world religions.

## Introduction

Bosch’s influential *Transforming mission*, which can still be considered the most widely used textbook on missiology 20 years after its first publication (Saayman 2009:219), is an important building block in the formation of students in Missiology. In 2009 and 2010, postgraduate theology students (Master of Divinity) preparing for ministry at the University of Pretoria participated in an innovative process to interact with *Transforming mission* in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology. One of Bosch’s important contributions to the understanding of mission is his multidimensional approach. In the words of Bevans and Schroeder (2004:350), mission is more “stereophonic” than “monaural”. In the third part of *Transforming mission*, Bosch discusses thirteen stereophonic expressions of mission as a response to the transition in which the church finds itself. Mission finds itself in a time of testing and paradigm changes “where danger and opportunity meet” (Bosch 1991:366). Sweet (1999:17) describes this as a sea change of transitions that is birthing a completely new world. Indeed a time of massive paradigm shifts. Paradigm shifts are by nature paradoxical. The emerging postmodern paradigm is paradoxical.

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One of the characteristic features of postmodern culture is that "opposite things happen at the same time without being contradictory" (Sweet 1999:17). It is a contradictory new world and paradoxes have a field day, especially in theology (Niemandt 2007:27). For mission, this means continuity and change, tradition and transformation. Mission is a paradox - a "single, complex reality" (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:394). In the words of Bosch (1991:367): "It is only within the force field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologizing for our own time in a meaningful way."

In the midst of these paradoxical changes, Bosch formulated his thirteen elements of an emerging ecumenical paradigm. Saayman (2009:226) described Bosch's open-ended approach as one of his greatest contributions to missionary thinking and practice. It has "opened up many new avenues to talk, think and write about mission, a truly liberating experience." Bosch's (1991:367) call for mission to be undertaken in an imaginative new manner has found fertile ground in the hearts and minds of a digitally literate, innovative generation of emerging theologians. In this "WWW World" in which the world has developed a whole new way of being and thinking, the invention of the computer is the most important event in the history of technology, if not in history (Sweet 2001:31). It has created a digital culture that demands different teaching and learning experiences and new forms of learning. Traditional linear classroom education is being outpaced by the postmodern world. Interactive digital media connect multiple modes of experience; such media reconnect touch, thought and expression, they connect one person to others and encourage interaction (Miller 2004:76, 85). We are living in a "perfect storm", a wave of change that is forever changing the face of the world and church (Niemandt 2009:623). These times demand a new learning methodology. People are not post-literate, but omni-literate. "Sometimes they learn in a linear fashion reading a book. Most often they learn in lateral fashion by experiencing a data byte, or viewing a movie, or experimenting with a new idea" (Bandy 2004:81). The abundance of resources and relationships made easily accessible via the Internet is increasingly challenging us to revisit our roles as educators in sense making, coaching and credentialing (Johnson *et al*, 2011:3).

In the teaching and learning experiment with *Transforming mission*, ten of Bosch's thirteen elements of an emerging ecumenical paradigm were discussed using interactive digital media and a process known as "blogging". The relationship between the teacher and students was that of co-researchers and pilgrims on a journey of discovery. The learning methodology was guided by the following transitions in learning methodology:

From one-way teaching in a classroom	to	action reflection
From teacher	to	mentor and coach
From passive consumer of academia	to	interactive participant
From a one-man show	to	teamwork
From uniform, transferable	to	contextual, customised
From traditional technology	to	indigenous, contemporary technology

Bandy (2004:93) challenges seminaries and universities to develop a learning methodology that provides for action-reflection learning that devotes attention to image, sound and data byte. It cannot be linear but must be lateral by issue. It must be team based and interactive, using contemporary technology, creating spaces where the co-researchers can engage face-to-face and through web-based interaction.

The end result of these public digital discussions provides a window into the way emerging missiologists are reinterpreting *Transforming mission*. The innovate teaching process integrated Bosch's ideas, the understanding of these ideas by young missiologists, and a participatory, public digital discussion of these reflections into a new reinterpretation of what mission is.<sup>2</sup> The co-researchers became a community of trustworthy interpreters (Bailey 2007:182), taking the first small steps towards *Transforming mission* through blogging.

The process itself needs elaboration. Eleven groups of students discussed Chapters 11 and 12 of *Transforming mission*<sup>3</sup> over a period of six weeks. Every week, a blog on these discussions was posted on the Internet (See M.Div. University of Pretoria 2010). A blog (a contraction of the term "weblog") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Bailey (2007:177) describes it as a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and hyperlinks. Entries are displayed in reverse chronological order. There are several values that define the medium:

<sup>2</sup> The discussions can be accessed at <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/> and by following the links to the various themes.

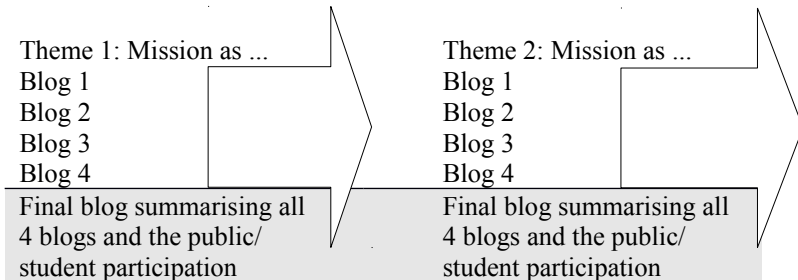
<sup>3</sup> Three themes are to be discussed by a new group of students at the end of 2011: mission as *missio Dei*, mission as contextualisation, and mission as theology.

*transparency*: bloggers tell you exactly who they are, what they think and feel;

*immediacy*: blogs display the most recent information at the top of the page;

*intellectual self-reliance*: bloggers imply that their point of view is important, valuable and deserves to be heard - blogging is a means of cultural agency.

Students were asked to comment on the blogs of other groups as well. The blogs were constructed as participatory and public discussions, and were open to public participation. Public participants enriched and sometimes profoundly influenced these discussions. The first blog was followed by weekly blogs, although the previous blogs were still open for comments. After five weeks, a final blog was posted. This final discussion paper summarised the previous blogs as well as the comments made by participants. Eventually this process gave birth (digitally and publicly) to a comprehensive reinterpretation of *Transforming mission* of more than 350 pages. The process is graphically expressed in the following figure.



A summary of the discussions of the eleven themes will be presented. This represents a window of innovation into the way emerging missiologists reinterpret *Transforming mission*, bringing film, popular culture, recent social and political events and post-Bosch authors into the conversation. An attempt will be made to relate the conversation in a way that gives voice to a new generation of missiologists, while simultaneously creating context and summarising the whole narrative.

### **The emergence of a postmodern paradigm<sup>4</sup>**

Bosch (1991:349) introduced his innovative ideas on mission against the background of the dismantling of the Enlightenment paradigm. He gave an overview of the shift that took place from the modern to the postmodern era and the effect of this on mission. His remark in *Believing in the future* that the *post*-phenomenon is not just a fad (Bosch 1995:1) has proved to be

<sup>4</sup> See <http://gsw820group1.wordpress.com/>.

accurate. The challenge is to probe our faith and find ways to participate in God's mission in the postmodern world in the light of our classical Christian tradition (Sweet 2000:xvii). This challenge is complicated by the fact that we are on the verge of the postmodern era, but are still firmly grounded in the modern era. Mission is in a time of testing and crisis (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:282). Although Bosch criticised the Enlightenment paradigm, his later remarks in *Believing in the future* (1995:13) must be kept in mind: "It is therefore to be affirmed emphatically that the process leading up to the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment itself were also a blessing."

### **Challenges of the postmodern paradigm**

The co-researchers attempted to ask questions relating to the new challenges facing mission. It was mentioned that the only constants are change and uncertainty. In typical postmodern fashion, the emerging missiologists attempted to formulate some of the challenges in the form of questions, as only questions can inspire new conversations that can launch us on a new quest (McLaren 2010:18):

- The postmodern paradigm is characterised by diversity, alienation, fragmentation and polarisation. This is a multicultural, multireligious, globalised and religiously polarised world (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:284). The question this poses is: how do we live together as the reconciled yet diverse body of Christ?
- The discussion was very much aware of the important role of technology in the postmodern paradigm. Ours is an interactive, global, anytime, anywhere, multimedia world (Miller 2004:79). The question this raises is: how do we take advantage of the technology that brought the world much closer together to deepen our awareness of one another and of our interdependence?
- Modern media and the ease of access to information raise the question: how do we proclaim Christ so that the Gospel can be clearly understood in an age of saturated information?
- Globalisation leads to growing interrelatedness as human beings. The issue of Christian faith among other faiths has become an urgent challenge in this multireligious and religiously polarised world. In the words of the Edinburgh 2010 Common Call, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths - and no faith - to the uniqueness of Christ (Edinburgh 2010). The group expressed their question in a similar fashion: how will we as Christians relate to persons of other religions and persons of no religion?
- Mission must be an ecological mission. God will hold us accountable for our humanity as much as for our Christianity

(Wright 2010:62). How, together with others, shall we be co-creators with, and stewards of, creation in a world living with the consequences and the contributions of the modern era?

- Mission is reconciliation (Kim 2009:249). How shall we bear witness in word and deed that faith becomes active in lives of love, service, and striving for justice and peace?

The co-researchers were quite aware that these kinds of questions bring more uncertainty than certainty, and much tension. However, the discussion revealed comfort in the fact that God is active in the postmodern reality, and is part and originator of a movement towards a better and more humane future (Saayman 2007:5).

## Mission as church-with-others<sup>5</sup>

### Otherness and church-with-creation

Bosch concluded his chapter on "mission as church-with-others" with a remark that the church is both a theological and a sociological entity, an inseparable union of the divine and dusty (Bosch 1991:389). It is significant that the emerging missiologists devoted much attention to important issues in the area of sociology and human identity, and the concepts of "otherness" and the "Other". The group uses the following definition of the "Other" adapted from wikipedia:

A person's definition of the *Other* is part of what defines or even constitutes the self and other phenomena and cultural units. The concept has been used in social science to understand the processes by which societies and groups exclude *Others* whom they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society. The concept of *otherness* is also integral to the comprehending of a person, as people construct roles for themselves in relation to an *Other* as part of a process of reaction that is not necessarily related to stigmatization or condemnation. *Othering* is imperative for national identities, where practices of admission and segregation can form and sustain boundaries and national character. *Othering* helps distinguish between home and away, the uncertain or certain. It often involves the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which further justifies attempts to civilize and exploit these *inferior* others. In this world we are all the *others*<sup>6</sup>.

The concept of the "Other" calls for theological reflection in view of Christianity's narratives of origin and confessional traditions. The discussion referred to biblical insights on these issues: the Old Testament

<sup>5</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep1/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other>

reveals both exclusive and inclusive approaches. In certain approaches (e.g. the Deuteronomistic history and Ezra/Nehemiah), genocide and divorce are acceptable when they involve the religious/cultural/ethnic *Other*, although other perspectives question this approach. Jonah rebels against the idea of finding the God of Israel eager to extend grace to the enemies of his people, and Third Isaiah calls the Persian Emperor - the *other* par excellence - the servant of the Lord. The New Testament is famous for challenging social and religious boundaries. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well and Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch serve as excellent examples. Traditions such as these challenge the boundaries between the *us* and the *them* that social and religious groups construct.

The discussion expressed concern that current narrative and confessional traditions are critical of *othering*. Bosch's paradigm theory and the creative tension to which he continuously aspires can be of help:

This enables us to move away from an either/or choice between the self (or in-group) over against the *other* on the one hand, and a denial of differences on the other hand. Holding to both extremes reminds us of the truth that, while we are certainly individual selves, these are formed by and exist in no *other* way than through the other.

Elaborating on Bosch's (1991:376 - 378) discussion of "Church and world" and the understanding of missions as "God's turning to the world", the church is understood as a web of relationships (Niemandt 2007:81 - 90). It therefore becomes critical to ask who is involved in the relationship. It is this question that places a premium on the definitions of the *our* and the *other*. What is the identity of the other? Traditionally, the answer has been to refer to the *other as other people* and to define them with the help of social, economic, political, racial and other cultural markers. The group was not satisfied to remain within the classical boundaries of these definitions, but made a serious argument that we are not only defined by other people, but also by "nature and our relationship to her". Kim (2009:225) pointed out the "noticeable omission" from Bosch's consensus on mission - the integrity of creation and eco-theology. The discussion stated that relationship with nature "opens a window to expand the concept of the *other* to which the church turns in mission to also include ecological concepts". They called this an "ecological anthropology" and by extension an "ecological ecclesiology". Bosch's reference to mission as church-with-others is thus broadened to mission as church-with-Creation. This reminds one of Langmead's (2008:17) description of "ecomissiology": "a vision for mission that includes not only a renewal of relationships between humans and God and between humans and humans, but also between humans and their environment". It must be noted that Bosch later acknowledged the fact that we cannot afford to exclude the environment from our missionary

agenda and that "a missiology of Western culture must include an *ecological dimension*" (Bosch 1995:55).

The group's reinterpretation of Bosch can be seen in one of the conversations:

If congregations and denominations share with their *others* in the type of communion that reminds of perichoresis, and enter into partnership with one another to participate in the *missio Dei*, then unity-in-diversity can itself bear witness to the reconciling love of God made manifest through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. A church that embodies communion to this extent, surely becomes sacrament of God's unifying love that proceeds from the Godhead to creation to include in holy communion with God that which is not God.

### **In discussion with film and popular culture**

One of the characteristics of the blogging was the interaction with film and popular culture. There were a number of metaphors originating from film. Vanhoozer (2007:17) describes everyday theology as faith seeking understanding of everyday life. Everyday theologians are readers of the everyday. If one regards the concept of the "*missio Dei*" seriously, the resultant missional understanding of the church as participating in God's mission in this world (Bosch 1991:390; Guder 2000:20) supports the importance of cultural and contextual exegesis. Theology is the interpretative help for translating the activity of God in his world (Niemandt 2009:622). It is all about *cultural literacy* (Vanhoozer 2007:18, 55). The church is to *be* a community of interpreters. The church interprets what is going on in culture by offering theologically thick descriptions that inscribe our everyday world into the created, fallen and redeemed world narrated in Scripture.

In the discussion of mission as church-with-others, the film *District 9* (Blomkamp 2009) was used to illustrate the importance of *symbiosis*. Symbiosis says much about church-with-others. It includes togetherness and interdependence, but symbiosis between two organisms may lead to the formation of a new organism. "Perhaps this is what we should be focusing on: co-operation between ourselves and others (who could be fellow believers in the same or different congregations as us, or people of other religions or other cultures, and even between ourselves and creation) in such a way that is beneficial to all concerned and that may, very often, lead to something new and more advanced." *District 9* illustrates what it might feel like to be in such a situation. In the movie, a special task team under the leadership of Wikus van der Merwe is appointed to evict "aliens" to another location. He is seen as the oppressor. At one stage, he is exposed to a chemical substance and gradually starts to undergo a metamorphosis from



human to alien. The film thus makes a statement about inhumanity in the irony of Wikus becoming more humane as he becomes less human. This movie conveys a perfect example of apartheid and xenophobia, and depicts the symptoms of how the other is commonly treated in society.<sup>7</sup> The questions raised are these: Is the church in any way different in her approach to the other? What should her attitude be?

### **Mission as mediating salvation<sup>8</sup>**

Salvation is a fundamental concern of every religion and the Christian missionary movement has been motivated by the desire to mediate salvation to all (Bosch 1991:393). The discussion focused on Bosch's (1991:399) point that redemption is never salvation *out* of this world but always salvation *of* this world, and therefore comprehensive salvation.

The co-researchers started out with reference to Bell's (2007) book *Sex God*. After Bell has described the horrible and inhumane conditions of Second World War concentration camps, he focuses on the brokenness of this world. The group agreed with Bell, pointing to a world that is craving for salvation of some sort. There is a fundamental need to transcend the suffering of this world. People's social distress had never before been as extensive as it was in the twentieth century. Christians today are in a better position than ever before to do something about that need. The church cannot pretend that its only interest is in eternal salvation without doing its utmost to alleviate the current suffering of people. The true follower of Jesus Christ should care about the needs of the marginalised as Jesus cared about them. The church is called to participate in God's mission in a way that speaks to and for the world's poor and marginalised. Salvation must be understood within a comprehensive Christological framework that takes Christ's incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection and parousia seriously. The discussion elaborated on Bosch's *Toward comprehensive salvation* by referring to the declaration of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2004 as an interpretation of salvation that operates within a comprehensive Christological framework. Building on the description of God's mission as creator (Father), redeemer (Son), and sanctifier (Holy Spirit), the bloggers agreed with the LWF's focus on three dimensions of mission, namely transformation (re-creation by the Father), reconciliation (by the Son) and empowerment (by the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, these are enhanced in the missiological understanding of the threefold way of Christ (incarnation,

<sup>7</sup> The setting of *District 9* is inspired by events that took place in South Africa during the apartheid era, with the film's title referencing District Six. District Six, an inner-city residential area in Cape Town, was declared a "whites only" area by the government in 1966, when 60,000 people were forcibly removed and relocated. The film also refers to contemporary evictions and forced removals in post-apartheid South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep2/>.

cross, and resurrection). The LWF cast their theology of mission in a Trinitarian framework, on the one hand, and oriented it towards the comprehensive revelation of Christ, as Bosch proposed, on the other. Bosch (1991:400) described salvation as "coherent, broad, and deep as the needs and exigencies of human existence". The emerging missiologists felt very comfortable with this understanding of mission as permeating all mission endeavours, including proclamation, service, advocacy for justice, interfaith dialogue and care of creation (LWF 2004:32). Theirs is therefore a comprehensive and integrated approach. Summarising the discussion, they asked:

Will it be mission understood as redeeming souls for the hereafter or as redeeming people from their current situations? Regarding this creative tension, why should it be either-or? Or neither-nor? Why can't we see this as two sides of the same coin? Understanding this creative tension as two sides of the same coin can only strengthen and enrich our understanding of mission and salvation. It will help us to take the whole picture into account - not only the spiritual or the socio-economic or political - and it certainly will help us to be practical on ground level! Mission therefore has two sides which are equally important!

In conclusion, one can say that the conversation succeeded in enriching a Christo-centric perspective that appreciates the newness and truth of the Gospel with a truly Trinitarian dimension and kingdom perspective.

### **Mission as the quest for justice<sup>9</sup>**

Mission and evangelism can never be divorced from a discussion of mission as the quest for justice (Bosch 1991:401). The group referred to Bosch's (1991:408) point that mission implies an evangelical and a social responsibility, a convergence of convictions overcoming the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. They did not want to make a choice between "evangelism" and "social change". For them, a choice for the Gospel is a choice for both and more. "Justice will come when the Gospel changes humans and the systems in the world."

They proposed an interpretation of the concepts of "faith", "hope" and "love" as a possible way to configure the "convergence of convictions":

It can be said that *faith* gives content to *hope* and *love*. Where acts of hope and/or love is being lived out, it presupposes a faith or a belief that something transcendental to the hopeless or loveless situation is possible. Faith, therefore, provides content or a reason for love and hope to exist. *Love* can be seen as the thing that gives style to our *faith* and our *hope*. The way and the amplitude at

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://gsw820group2.wordpress.com/>.

which we love our neighbour, God, nature, etc. will determine the style or the way in which we live out faith and hope towards our neighbour, God, nature, etc. *Hope* can therefore be described as the driving force behind *faith* and *love*. Hope is the engine room from where our Christian faith and love finds its origin and its existence.

The above-mentioned configuration of these three concepts can provide a doctrinal explanation for Christianity, but it can also provide motivation for our missional task at hand.

Because God brought us into justice, through faith, hope and love, we as Christian believers should also extend this justice into our yet broken world, by means of a good configuration of and by living out the faith, hope and love that dwells within us.

### **Jesus: Castle-lord or slum dog?**

The blogging was designed to bring popular culture, current events, contemporary confessions and post-Bosch authors into the conversation. The group referred to a message by Irish rock star and philanthropist Bono at a White House prayer breakfast (2 February 2006). Bono made the following remark:

God may well be with us in our mansions on the hill, I hope so. He may well be with us in all manner of controversial ‘stuff’, maybe, maybe not. But the one thing we can all agree, all faiths, all ideologies, is that God is with the vulnerable and the poor. God is in the slums in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives. And God is with us, if we are with them.

Bringing together hope, faith and love entails a convergence of evangelism and social responsibility. It involves a holistic approach that entails caring for the whole person. Practically, this would mean that if a person is hungry, I would not only tell him nice Bible stories but also put food on his table. Social responsibility is not limited to catering for physical needs. It requires a longing for justice. *When there are oppressive structures that are unjust towards fellow human beings, I must take it upon myself to act socially.*

The group concluded:

So then, was Jesus a Castle-Lord or a Slum dog? I’ll leave that for you to answer. What I do believe is that Jesus was inclusive! Furthermore, from reading the scriptures, I cannot but conclude that YHWH and Jesus had a special place for, and relationship with, the oppressed, the widow and fatherless, the hungry and sick and those that move on the fringes of our communities.

When we are with the needy then God is with us (Bono). We see that Jesus spends his time in the slum and in the synagogue. If love and relations are the driving force of hope then we should be well aware of the fact that we are not hope givers but hope bringers. We can't be so arrogant to believe that we can enter a space and bring God to the slum when God is already present in that slum, waiting to be acknowledged there. Our primary focus should actually then be to relate with all colours and flavours of people and together seek God in the so-called 'slum'. We believe that this inclusive relational approach in our mission, might bring us closer to hope; acceptance of one another; our understanding of God's presence in our pain and misery; a realisation that God want(s) to know our hearts and give hope, love and social justice in all of his creation.

### **Mission as evangelism<sup>10</sup>**

The discussion raised an interesting point on methodology, stating that "theology as an academic discipline in today's time will need to move away from theory first and praxis second. There should be a spiral interaction between the two, gradually building up a better understanding of what's going on in God's world, especially in mission. Defining and doing must go together and help each other to help the world." Theology needs more reflection, more poetry, more art and fewer clear definitions. An emphasis on praxis (as an integrated "theory/practice" understanding) can help to shift the focus to reflection from within the everyday lives of congregations. The challenge would be to ask: what kind of habits and practices do we cultivate in congregations that embody this kind of shift, and how do theologians, leaders and pastors participate in such praxis? Whether the group's discussion was informed by this praxis-reflection movement is unclear, but the emphasis on the role of relationship building in evangelism is evident. "It is about a journey, about having a relationship with the people you evangelise." Sweet's book *So beautiful* (2009) was mentioned in the blogs. Sweet (2009:99) challenges Christianity to get over "its propositional impotence" and to start "flexing relational muscles and build up a relational theology". Evangelism should involve personal relationships (community). In a relationship like this, it means that two agents will be present in the communication process - language and deeds. Language is composed of words that find meaning through symbols, actions and experience; therefore, it is quite easy to understand that words can have very little meaning and have a very small impact without the backing of our actions, deeds and relationships. The group questioned the attention the Reformed tradition devoted to these aspects, at least as far as praxis is concerned. Perhaps the Reformed praxis is so focused on grace that the importance of "good deeds" has vanished to only a shadow of its original glory. They

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://gs820group3.wordpress.com/>.

quoted Bosch's (1991:414) reminder of the importance of an attractive lifestyle: "Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle". A person's lifestyle or true identity is always visible in the relationships closest to the person. When people outside the church look within her walls, the community that functions within those walls will be the most visible witness to them. "Therefore, evangelism, action and community are three interconnected terms that cannot function without the other."

### **Mission as liberation<sup>11</sup>**

Most people tend to view Liberation Theology only in political or economic terms. Therefore, the "oppressed" are associated with black people or poor people.

In post-apartheid South Africa we would like to think that the oppressive political and economic institutions are mostly a thing of the past. Therefore liberation theology is mostly not relevant for South Africa today, right? Wrong. We forget that liberation theology also includes social categories. So, even if we didn't have political or economic discrimination in South Africa (but we still do), we still have social discrimination (against women and gay people). Thus, I would like to think that liberation theology is still relevant.

The group agreed with the value Bosch placed on Liberation Theology as an expression of mission as liberation. It helped in shaping their ideas on the rediscovery of God's involvement in history as the God of the righteous. This discovery has also enabled us to think afresh about the presence of the Spirit and the Spirit's involvement (Bosch 2008:442).

From this agreement with Bosch, the discussion moved to the contemporary South African focus on church unity. A participant critiqued churches that are engaged in negotiations for structural unity because of a secular emphasis on political reconciliation, instead of it having its origin in true theological reflection. The Belhar Confession is described as one of South Africa's prophetic voices, connecting Reformed and Liberation Theology. It succeeds in confessing Christ not only in relation to racism, but also in relation to poverty and other forms of social injustice (De Gruchy 1991:215). Viewed in this light, the church is a "site of struggle" for liberation, justice and truth in the sense that the church is not struggling to bring about justice in "the world" only, but in the church itself (p. 220). The Belhar Confession has "great missionary value", not only for the Dutch Reformed family, but also for numerous other congregations, whether local or international. "The missionary value of Belhar can be seen as the

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep3/>.

liberation of the church from missionary imprisonment and a reformulation of mission."

## **Mission as inculturation<sup>12</sup>**

### **Increation**

Bosch (1991:447) stated that "inculturation is one of the patterns in which the pluriform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself." The group introduced their discussion of "mission as inculturation" by referring to the important point that the Christian faith ought to rethink and reformulate its relationship with each human culture: "and this must be done in a vital way, in depth and right to the cultures' roots" (1991:452). The group argued that we live in a fundamentally different world, even compared to the world Bosch knew, hence the importance of revisiting the term "inculturation".

Regarding the *missio Dei* seriously is to start with the incarnation of Christ. The incarnation of Christ was a moment of *increation*: he became flesh. It happened to be in the form of humankind. The sending of God is a sending to the world, to the totality of creation. This primary focus of the incarnation as "Creation bound" only poses a problem if one thinks of people and nature in a dualistic way. This dualism needs to be deconstructed. This implies that the true missional church will be an organic or ecological church. Our eyes have been opened to the visceral reality of our material world and our part in it. Discerning the reality of our world, the focus can no longer be purely on culture *per se*, but must in some way or another assimilate the context of earth-bound context in which culture exists. The focus of a missional church must be Creation bound. The discussion referred to the Edinburgh 2010 declaration, which defines the mission of the church as follows: "The mission of the church is seen in her search for a spiritual framework that affirms human life, mutual respect and equality by working towards inner and mutual conversion, just community, survival of God's creation, together with church growth" (Edinburgh 2010). Understanding God's mission as encompassing the cosmos suggests that Christian mission includes all of God's created order. This awareness has stemmed both from a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all life on earth and a Trinitarian understanding of God who reconciles all creation and eschatologically brings the new creation into communion (Rom. 8:18 - 25). The group proposed the introduction of the concept of "increation" to advance a relevant understanding of inculturation in the twenty-first century. The concept of "inculturation" is anthropological at its core, and as such is in need of reconceptualising.

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep6/>.

The group conceded that, as a result of the loss of humanity's partnership with the soil we live on, *increation* is difficult to grasp for modern Christian minds, who understand the salvation of the individual soul as the redemptive pinnacle of faith, and who habitually view the created world as a functional thing to be used in the pursuit of individual wealth. They state that the challenge facing missions is not so much inculturation as *increation*: to re-establish the connection between (hu)mankind and Creation, to bridge the dualism between nature and history, and to transcend the Greco-Roman salvation narrative. Recalling Bosch's (1995:55) discussion of the ingredients of a missiology of Western culture in *Believing in the future*, he might have agreed with these emerging missiologists. The *increation* of the Gospel message will help to address social injustices and ecological destruction, and will contribute to the recognition of God's sovereignty over all of Creation.

### **Mission as common witness<sup>13</sup>**

The discussion played itself out against the background of the reality of a world Christianity (Kim 2009:264) and amidst the massive ecumenical thrust of four major ecumenical events in 2010: (a) Tokyo 2010; (b) Edinburgh 2010; (c) the birth of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and (d) Lausanne III in Cape Town. These events, as well as the fact that the Christian faith is now the faith of many different cultural groups, highlight the diversity within Christianity. There are different ways of reading the Bible, different beliefs in spiritual forces affecting daily life, different priorities for faith as a result of economic factors, and different theologies. We are in need of a new ecumenism that will help us to rethink and reshape our beliefs and practices (Kim 2009:264).

The blog on mission as *common witness in practice* was the focal point of the discussion. Church and mission cannot be separated (Bosch 1991:464) because mission brings people into this family. "Minor theological differences can never supersede the very important theological realisation that God made us his children and that all believers now belong to the same family. Families do have some plurality within them, but there is always an overarching sense of unity and belonging that ties us together. Even if we bring people into the family in different ways, we do have the same family." The emerging missiologists stated that any church claiming to be one only in theory "just does not cut it!" Although there was agreement on the point that unity in the church does not mean uniformity, there was a strong conviction that more can be done to establish unity. Unity will not be effected from the top down, but rather from the bottom up. It was also noted

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep4/>.

that ecumenism should not only happen because it is necessary to survive; rather, it should be practised in order to become one body in Christ.

Paradoxically, the group stressed the importance of common witness, as well as the observation that the church has become a body with many different faces, and that the manifestation of the church in many new and fresh ways may be conducive to mission. On the one hand, they supported Bosch (1991:466) in his stand against the proliferation of new churches. On the other hand, there was simultaneous understanding of Viola (2008:xxi) and his concept of the "organic church", which presupposes the proliferation of many new (house) churches. Perhaps this reiterates Bosch's (1991:367) notion that it is only within the force field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologising in a meaningful way.

### **Mission as ministry by the whole people of God<sup>14</sup>**

The dramatic shift away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men towards ministry as the responsibility of the whole people of God (Bosch 1991:467) is a reality. One of the particular expressions of this dramatic shift is the "organic church" movement. Authors such as Frank Viola, Alan Hirsch and Neil Cole have visited South Africa and their books are widely read. The organic church movement can certainly be regarded as integral to the phenomenon of "base" or "small" Christian communities, described by Bosch (p. 473) as a development of momentous significance.

It came as no surprise that these ideas were frequently mentioned in the discussion of mission as a ministry by the whole people of God. Bosch (1991:474) asked for an "a more organic, less sacral ecclesiology for the whole people of God". The discussion group fleshed out Bosch's vision by bringing Viola into the conversation. Viola views an organic church as a non-traditional church that is born out of spiritual life instead of being constructed by human institutions and held together by religious programmes. Organic church life is a grassroots experience that is marked by face-to-face community, every-member functioning, open participatory meetings (as opposed to pastor-to-pew services), non-hierarchical leadership, and the centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ as the functional leader of the gathering. It is an open and participatory community in which every member of the believing priesthood functions, ministers and expresses the living God (Viola 2009:283). The organic church stands in sharp contrast to the institutional church. Viola and Barna (2008) state: "We are also making an outrageous proposal: that the church in its contemporary, institutional form has neither a biblical nor a historical right to function as it does". The leadership in an institutional church is hierarchical and leads to a divide between clergy and laity. It can be argued that such a division - the

<sup>14</sup> See <http://gsw820group4.wordpress.com/>.



barrier between a passive and empowered laity - can be bridged by the insights associated with the organic church.

This is not a plea for a church without the leadership of clergy, but for an evolved understanding of leadership. “We no longer live in an age where the clergy is understood to control and dominate the church process; worship, evangelism and Bible study, to name a few, involve a give-and-take between a pastor and his or her congregation. We must simplify church structures because we understand that the gospel is meant to spread spontaneously, through interaction and relationship rather than dictation from a pulpit.” With reference to Cole, “organic leadership” is described as pastors relinquishing control over ministry. “Giving up control can be difficult, but a true leader is willing to give his or her leadership away.” One contributor remarked:

[A]ppropriate actions should follow. If the ‘clergy’ would stop taking responsibility for everything and organising everything then the responsibility tends to be picked up by the ‘laity’. And if it’s not, then it should die anyway and probably wasn’t necessary in the first place. So in short, if you want all the believers to take part then stop doing everything yourself. Throw a few balls in the air and see if someone catches; if not, so be it.

### **Mission as witness to people of other living faiths<sup>15</sup>**

McLaren (2010) pleads for a new kind of Christianity. There are a number of crucial questions that open the way for this new Christianity. One of these questions is: “How should followers of Jesus relate to people of other religions?” (McLaren 2010:207). Bosch inaugurated a new era in missiology and prepared the way for such a new kind of Christianity. His descriptions of the characteristics of mission are more relevant than ever. It is no coincidence that Saayman (2009:225) described this particular section as expressing the absolute essence of Bosch’s mission and missiology: “There is no place in authentic Christian mission for triumphalism, only humility; Christian missionaries are vulnerable, because they do not have all the answers and are as likely to fail as anybody else. Yet this does not incapacitate us, because we do know that we are witnesses, envoys and ambassadors of the Servant Lord who sits on the throne.”

The discussion focused on the following themes: mission as dialogue, whether salvation exists outside Christianity and the motivation for mission.

### **Mission as dialogue**

The discussion affirmed Bosch’s (1991:483) view that the relationship between Christianity and other religions should be one of dialogue. As soon

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://gsw820.purpletoolbox.co.za/groep5/>.

as the coexistence of different faiths is accepted, dialogue can follow. This dialogue with other religions must be sociological and philosophical instead of theological. It must be carried out in humbleness and with repentance. "Christian faith is one of grace and can only be found by the cross." Reading the blogs and comments brought to mind the description of Bevans and Schroeder (2004:378) that dialogue is the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission. As the bloggers put it: "Christian mission is participation in the mission of *God*, and *God's* being and action is dialogical."

The blog elaborated on the idea of participating in the mission of God. Dialogue is only possible if we proceed from the belief that we are not moving into a void, but that we go expecting to meet the God who has preceded us and has been preparing people within the context of their own cultures and convictions. God has already removed the barriers; his Spirit is constantly at work in ways that surpass human understanding. It must be borne in mind that the discussion took place in the midst of Edinburgh 2010, at which the Common Call summarised mission as dialogue in the following way:

Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths - and no faith - to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.

Mission as witness to people of other living faiths means that dialogue is critical, humbleness essential, integrity a must and relationships central.

### **Does salvation exist outside Christianity?**

The question is: do other religions also provide salvation? This question refers solely to something that happens to an individual after death and suggests that people join a specific religion in order to be guaranteed this salvation, that religions expand geographically and numerically in order to ensure such salvation to increasing numbers of people. Bosch (1991:488) repudiates the notion that this is all religion is about, that this is the only reason that people (should) become Christians. He states that "conversion is not the joining of a community in order to procure 'eternal salvation'; it is, rather, a change in allegiance in which Christ is accepted as Lord and centre of one's life." This challenges us to live, not from a foundation of arrogance, but with Jesus as the core of our lives. The blog expressed it in this way: "Such an approach, marked with inculturation, inculturation and *inreligionisation* is only possible if the Greco-Roman pot is broken, or to use the words of Brain McLaren, the Greco-Roman narrative is

transcended.”<sup>16</sup> Religious plurality is growing in South Africa. It is possible to share life with people of other living faiths without being flatly against other religions. It is possible to be freed from the insider/outsider, us/other paradigms.

### **Mission as action in hope<sup>17</sup>**

One of the important responses of an emerging missional paradigm to the postmodern world is that this paradigm is much more open to a different understanding of space and time. In the recovery of the eschatological dimension (Bosch 1991:499), the “desire of God” as expression of eschatological longing is extremely important. The problem is that we sometimes find ourselves without the ability to describe the desire of God. Bosch (1991:512) opens new possibilities by stating that it can only be done by *poiesis*: “imaginative creation or representation of evocative images”.

By exploring the intrinsic relationship between hope and eschatology, one finds oneself at the core of what is at stake in Christian hope. This must also be linked to the kingdom and reign of God. Pannenberg (1998:527), in the third volume of his *Systematic theology*, writes that “the future of God’s kingdom for whose coming Christians pray in the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:10) is the epitome of Christian hope”.

One of the implications of linking hope to eschatology and the kingdom of God is that it highlights the difference between eschatology and teleology. Teleology assumes the steady progress towards some future goal or purpose. Eschatology brings together the past and future into the present. Biblical-theological eschatology is therefore always grounded in God’s promise as much as eschatological hope can rest only on God himself. What is at issue in hope of the kingdom of God, is God’s own presence to judge and to save. The co-researchers were challenged to think about how congregations can participate in discerning God’s preferred and promised future to the extent that it brings hope in a world of despair. It appears that the discussion developed in the direction of the fundamentally different perspective described by Bosch (1991:509) as asking about the Christian’s involvement in the world rather than seeking to know God’s future plan.

The group answered the challenge of bringing hope in a world of despair with a very interesting reference to popular culture:

### **Can the church learn something from Oprah?**

Tsunamis, earthquakes, terrorism, sickness, war, crime, poverty... These are words very familiar to us in our modern world. We hear them on the radio, read it in the papers, and see it on television. But not just in the negative sense. We hear it when people are doing something to help heal these

<sup>16</sup> See also McLaren (2010:207 - 224).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://gsw820group5.wordpress.com/>.

problems. Like on reality television. But do we ever hear anything about it in our churches? Does it feature in the news letters of our congregations? Do people find more hope from Oprah than in the church?

We believe that the church needs to reconnect to people's lives. We have become a consumerist society, where we switch on televisions and hear the theme songs of programmes that give us instant hope. Yet the church is slow to provide us with hope, if any. The pain that people experience is experienced in real-time and therefore the church cannot take weeks or months to decide then give hope in certain situations.

Maybe we should reconsider the type of hope the church sells? Does the church address people's problems with a 'quick-fix' approach, or is the church focused on relationships. Could these relationships bring us more substantial hope? Maybe this type of relationship-based hope takes a little longer to develop, and maybe this type of hope will last longer than talk-shows, self-help programmes and books or quick-fix one-liner.

## Conclusion

Twenty years after its first publication, *Transforming mission* has not reached its sell-by date. On the contrary, it has not only found fertile ground in the hearts and minds of a digitally literate, innovative generation of emerging theologians; it has proved to be the very fertile ground that allows for the cultivation of an imaginative emerging missiology. Reading through the discussions of a new generation of missiologists, one cannot but be left with an impression of the relevance of *Transforming mission*. David Bosch did not only identify a new postmodern paradigm, but in leading his readers "towards a relevant missiology" he also fundamentally shaped the way a new generation understands and practises church and mission.

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